

# 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*

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42<sup>ND</sup> Sitting

Wednesday, 3<sup>RD</sup> April, 2013

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*Assembly convened at 1.09 p.m.*

*Prayers*

*[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]*

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER**

### **Request for leave**

**Mr. Speaker:** Good afternoon, everyone. There is no announcement, except to say thank you for what I thought was a good orderly day yesterday and I hope that we continue in that vein and perhaps we can even leave here as early as we did last evening.

Leave, again, has been granted to several Members, including Dr. Ramayya and Mrs. Hughes, from today's sitting.

Those would be my announcements. Thank you.

## **QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, there are just three questions on the Order Paper for written replies by the Minister of Education, but leave has been granted for her to have those delivered in due course, shortly. Thank you

**MOTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OR SITTING OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND MOVED BY A MINISTER**

**SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO. 71(2)**

WHEREAS Standing Order No. 71(2) provides for five (5) days to be allotted for the debate on a motion for the approval of the Estimates of Revenues and Expenditure;

AND WHEREAS it is anticipated that the five days allotted by Standing Order No. 71(2) may be inadequate for the debate on the motion for the approval of the 2013 Estimates of Revenues and Expenditure;

AND WHEREAS the Government and Opposition agreed to commence the sittings at 1.00 p.m. and conclude at 10.00 p.m. or thereabout for the period of the general debate of the 2013 Budget;

AND WHEREAS in response to a request of the Opposition for a further extension of more days, the Government agreed to propose that the debate be extended to six (6) days instead of five (5) days, as stated in Standing Order No. 71(2),

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That Standing Order No. 71(2) be suspended to enable the debate on the motion for the approval of the Estimates of Revenues and Expenditures for the year 2013 to be extended to six (6) days.”

*[Prime Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have given consent in accordance with Standing Orders No.28 (2) for the Hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs to move a motion which is in his name. Hon. Prime Minister, you may proceed.

**Prime Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs [Mr. Hinds]:** Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, I would like to move this motion standing in my name and this is to do much the same as we did last year. There has been discussion between the Chief Whips and there is the feeling that maybe we should allow ourselves a sixth day so that the debate can take place adequately; everyone can have sufficient time to make their presentations. I so move this motion that essentially seeks for the suspension of Standing Order No.71 (2) so that the debate could be extended to six days instead of five days.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank, Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Members, the motion is proposed that we extend our debate from five to six days, which I believe was done last year and is sound judgment and so I put the motion.

*Question put, and carried*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much.

## **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:** Members, we will now resume the debate on the 2013 Budget. I am notified that the first speaker for today is the Hon. Member Mr. Basil Williams. Mr. Williams, I invite you please to proceed. Thank you, very much.

**Mr. B. Williams:** Thank you. If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker, in an honest attempt to characterise this Budget, the immortal words of Sir Walter Scott pervades my mind. I quote: “Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive.”

It has become a *fait accompli*. This is yet another, and I quote, “biggest budget” by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government. The question is: Biggest for whom, the masses or the people or a cabal of friends? Has the life of the ordinary Guyanese undergone a qualitative change or is it still attended by shortages?

There is a frightening arrogance, a callous disregard on the part of those in the minority government for the best practices in government. Nepotism and corruption have become the signature of this Government. What kind of mind in the full glare of an ever pressing call for equity in the broadcast media would give its family and close friends most of the frequencies allotted for radio and television well-knowing that it would be revealed to the world sooner than later? What kind of mind would seek to covet the Plaisance Community Centre Ground to its own purpose without a care for the villagers, especially the youths who have, for generations, meaningfully used it?

Is this what the Hon. Minister of Finance has in mind at page three of his Budget speech when he was, and I quote, “calling on all others to join us in the steady march to further develop our country”? The truth is; life is a continuous struggle for a large segment of this population who has been marginalised and discriminated against since 1992. The Hon. Member Irfaan Ali regaled us about a dreamy Guyana and that our per capital income was, in 2012, over US\$3,000; that is income per each Guyanese. This is yet another deception. The learned authors of Hunt and Sherman showed that per capita income to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was an erroneous

measure of the prosperity of the masses and that what was important was the distribution of income among the people. It is an incontrovertible fact that most of the wealth of Guyana is distributed amongst a small 20% cabal, while the other 80% of our people have to scramble for the crumbs, thus the well earned aphorism, I quote: “Prosperity for whom?”

The Hon. Member, Dr. Vindhya Persaud, appeared very organised over the power of one seat as to suggest, if not for, the PPP/C would have been trampling on us as in the last 20 years. Factor in this, a simple constitutional change before the last elections would have crystallised the PPP/C’s position. Had our Constitution a provision for post election collations to yield up a President and, thus, for a Government that one seat would have given the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) the President and the Government and the PPP/C as the Opposition. That is the power of one seat and I dare say that we will have to look at amending our Constitution to ensure that we could have collations after the results of the elections are declared.

The Hon. Minister of Finance presents this Budget under the theme, *Overcoming Challenges Together Accelerating Gains for Guyana*. Is the Hon. Member...

**Mr. Speaker:** Mr. Williams, excuse me. Is there an electronic device near to your microphone?

**Mr. B. Williams:** I do not know if I am being bugged; I will have to check.

**Mr. Speaker:** Given that it is you, Mr. Williams, anything is possible. You seem to attract these... but if there is any electronic device nearby, or that of any other Member, please, it is affecting Mr. Williams’ delivery.

**Mr. B. Williams:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, the budget is under the theme, *Overcoming Challenges Together Accelerating Gains for Guyana*. Is the Hon. Member serious? For consecutive years the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, Mr. David Granger, wrote the President requesting a tripartite approach to developing a budget in which all Guyanese would benefit. Having rejected this sensible proposition, could one not argue that this, I quote, “togetherness” call is yet another deception? The fact of the matter is that this budget reiterates the Government’s preference for brick and mortar over flesh and blood.

Enough, it is time for me to look to my laurels. I begin:

Legal: It is apparent that the Government believes that the delivery of justice lies in more infrastructure. Billions have been spent on constructing new courts and refurbishing existing ones. Another \$2 billion is allocation this year to continue the splurge; never mind that the Leonora Magistrates' Court, for years now, and the Georgetown Magistrates' Court are not yet operable. What of the quality of delivery? Why can we not be impacted on the mere visual apprehension after the spending of all of that money? Why not modernise courtrooms, make them fully air conditioned, microphones and a digital recording system? Surely this will speed up trials. The Deeds Registry is still afflicted by lost transports and surely the developing of standard forms will speed up transactions there in.

The Judicial Service Commission, we again reiterate, must be fully constituted. There must be a fast track mechanism to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ), the CCJ, and the division of the functions and distribution of the responsibilities for the administration of the courts, between the Chancellor and Chief Justice, must be restored.

The Criminal Law Procedure Amendment Act, No. 17 of 2008, introduced into our jurisprudence paper committals to avoid unreasonable delay in affording a Guyanese charged with an indictable offence a fair trial. The question is: Is it being applied by our magistrates countrywide or only by a few enlightened ones? The Hon. Attorney General, I hope, could answer this question. The jury must remain sacrosanct in our jurisprudence. It is an outrage to empower the Director of Public Prosecution (DPP) to appeal a jury's verdict of acquittal and this should be repealed.

During the last year our justice system, the court in particular, was confronted with a quartet of cases, five, by the learned Attorney General against the Parliament of Guyana seeking to overturn decisions taken by the latter in its internal proceedings. Traumatized by each defeat in the National Assembly the Hon. Attorney General sought refuge in the court in every occasion. He was unsuccessful in the completed ones but sought to obfuscate the truth by propaganda through the Government's monopoly control of the media. In the first action, No. 19 (12) of 2012, dealing with the composition of Parliamentary Committees, at page 29 of his judgment Chief Justice Chang said this, and I quote:

“The facts as alleged by the Attorney General in affidavit in support of the motion are legally incapable of supporting this claim to a constitutional breach.”

The second action, No. 2 (16) W of 2012, dealing with the budget cuts, is still pending. I have written Chief Justice Chang seeking to have that matter completed by letter dated 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2013, but the learned Chief Justice has been unable to do so and therefore the provisional decision obviously is that the jury is still out on that question.

The third action, No. 69 CM of 2012, the Hon. Attorney General contended that it was unconstitutional for the National Assembly to pass a no-confidence motion in Mr. Rohee. This was the case the learned Attorney General fled from, if you recall, when he withdrew and wholly discontinued it, recognising his folly. I believe that he was reminded that there was a no-confidence motion against the then Minister of Labour, Mr. Manzoor Nadir, which was not successful because, of course, the majority was on that side of the House.

The fourth action, No. 94 CM of 2012, the Attorney General also lost. His question to the court was whether the National Assembly could prohibit Minister Rohee from speaking. The learned Chief Justice said, “Yes, Rohee had no right to speak as Minister”. He then gave him a consolation point, Mr. Rohee has a right to speak as an elected member, whatever that means since we have no constituencies where persons could identify an Member of Parliament (MP) as their MP, but we have a Proportional Representation (PR) system which is a list system.

Those cases invoked high constitutional questions about the independence of the National Assembly to go about its business, undisturbed and not interfered with and those matters that are still pending we trust that at the completion thereof the Government and the Members on the other side of the House would recognise that the National Assembly must proceed with its business without such interference in the future.

Labour: The Hon. Minister of Finance omits, as is his want, any reference to the Ministry of Labour in his budget speech, but do not be misled. The PPP/C has never forgotten nor forgiven Trade Unions which they blame for unseating them from government and keeping them in the wilderness for upwards of three decades.

The Government had implemented a policy of 'divide and rule' in the Trade Union Movement and, in fact, had engineered the split there in using Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Guyana (FITUG), an umbrella organisation for Trade Unions loyal to the PPP/C, against the Guyana Trade Unions Congress, which it perceived to be hostile towards it.

The Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) has historically been singled out for harsh treatment, thus efforts to frustrate Public Servants by keeping them on the breadline with starvation wages and relentless attacks on their unions which involve breaking up its bargaining unit into semiautonomous agencies or entities, bringing into focus the question of continued representation by the GPSU of the workers in these new bodies.

No doubt you are aware that I have shown over the last 12 years that Public Servants have had no real increase in wages and salaries because of the annually imposed 5% increase by the Government in breach of the collective bargaining agreement. The new Minister of Labour, Dr. Nanda Gopaul, has been talking about a new minimum wage. For years the Guyana Public Service Union has advocated increases ranging from 15%-20% in wages and salaries for Public Servants. I respectfully submit that the Government could doubly afford to increase wages and salaries and the minimum wage; the reason being that they use only part of the earnings of this country to determine the earnings of public servants. What about National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL)'s funds, Lotto funds and the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) funds? These are not factored in the amount available for Public Servants' wages and salaries. The latter amounts are used to benefit supporters of the Government with those capital projects. In this year's Budget the sum of \$661,872,000 is budgeted for revision of wages and salaries, yet the employment costs are projected to increase by \$4.6 billion.

The APNU calls on the Government to stop fooling around with the lives and wellbeing of the Public Servants in Guyana and to pay them a living wage.

Job Creation: We know that job creation is a function is a function of investment. Following direct investment I hardly hear anything about them, local investment and investment by the Government. The Marriott issue shows that the question of job creation is not taken seriously by the Government. **[Mr. Nandlall: Mislead you all again?]** The Government... what is wrong



with my junior, Mr. Harmon? The Marriott issue shows that the question of job creation is not taken seriously by the Government. The Government never publishes the unemployment rate. What is its employment policy? It does not publish any manpower survey or, indeed, whether it conducts any.

It is conventional wisdom that big construction projects are job spinners and ought to employ many Guyanese. Unlike the People's National Congress (PNC), when in Government, the PPP/C does not guarantee employment to Guyanese in big international projects in Guyana. The Chinese workers, for example, were preferred over the Guyanese workers in the Marriott case. The APNU recommends to this Government that in all such contracts they must include what we called, in our day, a "Guyanisation Clause". That clause not only guaranteed work for the Guyanese workers but ensures that whatever project or entity it is would be taken over gradually, over time, by Guyanese labour, talent and skill.

RUSAL: Mr. Speaker, you would recall that in the last presentation last year I greeted Dr. Nanda Gopaul well. I greeted him well. I informed him about the intromissions of his predecessor and I trusted that he would escape the type of treatment the then Hon. Minister of Labour had meted out to the Guyanese workers in the bauxite industry. I pointed out to the Hon. Member that we had to seek recourse in a no-confidence motion against the Minister to get him to do his work and to do well by the Guyanese workers in that industry. I thought that he had taken my word seriously. It is evident that he has not.

The PPP Administration has been deliberately lax in ensuring that the bauxite company of Guyana, RUSAL for short, observes and respects the laws of Guyana; particularly in the area of the adherence to occupational health and safety regulations. This is evident by the following developments:

1. RUSAL workers at Arorima worksite were recently injured as a consequence of gross violations of the regulations and procedures for the disposal of explosives. As a result many were injured and some severely.
2. RUSAL suspended 67 workers who protested unsafe working conditions at its operations during May 2009, shortly afterwards RUSAL dismissed five workers who were protesting about the unsanitary conditions for the storage of food materials in areas

infested by rodents and roaches in the kitchen where meals were usually prepared for the staff at the Arorima location.

As a consequence of those above stated developments, these said same matters were listed as differences for resolution by way of arbitration to be conducted by the Ministry of Labour, however, having inherited the problem, Dr. Nanda Gopaul false started a purported invocation of compulsory arbitration by his failure to sign the notice himself, as was required, instead of the Chief Labour Officer and the result was RUSAL took advantage of this and took the Minister to court.

Years ago we had requested that we introduce an industrial court in Guyana so that matters of labour would not be bogged down in the general malaise in the wider justice system. The President, who was in fact seated over there at that time, was very favourable to the idea but thought that we will look at it down the line. That was nearly five years ago and I trust that we would look at it now again, now that the Hon. Member is President of Guyana.

The point is that the Guyana Bauxite Union obviously would have been shut out from this arrangement where they went to court and so they had to intervene in that matter and they go leave from the Chief Justice to do so and recognising, my junior, that if the matter was left like that it would be for another 20 years, the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) and the General Workers Union (GWU) lawyers suggest that the matter be resolved and that the Minister restart the proceedings and sign again. The Minister agreed to that and so the matter was withdrawn. That was over a year ago and the Hon. Minister of Labour has not seen it fit to restart, in the correct way, the compulsory arbitration for the workers of the bauxite industry and the company, RUSAL. They cannot do that but a month ago Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL) had a strike and GPL, in that bargaining unit, had to deal with National Association of Agricultural, Commercial and Industrial Employees (NAACIE). Many of you might not know that but the Hon. Minister, Mr. Nanda Gopaul was the Secretary General of NAACIE. He is very experienced. That is why one has to wonder why he did not sign the invocation documents himself, instead of giving it to the Public Servant to sign. What we noted was after about a week the Minister, himself, intervened in that strike and, on this occasion, signed the relevant documents for the arbitration proceedings. **[Mr. Nandlall: What is wrong with that?]** What is

wrong with that? You came late. You would have learned about nepotism and corruption. Now, I am not saying that you are involved in that. I want you to get me clear.

Question must have to be asked as to how this Minister of Labour, the Hon. Member, could move so swiftly to resolve this matter involving NAACIE and after all these years they still have the bauxite workers at the mercy of RUSAL. The General Manager of RUSAL even attempted to whip them with a spade. That is what they brought our Guyanese workers to. They have no respect for the Guyanese workers and we are calling on this Minister to use his powers and intervene in the same manner in which he intervened in the GPL/NAACIE strike. Start the arbitration or face another no-confidence motion and this time, we assure you, we will win this no-confidence motion.

*1.39 p.m.*

This Government likes to say that it is a working class Government; it has the interest of the workers at heart, but does it, Mr. Speaker? When the honourable late President Dr. Cheddi Jagan was in power the attitude that he displayed to the workers of Guyana was so substantially different from his successors. He ensured that he had increases that were above rate of inflation and if there was even a slight increase in the GDP he wanted to share part of that increase with the workers of Guyana. But alas! Since his demise, I do not believe that he would have liked to come and sit amongst the Members on that other side. I do not believe that he would have liked to see what is occurring right now.

This Government has a duty to take care of our workers and it has neglected this duty. We are saying that we are holding the Government to account and we believe that it must act presently and it must act now. The Government must do it now.

Therefore I leave with you, Mr. Speaker, and this honourable House this little verse titled, *Styled: the lament of a Guyanese worker*, and I quote:

“Do not cry for me PPP/C, the truth is you never really loved me. All through my hungry days, my poverty stricken existence you kept your silence and you kept your distance.”

Thank you Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you. I believe that there is a strain in music that can be put to it immediately too. Thank you very much Mr. Williams for your contributions which, I think, liven things up here this afternoon. I now invite the Hon. Member Mr. Robert Persaud, who I am sure will add life to this debate, to continue on behalf of the Government.

**Minister of Natural Resources and Environment [Mr. R. Persaud]:** Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. Let me commend and congratulate the Minister of Finance and the team of the Ministry of Finance for doing an excellent job in putting together Budget 2013 titled, *Overcoming Challenges Together, Accelerating Gains for Guyana*.

Budget 2013 does not only bring a pot of goodies for all the people of Guyana but it continues to pursue the vision, it continues to realise the commitments of the PPP/C, that is, to provide a better standard of living for all of the people of Guyana.

It is important to reflect on the context of the budget and the Minister of Finance, very eloquently, certainly painted a very realistic picture as to the external environment, the developments taking place in our country as well as where our country is heading and where we want the people of Guyana to go, in terms of development and prosperity.

The measures, the policies, the direction outlined in Budget 2013 gives life to what was promised by the PPP/C at the 2011 Elections as contained in the manifesto. I make reference to this, not only out of partisan consideration, but I make reference to the manifesto because it shows consistency, but more, it reflects a Government that is honourable, a Government that when it makes a promise it delivers that promise. If we look at subsection of the manifesto and at all the areas ranging from infrastructure to growth for development and then move to the area looking at ICT development as a critical enabler, modernising and diversifying the productive sector, education, youth, sport and culture, new economic activities looking at health, and the list goes on, we will see that the commitments and the promises here are being given life, are being realised and are being enabled by Budget 2013 as part of that larger five-year programme that is outlined in the manifesto.

That is an important context because we must not see the budget as a singular document in isolation of the visions, in isolation of the wider plan or the framework of development. That vision, as the Minister of Finance mentioned, is contained in a number of documents and an

important one being the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), a document that is not only being celebrated and supported locally but one that is winning international support. We must recognise how the budget was framed and the context and the perspective that are so reflected in the document.

Over the past several hours of listening to the debate and the contributions of the Opposition points to a number of factors. The first one, as some of my colleagues would have mentioned, shows that the Opposition, so far - because there are many others to come, there are many *big guns* to come, as it were - has been unable to pinpoint weaknesses, has been unable to criticise or to show the demerits, or to show the errors, as it were, in the measures and the policies that are outlined. There has not been a single strong criticism of any policy, of any measure that is being contained in the budget.

The fact that we have seen this certainly indicates that we get a feeling of reluctant endorsement and which we welcome. That is good. It is something that we should all admire each other for, that when something is good we should compliment it. It is not because it comes from the other side; and likewise when there are good ideas and good suggestions from the Opposition the Government supports and gives consideration. By the omission or the inability to come up with any sound strong effective criticism of Budget 2013, so far, certainly indicates that - we have a document, we have a budget here - in a way, enjoys some form of support from the Opposition. It is a compliment that I am offering; it is not necessarily a criticism. One of the first speakers to do so far, including the Hon. Member who just spoke before, actually I was surprised by the... [Hon. Member: Brevity.] It is not only brevity, but the lack of depth, in terms of looking at the issues as they relate to the budget.

What we have found so far is that the focus was on addressing extraneous matters and a lot of it is addressing issues that have been repeated. We go to the old lines of corruption, discrimination, marginalisation, and the list goes on. The lines and points raised have been old arguments made since 1992, as was recognised by the Hon. Member. These accusations have been effectively debunked Parliament after Parliament, public inquiries, various investigations and even those constitutional bodies have found that the claims and the accusations have been empty. They continue to be without any substance or validation.

Having said that, we also heard issues, in which the debate was being transformed into a complaints forum. As we have just heard from the Hon. Member, who preceded me, that if you have a bone to pick with the judiciary you come here and you use that... [Mr. B. Williams: ...you and your family.] Do you have a problem with my family? [Mr. B. Williams: Yes.] Do you have a problem with my family?

**Mr. Speaker:** Gentlemen, one second Mr. Persaud, let us not make any comments about other person's families. I recall last year Mrs. Backer, and rightly so, took umbrage when there was a mention of, I believe, a relative of hers and she was correct. If a Minister is speaking, or a Member, let us avoid, at all cost, any reference of any Minister's family. If there is an issue with a Minister let us deal with the Minister but avoid their children, their families please. If there is a substantive motion on the floor that wishes to go to that then we will consider it but until such time I would ask that we, whether by way of *sotto voce* comments, heckling, or otherwise, families, in my view, should be sacrosanct and away from our personal attacks.

**Mr. R. Persaud:** Mr. Speaker, it is just to say that I am very proud of the people who surround me - my biological family and the family of the PPP. I am not embarrassed. I am not sure that many of us can say that.

We need to also look at the budget as a document that recognises the need for us to construct a society that is one which is inclusive and provides opportunities for all of our people, particularly the current and future generations. I say so because we are a country with a particular makeup. We are a country that has had a history of struggle. We are a country whereby we have undergone some serious challenges, immediately and certainly, if we look deep, and look very deep, into our history. We need to recognise that in going forward it is the responsibility of all of us to ensure that the type of measures and policies that we put in place continue to create a country in which every single Guyanese - not withstanding race, not withstanding religion, not withstanding social status - feels as being a part of this country or, as my colleague said, being a part of the Guyana dream. That is what this budget also seeks to do. It creates an environment and the opportunity for inclusion. If we look at all the measures, which have been detailed and outlined by the Minister of Finance, we will certainly point to that.

This budget does not only offer up those measures for inclusion, in terms of people's participation in the development of our country; it does not only give every single Guyanese the opportunity to write the story of development, but it also gives us elected leaders the opportunity to create and to build a culture of tolerance, to build a culture of creating a Guyana for all. That is also the opportunity that this budget presents.

Several speakers before me - I remember the lead spokesman on finance the Hon. Member Mr. Carl Greenidge - raised the issue, and certainly reference was made to the Minister of Finance's comment, about political dialogue and political consultation. The records will show that we in the PPP, and now the PPP/C, have not only talked the talk but we have walked the walk when it comes to political consultations and political cooperation. If we look at our history when Dr. Jagan was elected as Premier in the 1960s he came out and he offered half of the Cabinet to then breakaway PPP, which became the PNC, to the late President Forbes Burnham. If we look throughout our period... [**Hon. Member (Opposition):** Where did you get that from?] Where did I get that from? It is contained in our history. The Hon. Leader of the Opposition, a very versed historian, can probably point you to that address.

Over the years, too, even when the late President Forbes Burnham was in Government he also made overtures and there were positive responses from the PPP, in the form of critical support, in the 1970s and even just before his death in 1985 when there was some form of discussions. If we look in recent history, in the 1990s, when we were coming towards the end of that struggle for the return of democracy, the PPP, from the Opposition side, again, sought to create unity, to forge alliances, and we had the patriotic coalition for democracy, something that the Hon. Members Gail Teixeira and Dr. Rupert Roopnarine might be quite familiar with, and again those showed efforts.

If we look throughout the PPP/C time in office and the efforts that have been made starting with the t City Hall when we thought that we were going to use the Mandela's Formula, in terms of sharing the governance... It was Dr. Jagan who had said to let us start it at the City Hall. We said that we would allow the others, as it were, to go first. Because of the make-up of the city council when it was time for the PPP candidate to become the mayor the agreement was aborted. We did not give up on that and then we continued with other efforts. The PPP/C even presented a document which is called "Political Cooperation," that is, a building thrust for political

cooperating in which it enunciated a road map to bring about increased, enhanced political dialogue with the aim of lifting and making much more substantive political cooperation. There have been a number of efforts. Some we have seen progress; some we have seen some positive responses from the Opposition and others we have seen those opportunities squandered.

Whilst I do not want to go into the details of what took place prior to the budget, but certainly one cannot ignore the facts that efforts were made. Discussions were held to entertain the views not only on the Opposition, but of the wider Guyanese society, so that at the end of the day we will have a budget that reflects the aspirations and also that reflects the needs of our people. When we talk about political dialogue and about political cooperation we must ensure that we do what it takes. Even if we look at what has been the positive response by other stakeholders and also the silence, in a way, from the Opposition, so far, shows that there has been some levels of consensus that this Budget 2013 reflects what the people of Guyana wants, but more so it points to the collective vision of taking our country forward.

In the Minister's presentation he referred to the performance of the various sectors of the economy, both the traditional as well as the new and emerging sectors. Yesterday my colleague Minister Irfaan Ali quoted one of the Caribbean reports, in which a number of other studies have confirmed, that countries such as Guyana, which possesses the type of rich natural resources, are in a position to withstand global and other difficulties. What this Government has been doing and the measures contained in Budget 2013 will certainly reinforce policies and measures that will see our country developing our natural resources, in a way, to bring about prosperity for all of our people.

Already, when we look at the performance of some of the subsector within the natural resources sector we will see that they are positioning themselves for growth, for expansion and also for provision of more opportunities for people. Take for instance gold, in the year 2011 gold declaration was three hundred and sixty-three thousand ounces, last year it rose to four hundred and thirty-eight thousand six hundred and forty-five ounces, the highest ever outside of OMAI. If the target is looked at, which is set for this year of four hundred and fifty-one thousand ounces, it certainly points to a sector that is growing.



Let me dwell a bit on gold because its contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is significant. That is why thousands of hard-working people within gold mining and the wider mining sector are offended when they are described in the most demeaning of terms about their activities. We are building a gold mining sector that every day we want to modernise; we want to improve extraction and recovery. Currently it is about thirty-five to forty per cent.

We are embarking and introducing and working with the miners association in introducing technologies that will see us improving recovery rates in the nineties... We are also looking at technologies that are very green, environmentally friendly, moving away from... to mercury free technology. Last year there was, for the first time, the importation of close to one dozen mercury free gold processing plants into the country. The miners themselves had done that and they must be commended. These are not plants that were imported by the Government and distributed and issued on an edict, but the miners on their own had took the initiative because of their own sense of responsibility, and certainly also because of insistence too that mining is conducted in a very safe and environmentally friendly way.

This sector has brought about life to communities that had lost hope. If we go into Region 1, the Port Kaituma area, if we go to parts of Region 7, Region 8 and even other towns and areas that support the activity, and even right here in Georgetown, we will see the thousands who, on a daily basis, depends on mining and mining related activities and they are not prostitutes as someone had wanted to suggest.

**Mr. Speaker:** Mr. Persaud, there has been no suggestion that prostitutes...

**Mr. R. Persaud:** Mr. Speaker, I can clarify and then withdraw if you insist. The context of my reference to prostitute is that the Hon. Member Mr. Bulkan, in his presentation, said that there was prostitution being brought within, and with my reference to the thousands who depend, I am saying that they are not all prostitutes.

**Mr. Speaker:** I do not think Mr. Bulkan meant that, but I can tell you as a frequent...

**Mr. R. Persaud:** I am not suggesting that he does, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:**... or he never intended or inferred that. I can tell you, myself, as a frequent visitor to the interior that it does breed and is breeding trafficking in persons and prostitution. That is a fact. I think we accept that, but Mr. Bulkan was not implying that mining equals prostitution.

**Mr. R. Persaud:** Mr. Speaker, what I just made was a clear statement of fact that when we go out there everyone is not a prostitute and that all miners are not engaged in prostitution. What we have is progressive hard-working people who are seeking to eke out a decent salary and they ought not to be castigated or to be damned and shamed for some political reason.

We are also looking at two large scale mining plants. There are the Aurora as well as the ETK Inc./Sandspring Resources Ltd. whereby we are looking at that as part of those transformation of the gold mining sector. If we look at the other area...because mining and quarrying last year contributed close to eleven per cent of GDP - a significant chunk of the GDP.

If we look at the bauxite performance too we will see that we have been able to, more or less, under this Government, revive what has been a dying industry to one that is very vibrant today. If we look, in terms of production, in the year 2011 the production was about 1.8 million tons. Last year, notwithstanding the disruptions of Bosai's operation due to the unrest in Linden, bauxite output was recorded at 2.2 million tons. It shows the dynamism; it shows the growth in activities; the opportunities and the jobs that are being created because of the instrumentality of the PPP/C working with the investors, working with the communities too, in bringing about life and economic activities to those communities. We need to recognise that whilst we have been pursuing growth in new and emerging sectors of our economy this Government has not neglected the traditional sector of rice, sugar and bauxite. That is why if the budget is looked at the Government continues to place emphasis on investment in those areas.

As the Hon. Minister of Finance has done... He has reviewed the performance, so I need not to repeat that, in terms of the growth and even in some areas in which there was a decline, take for instance in forestry, for a number of factors, but these certainly have pointed to a very dynamic, expanding and growing natural resources sector that can only bring about more wealth, more prosperity and more opportunities for our people.

Whilst we move and put emphasis on the development of the natural resources sector, we are also doing so in harmony with the environment, and our Low Carbon Development Strategy sets

out that pathway. It outlines that vision. It gives the direction in which we can have, as it were, the better of both worlds, that is, to be able to develop our natural resources and at the same time manage and preserve our environment so much so that, as a nation, we have been able to earn in excess of US\$115 million from environmental services of our rainforest due to sound environmental management.

*2.09 p.m.*

As the Minister of Finance referred to our agreement with Norway and the contribution that has been made to the Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund (GRIF), in terms of these resources being used to promote Amerindian community development, looking at clean energy, I am quite sure, very soon, the Minister and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) will be signing an agreement for the medium and small enterprises, whereby there are resources here to create a number of green jobs targeting medium and small enterprises. That is how we have been able to manage and to achieve that balance, a balance which has been recognised internationally whereby we have seen growth. We are one of the few countries so richly endowed with natural resources where eighty-eight per cent of our land mass is covered in tropical rainforest. We have been able to expend natural resources and at the same time manage our environment, manage our forest areas that that also become a contributor to national wealth and national development. This is something we all must be proud of. This is not something that the PPP/Civic Government singularly claims credit for. This is something that the people of Guyana must claim credit for, including the Opposition because, from time to time, it has supported policies and measures there that allow us to build that framework whereby we are able to develop our natural resources in harmony with sustainable and sound environmental practices.

The environment will continue to be given tremendous focus. If we look in terms of the allocation in the budget, looking in terms of how do we manage the environmental effects of mining and the resources, which have been provided and the work programme planned by the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC)... For instance, fourteen mobile stations, which have to do monitoring, have been purchased and reinstalled. Eight GGMC stations will be built at different mining communities. Another one hundred and twenty-five staff will be employed to do monitoring. We will be working with Amerindian communities to train

environmental officers and to equip these environmental officers so that they too can help us to police and to manage whatever effects that we may have.

We are looking at how it is too that we can manage the social effects and the relationship with this sector, not only from the ecological standpoint, when we talk about the environment, but also the economical standpoint, looking at how it is, especially with Amerindian communities on how do we manage the relationship between those who are engaged in that natural resources sector and in various communities because the indigenous communities are part and parcel too of the development of our natural resources, not of the exclusion. There are a number of legislation that speak to that; there are regulations. We are constantly reviewing and ensuring that we are effective in their implementation. We have engaged the Indigenous Peoples' Commission to work with the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment in the environment and our agencies, in terms of preventing conflicts and managing situations so that there can be a better working relationship.

We are also looking at how it is that there can be special regulations put in place so that we can, at the end of the day, doth see an activity or activities that are generating wealth and income and prosperity at the same time are doing so and it is happening at the cost of social development and national harmony. We are trying to manage those. It is the balance between the national resources, ecological development as well as sociological development throughout the length and breadth. That is what we will continue to pursue. That is the vision that we will continue to pursue as outlined within the budget measures catering for all sectors of our economy.

In 1595, when Sir Walter Raleigh came to the northern part of South America, he came in search of El Dorado. He did not find that fable city but when he reported back, in London, he did not say that his mission was failed because he did not find fable city. He said what he saw there was an area rich in natural wealth, rich in potential and, for him, the El Dorado was real. In 1595, he believed that the El Dorado was real although he did not find that city. I make reference to the El Dorado, not the El Dorado fifteen, five, twelve or twenty-five year-old rum, because it was a dream of the El Dorado that had inspired our people, our ancestors. It was the dream of that El Dorado that certainly would have inspired the 1763 Slave Revolt which 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary we are celebrating this year. It was that dream of pursuing an El Dorado that saw Indian immigrants, some forcibly, some voluntarily leaving poverty and coming in search of that El Dorado to

Guyana. We must be proud of that too because this year we will be celebrating 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of Indians. Also the Chinese too, and I wish to remind ourselves that they were in pursue too of the El Dorado when they came here. The Chinese this year will be celebrating 160<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their arrival. The Hon. Member has left but I want to remind him that the Chinese are part of the six people that make up our nation and they continue to.

Our first President, President Arthur Chung, and you, yourself, Mr. Speaker, are from Chinese descent.

**Mr. Speaker:** It is some.

**Mr. R. Persaud:** It is some. I have my research correct, Mr. Speaker. We continue to be in a land in which we are diverse, very open, and our people continue to be inspired to pursue that El Dorado. The dream of El Dorado is alive and, as described by our honourable colleague, Minister Irfaan Ali, it is a Guyana dream. Certainly, if we look at Budget 2013 it will allow every single Guyanese to pursue that El Dorado. I say so because we need to move away from this mindset that the cause of our problem is someone else and because of that we are not able to get opportunity because of someone else. Even as a nation, we must also start take a grip of our destiny more and spend less time looking back and blaming our colonial masters and those before. Likewise, when we get up and we speak, and when we make our presentation too, we must let our supporters, we must let our constituents, know too that this Budget 2013 is about solving their problems. It is about empowering them, about giving them opportunities. This budget is not about discrimination, it is not about taking away opportunities.

With those few remarks, with those comments, I wish to join with my other colleagues, those silently and those certainly who have spoken here, in commending the Budget 2013 to the National Assembly.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

**Ms. Wade:** I rise in relation to the budget presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, 2013 under the theme *Overcoming Challenges Together, Accelerating Gains for Guyana*.

As an elected Member of Parliament representing Region 5, I want to say this Budget 2013 will not remove the frustration and depression that exist. Shouting the biggest budget ever will not solve the problem. It will not make an impact on the poor people's life, when on a daily basis residence continue to face hardship. The budgetary allocation to Region 5 continues to be inadequate. Hence the affairs of the region are not properly administered and this is hindering development in all sectors. Sir, the purpose and function of any government is to sustain the welfare and the well-being of all people - rich and poor, young and old - and as such the budget is not a statement to be taken in isolation, it is a part of a design to bring great happiness and comfort to all Guyanese. The emphasis and the objective are and must always be the happiness of the people.

Prior to this budget, the APNU Members of Parliament embarked on a series of outreaches in six out of the ten administrative regions. We went into the highways and byways; we spoke to the residents in the various communities and we listened to their stories and concerns as to how they feel their issues should be addressed. I would like to thank those patriotic citizens most profoundly for my presentation today was aided by them. What is of great concern is the fact that many of those persons and groups claimed that have also voice their concerns to the Members of the Government. As such, I am disappointed, for I know that those issues were not addressed in the budget. I recall that during previous debates I spoke of some very critical problems affecting people of Region 5, matters which required urgent attention, but the Government completely ignores the needs of the people. Whenever I stand up to speak I do not mislead the House. I am here with issues from Region 5. Budget 2013 is before us, so now I turn my attention to rice.

At page 18, the Hon. Minister outlined the achievements in the rice industry as another record performance. I stand here as a messenger of Region 5. I stand here to deliver a message from the farmers of Region 5. I have said before and I will continue to say that Region 5 is the largest agriculture region in the country and therefore its input to the country's development is very important. All is not well in the agriculture sector in Region 5. A collaborative approach is required to address the key obstacles faced by farmers to ensure that the limited resources are used effectively and efficiently. Priority must be given to the implementation of measures to reduce flooding in the flood-prone areas on a timely basis.

Maintenance of access roads, dams, drains, structures, canals, embankment, empoldering of rice land, repairs to *kokers* and sluices must always be ongoing. We know that huge sums of money are spent in some areas to rehabilitate farming communities but what is wondering is the failure to manage the business of the State. Cattles continue to ravish farmers... and destroy the infrastructure. Tractors owners continue to traverse the dams on a daily basis in and out of the rainy season, and these are the big ones. I am asking that measures be put in place to deal with these unacceptable behaviours. Because of the adverse conditions experienced in past, drainage and irrigation is absolutely necessary. There can never be any recovery from adverse conditions so the Government needs to put in place a comprehensive disaster preparedness programme to deal with emergencies to save the millions of dollars that farmers would have spent on their farmlands.

In Region 5, there is an ongoing land related issue. Once again, Mahaica-Mahaicony-Abary Agricultural Development Authority (MM-ADA) had caused to publish the names of farmers who are delinquent with payment of their drainage and irrigation charges. I recall, some years ago, farmers battled with this very issue under the watch of former Minister of Agriculture, the Hon. Robert Persaud. Sir, during that period the Minister came to Bush Lot and he spoke to hundreds of farmers and at that meeting the Minister decided to set up a Land Review Committee. Mr. Minister, do you remember that? That Land Review Committee, Mr. Bishop, the honourable member Bishop, a very good man, headed this review committee... [**Hon. Members (Opposition):** Is it this Bishop?] I said an honourable man... and we had six such consultations in Region 5. We had three on the West Coast of Berbice; we had three in the Mahaicony. Farmers came out and they expressed their feelings and concerns. This package went to the Hon. Minister then. It is with Mr. Persaud, the then Minister of Agriculture. I am asking the now Minister of Agriculture please to collect that very package. That is a very important package, so that we can proceed with the feelings that expressed during that period. Farmers came out and they expressed their feelings, Mr. Minister, and so I need you to get that package so that we could have a way forward.

There were farmers, also, whose loans the then President restructured because he had to do that to save their properties and gave them the opportunity to go back to their livelihood, as farmers. That was a way forward. We need to have a way forward, this time around; because of the

constant flood in some areas farmers are indebted to MMA/ADA. There is no dispute about that and because of this indebtedness some farmers have no choice but to sublet for survival and that is what is causing the problem right now - subletting.

Facilities are not in place to access the land needed. They need equipment. We know in the past that MMA/ADA had tractors and combines to assist the small farmers and those are not in place anymore and so the problem here is not the repossession, but a meaningful suggestion. Those farmers have to put food on their family's tables and they have no other means to do so.

Sir, I have some suggestions from the farmers. They want to meet with Hon. Minister Dr. Ramsammy, as urgent as possible. They have burning issues; they have problems, Mr. Minister. They feel also that the notices, which are in the papers, are not adequate. MMA/ADA must send notices to the farmers telling them when that this repossession period will take place because some of them do not even buy newspapers, so they are only hearing, by the ways, that their names are in the newspapers. I am saying Hon. Minister that you need to come and talk to these farmers.

Farmers believe that the rich should not get this land. What about their children? Some of them have five or six sons and those lands must be given to their sons, Mr. Minister. Government needs to bridge the gap between the haves and the have not, the rich and the poor and the grass roots farmers. Agriculture is their business, all their life, since in the days when ploughing was done with a pair of oxen and even before the MMA/ADA came into existence. Can we say to those farmers now that the lands are not theirs anymore? Serious consideration is necessary at this time for those farmers to meet their survival needs and their living standards. I hope that during this 2013 period farmers will overcome the barriers that presently exist. I must warn that consultation is needed at all times when dealing with farming issues.

Let us look at the high prices for fuels, fertilisers, even the labour cost in the rice industry now, the chemical, transportation, be it the truck or even the combines or the draining cart that are loaded into the trucks. These prices continue to rise but the paddy price remains the same and so the farmers need some relief.

Let us look at the Strath Campbell, the Mahaicony area, Washclothes and those areas, the farmers there still awaiting the four-door sluice at the *basket primpler* canal and they want a



continuation of the port Baiabu Canal to link Butenabu Creek to ease them of all their drainage problems in the area. There are problems in the rice industry. We cannot run away from them.

I would like to turn my attention to housing and water. I stood up in this very House during last year and I spoke about Number 22 Bel Air, West Coast Berbice, that there is a squatting area there - I hope that the Minister taking into consideration Number 22 Bel Air squatting area – and the residents there have been clamouring for years to get the area regularised in order to access electricity and pure water supply but to no avail. I have spoken about this before; it is the same old story all the time.

Talking about water: In my area there were those White children from Connecticut and they were on a programme in Guyana, B3. It is called “Building Beyond Borders”. They were in Festival City. We were fortunate in the Kingelly/Chester area to have them build a community centre for us. We called it the “King Chest”. They came in about three weeks ago. Mr. Speaker, a Sunday, getting up in the morning, and on the Monday, getting up in the morning, we were awakened with screams and shouts and we were wondering what had happened to those children already. When we ran to the rescue of the children, it was four of them, it was that they had turned on the pipe and they saw the grounds from the water. If I should display - it is no joke - how those children went on, each and every one of us will run out of this National Assembly. There were screams and the shouts - “There is blood coming through the tap; there is blood coming through the tap”. That was a first impression and, as you know, Mr. Speaker, what you see is that you will get, so they told themselves that that was it here - first time visiting Guyana.

When I heard the Minister yesterday as though “All things bright and beautiful, All creatures great and small”, I am saying that is not so. When we get up to speak, we must acknowledge, as the Hon. Member Dr. Westford acknowledged, that everything is not well. We must let Guyanese people know that all is not well. There was a second set of B3 students who came. As soon as they got here, they said that they were told not to touch the taps. The message went all the way to Connecticut and that put us in a bad spot. We had to purchase five gallons of water for forty children on a daily basis for them to brush their teeth. You could understand, Mr. Speaker, we need proper water system. If we are talking about tourism, there are people coming into our country and when they will reach here and that is what they will see – “ blood through the taps” - it is a serious message. We are far from tourism.

It is appalling to see the deplorable state of Government houses in the MMA/ADA compound. Mr. Speaker, it is not even at the MMA/ADA level, even in the police compound at Fort Wellington, the houses are all ready to drop at any minute. I mean to say that there are persons who need homes and so it hurts when one goes to those areas and sees those Government houses standing there by themselves. Public servants need homes to live and they cannot have those homes. We have to do something. It seems as if no effort is being made to renovate those buildings and taking into consideration the billions that will be spent in water and housing sector during 2013. I say that consideration must be given to families to have access to water who live in locations all their lives but have no documentation of ownership to take to the Guyana Water Inc. (GWI), hence they have no water. They always have to molest neighbours for water. I would like to see this Government, during this year, gives considerations, say something, to GWI so that those persons in those categories can have some assistance.

Roads and bridges: During the year 2011, the residents of Burma, Mahaicony, had to block the main access road to show their disgust with the state of the road there, yet today the situation remains the same. This is unacceptable. They have changed the name now from Burma Road to “Abortion Road” because pregnant mothers are suffering in that area. Whenever I have to go to Burma, it hurts to go to there. I am saying that and I hope that the Hon. Minister will have the road be completed in the year 2013. He had promised to do it in the year 2012, it did not happen. Please let it happen in 2013. The view of the residents in various communities is that they should be consulted whenever development works are being carried out in their communities. They need consultations, Mr. Minister. The residents feel, whilst the Government boasted about accomplishments of roads and bridges, the works are of poor quality for large sums of money. Region 5 should be part of a level playing field when the determination of whatever is being done there, in the construction of roads and bridges. They want to have their say.

We need proper streets and roads in Number 30; we need them in Number 28; we need them in Linchfield, Bush Lot, Catherine, Calcutta, Hopetown, Yeovil, where I am living, and Belladrum. The south of the public road, at Tempe, there is a police officer living there. When it rains that officer, with her footwear in her hands, would be battling it through, going to work. We need to have those officers more comfortable. It is two of them, one at Number 28 and one at Tempe.

Those areas are not listed for works in the year 2013. I do not know what will happen to those people.

Power generation and supply: This is getting nowhere in Region 5. There is no reliable affordable supply of electricity. Our young people have to be using lamps; they cannot even enjoy a simple television programme or computer service. I spoke about Number 30, Back Street, 40 ohms are there, Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Prime Minister knows about it and Dr. Anthony knows about it because it was during the year 2006. The Former President Mr. Jagdeo, during his campaign in those regions, promised the people there. This is 2013 and up to now, there is nothing. Those 40 ohms in Number 30, Back Street, those young people are asking every day when they are going to have electricity and no lamps.

*2.39 p.m.*

I have been pleading since 2007 also for Calcutta, Catherine, Number 9 and Number 8. These are areas that have not seen electricity all their lives. Young people are growing up without electricity; these are just to mention a few. These poor people cannot enjoy a comfortable living like every one of us in this House. Surely, they cannot afford the \$238,000 per household. That is what is causing the problem. The one pole to get to their homes is \$238,000. These are poor people.

There is also need for street lights in the Region in the following areas, Chester to Rising Sun – I am living in a little village called Yeovil; I am an original country girl. Electricity installation stopped the village before me four years ago. I stood up here talking about my village. People said to me that I am a Member of Parliament and living in darkness. I hope that the Hon. Minister will see it fit that, at least, the MP of Region 5 can have some street lights in her village. It is disgusting. Guyana needs to show some concern and bring some relief to residents, especially with the ills that are taking place in our society today. Break and enter is the order of the day.

Sanitation: The disposal of solid waste in a safe and efficient manner is supposed to be everybody's business so as to ensure the health and safety of the citizens of this country. There are three landfill sites that were identified in Region 5 for garbage disposal. The residents are

saying that there must be consultation before anything happens. So, the Hon. Minister needs to have that done in Region 5.

**Sea and River Defence:** The northern embankment of the main drainage canal is being threatened by the Atlantic Ocean – I notice the Minister is not in here. The embankment has eroded significantly in the vicinity of Eldorado Village. The division of the Ministry of Public Works and Communication needs to look at this urgently. Region 5 needs proper sea wall structure in No. 37, Plantation Brahan, Yeovil, where I am living, and Plantation Ross. Urgent corrective measures are needed in these unsafe and frightening areas. Residents of Profit, Foulis, Eldorado and Belladrum are tired of the salt water and the losses of millions which they suffer. These residents are still awaiting compensation.

**Vulnerable Groups:** I now turn to the issue of poverty among our poor, single parents, the elderly, the young, the disabled and the powerless. The emphasis and the objective must be happiness to our people, especial since the Government says “*Overcoming Challenges Together, Accelerating Gains for Guyana*”, which is the theme for the 2013 Budget.

Guyanese need a good life at a personal level. They need a sound education, satisfactory employment, economic opportunity and social protection for the vulnerable. The number of applications for public assistance has increased tremendously, Mr. Minister, over the years. It is alarming - the majority of applications for economic situations. This tells a story, and, judging from the applications, we are sure to have more dropouts in school.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, your time is up. Could someone ask for an extension of five minutes for her to conclude please? Thank you.

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

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Ms. Wade:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Workers can no longer survive on the meagre wages due to the high cost of living. This is contributing to increased poverty in the Region. There are parents who cannot afford to send their children to school, and there are those who go without meals.

Child abuse, domestic violence, suicide and rape are all on the increase. I must say that the probation and social services workers in Region 5 are doing a very good job. But those who are in charge of the child protection division in Region 5, the Minister needs to give that area complete overall... The officers there are not working in the interest of our Region's children.

In this National Assembly, we know that we have to disagree to agree. This is our country and we want what is best for everyone. The truth of the matter is that some of us have and some of us do not have. All we are asking for is a decent standard of living. This Government must make sure that this happens.

Young people comprise 60 per cent of the Guyanese population. Our success, as a nation, relies on youth. Although they are graduating from various learning institutions, they remain unemployed. The Youths of Region 5 deserve a better living standard. So, I am saying that Region 5 must have a levelled playing field.

We need a platform for drama, music and arts also. Government needs to create and implement a programme for the children of Region 5, with special needs and also gifted and talented children. Every year the region takes children to the annual National Athletics Championship and they perform well - from the region. They are never given the opportunity after then to see the light of the day until it comes around the following year.

Upgrading and developing the sporting facilities in my region must be priority. We need to look at areas such as Perth, which never had a ground, Strath Campbell, Number 28, Litchfield, Number 5 and the list goes on.

I am saying that in health we need a malaria centre. We have young people who are earning their livelihood from the Interior. So, we are asking that they be given a centre in Region 5 to ease them from travelling from New Amsterdam to Georgetown whenever they have this attack.

In conclusion, the purpose of a budget is to improve the quality of life for all Guyanese, not a few. Guyanese have a right to know how their moneys are being spent. Guyana cannot continue in this present state of stagnation. If we allow that to happen, our future generation will enjoy no peace and prosperity. We want not to remain poor; we do not want to be dissatisfied and deprived. Our personal aspiration must not be to remain unrealised. So, we hope for a better life

that will fulfil our needs. Our children's future will be bleak if we do not have this. We cannot allow this to continue. We have to pray and ask the lord to move the Ministers of the Government from a hearing place to a listening place, for it is a known fact that only by listening we can attack and make good decisions.

APNU's aim is to make this Parliament meaningful and to bridge the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. So, in this Tenth Parliament, we are saying that no gap must exist. This must be the main focus, to make the inputs and shape decisions, especially for those who are affected directly.

Hence, I say in closing that this God does not sleep and he reminds us in Proverbs 29:04 that when the king is concerned with justice, the nation will be strong, but when he is concerned with money, he will ruin the country.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member. I have always held the view that our regional Members of Parliament provide the pit and substance of what a budget debate should be on both sides. So, I compliment the speaker for taking us into the streets and the hamlets and the villages where it matters most what happens with the people's money in this country.

**Minister of Human Services and Social Security [Ms. Webster]:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today in this honourable House to lend my support to Budget 2013 under the theme, *Overcoming Challenges Together, Accelerating Gains for Guyana*.

Let me first of all extend congratulations to my colleague, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, the Minister of Finance, for articulating such a vision in this year's Budget presentation which contains key structural initiatives for continued growth in our economy.

Mr. Speaker, our Government remains committed to accelerating progress and development in Guyana.

I listened intently to the Hon. Member, Ms. Jennifer Wade, as she gave her presentation and I want to assure Ms. Wade that our Government is still a caring Government. The Hon. Member made mention of some staff of the Probation and Social Services Department in Region 5 as to

how they conduct their work. I will say that the staff of the Probation and Social Services Department of the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security work beyond the call of duty. They are dedicated. I noted her comments on the Child Protection Agency, and I would like to assure this honourable House that, as our Ministry continues to expand our services throughout the country, we will certainly investigate all concerns and complaints provided against our officers. I want to assure this honourable House that Ms. Wade's comments have not fallen on deaf ears.

I believe that we, as representatives of the people in this National Assembly, must be committed to working together for the benefit of all Guyanese. We must be steadfast in our endeavours and continue the process which began over two decades ago and which will enable our people to realise their dreams and aspirations, thereby making Guyana a better place.

The PPP/C Government has demonstrated, over the past years, through our policies and programmes, that we have a sustained track record. No one can deny the fact that the Guyana we see here today is vastly improved compared to what existed more than 20 years ago. Our approach has been one of targeted interventions with a focus on sustainability. The evidence is in the investments made across all the sectors and the support given to enable our private sector to prosper. These initiatives have enabled a record seven years of growth in our economy. Today, our citizens are beneficiaries of these initiatives. More so, if we were to look at the social sector, the programmes being implemented are all aimed at improving the quality of life of all Guyanese, which include our women, our children, the elderly and those vulnerable persons within our society, through targeted interventions.

Our Government's position is that every single Guyanese citizen must have access to the same opportunities, irrespective of where they live. It is, therefore, of utmost importance that greater emphasis will be placed upon the delivery of improved social services within our communities. It is to this end, in 2013, the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, in accordance with its mandate, will focus on meeting human needs through the provision of human services. As stated in the Budget presentation, "This Government remains committed to ensuring that all children have access to the care they deserve, thus granting them the opportunity to attain the skills and knowledge to become productive citizens."

In 2013, the Child Care and Protection Agency will continue to play a leading role in the investigative process of child abuse cases reported throughout the country. In fact, there was an increase in the number of child abuse cases investigated from 3,653 in 2011 to 3,690 cases in 2012. Of those cases, 396 children were successfully removed from abusive situations, and eighty-one (81) of these children were re-integrated into their biological families, from formal care, including foster care, residential care and kinship care.

In addition, the Agency provided family support through parental counselling services to 5,325 families in 2012. This year, emphasis will be placed upon the implementation of the Early Childhood Development Programme with the registration and licensing of all day care facilities for children.

There are currently in excess of 200 such facilities in operation throughout our country, and this year it is our intention to introduce night care facilities for children of single parents, in an effort to support those parents, particularly mothers who, by virtue of their employment, are required to work long hours.

This initiative is one of the clearest reflections of the fact that our Government has seen the need to reduce the vulnerability of our children being left without adequate supervision and care, with emphasis being placed upon the safety of our children. It is with this in mind that under the Family Assistance Programme, the Child Care and Protection Agency has conceptualised the initiative which will assist those disadvantaged and which will include our single and low-income parents. We continue to work towards the prevention of separation of our children from their families. Specially trained officers will be tasked with the responsibility to register and license these day care facilities as well as to monitor their operations to ensure that they operate in accordance with established standards.

Our Government has recognised the importance of investing in the most valuable resource which is vital to Guyana's continued development, our people. In addition, there are plans for the expansion and strengthening of the foster care and kinship care programme as an alternative care option for children at risk, whilst heightened focus would be given to reducing the number of children in institutional care by promoting family-based care. I am advised that this has been proven to be a better care option for our children, compared with institutional care.



Whilst there are some children who will have to remain in institutional care, greater emphasis will also be placed upon ensuring that all privately operated children's homes conduct their operations in accordance with the minimum standards and guidelines in place. There are currently visiting committees in place whose primary responsibility is to conduct inspections of these facilities and to monitor and evaluate the operations with a view to ensuring that there is compliance with the minimum standards.

Guidelines for developing policy regulations in early childhood development services have been developed by the CARICOM Secretariat as the first of its kind. These guidelines seek to standardise early childhood development services throughout the region, and are intended to support the establishment of protective mechanisms and benchmarks at the national level and provide a common methodology and set of principles in developing early childhood policy regulations and standard regimes.

Family Assistance: There will be increased psychosocial support and other assistance to families at risk for the prevention of child abuse and the separation of children. The Family Assistance Programme includes day care services support, school uniform assistance, skills training for parents and food assistance vouchers.

New Mahaica Children's Home: The new state-of-the-art Building which was constructed to house the Mahaica Children's Home has been completed and will be commissioned shortly. This facility will provide care and support for our children, including our teenage girls who have been abused. This year, special attention will be given to complement the existing Programme in place with the re-integration of teenage mothers into the school system. This is quite important as we must ensure that our young girls are educated and empowered. Day care services will also be provided to support teenage mothers in continuing their education and building a livelihood for themselves.

I am sure that you will agree that child protection is everyone's business. I wish to solicit the support of every segment of society. The Childcare and Protection Agency, recognising that partnerships in child protection are essential, has been making efforts to establish the necessary linkages with parents, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and other faith based organisations. The Agency will be continuing its efforts to establish these alliances to effectively

meet the child protection needs of our children.

In this regard, our Government has put in place a robust legislative framework with the primary objective being to ensure the protection and equality of all our children in Guyana. However, we continue to examine existing legislation as well as initiate new ones to meet the demands of a changing society and environment. Guyana re-affirms its commitment to fulfilling its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. I must say that we have made progress on the implementation of the Convention, as well as consulting with other stakeholders engaged in children's issues.

Through funding provided by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), capacity building workshops and training programmes will be conducted this year for the staff of the Child Protection Agency as the Administration continues to place emphasis upon enhancing our human capital, pursuant to realising our national goals.

In 2013, there will also be the re-organisation and de-centralisation of services provided by the Agency throughout the ten Administrative Regions, which I alluded to before. I wish to highlight also that this year the sum of \$233.7 million has been budgeted to meet the current expenditure related to the Agency's operations. In fact, in this year's Budget, the Agency will be a separate programme for the first time.

We continue to exert all efforts to increase efficiency in the delivery of services to those vulnerable persons within our society. Later this month, the Centre for the Rehabilitation and Re-integration of the Homeless located at Onverwagt in Region 5 will be opened. This project became a reality as a result of bilateral relations between the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Government of Guyana. We are indeed grateful to the Government and people of Venezuela for this kind gesture.

The completion of this facility will house approximately 180 persons and will include male and female dormitories, and an administrative block among others. This signifies, once again, our Government's continued commitment and concern about the welfare of our citizens, especially those who are faced with difficult circumstances and those destitute persons who have nowhere to live.

These persons will be afforded the opportunity to access available support services. It must be noted that as part of the comprehensive approach to address the needs of those deemed vulnerable within our society, it is our intention to support the rehabilitation and re-integration of these individuals into society.

Mention was made of hopelessness and the suicide rate. Suicide, as we all know, is symptomatic of mental illness. I wish to reiterate the Ministry's commitment to understanding and addressing the mental and emotional wellness of our nation's population, particularly the youths in our society, through the strengthening and expansion of our Probation and Social Services Department. Our Government recognises that development is not only at the infrastructural level, hence the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security has consistently been expanding its counselling and social services programme throughout the Regions, aimed at creating an environment where persons can have opportunities for emotional support to be given through our counselling centres.

This Government's concern for the elderly has been evident. Today, every Guyanese who resides here in Guyana, aged 65 years and older, is eligible to receive the monthly old age pension.

In July, 2012, Cabinet appointed members of the National Commission on the Elderly. The Commission is comprised of eleven (11) members; amongst them are prominent leaders of faith based organisations, health professionals and retired public officers. The Commission has since engaged various stakeholders during a workshop in December, 2012, in collaboration with the United Nations Fund for Population and Development. Among the priorities of the National Commission on the Elderly are:

- (i) developing a comprehensive action plan;
- (ii) conducting public education awareness programmes to sensitise persons about issues which affect the elderly;
- (iii) developing minimum standards for all homes and facilities providing care to the elderly with a view to possible legislation being formulated;
- (iv) preventing abuse of the elderly;

(v) development of a curriculum on gerontology; and

(vi) conducting training programmes for caregivers employed in institutions that provide care for the elderly.

*3.09 p.m.*

Improving the quality of life of our senior citizens has always been and continues to be important to this Government. We continue to view our interventions for our senior citizens not as one item and one-off injections, but rather as a comprehensive package of support and services. When one adds the eight months of old age pension increases and the electricity assistance, it reflects more than a 33 per cent increase on a monthly basis for our pensioners.

In Budget 2013, I wish to indicate that I am cognisant about comments made about a request for an increase in the monthly rate payable to pensioners. Every month, if we were to do the calculations, \$990 is given for water rates to pensioners in Georgetown via Budget 2013. Now, there is an increased pension of \$12,500 monthly. Added to that, there is an electricity assistance, which, if one calculates it, works out to approximately \$1,667 to offset the cost of electricity bills, which totals about \$15,157, which is in excess of \$15,000 per month in financial support.

In order to responsibly increase old age pension to even higher levels in the years ahead and in light of the fiscal sustainability constraints, it will be necessary to consider some means of verifying need and income levels so that our expenditure is targeted in a pro-poor manner.

In short, Mr. Speaker, do we, in this honourable House, as together we ensure a pro-poor budget, wish to have the retired, well-to-do pensioner who lives in a gated community and has a business be entitled to receive the same benefits as the senior citizen who lives alone in a rented home, striving hard to meet monthly needs.

That is not all. The package of support goes beyond the \$15,157. Our health sector is ensuring that greater focus is paid to chronic non-communicable diseases as life expectancy issues of our senior citizens now require greater attention as we are living longer in Guyana, and this issue must be addressed.

And we go on further, this year, the Commission for the Elderly also will look at standards for senior citizens' care homes and hospitals to ensure that we do not write-off our elderly simply because they are above the age of 70, which is the life expectancy mark.

We will work to establish a national register for shut-ins with a view to developing individual case management plans and providing training to empower caregivers. I had the pleasure of visiting one of our senior citizens who attained the age of 90 and I was heartened to learn that part of her secret to long life was maintaining a healthy diet of locally grown fruits, vegetables, provisions and fish. I am sure her story is not uncommon and will be repeated over the years to come. As the benefits of the Grow More Food Campaign continue to redound to ensure greater food supplies at affordable prices in both our markets and our kitchen gardens, this will, indeed, contribute to the physical and economic health of all our people, especially our pensioners.

Our women have made significant strides in Guyana's development in diverse fields, and more so in national decision making. Indeed, our women contribute to national development in a significant way. In fact, Guyana was ranked 42<sup>nd</sup> in the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index out of 145 countries, and ranked 32<sup>nd</sup> for the political empowerment of women, 25<sup>th</sup> for women in Parliament together with women holding ministerial portfolios, and for educational attainment Guyana ranked 28<sup>th</sup> out of 135 countries. These indicate that our women are indeed poised to play a greater role in our country's development. Our women are our nation's wealth, and they are valued members of our society.

Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread violations of human rights, which is prevalent in every continent and in every culture. It manifests itself in many forms, transcends race and class, and occurs in diverse settings. It presents a challenge which causes significant harm to the individual and degrades the fundamental moral and social fabric of society. It impedes social progress and development for advancing women's rights.

Our development as a nation is dependent upon all of us in this honourable House being united on this front. It is, therefore, of utmost importance that we recognise the need to pay critical attention to socio-cultural expressions and stereotypes that degrade women and perpetuate the myth that women are an inferior class.

We need to inculcate in our young women a deeper sense of awareness of their own values and recognition of their own self respect and the need to demand that respect from others. These are the types of interventions which will no doubt assist in our efforts to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls in our society.

During 2012, the Ministry launched a National Conversation on Domestic Violence and consultations were held with stakeholders throughout the ten Administrative Regions. I am proud to say today that the draft national action plan is currently being finalised and will be circulated shortly.

At the recent International Women's Day symposium, which was held on March 8, 2013, participants made recommendations which emanated from group discussions held during the symposium in thematic areas comprised of social issues, employment opportunities, job creation and poverty alleviation, equal pay for equal work, women's rights from law to practice, women in leadership, and empowering our women to become entrepreneurs in a changing world. The draft report will be circulated shortly with specific recommendations made which also include possible amendments to some existing pieces of legislation.

This year, the national machinery for women – the Women's Affairs Bureau (WAB) – will conduct public awareness sessions on the new sexual offences legislation and continue educational sessions for women on the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) throughout the Regions. In addition, the Bureau will collaborate with line Ministries on gender issues and gender based violence, utilising the gender focal point of each Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to deliver on our Government's commitment to assist single parents and to support their efforts to achieve a better quality of life. This year, more than 400 single parents will be the beneficiaries of specially targeted training programmes which will further support their development. The Women of Worth (WOW) Programme will be reinvigorated with the Programme being launched in Regions 1 and 7 so as to ensure that single parent women in these Regions have access to this initiative, whilst supporting their quest to become entrepreneurs, thereby changing their economic circumstances in the future. To date, there are more than 200 applications from prospective applicants within those Regions.

We are supporting their quest to become entrepreneurs and plans are ongoing to assist beneficiaries under this Programme in the cottage industry to access markets for their products by collaboration and partnership with private sector and businesses, as we seek more opportunities to support the empowerment of our women to realise their dreams.

Towards the last quarter of 2012, the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security commenced work for the preparation of a strategic plan...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, your 30 minutes are up. Could someone move an extension of 15 minutes for her, please?

**Mr. Hinds:** Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Minister be granted fifteen minutes to conclude her presentation.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Ms. Webster:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

...in an effort to strengthen and improve the administration of its operations and programmes nationwide, with the primary objective being to develop a five-year strategic plan for the sector.

As much as we, in the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, advocate for every family to work to overcome challenges together, we, as a national family, must embrace the theme of Budget 2013, *Overcoming Challenges Together, Accelerating Gains for Guyana*. I firmly believe that if we maintain a collective view and vision and our role in this House is to work together in service to the cause of national development, then our every action and intervention must support the achievement of this vision. And before we act or speak, we should pose the first question to ourselves: how will my actions and my interventions contribute to national development? That singleness of thought and purpose must be our driving force. In so doing, Mr. Speaker, we will undoubtedly be able to capitalise on the opportunities that the current dispensation provides. History and the people of this country will ultimately judge us and I trust that we will not be found wanting.

I congratulate my colleague, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, for his presentation of Budget 2013 and commend it to this honourable House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member. I am sure that we all look forward to some of those initiatives being implemented.

**Mr. Allicock:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Speaker, Members of the Government Benches, Colleagues of the majority, I rise today to make my presentation to this very, very inadequate budget, Budget 2013, under the theme, *Overcoming Challenges Together, Accelerating Gains for Guyana*, which was presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance, Minister Ashni Singh.

This Budget is a miserable failure of the Government to understand the realities of the masses and to give expression to their needs and aspirations. It is a miserable failure of the Government to address the issues that abound in this beautiful piece of God's earth called Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to address, specifically, the Rupununi region where I hail from. The Garden of Eden surely must have been located in this magnificent region, but the lack of vision, will, skill, the lack of prudent management, and the abundance of corrupt practices have combined to render the Rupununi one of the most backward places in the entire Caribbean.

Mr. Speaker, no proper consultation with residents or their representatives is carried out in the so-called development plans. There is no comprehensive plan.

The people of the Rupununi are very intelligent and know what is needed in their various communities. They do not need someone sitting in their carpeted, air-conditioned haven in Georgetown deciding what they need. So, it is time to start a constructive consultation process, which will take more than two hours, as is the norm by the Government.

Mr. Speaker, I know the Hon. Minister Ganga Persaud of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development will say that the Regional Democratic Council (RDC) is so charged, but that is only in theory. That is only a formality. The reality of the situation is that the RDC makes suggestions, but the bureaucrats do their own thing with the submissions. They speak democracy and act hypocritically. Be it as it may, Mr. Speaker, the Budget has failed, dismally, to address the needs of Region 9. Let us examine the facts.



Education: According to the figures from the education department, an average of 135 students leaves the three secondary schools at Annai, St. Ignatius and Aishalton, annually. With the advent of the secondary school at Sand Creek, this average will indeed be revised upwards. The combined percentage pass at the Caribbean Examination Certificate Examination (CSEC) is well below 50 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, what happens to the students who do not pass? In fact, Mr. Speaker, let us examine the prospects of those who pass. A miniscule percentage, through the good fortune of their families, would gain access to higher learning by gaining entry either into the Guyana School of Agriculture, the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) or the University of Guyana (UG). Through scholarships, another insignificant number gains entry to the Government Technical Institute (GTI) and other institutions of learning.

The majority of persons are forced to seek employment in Lethem and Brazil. What sort of jobs is available in Lethem? Mr. Speaker, the only prospect is shop attendant. Young people with five and more subjects are working as shop attendants since there is hardly any other opportunity for them. Those who migrate to Brazil find themselves in somebody's kitchen or on a farm as farm hands. This is no way in overcoming poverty. It is totally not satisfactory.

Let us examine the fortunes of the students who do not do well. They have no future. There is no second chance for these young people, and every one of us deserves a second chance. The education system is not geared for giving second chances. There is no three-strike rule here. One either hits it the first time or is out.

Mr. Speaker, I am quite certain that many persons in this august Chamber had the benefit, at some point in their lives, of higher learning. My people in the Rupununi have no such recourse unless they travel to Georgetown. This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century and no child, I mean not one single child, should be deprived of the right to a quality education, but that is exactly what is happening in the Rupununi.

Mr. Speaker, I do not have to remind you of the deplorable state of the education system nationwide. From the lack of trained teachers, overcrowded schools and dormitories, poor incentives for teachers and availability of appropriate text books, et cetera. The list goes on.

Those students are at great risk in this age of globalisation and fast paced information system. They are very vulnerable in this the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It need not be so. If the architects could only recognise that universal education needs not only be lip service, but vigorous and aggressive implementation, they will begin to see the light.

What is needed in Lethem is a technical institute; this will give our youths the life skills that can be used in the rapid development we are witnessing in Lethem. Instead of bussing in workers of every category into the Rupununi, we can have a ready supply of skills needed for the type of develop we need. With this approach, we will have a better opportunity for money circulation to the many households to assist us out of poverty. So, I strongly propose that we begin construction of this institute like yesterday. Our youths demand this and we have to listen to them. We have to cater to their every need.

An examination of the regional official's submission revealed that the Hon. Minister of Finance did not agree with the region. The regional officials are on the ground and they know the priorities, but persons sit in Georgetown and pretend to know better. They think they are the bosses of instead of the servants to the people. This should not be the case. For example, for buildings - education, the regional officers requested the construction of teachers' quarters in Taushida, Achiwuib, Kaikumbai, Haiowa, Annai, St. Ignatius and Crash Water. I find it mind boggling that the first request was not approved. These projects are listed in order of priority. So, the foremost priority – Taushida – was left out, but another village was included that was not requested for. That village is Sand Creek, a well known People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) stronghold. What is [inaudible] is the fact that these submissions are done for up to 2016, and Sand Creek is not requested for in any of those years.

Again, requests were made to construct sanitary blocks at Arapaima and Aranaputa Nursery Schools, and Yurongperu and Kaikumbai Primary schools. These were approved, but two more were thrown in and those were Shiriri and Kumaru. The same applies here; no request was made for up to 2016, but these were included nevertheless.

We have a very critical situation at the St. Ignatius Primary School where the facility is grossly overcrowded. The learning environment is not conducive. There have been repeated requests by

the school's administration and the Parent Teachers' Association to have the school extended. That is a priority but it did not find favour with the Hon. Minister.

Again, Mr. Speaker, there is a serious problem of overcrowding in the dormitories at St. Ignatius and Annai. We have cases of students being made to double up and being forced to share a bed. This is not healthy and needs urgent attention.

On study nights, all the students cannot share the hall together, so there is a staggered system of studying where the lower classes study earlier and the higher classes study later in the evening. Again, this request for extension of the dormitory was made by the schools' administration and the relevant authorities and, yet, this was denied. We would like to know why these priority projects did not find favour with the Hon. Minister.

In addition, one year ago I made mention of the lack of payments to staff at the dorms at Annai Secondary and to the suppliers who would normally supply food to the dorms. I brought this to the attention of the Hon. Minister, Mr. Ganga Persaud, who promised that these matters would be taken care of. To date, these matters are still pending. People have already worked and to get that meagre bit of money is a difficulty. I would like to ask that these matters be addressed and the workers are treated as human beings.

Health: Mr. Speaker, the money allocated for health in the budget is an apology. Is that all the people in the Region are worth? We have a so-called state- of- the- art hospital at Lethem that is woefully inadequate to serve the needs of the Region. This facility is a glorified Health Centre at the best.

Region 9 has an important road link with coastal Guyana that spans some 350 miles. Tragedy happens along this trail ever so often. The most recent was Wednesday, 27<sup>th</sup> March, when a Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV) careened off the Pirara Bridge, plunging some 20 feet below. It was quite a miracle that the occupants escaped serious injury. A few years back, a presidential guard met his death at the very Bridge when the vehicle he was in ran off the Bridge. There is always the potential for serious accidents with multiple casualties. We have to become prepared for any eventuality.

In its present state, the Lethem Hospital cannot meet the demand. People will simply die, and unnecessarily too. The Budget did not consider that. We need a hospital that will serve all classes of injuries and sicknesses. Presently, the Hospital is not capable of diagnosing a simple case of typhoid, and there is always the potential for that sickness to raise its ugly head. We need a hospital that is fully staffed, adequately stocked with equipment and drugs; we need specialist doctors; we need a general surgeon, at least, not periodically but full time.

We have cases in the Rupununi where pregnant mothers were required to travel to Lethem Hospital on motorcycles over rough terrain. This is certainly not a best practice scenario. The last case we had was a young mother, Ms. Rosaline Stephens. She took in with labour pains at Parishara. There being no health worker there, the residents contacted the health worker at Haiowa some 11 miles away. The health worker got there on a motorcycle at 8.30 a.m., made a call to Lethem and was told to take the lady to Haiowa on the cycle where a vehicle will be sent to transport her to Lethem. She arrived at Lethem at 2.00 p.m. and waited for some six hours; she delivered by 3.00 p.m. but bled profusely. She was rushed to Boa Vista in Brazil at midnight. By 4.00 a.m., she was no more.

It should be noted that time and time again we have had deaths in Brazil, causing great difficulties to return the bodies to Guyana. It is very costly and stressful to the relatives. If there is a state-of-the-art hospital there, these cases should be looked after right here in Guyana. This is a continuous worry to our people.

*3.39 p.m.*

What action has been taken to avoid a recurrence? The answer is nothing. In fact, the Budget for Region No.9 is giving scope for this to continue. Under Health Services, Land Transportation, an All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) has been requested. What is more it has been ranked a number one priority and has been classified as critical. Well, it seems that we are heading for a more critical health delivery program in Region No.9. With the potential for serious and multiple casualties, coupled with difficult terrain and the likelihood of various emergencies in far flung communities, one would have expected as a minimum the request for a 4x4 type ambulance that would be of more benefit to the people of the Rupununi.

We have another Hospital at Aishalton in South Rupununi, approximately 126 miles away from Lethem which is another glorified health centre. There is at present no doctor or Medic at this facility. The Government is harping about the billions that they are spending in health-care, but who are the beneficiaries? It is certainly not the people of South Rupununi. It must be noted that the facility once boasted a doctor, a medic and a sister. The Sister retired, the Doctor and Medic were removed for whatever reason. We now have a Community Health Worker who manages the facility at present.

Not too long ago, Mr. Nigel Hughes had reason to use the facility when he suffered a heart attack while on a visit to the area. Fortunately, he survived. Here I am talking about the communication system in the event of emergencies. Word got out that Mr. Hughes had fallen ill and efforts to contact the Aishalton district, both the hospital and the police proved futile because the radios simply were not on. What is the use of having improved facilities if they cannot be used in cases of emergencies? I wish to submit that the Hon. Ministers of Health and Local Government implement systems so that there is 24-hour communication in all communities. We cannot afford to have our people suffer undue hardships - we need to have one doctor based at the Aishalton Hospital. That is the minimum we will accept and the least that the people are expecting.

At Annai, the Health Cottage is in shambles. There are regular motorcycle accidents where head injuries are most common. The doctor has access to an SUV to take patients 76 miles to Lethem. What about an ambulance? An SUV is not a suitable vehicle for patients requiring ambulatory care. What is more, many times when the vehicle is needed the District Development Officer (DDO) cannot be found, or when the DDO is found, the driver has to be located. On numerous occasions there were no fuels to undertake emergency trips to Lethem. In these instances the health officials have to rely on the good will of the residents. This is not satisfactory and the Budget does not address these issues.

On examining the regional submission, one would find that it lacks vision and common sense in relation to land transport. But like the Minister did under education, he could have put a 4-wheel drive ambulance for Aishalton, Annai and Karasabai. This Government loves to boast about improved healthcare but that is not demonstrated in this Budget. The regional authorities requested a number of items for the hospital and very few got approval. The implication here is that the facility will have to operate for another year without these devices which, I am sure, are

critical to the delivery of quality healthcare. While officials would want to report the true situation of the hospital they are scared of victimisation.

The Amerindian Affairs and Land Rights: The Rupununi is mainly an Amerindian region with 65 communities spread across this vast region of some 33,000 square miles. We have communities as far north as Surama, and far south as Masakenari, the home of the Wai-Wais. Nations are being challenged today as other peoples are seeking tracts of land for various purposes. We need to safeguard the rights of the Amerindian traditional lands in this expansionist era. We need to always be sensitive to the cries of the Indigenous peoples as it relates to land demarcation and extension. It is imperative that we do so, failing which Guyana will lose the honour of having and preserving indigenous custom and habits.

The Ministry of Amerindian Affairs was established to represent the Amerindians—the Amerindian interests totally - not to suppress them. Today, some 40 years after the passing of the Hon. Stephen Campbell, who fought for the rights of the indigenous peoples, these issues are still not being settled. We need to be respected. It is time that we were seen as part of this country. We are treated as though we are things in a corner. Why cannot our lands be settled? Why is it? In the Amerindian Act 2006 it looks as though you offered us a cup of coffee with milk and sugar but told us that we can only use the coffee and you will keep the sugar and the milk. It is a terrible situation.

This Government is failing in this regard in Region No.9. Unless every community is satisfied with the land allotted to them then we have failed. We have various instances of dissatisfaction with boundaries in the Rupununi, and, as a matter of fact, in the whole of Guyana.

The most notable among these are the communities of Sawariwau in the South Central Rupununi and Parishara in the North Central Rupununi. There is a need for the authorities to sit and talk—not to talk to these communities but to sit and talk with them. There is a need to find swift amicable solutions to these problems. We cannot have these issues fester for long periods as is the case presently. Mr. Speaker, allow me to signal our support to our brothers and sisters in the other parts of the country especially those in Region No.7, particularly the villages of Kako and Isseneru. We are in solidarity with them.

The Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment, Hon. Minister Robert Persaud, said that there are a lot of plans to support the indigenous peoples, but we can only operate if we are sure that the land we are developing is ours, not only that six inches, so we have to address that.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member your allotted time is up. Could someone move that you be given five minutes to conclude your presentation please?

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

*Question put and agreed to*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member please conclude.

**Mr. Allicock:** Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. We also have the situation with lights in Lethem, the roads, the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) and so many other issues. While the Government is gloating over the Budget as the largest ever, the conceptualising of it lacks vision and foresight. The Budget is seriously lacking in the human elements. It did not give expression to the people's will. It is not a human Budget, rather, the Government continues its trend of including projects in the Budget to ensure that its cronies benefit financially. There is absolutely no correlation between value for money and these projects. The people of Region No. 9, like the rest of this beautiful land of ours, are the poorer as a result of this monstrosity of a Budget. The education of our people was not addressed; our citizens will continue to die in Brazil, because the health component of the Regional Budget did not consider their needs; our roads will continue to be unsafe thus putting the lives of our people at risk; our citizens will continue to be unsafe, even in their own homes, because this uncaring administration cares nothing for their security; our Amerindian communities will not get their lands demarcated or extended in a timely manner because this Government lacks the political will to conclude the process; the water provided to our citizens will be unfit for human consumption because this Government does not care; our people will continue to experience prolonged blackouts because this Government lacks the vision to eradicate blackouts, a promise they had made since 1992. People will continue to live in poverty because the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper is just another document for window-dressing, and the Government is woefully incompetent to implement this ambitious blueprint.

Therefore, I am calling on my colleagues to vote against this apology that we have for a Budget. I am calling on my colleagues to send a clear signal to this uncaring administration that we are not prepared to tolerate and give our blessing to mediocrity, which in turn fuels corruption and graft. I call on the Government to come out of their dream and face reality. For while the elephants fight, the grasses suffer according to the old saying. So Mr. Speaker, I cannot and will not support this document.

Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members it is now 3.50 p.m. which is the appointed hour for us to take the break. We have listed next as speaker a Minister. I would not wish her to commence and then have to stop after 10 minutes of speaking, so I suggest we take the break now and resume at 4.50 p.m. *[Interruption]* It is my suggestion. If the Minister wishes to proceed I would not interfere.

**Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]:** I would not want to stop, Sir, but I was saying I would not be that long.

**Mr. Speaker:** Your Ministry is large.

**Ms. Manickchand:** We do have appointed times that were agreed on. So if we are willing to go into the break a little bit I will be happy to start now.

**Mr. Speaker:** I do sense that some Members may wish to move around and use facilities and refresh themselves.

**Ms. Manickchand:** Well, I will wait until after the break.

**Mr. Speaker:** Very well. Hon. Members we suspend for one hour until 4.50 p.m.

*Sitting suspended at 3.50 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 4.50 p.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members we will now hear from the Hon. Minister of Education, Hon. Member Ms. Priya Manickchand. I invite you to proceed please.



**Ms. Manickchand:** Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. I wish today to join with my colleagues in this House and indeed the people of Guyana who have expressed deep appreciation to the Hon. Minister of Finance Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh and his very able staff led by our very own Ms. Sonia Roopnauth the Director of Budget, a Guyanese woman - a matter of which all of Guyana can be proud - and a person of whom we can all be proud too. They have given us a Budget this year that will continue the work of other Budgets that came before this Budget was crafted to meet the needs of large sections of all our various populations. For that, I say warm congratulations and offer our deepest gratitude.

This particular Budget cannot be read in isolation. It has to be read with Budgets that came before. It has to be read in conjunction with our dreams for Guyana, our vision for Guyana; it has to be read in conjunction with the needs of our country and her people. So this Budget that was put forward here by the Hon. Minister of Finance does take us that step further to realising our dreams for this dear land of ours. Particularly, the 2013 Budget does something that I think has startled us all—something we can all marvel about. Although this massive Budget is the biggest Budget that is a matter of fact, so I do not think we can be accused of boasting that it is the biggest Budget. It is as a matter of fact the largest Budget this country has ever seen.

This Budget has money in it. For the first time in the history of this country more money will go to more people to help them in their personal development and to help them enjoy the development of our country as a whole. This Budget has something for everybody. That something it has for everybody is going to allow people to enjoy the benefits today, tomorrow, next week, next year and the next ten years so that their grandchildren will enjoy the benefits that will flow from the 2013 Budget. This is a Budget that caters for our young, our old, our women, our middle aged, our health needs, our education needs, our human services needs, and our agriculture needs. This is the Budget that feeds into us realising what the Hon. Member Irfaan Ali called yesterday the Guyana dream. What is it we want to see for Guyana? What is it we hope to spend our time here both in the National Assembly and on earth doing for this dear land of ours, but more than that doing for ourselves, our children, our sisters' children, cousins' children, children whom we have sworn to look after and protect? What is it we see in this Guyana we speak of? This is a place where we want to see all our children loved, protected and looked after by their parents, their teachers, their guardians and the people who are supposed to

look after them. This is a place where we envision that men and women will be equal to each other and the benefits that flow will be enjoyed by us all. This is the Guyana we are trying to build where our old people could enjoy their golden years with pride and dignity, enjoying what they have worked for. This is the Guyana where our single women will be single but will never feel alone because we are there with them. This is the Guyana we are trying to craft, to build, where one does not have to pay for health care although one can if one so desires. This is the Guyana we want to build to make sure all our children all across this land, irrespective of where they live or what they look like could enjoy quality education from nursery to tertiary. This is the Guyana we are trying to build. This is the Guyana that will require not us in Government alone but we will all have to work together to build. This is the Guyana that this 2013 Budget helps us to advance.

Minister Singh is asking us to overcome our challenges together and to accelerate our gains for Guyana. For those who have gotten up to say we do not recognise there are things to be done, we are here with a Budget which very name tells you we recognise that in the building of our dreamland, this building of the Guyana we so say we love we have challenges and we will always have some of these challenges. We will always be below sea level. I do not think that is going to change irrespective of which party assumes office. We will always have challenges of meeting the kinds of needs we have to meet if we are to become and sustain the status of a first world country. First world countries will tell you they have challenges. The United States of America in some places like Alabama they do not have running water. However, in recognising these challenges and in trying to overcome them together it requires us to do more than wax lyrical in this House. We would have to put our shoulders to the wheel. It is a lot harder to recognise a challenge and to work towards overcoming that challenge and accelerating a gain although that would be best for this country and her people; it is a lot harder to do that than to sit in the proverbial armchair and say what is wrong with all that is around us. I would be the first to tell you that if you want to find something wrong with a system come to the sector over which I have responsibility. When you are dealing with 10,000 teachers and 300,000 students in 1,000 schools you are bound to find something every single hour of every single day that is wrong in that structure. That is the way it is; that is what we are dealing with. So we could tell you almost all of what you can tell us and we do not reject or resent any kind of constructive criticism. What we say is come and work with us to overcome these challenges and accelerate the gains that we

have made. Do not come postulating about sharpening your different instruments. That is not helpful to our nation; it is not helpful to the people of Guyana; it is not helpful to the people who look up to us here to lead and to give them what they are deserving of. We can only help our people if we constructively put our minds together. I would be the first to say if we were to combine our efforts, Government and Opposition, we could get more for the people than any one side by itself. So we call on the Opposition today in going forward, there is time and space to change this destructive behaviour that has gone hither forth. There is space right now as we go forward for us to hold hands and take Guyana forward; for us to hold hands and take all of Guyana's people forward. It is up to us in this House to strengthen our resolve or even to establish a resolve, because sometimes I worry about whether we have that resolve, to do what we have to do to make our country a better place.

This 2013 Budget combines with other Budgets and continues a path of development that has started under this PPP/Civic Government. Over the last five years the allocation to the Ministry of Education has been on average fifteen percent of the national Budget. This is as compared to five percent in 1992 of a much smaller Budget. In 2013, the social sector spending has risen by over 16% of the 2012 spending to amount to more than \$70 billion on the people of Guyana. I am worried and concerned when I hear things like, "there is nothing in this Budget for anyone". A Budget deals with money. When we are going to spend more than \$ 70 billion on the people of this country, that is something in this Budget. That is \$70 billion plus for the people of Guyana. That is our saying to the people of Guyana in these particular sectors we love you and here is how we are going to manifest that love. So when we say that we are going to...I hear a chuckle from Mr. Williams; Mr. Williams is a very funny man. This is something we have seen continuing over the years from the time this Government took office. It is very different, so that is why some of the more aged Members of this House who might be stuck in a different era might not be able to appreciate what we are trying to do here. This Budget continues the PPP/C's trend of investing in the people of Guyana, the men, the women and the children of Guyana.

There was a time in our country when the foreign services expenditure was higher than education, health and housing sectors put together. It does not happen that way now. This year we are spending more than \$70 billion on education, health, housing and water, and that has risen by 16 percent over the expenditure in 2012. So when people stand up to say this Budget is

not pro-poor and that the Budget has nothing for anyone, I am going to have to ask them to really consider the expenditure proposed. Let us take the education sector.

Here is a place, while much remains to be done - we in education will be the first to tell you that - there has been so much done that it would behoove anyone, any sensible person with a national interest, to make congratulatory remarks. Of course, along with those could be suggestions as to how we could do better. In fact, you will see from the Education as we have seen, and I intend for this to continue, we will establish policies and implement them and when those do not work we would change them, revise them or quash them altogether. We will continue working to make sure we get it right for our children in the education system.

From nursery, or what is referred to as early childhood education, Guyana leads in the Caribbean. And this is something we could celebrate. More than 85% of our children of the relevant age cohort are accessing nursery schools in Guyana, and the population is even higher in the coastal regions. This we believe is the highest in the English speaking Caribbean, our dear Guyana. In year two the nursery programme we are introducing children to pre-literacy skills so they are going into primary schools better prepared for the learning they are going to get there and for the reading that they are going to be exposed to. The proportion of trained teachers has risen in the last four years from 56% to 67%. And most of our nursery classrooms in our nursery schools are child friendly.

*5.09 p.m.*

The billions that will be expended on education this year to train our teachers, to make more of our classrooms child friendly and to allow us to consider more deeply making nursery education compulsory, those billions that will be expended are billions that will be expended on our Guyanese children, the most vulnerable of those our youngest children. These are billions that will be expended on training our teachers. There is something in the budget for everyone.

We move on to primary education. In our primary education we have attained, by the United Nations (UN's) standard, access universal primary education. What that means is that in Guyana and this is not so in many parts of the world, but in Guyana we have primary schools that children can access all across this land, whether they are in Region Nos. 1, 9, 6 and 4. All across this land, children can access primary schools. We have attained that Millennium Development

Goal of access to primary education. We are moving even as we address other issues, to attain universal secondary education. In fact, it was President Ramotar who, many times when he was merely a candidate, promised across this nation that in his first term we will achieve universal secondary education. Minister Robert Persaud spoke of us fulfilling our promises to the people, this is one of the promises in the PPP/Civic Manifesto of 2011 and this is promise that we are well on our way to fulfilling.

We have achieved universal secondary education in Region Nos. 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9 and 10 and Georgetown. With the allocations made in this year's budget we are going to be able to achieve universal secondary education in Region Nos. 5 and 6. In Region No. 5, to do that we had proposed an extension to the Rosignol Secondary School, Novar Secondary School, Fort Wellington and Mahaicony Secondary Schools and the construction of a new secondary school at Woodley Park and a boat to take children from the deep Mahaicony areas to the Mahaicony Secondary School and other schools on the Coastland.

We have received a combination of allocations made last year and what is proposed this year, all that we have asked for. We say thank you to Minister Ashni Singh. We are on our way with the provisions made in this year's budget of achieving universal secondary education, in yet another Region of our country, Region No. 5.

In Region No. 6, we needed an extension at the Tutorial Academy Secondary School and at Tagore Memorial Secondary School in the Lower Corentyne and two mini buses for transportation. This year we have in the budget - the provisions made in this budget - which I am imploring you all in this House to vote for. An implication of not voting for this is that you are saying to the children of Region No. 5 and Region No. 6, "You are not entitled; you are not deserving of a secondary education. So stay in your house, stay in the river, stay in Mahaicony, you cannot come to school." That is really what we are saying to them if we do not support this proposal.

We are going to be allowed from the budgetary allocations to get extension works at Tutorial Academy Secondary School and the Lower Corentyne and Berbice High School. One bus is going to be procured to transport 120 children from Villages' Nos. 59, 65, 51, 48, 43 and 26 Eversham and Wellington Park, to Central Corentyne High School. For the persons who come

here and say that we love Berbice and we want to help Berbice, we would expect you to help them by supporting these allocations made in this years' budget.

We had heard earlier someone saying that this budget makes no dent. It is a big budget, but it makes no dent on the people's lives. Nothing happens overnight and like in your own home, when you first build a home and then add different things; a wall here, new carpeting there, different paints here; that is how a country will have to work. That is how a developing country works. Whereas, we were far away from universal secondary education or access to secondary education in 1992, over the years we have gotten to a place where six of our ten Regions have it. Where we in the PPP/Civic are promising the other four Regions that they too will get access to secondary education universally, before the end of these five years. This budget helps us to bring two more Regions up to scratch with providing a secondary education for the children in those Regions. These are usually poorer children; these are usually children that are far away because they are in riverine and deep hinterland areas. These are the people this budget is catering for; these are the children this budget is catering for. If we speak of equal opportunity and a quality education and the desire to have those things, then it must be more than lyrics. It must be where we intend to do this and we will manifest that intention by voting the right way. We will manifest that intention by supporting the right proposals. That is all that I ask this afternoon in this Hon. House.

In addition, to universal secondary education, we recognise the (UNESCO) projection; we have taken that into consideration here in Guyana. Eighty percent of the world's workforce would be Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) reliant. They would be reliant on technical and vocational education skills. As a result of which Guyana has been preparing herself and her people for this new movement in the world. As a result of that we have more than nine technical and vocational educational institutes, where we have more than 3000 men and women. Most of them are young men and women enrolled in the different areas doing different training for technical and vocational skills. We graduate more than a thousand of these Guyanese young people every year. Last year we spent more than \$3.3 Billion on this sector. We have been studying as Mr. Allicock well knows. To come here, which was not being candid with this House, to say that this is new and you have come and are proposing an institution at Region No. 9. This is something that has been in the talks for a long time and any relatively well informed

resident of Region 9 would have know that. We are in the process of studying it with a view to bringing this to fruition Sir. We expect that very shortly we will have an institute- a technical and vocational institute - at Region No. 9 to cater for the boys and girls. We hope that we can count on the support from Mr. Allicock and his party; to support the \$1.5 Billion allocated this year to Technical and Vocational Education across this country.

We are also catering for the children who might want to pursue the TVET type education, even in high school, etc. We have crafted the Secondary Competency Certificate Programme (SCCP) programme, which is, the Secondary Competency Certificate Programme, where we hope to graduate our children with at least a level one Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) certificate. This would allow them to pursue skills training and job opportunities much faster when they exit the school system.

This has seen us; a combination of this and other measures, which I will come to just now, has seen us reducing the number of students who drop out of our schools every year. We have allocated in this year's budget, more that \$1 Billion for school feeding; more than \$1 Billion to give to more than 64,000 of our children, of our babies, a meal every single day. This is a living budget that means a lot to the people who depend on the allocations here.

This is a National Programme, it is offered in all regions, except Region No. 9. The beneficiaries are all nursery school students. It is the Fruit and 45 Biscuit Programme, where all nursery school students and primary school students in grades one and two... this is all across this country irrespective of how you look; irrespective of what gender you are; irrespective of how you parents voted, this is what we are offering to all our children in this country. We offered to 66 schools in Region No. 9 that is 38 nursery schools and 28 primary schools; approximately 3,400 students; 2,239 primary students and 1240 nursery students; we offer a juice and biscuits every single day. We have budgeted \$50 million for this year.

I am prepared to accept from Mr. Allicock an explanation that he was not with the programme and he is going to get with the programme. I am prepared to accept that because Mr. Allicock is willing, I am sure, to serve the people of Region No. 9 the same way we are. Those same people will tell Mr. Allicock, the thousand of them that are receiving this food every single day that he cannot take this away from them. If he takes this away from them, by what he said,

“Voting down this Budget”. Is that what he said? That he is calling on all of us not to support this budget. What Mr. Allicock is doing is, he is saying to those 3,400 students in Region 9, “You do not count, we do not want to give you a meal, never mind that I can eat three squares a day, tuff if you cannot. That is what he is saying.

The community Hot Meal Programme is offered in Region Nos. 1, 7, 8, and 9. In total nearly 6,300 students benefit from this programme every day. They receive daily lunches at school. In this 2013 Budget \$550 Million is budgeted to provide hot meals to 16,000 students in Region Nos. 1, 7, 8 and 9. So you see it is easy. It is easy when we have our various business interests and parliamentary salaries and are able to afford three square meals a day and benefited from something that allows us in our education. It is easy to deny or it is easy to ignore what this budget is going to do for people who really need it. If we are really going to ask for equal opportunity across this land, then we must pave the way for people to be able to avail themselves of the equal opportunities that we are offering.

We also have been giving, for a number of years and continue in the 2013 budget, to every single student nursery, primary and secondary - from nursery all the way to grade 11 - to every single student in Guyana, either a uniform allowance or material or fabric to make a uniform. More than \$300 Million will be spent on doing this programme this year. And again, if this is not supported then we must stand here and look the parents in their eyes, we must look those children in the eyes and tell them go home and turn over your uniform, you cannot get one this year because the Opposition is going to vote down this Budget. We are going to have to tell them that. That is going to be something that you are going to have to do for yourself. I am saying there is space because I believe that when you put everything aside here, everybody is in here and we have all, whether we held Bibles, Qurans or Bhagavad Gitas or we just affirmed, took an oath in this Hon. House and said that to the best of our ability, without affection or ill will, we were going to serve the people of Guyana. I can tell you that sometimes that oath can get clouded and I am saying that we all have an opportunity today to remove the clouds; to remove the myopia that affects us and really focus on what we are here to do. We can do that by understanding that the people who rely and depend on the allocations provided here, could only get them, if we support this budget. I am asking kindly that we remember our oath and in so doing we will do the right thing.



**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you need to have someone get an extension of time for you.

**Mr. Hinds:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. I propose that the Hon. Minister be granted another 15 minutes to conclude her presentation.

*Question put, question carried*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you Prime Minister. Hon. Minister you are to proceed.

**Ms. Manickchand:** Thank you, Hon. Prime Minister. I can tell this House a lot more of what we have done and a lot more of what is planned. Indeed I would be happy to sit with any Member or a collection of Members at any time, on any day to discuss more of what we will be doing in the Ministry. More than that, to hear from Members in this House, whether they be Opposition or Government and indeed to hear from members of the public, whether they be parents or guardians or students themselves. How is it we can better serve the children of Guyana in the education system? How is it that we can better prepare our school leavers for the work ahead of them, the development of our country? We would be happy to talk to our people, to anyone about that.

The combination of many measures, the provision of school uniforms, the provision of meals, the different environments – the provision of the actual classroom, the provision of trained teachers to a percentage that is unprecedented in our land. All of these things have contributed to us seeing a reduction in the dropout rates in our country. This is something that concerns us all.

We are concerned as I am sure the other Members of this. We on the Government side are concerned; we at the Ministry of Education are deeply concerned about every single child that leaves school early. We are concerned that that child would not be prepared for the world that faces them and more. We are concerned that we would be robbing ourselves of the benefit of a child who is properly prepared to help to develop Guyana. This is something that we will keep working at. This is something that we will join with other countries across this world in trying to resolve. Many countries, including those countries that have far more millions of people and far more years of experience addressing the issues of education that they struggle with daily. We will continue to address this issue. I am happy to report in this House and I think the Nation

needs to know that with the measures that the PPP/Civic Government have put in place over the last couple of years, we have seen a reduction in the number of children dropping out.

In 2005/2006, we had from the general secondary schools 7.5% of our population or 1940 students dropping out. In the 2009/2010 period, we had 4%. That is a reduction by 3%; we are talking about 800-900 children that stayed in the school system and who are now going to be able to better prepare themselves and their families for all that Guyana is able to give. So for what we have done in budget after budget and what we have been asking to be able to continue to do, once this budget is approved, is to allow our children the opportunity to finish school so that they can develop their lives, their family's lives and our country better than if they were not able to finish school. For every child that we offer school meals to; for every child that we offer the uniforms to; for every child that we offer more trained teachers to, we are more likely to be able to retain in our education system, retain in our class rooms, our boys and girls so that they can benefit from the instructions that happens in those classrooms. I was a little put off just now with a *suck teeth* that I heard; wherever you sit in this House, the fact that 800 children in a four year period stayed in school rather than dropping out, should be something that we are all cheering about.

The other thing I would want to address quickly before I start addressing some matters relating to Region No. 5, where I am the geographic representative, is our Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) results. We have been entering, year after year, higher and higher numbers of candidates, which speaks to a perhaps a better education system, which speaks to us being able to retain and attract more children in our system. In 2008, where 9,912 students had written CXC, by 2012 that number went up to 13,878 students. That is a jump of about 4,000 more children writing CXC because of the very measures that we have put in place.

When the Hon. Member, Mr. Bulkan says that this Budget has nothing and the budget by itself does nothing, the Hon. Member would be encouraged to understand that year after year, budgets build on each other and build on gains that we have made. What this budget is trying to do is to accelerate those gains that we have made.

Back in 2008, the Hon. Member may have well have said, there is not have enough here for "X", "Y" and "Z" so let us throw the whole thing out. If we had done that, if we had taken that

attitude then, then five years later we would not have seen the 4,000 more students writing CXC; 4,000 more students being exposed to opportunities that they would not have been exposed to.

We have also seen a worrying trend, something that again, while we can paint the picture that wows Guyana, we have seen worrying grades in mathematics and English. This is a worry we share with the entire Caribbean Region; this is a worry we share with the world. That is where the STEM subjects - science, technology, English, mathematics- engineering mathematics - came up. This was a whole project – Google it. The entire world is addressing this issue. We recognise that we have had poor grades in mathematics since Adam was a boy. In fact, I have grades here from 1985 all the way on to 2012, which I cannot give. But I could say this Sir, when I wrote CXC in 1992, 9.8% of the students or the writing population passed English. When I wrote mathematics in 1992, 18% of the students passed. Last year, what we got was a little bit of an increase at 30% and 29%. My point is, this has been a problem forever, so we can stop behaving as though this is something that brewed over the last two, three or five years. This is a problem that Guyana is struggling with; this is a problem that the Caribbean is struggling. We are going to continue putting measures in place with the hope and in certain cases with the confidence that they will work. In fact, we actually introduced the math and English programmes for the CXC class of 2012 and we saw relatively good results. Where in the Region, that the entire CARICOM region, the mathematics pass rate was 33% and in Guyana the overall pass rate was 29%. The pilot schools passed at 39%, topping the overall region and the regional average and the national average. Where in English, the regional pass rate was 47% and our overall pass rate was 37%, our pilot schools got a pass rate of 52%, again topping even the regional average.

I do not think this is a problem we can solve over night; this is something we are going to have to continue to work at. What I can say with confidence that I have seen, is renewed interest and perhaps a deeper belief now that we can solve this if we work at it amongst the stakeholders. Who are those stakeholders? Teachers, regional education officers, parents and students with more of an understanding that this is not something we have to throw up our arms at. This is something once tackled, we can conquer this monster.

I believe that this is something that while we do not know yet if this is the solution, I can say that the introduction of this new project has created a level of confidence that I did not see before. I ask you to join us on this programme. When we go all across the country to the schools talking to

parents about how they can help their children, come with us in those schools. Throw on your jeans on Sunday morning and come let us talk to those parents about what they need to do; how they need to support their children because in this battle we are going to need every single person on board.

Without a doubt the education sector is again receiving much attention. Like I said over the last five years, we have seen this sector being allocated at least 15% on average; 15% of the Nation's budget. This is different from before. We have seen how that increased allocation and commitment over the years resulted in better results in our children staying in school. I suspect we will see benefits from it 20 years down the line when these children are now blossoming in the world of work, in the classroom teaching, at an engineering site building bridge. We will see the effects of this later on in Guyana.

We will continue in this sector to offer our very best as far as we can. I wish to, before I close on the education sector, say heartfelt thank you to the people who work daily - they are not in the newspapers and they are not in the headlines - the teachers and the education officers and the planners and the people who work every single day to make sure our children get an education so that they can be better prepared for the world of work. We are going to continue our partnerships with the people we partner with and take this sector forward.

I am the geographical representative of Region No. 5 – Mahaica, Berbice. We heard from Ms. Wade earlier and I have to say this, from the beginning, without reservation. Ms. Wade is one of the hardest working members of that side of the House. I can say that without reservation. She is genuine in her efforts and hardworking on the ground. I have seen it myself and I have seen how dedicated she is. I do hesitate to adopt all that the Hon. Member has said. The Hon. Member painted a picture and said, we must not come on this side of the House and say that all is bright and beautiful and all is wise and wonderful. We must come and we must say that things are left to be done. As I said, the budget is intitled, "*Overcoming challenges together*". We recognise we have challenges. The Hon. Member did exactly what she was saying that we should not do. She painted a picture of Region No. 5 that was so woeful; everything is terrible, nothing is right, everything is going bad. I grew up there; this is my region. The Hon. Member spoke of rice farmers. That is my story; that is my father. The Hon. Member spoke of cattle farmers. That is

my father and that is me. I actually am a cattle farmer. This is my story, I understand it. What the Hon. Member is saying might be true, but it is not the picture the Hon. Member was painting.

Mahaicony Creek, all the way to Barabara, they have electricity. Something we would not have dreamt of when I was growing up. Someone posted on *Facebook* the other day, a picture of an engine and me. The most non-technical person could have identified that it was a Lister Engine. Because I have seen Lister Engines used for the generation of electricity in that community. They have electricity now not something they would have ever dreamt of. Are there communities left without electricity? Of course, but this is the constant building we would have to do. When everywhere in Region No.5 has electricity, then we have to start making sure every home is painted and we have to make sure everybody has water. That is how we build. And that is what we are asking you to partner with us to do.

5.39 p.m.

It is true that farmers have irrigation problems, but the Hon. Member did not say that that number was much reduced. In 1990, rice was produced in Guyana at 93,444 metric tonnes. In 2012, we had a 450% increase, at 422,000 metric tonnes. Do you know how that was done? That was done because the drainage and irrigation is much better; that is not to say that there still not works to be done. It is much better than it was. The confidence in the sector is much higher than it ever was before and the technology transfer, where we have Rice Extension Officers going out and teaching people how to plant new varieties and what to do with those new varieties and how to bring in higher yields. These are things that have contributed to the historic production of 422,000 metric tonnes of rice – the highest we have ever produced in our country.

In Region No. 5 there is a problem. The problem is that landlords are not paying their rents so the farmers, hardworking men and a smaller number of women work every day to bring in produce and we can stand here and celebrate it. Those farmers, the smaller farmers, are paying \$12,000 to \$16,000 per acre for rice and the MMA is asking the landlords to pay \$2,500 per acre and the landlords are the ones not paying so some of the persons that Ms. Wade might have been speaking of are not on the land and are not living there. They are in other Regions, not even in other communities. The farmers are toiling every day, rain or shine. Those farmers who are toiling every day are not the farmers who are to be blamed. They are the people working to give

us produce. They are putting rice on our plates, literally. The problem is that the landlords are not paying and we must not defend those. We must make sure that they pay so that the very people we stand here to represent, the smaller farmers, can receive the services they need.

Region No. 5 is on the move. As I said, by the end of this year we are going to have universal secondary education in that region. We are going to have... I am out of time, but I could have told you of pages and pages of work that was done last year. In the health sector alone there are six projects that were done that are benefitting large numbers of persons. For example, there is a construction of a reservoir and water filtering mechanism at the Mahaicony Hospital which will benefit 72 medical staff members and 750 patients daily. What that means is not only are they going to get the water and we have a structure; it means that 750 people do not have to run from Mahaicony or Region No. 5 to Georgetown Hospital; it means that the doctors who are serving are conserved in a more habitable environment. We are providing services with the moneys provided in the annual budget and year after year we are building on the gains we have made.

This year's budget has much for many and I say that it is incumbent on us, it is almost a sacred duty, to make sure that we do not deny the beneficiaries – not us in this House but the people of Guyana – the benefits the 2013 Budget has in store for them.

I thank you, Sir. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Member. I now invite the Hon. Member, Rev. Morian, going across to another region, Region No. 10, to address us.

**Mr. Morian:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give God praise and thanks for this opportunity again to address the 2013 Budget Estimates and I hold myself to an encouragement I hear yesterday, “to be reasonable and responsible”, but before I get into the budget, proper, I want to expand on information given to us by the Hon. “Orphan” Ali. He gave some information yesterday and my information...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, it is “Irfaan”, not “Orphan”.

**Mr. Morian:** Sorry, Sir, “Irfaan”. My information is dated 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2012, and it reads thus, I just want to read one point of it which speaks to drinking water in Guyana and this is a report by the US Embassy:

“The water supply throughout the country should be considered contaminated...”

**Mr. Speaker:** What is the year of that report?

**Mr. Morian:** 2012. I could go it over again, 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2012, US Embassy, 100 Young and Duke Street, Georgetown.

“Drinking Water

The water supply system throughout the country should be considered contaminated and travelers should treat all boiled water before consumption or purchase of boiled water.

Medical Facilities and Health Information

Medical care does not meet general international standards. Skills available for minor medical conditions, although quality is very inconsistent, emergency care and hospitalization for major medical illnesses and surgery are very limited due to lack of appropriately trained specialists, below standard in-hospital care, poor sanitation.”

I did write on this some time ago and I came under a lot of scrutiny from a good friend of mine. It also said that tuberculosis is an increasingly serious health concern in Guyana. Finally:

“Driving in Guyana can be potentially very hazardous. The traffic accident fatalities in Guyana are higher than in the United States.”

There is another piece of document that I want to read before I look to the budget and this document is from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and it is entitled “The Role of the Legislature in the Budget Process – Recent Trends and Innovations” and it reads:

“...legislatures have the capacity to amend or reject the budget proposals of the executive and to substitute one of their own...”

This is happening in Sweden and the United states. It also went on to say:

“...legislatures can amend or reject executive budget proposals...”

In Brazil – I am drawing on precedence – the Congress now has the power to cut and to extend the budget. Finally the European-empowered Parliament rejected the \$1.3 trillion EU Budget Proposal.

I now turn to ours. As I said, I want to be reasonable. I want to be magnanimous too. As a student of economics I understand the serious nature of putting a budget together so I want to acknowledge the work of the Minister and his staff in putting the budget together.

According to the economists Milton Keynes and Professor Kosner, a budget proposal or a budget estimate should produce sustainable livelihood for its people. I am not here to condemn the budget but I am here to draw a parallel with budget provisions and what is taken place in Region No. 10 and leave you to draw your own conclusions.

If one is to look at a budget, especially in the case of Region No. 10, one needs to examine to socioeconomic conditions prevailing at the time of the budget. We need to look at the challenges and opportunities in Region No. 10. Then we need to look at the budget and examine the kind of provisions that are made available for Region No. 10.

The socioeconomic conditions on the ground are as follows:

Growing Unemployment: Somebody spoke of the “Chinese company”. I need to bring them up to speed that the “Chinese company” employs 450 workers and they are working them overtime, triple the time because truly...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, are you referring to BOSAI?

**Mr. Morian:** Truly they are supposed to have hired over 1,000 persons. In previous years, during the PNC Administration we had 5,000 persons working at the bauxite industry. Contractors had 2,000 persons working. I am saying that there is a rising cost, increase in poverty, run-down infrastructure, broken road, hundreds of our young people who graduated from secondary schools with grades in CXC who are unemployed and are languishing at home in poverty.

Conservative estimates have placed unemployment in Region No. 10 as 35% of the working population. We do not have a television station that we could call our own. Our television station



is run like a Russian Gulag. I am looking at the budget and one would feel that I am looking at an elegy instead of a budget proposal.

I want to be more specific. For Agency 80, Upper Demerara/Berbice, we see his provision or allocation from the budget in four areas: Regional Administration and Finance, Public Works, Education Delivery and Health Services. I challenged this budget as it relates to promoting sustainable development because residents in Region No. 10 have recognised that agriculture is the next frontier for development in the Region. I submit here consultancy work by Vogatti and Associates of Trinidad and this is what they wrote. I have the assessment here:

“Region No. 10 with its large unoccupied space, 22,975 arable land ready for agriculture, 1,775 forested lands are available for agriculture. There is a large labour pool.”

They have identified Takama Savannah, Ebini, De Velde, Kimbia, Wiruni and Kwakwani. It is troubling that, as these areas are occupied by indigenous population, a shortage of funding for Region No. 10 is also a serious attempt to starve and malign and under develop our indigenous peoples in Region No. 10.

There is a second document prepared by the Government – “Land Use Plan, a Pilot Area in Guyana” and I wish to quote from it. It is a collaborative effort between the Government of Guyana and the German Government and it reads:

“Ituni has great opportunity for kaolin while generally there is good forestry land for logging...”

Here is the conclusion in this document.

“Linden could become the next economic center and a transit point to the hinterland, along with the promotion of cash crops and ecotourism.”

But in our budget estimates the budget releases funding under four heads and no money was released for agriculture, while there is great potential in Region No. 10 for agriculture. I should note that this year in the releases, under Public Works, we have seen a reduction of \$16 million.

I submit in the midst of what I might call a comic opera, comic situation that for the residents of Region No. 10 there seems to be a deliberate attempt to under develop Region No. 10. If a

budget is supposed to provide for sustainable development, the macro focus of a budget is to promote sustainable development and a good life for all Guyanese and here we have thousands of acres waiting for funding and this budget has failed to provide any funding for agriculture.

Somebody asked me to be reasonable. My question is: Can I be so reasonable to support a budget that speaks to my underdevelopment?

I want to be specific in some more areas.

Gender Issues: The budget provision for Region No. 10 has failed to address the issues of women in Region No. 10.

Gender Equity: We are at a severe disadvantage in Region No. 10. Our women are employed in low-pay security jobs. I raised this last year and a good friend of mine on the other side had promised to look into it but we are friends so I would not call a name. They are occupied as sweepers of Government facilities and earning less than the minimum wage. One would have expected that in this new budget provisions would have been made to address issues affecting women. Most of them are under the minimum wage. There is high unemployment among the women. There is high unemployment among the men and there is serious migration from Region No. 10 because our men folk are going after jobs outside of Region No. 10 so one could understand what is happening in the homes.

We have asked for years for the erection of a halfway home for women that are exposed to domestic violence. Every year there is the promise, but this year, again, there is no provision in the budget. This also sets out the women that are in Kwakwani, Ebini and all of those areas that our indigenous people occupy and I am telling the framers of this budget that they need to take a visit to these communities and be aware and see the underdevelopment that is taking place in indigenous communities.

The budget omits the contribution and the struggles of our women in Region No. 10 to survive. Today, I salute the women of Region No. 10 that in the midst of all of the economic decadence and the orchestrated struggles placed on us by the PPP/C Administration our women folk are still living and they are working hard, producing for their families.

The budget for Region No. 10 failed to address issues affecting our young people. The budget has failed to address the issues affecting school leavers who are unemployed. I submit that the United Nations Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (UN PRSP) has identified that youths have a role to play in their development. We recognise that poverty reduction is not just an attempt to meet the young people. Basically, it is also the participation of young people in their own development. Throughout Region No. 10 youth development programmes remain drastically under resourced, ill equipped. The budget presentation should be a format or a tool to develop our young people. I checked this budget, cover-to-cover, because basically it is under four programmes. The question is asked: Where do our hundreds and thousands of young people go, where do they turn, for better livelihood? How could I as a representative of Region No. 10 go back to my community, go back to the thousands of young people who are unemployed, who are eking an existence. Some are washing bottles and selling. Most of them are just languishing and unemployed. How reasonable could I get to go back to the region and say, “I have supported a budget that speaks to the underdevelopment and marginalisation of the people of Region No. 10”?

The budget has failed to promote a programme to reduce extreme hunger and poverty among our young people. There is no initiative. There is no programme. There is not plan. If one checks the budget, there is nothing dealing with young people in Region No. 10. At Wismar there are 25 grounds that are in disarray. When one goes to Ituni there are four grounds. When one goes to Kwakwani there are three grounds right now. If one goes across to McKenzie, as we counted, there are 18 grounds. All are in a state of disrepair. Do you know what I like in Region 10? The young people are fighting back. They are aware of their struggles. They are playing basketball using bicycle rims as the hoops to throw the balls into while millions of dollars, we are told are in this budget. How could we support such a budget when our young people are seeing us as failing?

These are the facts. Do you know what I am happy about, Mr. Speaker? Despite our presentations here, the Members on the Government side who, from time to time, would say to me, “I am coming to Linden” because of the fact that I am always reasonable and responsible but I promised my good friend, the Hon. Neendkumar – we are friends. [Mr. Neendkumar: We are friends. Man, talk the truth.] I promised him...

**Mr. Speaker:** Wait. Based on what I heard just now, is that your friend?

**Mr. Morian:** The word of God said that even one's enemies or those who are perceived to be enemies one needs to love. That is the diction that I follow. There is no agenda. Check the budget. I listened to the Hon. Minister of Education and the truth is that a lot of work is being done in the Ministry of Education, but I am saying there that there is no specific programme or budgetary allocation to deal with school-based violence. It has gone beyond beyond. Even speaking to the framers in the department or in the Ministry of Education, *mano a mano*, they are at their wits end because these things cannot be fixed by political rhetoric. Moneys have to be spent. Moneys have to be committed to the Regional Democratic Council, to the people who are elected to serve their people, who understand the nature of the problems so that they, themselves, could work and solve these problems, but we cannot stay in Georgetown and promote a budget with huge numbers but basically there is no output from such a budget.

In the land use plan prepared by the Government, it speaks to opportunities in tourism. Every year, as this document is updated there is much talk about development in Region No. 10 about tourism but again I draw your attention to the budget releases and provisions. This is more hot air than reality. There is nothing in the budget that speaks to tourism. Places have been identified. The mined out areas, Rockstone, parts of Ituni, parts of Kwakwani have been identified as places for ecotourism and every other thing that relates to tourism, but do you know what? At the end of the day we are faced with yet another budget, a lot of figures, a lot of numbers, but Region No. 10 seems not to be a part of the agenda of this Government and we are suspicious that there is an organised or orchestrated programme to under develop Region No. 10 because – check it – there is nothing in the budget.

Even in the areas of agriculture, we have been brining this year after year – the issue of land titles. It remains a contentious issue. I could go further. Over the past three weeks we had reason to eject persons that claimed that they were sent by the Government to occupy lands in Region No. 10, but I need to sound a warning that Region No. 10 is like Fort Knox. Once one is coming into Region No. 10 to occupy property that does not belong to you, well... The rest is in the fine print. We are yet to release land leases and there is nowhere in the budgetary allocations that addresses this issue and it is a contentious issue, year after year, but overall it marginalises the

people who want to get involved in agriculture because they cannot go to the bank for a loan, they cannot use the land as collateral, hence they are at square one.

While the Hon. Minister of Education made a good presentation of works in the area of education the budget provision is yet to address the state of our teachers in riverine areas. If one checks the record, in the month of December teachers had to leave riverine areas. Roofs were blown off, steps had collapsed and a whole lot of things went wrong. Minister, if this was not reported to you I am very sorry but these are facts coming out of Region No. 10. There is nothing in the budget that speaks to improving on the lack of teachers in the riverine areas. This is a fact.

I am speaking now concerning disaster preparedness and by extension I need to drop in a caveat here as it relates to disaster preparedness, even in this House, before I turn to Region No. 10. When the budget was being read by the Hon. Minister of Finance there was a movement of a glass and one felt the tension because all along the corridors were cameras. As a disaster preparedness practitioner I was a bit tense that if something would happen in this House there would have been a catastrophe. I posit, despite this is not in the Region 10 estimates or budget, that we are sitting on a disaster where Parliament is concerned in the way it is currently configured.

Let me go back to Region No. 10. Macroeconomic forces, fragile physical environment and the local economy have seriously affected our vulnerability as it relates to disasters. The people of Region No. 10, the economy, the infrastructure, the funding that has been released, there is no way that we could respond to a disaster in Region No. 10. We have been calling, over the past five years. Some persons remember that in the year 2005, Region No. 10 played host to over 2,000 persons that migrated from the east coast during the flooding and we had to put up makeshift provisions for disaster situations. While some persons look at this as a misnomer, as a practitioner in the area of disaster preparedness, our budget, again, is like a skeleton and I could repeat what I said again, Hon. Member. The budget is like an elegy – a mournful poem, a mournful reading. Those who did literature would remember “elegy” as a graveyard, a country churchyard. This budget is an elegy. One looks in a budget, despite who prepares the budget, for the impetus to take a community forward. Region No. 10, based on all of the shenanigans of the Government, based on all of the masquerades... [Mr. Nandlall: Got to be “eulogy”.] ...right

now... Not a “eulogy”, Sir, an “elegy”. I guess that I just had to help his English. I want to submit here that there is no new investment in Region No. 10 listed in this budget.

I want to conclude by using a precedent from another country. We have been hearing about the one-vote majority and one has heard it so often that one wants to know if the record is stuck but there was a time when there was a five-vote majority. That record is supposed to be playing simultaneously with the one-vote majority, but it is not. There is precedence though. There is precedence in the world and I need to share it here.

*6.09 p.m.*

In Kenya the Government has passed a 1.4 trillion shillings budget, basically it took that budget to Parliament. It was a very contentious. It had some of the same situation that we are going through, right now, but the Government found common ground with the Opposition because it recognised that at the end the day what was at stake was the development of the country and this was the agreement that came through. It agreed to pass supplementary provisions of fifty-six billion shillings. I do not think that we have gone beyond redemption at this point. The Parliament in Kenya had to pause, had to examine where it was going and the Government was pragmatic and said to the Opposition, “We need to meet again”. Hence, the fifty-six billion shillings, a supplementary provision that pleased the Opposition. I need to move on.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, your time has elapsed. You have about three to four minutes to give your total...

**Mr. Morian:** In the Marshall Islands, based on the parliamentary discussions and the problem that the Government is having to pass its budget as it relates to the Opposition. In the Marshall Islands the Government, right now, is considering a \$32.7 million supplementary budget because its agreements was fostered with the Opposition.

I posit here, Sir, that in this House we still have a number of days to conclude the budget proceedings. Hence, I am saying to you, Sir, that whatever comes out of this budget is as a result of what we would have done here, but this might be our last and final moment to do something positive for Guyana.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

**Minister of Health [Dr. Ramsaran]:** As I rise to join the debate, the discussion, the conversation, surrounding this budget, I would like, first of all, to join with the Hon. Minister of Education when she said this budget has much for many. That is in the words of the Hon. Priya Devi Manickchand, Minister of Education, eloquently said, thereby endorsing the good work of the Minister and his team. Before I go into my discussion and my contribution on the good work that he has done I would also like to join in congratulating his technical team. We oft times forget those people behind closed doors, those persons working around the clock, who get things done. I would like to recognise those hard-working members of the Ministry of Finance who have been able to craft this budget which has so much for so many.

At the same time I would like to note that the Minister of Finance and the technical team, which I referred to, have recognised the good work that the Ministry of Health and the health sector have done to such an extent that they have moderately increased the absolute amount of moneys allocated to the sector. This endorsement or this recognition of the good work done by the health sector is also a recognition done by so many thousands of health care providers who we do not see on the front pages, we do hear about, but whose work has done so well.

I would like to recognise the work of this group of hard-working Guyanese who incidentally are predominantly women and who represent the significant group of our workforce. Minister, I thank you for recognising their contribution. At the same time, I would like to say that this is the group of workers who make us proud whilst at the same time protecting the nation twenty-four hours per day, protecting the nation to such an extent that we have continuously won international accolades.

Guyana has the distinction of being among the countries with one of the highest coverage for routine vaccines and antigens. That protects our children; that create the future. This is only possible from the hard work of those workers, who I referred to, oft times performing their functions in difficult challenging conditions. As I will show shortly that the Ministry of Health, the health sector, has achieved and continues to achieve but it still has significant challenges and the Members would have known of them. The Members would read about some of them in the newspapers – an outbreak there, a maternal death there. There are challenges, but there have also been significant gains.

Let us speak about some of those and, at the same time, let us take a pause to reflect all the structure of the budget in which I see, not only in the health sector, but right across other sectors in the budget, that it is an all-inclusive budget. A budget which allows all stakeholders to say, “Yes, this is my budget.” It is not only the Private Sector Commission can say that. My health sector workers, my patients, people needing rehabilitation services, they are all included. I asked the Members to give me their ears to look at some the achievements, some of the things that we have done, but whilst doing so I also have a little misgiving.

I have heard from over the other side of the aisle, from the very first gong, from the Hon. Member Greenidge, shadow Minister for Finance, who attempted to lay the foundation to vote against the budget or to cut it. What is a bit more alarming, in some other contributions, is that I recognised that some of the persons calling for cuts did not seem to understand the content of some of their own discussions. For example on the specialty hospital, on the retention moneys for capital works in the health sector, good colleagues, especially in the media and in the gallery, I shudder to think that it is as a child with a match. A match is a useful thing, but in the hands of a child, unschooled and unaccustomed to systems, it can do damage. Several of the contributions from the other side were passionate, showing that they were trying to grasp with material but not understanding it. *[Laughter from the Government Members]*. I do not want you to laugh at them. I want us to understand that we need to recruit them because they have constituencies and the passion with which they have approached the subject matter showed that we have made mistakes on this side. We have not been able to get over to them for a year because some of the said arguments that were raised here last year, in regard to the specialty hospital, keep coming back. **[Mr. B. Williams:** You are getting it wrong, as usual.] I hear a voice a wilderness. I will come to that again, but I am suspecting that in the coming days when we go line by line it will become apparent.

Let me just, in passing, say this: Having a voted provision does not mean that the contractor has been given that money. He has to go through a certain process. Last year, just about this time, about the same issue, that is, the specialty hospital, which we so much need, whether we are petite or whether we are hugely endowed we sometimes could end up with cardiac events... We will come to that later. What I am saying is that the provisions voted for in this case, for example, I think my good colleague, the Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, spoke to this figure, \$97



million, it does not mean that the person... That is the contract cost or the contract sum. I want to briefly assure her that those moneys have not been disbursed. There is a certain process and I advise that she should learn that process. I do not have the time for a pedagogic session now but I am willing to have a group... I think we need to do this. The Ministry of Finance, for example... For example, Minister Benn, from time to time, would call in the contractors and do a symposium. He would do a session so that they can speak the same language at the same time. I think this is a good model to follow Minister, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, so that it would be understood that a provision, which you are looking at, has certain processes or procedures before you can touch that money.

The contractor, who, I think, was referred to by Ms. Ferguson as Mr. G. Bovell, has not been given that money because, indeed, he has not done that volume of work. I would like to say that he has been given moneys based on the measured works done, but we will have that discussion in the coming days as, no doubt, Ms. Ferguson will raise these issues and we will elucidate more and more on them.

The issue of moneys, which would be described as retention fees, was touched upon. I suspect that Ms. Ferguson was looking at the similar numbers of \$25 million in last year's budget and this year's budget. The component parts, my honourable colleague, are different, that is, a small sum for the school in East Street and the annex in Kingston, bringing that to \$25 million, and the retention referred to is a roll over since one contractor had to be dismissed and another engaged.

Let us move on, Mr. Speaker, Hon. Minister of Finance, to look at some of the positive things that the significant, solid and continuing investment by the Government of Guyana, the People's Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) administration, has allowed us to do over the past two years. Before we go into the actual analysis or before we take a pause to see what we have done with the moneys allocated by the Ministry of Finance, let us reflect on the fact that over the past few years the health sector has enjoyed the growing slice of the social sector budget, starting from 1992 when it was just five per cent of the national budget, then it grew, and it is now, in the past few years, ten per cent for the consecutive five years.

I note that the goodly pastor referred to the fact that he is a student of economics. I have not graduated to that level as yet, but I am told that when a country has consistent figures above five

per cent in its GDP gain it indicates that the economy is - The goodly economist will tell me - buoyant. I see the smile; he agrees with me. I have read a bit of Keynes too. The continuous ten per cent, which we have noted of the health sector budget as compared to the ten per cent slice out of the national budget also indicates, *a la Keynes*, that the health sector is buoyant. The pulse beat is correct; we are getting it right.

However, it behoves us now, after enjoying, as a sector, that significant investment, to manage in austere conditions because, as the Minister of Finance pointed out, Guyana has gravitated from a Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) to somewhere up the ladder, but he also indicated, in his discussions, when he made his presentations, that the things are still fragile, that there are still threats on the international scene. He warned us that we will have to continue to be vigilant, not complacent. That is why the Ministry of Health, and the health sector, noting that there was only a modest absolute increase, it is still grateful, which keeps it at the nine per cent level – a slightly lower level but in absolute terms, more money. We have to do things better.

The Ministry of Health has positioned itself to indulge in the economy of savings. Keynes did not speak of that pastor. That is my invention. We have to manage better... [**Mrs. Backer:** It is Paul Kneens-Douglas.] I have caught their attention. They are awake and alive, that is how we like them. I like to hear when the Hon. Member Mrs. Debbie Barker is barking back.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you will refer to Members by their correct names.

**Dr. Ramsaran:** It is Mrs. Debbie Backer. We are alive and your guidance, Mr. Speaker, has brought some life to the Assembly.

Over the past few years investment in infrastructure has created a certain base. Let us look, for example, at the hospitals: Diamond is a gem, and I am not punning on the words, there are still problems there, Leonora, Mahaicony, Suddie, Port Mourant. Let us come to Lethem and Mabaruma. I do not know if I can coin a term that might be slightly unparliamentarily, but one of our colleagues was tending to be an *untruther* when he described a bleak situation in Region 9. The hospital in Region 9 is a boom to the people there. As a matter of fact you have not been told that regularly, Mr. Speaker,... [**Ms. Ally:** What do you know about Region 9?] I organised this over the past few years and I will invite you to join the team sometimes. It will now be on a monthly basis. I would like to remind the Hon. Member Ms. Wade that there will be problems.

An air conditioner may not work now and then but my health workers still work under those conditions - praise them.

Let us go back to Region 9. The hospital there has such good equipment that one of the private sector doctors, and it is on tape, recently said..., because he had never travelled out to those areas. This is a goodly gentleman called Dr. Neville Gobin. I think I am allowed to call the name in a positive light and he has been one of the members of my medical-surgical team, with others from the private sector, who went in to Mabaruma - the Hon. Member Mr. Hamilton has been there - to Lethem and Dr. Gobin has said that he has recognised what this administration is doing for the indigenous people. In Region 9, as recent as the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of last month - Mr. Speaker, I hope I have your attention - there was a significant event. What we did was to send in a medical-surgical team. Who was on that team, Mr. Speaker? Who headed that team? It was the honourable Dr. Fawcett Jeffrey. Who else was on that team? He is one of the best bone specialists in the region, Dr. Amin; Dr. Bulkan, ultrasound specialist from the private sector, Dr. Raul, a Cuban, stationed at the Diamond facility, Dr. Monica Segala, a very bright woman, well educated, went overseas and came back. They did seventeen surgeries (Where is Mr. Allicock? Would you lend me your ears, Sir?) at the Lethem Hospital.

Previous to that, in the last quarter of last year, a similar team went and they did forty-nine similar surgeries. What type of surgeries they were? I want the persons in the gallery to listen to this and the cameras to show and tell it to the nation. They did cesarean sections. Cesarean section is a way of delivering a baby. Both mothers and children and, of course, the daddies are all happy. Thanks to Dr. Amin and his team - praise them. They go and work there and there are difficulties - thanks to Dr. Jeffery and team, thanks to Dr. Raul, thanks to Dr. Monica. They leave, in some cases, lucrative *coastland* private sector jobs for that long weekend - praise them.

Sometimes I wonder where my colleague the Hon. Member Mr. Sydney Allicock lives. If he did, and I know he does... My goodly colleague, let us embrace the truth a bit tighter, a bit cosier. Dr. Goddett is the doctor based in Lethem. He is one of the Jagdeo's scholars. He comes from that region. I want to pull the carpet from under the feet of the argument of the Hon. Member Mr. Sydney Allicock, that this administration is doing nothing for the young people in those regions. Dr. Goddett, and others, and Dr. Torres, who should be known to the goodly gentleman, are from Lethem. He is a doctor who was trained in Cuba, a young full-blooded Amerindian, who has

returned to served at Annai. I am going to dwell a bit on Region 9 because my colleague across the aisle did so much, I think, to the distress of the residents of Region 9 who have expressed so much good wishes and goodwill towards the PPP/C for providing these services.

Further to that, the goodly Dr. Torres was specially kept for a protracted period in Georgetown to give him additional skills. I remember when this young man came back, he wanted to go and serve his community. I said to him “Joe, slow, hold.” I want to keep you in Georgetown for several months to give you certain skills. He is now thankful that due to the additional training by this Government he has gone back to be able to do even better. Praise the Government for that. I would like to tell you, too, Mr. Speaker, since we are on Region 9... We were told... [Mr. Greenidge: Praise....] Yes. I did that, so I can blow my trumpet. I know what I am speaking about. I see my goodly friend the Hon. Member Mr. Norman Whittaker shaking his head because he knows what goes on at Mabaruma. He was the Chairman there when I was doing similar things in that region.

We have also sent similar teams to Mabaruma. What have we done there? Surgical correction of club foot, surgeries that would have had to be done on the coast in the past - hysterectomies - those things are happening. We keep increasing the number of doctors in those regions. I empathise with Mr. Allicock when he noted that presently Aishalton does not have a doctor, but I must correct him to say that it still has the pre-retired medex. What I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, and Mr. Allicock is that Dr. Celestine Haynes, who up to a few years ago was in the region, had to be withdrawn to be sent overseas to become an eye specialist. She will be coming back shortly.

Further to that, I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that very shortly two doctors have been identified to travel to Lethem. One will be travelling on April 22<sup>nd</sup> and the other on May 3<sup>rd</sup> to add to the already expanded capacity of doctors in Region 9. Remember the time when it used to be only the hard-working Dr. Idun [Ms. Wade: You like to gaffe.] This is called gaffe. The fact is that it will be having two more doctors, and they were just complaining. What respect do you have for our indigenous folks if we call this gaffe?

I would like to say that at Aishalton there is now a medex who is on pre-retirement, but in the meantime we are in the final stages of training. [Mrs. Backer: What would the medex do?]

Those were the people you had there for decades before the PPP/C started to send doctors in droves. What I am going to say is that there are some twenty-eight medexes in training and some of them will be going to Lethem and the other parts of Region 9 to assist the two doctors, in which my goodly colleague, here, is preparing, because they are the angels, should I say, of the Public Service Ministry, their contracts to go ahead.

Mr. Speaker, I see that I have your attention, we are strengthening Region 9. What I want to say is this: That there was a continuous refrain that there is unemployment - that this administration does not help young people; that this administration does not help indigenous regions and that this administration marginalises. What could be marginalisation here when I am sending my young doctors who have just passed through the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation?

What I want to say further is this: There are lots of doctors coming back. Over two hundred and seventy doctors will soon be in the system and the Opposition Members can applaud the PPP/C Government for that. What do they know besides that bland figure? They need to know that a significant number of them are indigenous youths. Under the past two administrations of the PPP/C, indigenous health has been put on the front burner. Indigenous health has been given a massive shot in the arm. Nurses from the hinterland are being trained at the New Amsterdam Nursing School. Besides that, take from Karasabai, the nurse now is a trained anaesthetic nurse, and so on and so forth.

I will not dwell exclusively on Region 9 and at the same time I will move on but must emphasise that the PPP/C, not only is looking at training young people, but it is looking at putting them in the jobs. [**Dr. Norton:** Training of Amerindians?] Yes. We will continue to train Amerindians. Do you have an objection to that? How can that be offensive? Mr. Speaker, protect me. Training of Amerindians is offensive. Where are we going?

*6.39 p.m.*

We are training young people to get into the health sector and at the same time to achieve our Millennium Development Goals. We have taken a commitment with the international community to achieve the Millennium Development Goal number 4. Let me tell the Opposition Members what this is all about because they seem to be floating a bit. They are really in deep waters. It

also referred to as MDG 4. It refers to safe motherhood. Yet another batch of midwives has been graduated and there is yet a small batch, small but significant, of trainee midwives.

There is a postgraduate programme in obstetrics and gynaecology right here in Guyana, but colleagues it is not a wishy-washy Third World invention. It is a programme that is stewarded, mentored and assisted by international centres of excellence, so that when, in a few years, those obstetricians/gynaecologist will be graduated they will be internationally certifiable. This, again, is to ensure that our under-five mortality and our safe motherhood, under MDGs 4 and 5, are achieved. We are in the process; it is in our grasp. We do not have to part the waves to cross, to get there. We are sailing smoothly to that. I am happy that this budget, although it has only given us a modest absolute increase, is positioning the health sector and my health sector provider to build, as the Hon. Member Ms. Manickchand said, on the gains of the previous investments.

Lend me your ear further,...

**Mr. Speaker:** We will lend it after you get an extension please. Your half-hour is up.

**Mr. Hinds:** Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Minister be granted another fifteen minutes to conclude his presentation.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Dr. Ramsaran:** I thank the Hon. Prime Minister for that extension.

Now under the effort to introduce other services, a neonatal Intensive Care Unit (ICU) service has been introduced, that is, intensive care services at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. These services, even as we speak, are in the process of being rolled out at Linden Hospital Complex. Linden Hospital Complex, incidentally, is one of the best run hospitals in the country. It has also been introduced in the West Demerara Regional Hospital and later in the year it will be at the New Amsterdam Hospital. What does that mean honourable ladies of the audience? It means that the under-five mortality should further decrease because the neonates accounts for as much as forty-five per cent of deaths in that subgroup. We are getting there. The health sector is on the move; Guyana is on the move as far as health is concerned.

We have also introduced other services and are expanding them, specialised services, even before we come to the specialty hospital. Cardiac services are being or have already been introduced and are being expanded. If one goes into the mountains, for example, or if one goes on a fishing expedition into our rainforest and gets a seizure, we are continuously there. The Ministry of Health does not sleep, and, of course, the Minister too, with the Ministry of Health, so we can extract that person and will bring him or her to the Caribbean Heart Institute. We will have our own trained Guyanese cardiologist backed by a Canadian-supported cardiologist who will be able to do an echocardiogram on that person and decide the way forward and then take that person to the catheterisation laboratory (cath lab) and patch that person's heart up. This is important because we are now experiencing an epidemic of non-communicable diseases. It is now in the lexicon and incidentally it touches high and low, slim and chubby and even those who are hugely endowed, smokers and non-smokers and abusers of alcohol and those of us who use too much salt. The services have been expended and I would like to point that this budget allows us to consolidate. We will be, for example, able to manage our medications and medical supplies better.

On International Women's Day, this year, we commissioned a huge, a massive, a modern, a state-of-the-art - I like that term - warehouse for our medications. It is computerised but still it is having problems because it cannot exist outside of the system. Sometimes there are human errors on the periphery, ordering the drugs too late or collecting them too late. The Minister of Finance, over the past few years, has joined the Government of Guyana's budget with international donor agencies to contribute, or get moneys, enough to build an half of a billion dollars structure. This is what I mean by the economy of savings. I want to thank the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to join in partnering with the Government of Guyana and the Ministry of Finance in helping us with that facility. This is what I mean by the economy of savings. Too often, in the recent past, we were allocating adequate moneys for medications and supplies but some got expired, some got spoilt. Definitely, this new facility, which is located not far from the 'buster' sign in the new Diamond housing estate, will put pay to those losses. As a matter of fact, it is finished. The Ministry has gone through the teething stages of the introduction of this facility and we are seeing some positive changes.

I heard from across the way that someone from Linden is indicating that Linden might be marginalised and that person seemed to be emphasising the reaching to that person's constituency, grandstanding, I suspect, for the cameras. I decided to flip my notes to things that are not in the health sector but at the same time support them, what we now refer to as the determinants of health - good water, good electricity.

Let us take Linden. I am told, for example, that the national *per capita* expenditure on water is some \$15,000. My calculation shows that for Linden, Mr. Pastor, the honourable, and Region 10, it is some \$30,000 or twice that figure *per capita* per year. That is what is the *per capita*. Now I hear the resounding silence. [Mrs. Backer: It is because of nobody is listening.] Well, how did you hear me say that? I am really enjoying this. Linden is listening. The *per capita* of national investment in water in Linden, by the Ministry of Housing and Water, under the able leadership of my honourable friend, Mr. Irfaan Ali, is \$30,000, whereas nationally it is \$15,000. Do the higher mathematics, Mr. Greenidge. The higher mathematics implies that we are discriminating in that social determinant of health called water in favour of Linden by a factor multiplied by two. Linden is listening. [Mr. Greenidge: Nonsense.] That is not nonsense; that is water.

Electricity, which also benefits our hospital: I understand, for example, that the electricity subsidy for Linden is five times the national *per capita*, average. If we were to look at the entire package for our beloved old-aged pensioners in Linden, many of whom enjoyed the services of one of the best run hospitals in the country – I want to thank the team that is running that hospital, especial the Medical Superintendent, my good friend, Dr. Riystat - are also enjoying a discriminatory status. They are having two times more of the sum benefits of the national average.

I will now move off from Linden. I just thought that I should have ruffled some feathers because I know Linden is listening. I have succeeded, Ms. Teixeira; you are right. I will enjoy looking at this, again, when I go to Linden, on the television there. I think I have made the point.

I would like to close by saying... [An Hon. Member: You do not have to close]. I usually have long closures. Whilst embarking on this closure I would like to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that one of the five underlying principles of the health sector, which was mentioned by Ms. Ferguson,



equity of access, the number one, we cannot, as a poor nation, hold a fully trained team in every corner of the country, but we can bring the patient having certain needs to that team. This is the gist of why Mabaruma Hospital was. Listen to the story. Listen to the legend. Why Lethem Hospital was built and basic staff was put there? Every time a team, led by Dr. Fawcett Jeffery, goes in the young doctor who works with them will get some of their skills and then after three to four to five years that youngster will come out for postgraduate training. Many of them will want to go back. As a matter of fact, some of them are so dedicated, such as the present head of the Lethem Hospital, that they do not want to come out in the first place. Praise those young people. Mr. Speaker, how do we, in such a huge country...? Do you know that this country is large as the United Kingdom? But we have a population that is small as one borough in London and it is spread all over. This PPP/Civic administration is committed to taking those services to them or bringing them to the services.

Let me tell you about the medical evacuation programme of the Ministry of Health. We are able to, and as I told the Member, this is not... Can I get a wee bit more silent or noiselessness? If we can bring out an Amerindian woman who is having a difficult labour, now and then, or a snake bitten patient, we now have thanks to the efforts of Mr. Harry Persaud Nokta, in the recent past and Mr. Robeson Benn, now. There are over one hundred and fifty serviceable airstrips in this country. In 1992, this Government inherited seventeen *bruk down* ones and it repaired and expanded. [**Mrs. Backer:** The drug lords know about them.] You seem, my dear Mrs. Backer, to be very enamoured with the drug lords. I would not want to go there.

The medical evacuation programme for the past year, 2011, we were able to bring out one hundred and twelve flights bringing out one hundred and forty-six patients, predominantly indigenous persons, but also anyone else, and that does not preclude a person being a professor, a politician. Once that person is sick I will go and get that person. I will bring that person out. These are expensive undertakings. I want to congratulate our pilots on this hundredth anniversary of aviation. I want to recognise the Dalgetys of the air wings of the Guyana Defence Force (GDF), the Jerry Gouveias, the Captain Fazil Khans, the Chan A Sues who would almost at any time of the night respond to a mercy call. Those incidentally are some of the same pilots who take my medical-surgical missions back in.

Mr. Speaker, in wrapping up, in these three last minutes, in 2011, we brought one hundred and twelve flights, sometime in the death of night whilst you are sleeping, four feet in bed, we are working. The aviators of this country are working; praise them in the hundredth anniversary, the centenary of aviation in Guyana. Then in the year 2012, we brought out one hundred and seven flights with one hundred and fifty patients. I am told that one hundred and thirty-five of those were indigenous people. These are costly things. I would like to... [Mr. Greenidge: That is an abstraction.] This is not abstraction. Mr. Greenidge seems to be going wack. Those were patients; those were women in labour; those were people with gunshot wounds.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to close, after having caught your attention, by quoting the Hon. Minister of Education, my good colleague, Ms. Priya Devi Manickchand, by saying:

“This budget has much for many. It must not be cut by persons who do not understand processes; it must not be cut by persons who are uninformed and you need to consult with your constituents.”

This budget, in closing has much for many and I will like to fully endorse it. I would like to recommend it to the press corps that is here; I would like to recommend it to the public in the public gallery and, more so, I would like to recommend it to those conscientious Members across the aisle, in the Opposition. Let us support it. I know I would not get the support of Mr. Greenidge, but I did not say that he was conscientious.

Mr. Speaker, thank you and I would like to endorse the budget presented by the Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh. [*Applause*]

**Dr. Norton:** May it please you, Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution in this honourable House to the Budget debate 2013 as presented by the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, Minister of Finance, entitled *Overcoming Challenges Together, Accelerating Gains for Guyana*. Whilst all have rights to his or her opinions and interpretations, and we of the Opposition will never deny the Minister Dr. Ashni Singh of this right, we must be able to distinguish between opinions and the realities that exist. I say this because of what the Hon. Minister attempted to lecture to us at the beginning of his budget presentation. He spoke about examples of parliamentary actions occasioned at the behest of the Opposition’s one-seat majority, the PPP biggest nightmare, that consumes valuable legislative time and effort in futile, unproductive and, oftentimes, counterproductive pursuits.

This, colleagues, is opinion, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, his statements caustic as they are could be further from the truth.

Now let us consider the facts and therefore the truth. The combined Opposition in the last fourteen months acted successfully to cut excesses in the budgetary allocations due to lack of accountability and transparency. We successfully passed a motion of no confidence against a poorly functioning Minister and that motion remains. Yes, we successfully passed motion and Bills those did not collide with the Constitution.

The taking of the Opposition to the court of law by the Government was without merit and can best be considered as a further waste of taxpayers' money in the interest of supporting the PPP/C's minority Government partisan interest. Let it be known that should this Opposition with its one seat majority, and that all we need, ever find it necessary, and I know we will, to do this again we will go right ahead and do our duty to the people of Guyana who have elected us to this Assembly. This is so, particularly because of how the courts of public opinion have judged what we have done in the past fourteen months.

Let it be known also that this Opposition is very much prepared to act, as we have done in the past year, and is eagerly awaiting the opportunity to do more on behalf of representing the interest of our constituents and even the constituents of the PPP/C which are increasingly finding themselves disillusioned by the Government they elected. I invite the PPP/C to call the bluff; we are ready, willing and waiting.

It was this same Minister, in his budget presentation last year, who announced to the National Assembly, in a completely differently tone, that there must be no doubt that as much as this current parliamentary dispensation provides important opportunities, so is it fraught with formidable challenges and continued that our quest for lasting solutions will have to be dominated not by partisan agenda but by rational and meritocratic consideration driven less by our impulsive instinct and more by our careful and deliberate judgement. This was the Minister; he said that:

“We must be able to resist the political lure of making choices like might have short term appeal and that compromise long term imperatives and most of all the current

dispensation will require us to eschew political opportunism and grandstanding and work together to make good and sound decisions that can withstand the test of time.”

That is what he said last year. Almost, it is impossible to believe that those words were coming from the same person, just eleven days ago, who spoke in a most corrosive manner. We urge the Hon. Minister, in the interest of all Guyanese and the good of our nation, to revisit and commit to those statements that he made fourteen months ago.

With the aim of achieving universal health coverage, through the primary health care approach, the Budget 2013 has allocated \$19.2 billion to the health sector but this can best be considered as only a start for it has now become the norm, and we only have to sit back and wait, for the PPP/C Government to come back to this honourable House for the approval of supplementary appropriations that it has already spent. In the Ninth Parliament alone the Hon. Minister came back with fourteen Supplementary Appropriation Bills. This year’s budget allocation to the health sector is \$2.2 billion more than last year, which was \$17 billion and was mainly for the infrastructural development, development of public health personnel and the provision of quality health service. Of last year’s \$17 billion budget for the health sector, \$1 billion was spent on infrastructural development, including funds for mobilising payments for the controversial, due to the shady manner in which information had to be obtained and the many unanswered questions, specialty surgical hospital. That caused the Hon. Minister of Health, the Hon. Dr. Bheri Ramsaran, to go to great lengths, in his budget presentation last year, to differentiate between site preparation and land preparation. He had even referred to a certain mayor of being racist because of questions asked. Mr. Speaker, you would agree that we should be careful at all time and not to label others as being racists when our own past actions can best be construed as such.

Not one on this side of the House was impressed by the Minister, Dr. Bheri Ramsaran, in his harping about the award of the contract for the site preparation, which was given to the Bovell Construction Services from Albouystown.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, if you would allow me, it is on a Point of Order. I believe that I heard an accusation or words to the effect of accusing Dr. Bheri Ramsaran, in relation to racism,

and therefore I believe that you have cautioned all of us about the language we have used in here. It was not a heckle; it was said on the floor a minute ago.

**Mr. Speaker:** what I heard, and I am subject to be corrected, is that the Member was saying that Minister may have used language last year of accusing the Opposition of being racist. that is what I heard, but like I said... [*Interruption*]

Dr. Norton, could you repeat what you have said? That is what I heard.

**Dr. Norton:** The Government is assuming that the Guyanese population has unlimited access to internet, so we were told that all the information about this specialty hospital project is available online. No effort was made by the authorities to place the information in the daily newspaper to which the Guyanese do have access and where they are more inclined to seek such information. There is still a controversy in the award, through the tender process, where the bank guarantee submitted by the company, Surendra Engineering, which won the tender bid, was on an Indian's bank letterhead that was never confirmed by any of our local banks. That should outright have disqualified that company and should have made it a non response bidder in the first place. We should also note that the established tender process of the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board was not followed.

**Mr. Speaker:** One second Dr. Norton. What I heard is that Dr. Norton made a reference to a proposal sent in on a letterhead of an Indian bank. What did you say?

*7.09 p.m.*

**Dr. Norton:** I am saying that the bank guarantee submitted by the company was done by an Indian bank's letterhead that was never confirmed by any of our local banks.

**Mr. Speaker:** If that is the reference, then I do not consider that reference to be racist.

**Dr. Norton:** They should out rightly have disqualified that company and should have made them a non-responsive bidder in the first place. We should also note that the established tender process of the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board was not followed, so that a company with no financial links to local banks was awarded the contracts, despite a competing

company, having such links with an established and reputable financial institution, operating here in Guyana.

Of further interest should be the fact that the company selected and awarded the project of which the Indian Government is lending US\$18 million has no experience with construction of this type and scale as compared to other tenders whose principle projects are construction of health institutions of the scale of our speciality hospital. They have done so the world over.

**Mr. Speaker:** I have heard nothing thus far. Is it later on?

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, my understanding was that he was going to read back what he had read already. [*Interruption*] I am speaking to you, Sir.

**Mr. Speaker:** I am hearing a point of order from Ms. Teixeira.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Thank you. My understanding on it was that the Hon. Member would read back what he had read before because we are making a statement that he made an accusation with racism. We thought from his action that he was going to do that. What he has done is not that. He has proceeded to read his speech in continuum and not go back to that phase.

Mr. Speaker, could I suggest to you, if you wish, because these are serious issues when we talk about racism in this place and accuse people of racist behaviour, that we take a break and you probably look at his speech?

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I do, in fact, take a dim view of any reference that may come over as racist. That is why I even cautioned a member about saying “the Chinese company”, but it is a *bona fide* company with the name Bosai. I, thus far, have not heard anything that seems to contravene that moral standard. I know that Dr. Norton did go back. I do not know that he went back as far as he ought to, but I still do not have a specific point of reference to say that he said something exactly. I will review it, but I do not see the need for us to stop. I will review it during the break and if it is so I will ask that it be withdrawn and expunged, if I am satisfied.

Let us go ahead.

**Dr. Norton:** The award of this contract to that company should remind us all of the Fip Motilall and the award of the road construction project to Amaila Falls. I am sure we all know what

happened. Note too that our past experience with the awarded company is not of a pleasant nature. That company was blacklisted by GuySuCo which had to withhold moneys from this company at one time for the construction of the Enmore Packaging Plant.

This company also had some difficulties in the supply of some pumps for the Drainage and Irrigation Board. I mentioned all of this because out of the \$2.3 billion that is earmarked for infrastructural development in the health sector, \$1.25 billion has been budgeted for the specialty surgical hospital in 2013.

The Hon. Mr. Hamilton, in his budget presentation last year, claimed that Dr. Norton came to the National Assembly, and to quote him, "...cries and cries and cries, bringing all his tears here." The Hon. Mr. Hamilton fails to recognise that I am making heartfelt and empathetic representation for the poor, the downtrodden, the marginalised and the neglected of this beloved nation of ours who do not have access to suitable and quality health care and who, quite unlike some like the Hon. Mr. Hamilton, do not have the means for seeking such at private hospitals here in Guyana or overseas, as in some cases, thanks to the Government of Mr. Hamilton, the Hon. Member.

Let me remind the Hon. Member that because I have been in the medical profession for more than two and half decades, I speak from facts and experience. I am no Johnny-come-lately in the health sector. I have seen what he has not seen and I have heard from the people most in need of medical care what he has not heard in all of Guyana. I have experienced the plight of patients dying for reasons that are avoidable. Certainly, I have been a Member of Parliament for fifteen years. This is so because I am here to represent the Guyanese people who need the kind of health services immediately and affordably, which the Government of the Hon. Mr. Hamilton is not providing. Besides, I am a member of, and with strong allegiances to, the PNCR, the Opposition allegiance and the people it represents. It is an allegiance which you, Hon. Mr. Hamilton, once shared not so long ago. I beg to inform the Hon. Member that I stand firm in support of that party and I am no crossover or no turncoat and will never be. I am here as a member of the Opposition, not to praise you or your Government, but to point out, to advise, to remind you and to criticise you when you are not doing what you are supposed to be doing on behalf of all Guyanese and to also tell you of your shortcomings and what I see as your failures, poor implementation and less than effective policies. I do so with no apologies.

The Hon. Member spent most of his last year's budget presentation referring to my presentation. It seems that there was a problem with the Hon. Member – and here again I go – that the only person to be called a doctor from the Amerindian community in the Cooperative Republic of Guyana was one Dr. George Norton.

**Mr. Speaker:** Feel privileged Mr. Hamilton. Let the Member speak.

**Dr. Norton:** Even if he did have a problem with me being the only person being called a doctor from the Amerindian community – and he had a problem - that was incorrect. We find it unacceptable and distasteful for the Member to come here to this House and to express such an idea, even if he had it in mind. [**Minister of Housing and Water [Mr. Ali]:** He has not spoken as yet.] I am speaking about last year.

The Hon. Member claims that that has changed. I would like to inform the Hon. Member that that has changed with my contribution with zeal and enthusiasm, for I have been with the University of Guyana's Medical School from its inception and helped in the formation of several Amerindian doctors.

Let us again deal with the facts. I was qualified in 1988, but was not the first Amerindian to be qualified as a doctor. Thanks to the PNC Government, I qualified as a specialist, along with so many others, in the areas of surgeons, laboratorists, orthopaedics, psychiatrists, pathologists, maxillofacialists, to name some, most of who are still in Guyana and some still with Government agencies.

In 1992, the PPP/C gained office and it took more than 15 years, according to the Hon. Member, for them to support the training of another Amerindian to qualify as a doctor. That is appalling.

It is a fact that I am the point man of health in the main Opposition party. The fact that I spent some good time speaking about the Georgetown Public Hospital...which was not accurate, the situation at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation necessitates such focus and scrutiny for correction because of the large sum of money that is allocated to that institution and because it is the main centre for referrals and advanced case management, at times being the only such centre. It is necessary that due attention be paid and comments be made that are relevant to enhancing



the delivery of quality service which, in many instances and situations, are significantly insufficient.

Apparently, we have some problems when we hear that at the Georgetown Public Hospital, the rats are eating the corpses at the mortuary and not the dogs as was the case in Region 1 not so long ago. We do not want to hear the public outcry that no hospital washroom should be as stink as that of the Georgetown Public Hospital. It is uncomfortable for some to hear that the US\$8 million that was spent for the in-patient facility at the Georgetown Hospital which is a little over one year old seems to be crumbling already, with the ceiling falling in various places, being swollen with moisture, the continuous overflowing of the sinks, toilets and washrooms, the floors remain pealed, cracked and dirt-stained; ventilation remains a problem as none of the electrical points are functioning; patients cannot use electrical fans, especially in the wards with one door and without windows. One of the elevators is broken as well as the intercommunication system not functioning. Bed-sharing still remains an issue and, at times, persons even have to share the bed with the dead. If all this is taking place right here in Georgetown, one can only imagine what is happening in the other 364 health facilities in this country.

If at the Regional Hospital in Region 7, Bartica, the yearly allocation of drugs has not yet been delivered, excuses being such as staff shortage, just think about the situation at the level of the district hospital at Kamarang that is without a doctor for over one year, at Mahdia in Region 8 or at the health centres and health huts in these Regions.

When a similar situation was reported by the newspaper about no drugs at the Buxton Health Centre, blame was readily placed on some delinquent pharmacist. There are no reagents to do lab work at the Bartica Hospital, not even a Haemoglobin (Hb) test. Patients are forced to seek the same at private labs. There is a Malaria technologist functioning as a pharmacist. With the contribution of our Regional MP, we can be assured that all the shortcomings of the health sector will be pointed out in all of Guyana's 83,000 square miles.

There are situations in the Lethem hospital, the Mahdia Hospital and the Linden Hospital that were referred to in the last budget presentation and all we heard was that these were noted. In the Linden Hospital, for instance – and we heard the Hon. Minister speaking so much about

sending persons to get trained and about the Linden Hospital being one of the best in the country... There has been so much talk about sending persons overseas to do further specialist training. Yet, there is a doctor who specialised in ophthalmology and is now back in Linden for over one year and the conditions for maximum utilisation of her skills are yet not in place, especially with respect to consumables and auxiliary personnel for surgical procedures.

We had three years to put arrangements in place but we have failed to do so. It seems that there is no interest on the part of the authorities to get this done. It is only yesterday I heard a Member from the Government benches referring to my brothers and sisters from Linden. Are they being treated differently? Should they not have access to the service of ophthalmology in their own town like the peoples of Georgetown, New Amsterdam or Port Mourant? We want to hear what the Government's plan of action is to correct these situations of no water or electricity at the Kamarang Hospital, and the shortage of drugs and adequate storage facility at the Mahdia Hospital. We want to know when these situations will be corrected, because we expect the Ministry to be fully aware of the situation. This is the strategy of the health sector which was claimed that I have no understanding of.

It makes no sense boasting about the 129 health centres or the 209 health huts that exist if they are not functioning properly and if they are understaffed and without equipment and drugs.

We learnt that in 2011 over \$15 million was expended on medivacs, bringing patients who have medical problems out of the Interior and, in 2012, more than \$19 million was expended. We listened to the Hon. Minister, Dr. Bheri Ramsarran, and how he boasted about how effective the medivac programme is. This year, the public is watching and waiting to see what is the tidying up, according to the Minister, which we heard from him, that will be done to avoid the repetition of the very sad situation of 15-year-old Zaleena Shadick who had her throat slit and was practically disembowelled and could not be evacuated in time to save her life from Mabaruma, Region 1.

We all had to swallow the typical statement made by the Hon. Minister, "We do not shake pilots from the sky or off trees," as the excuse for not being able to do so to save the life of that poor girl. We, the Guyanese people, want to see a protocol established, mandatorily

requiring domestic airlines to put all systems in place to medivac emergency patients. It was claimed that I came to this House and cried; I brought my tears here. Apparently, some of us will not be moved to tears when we hear or when we read the death note that Zaleena, from her death bed, wrote to her father begging for forgiveness.

This problem is not confined only to the availability of aeroplanes and aeroplane pilots. In Region 9, it is the availability of suitable vehicles to provide transport for the critically ill from the far-flung villages to the Lethem Regional Hospital as was ably pointed out by the Hon. Sidney Allicock.

In early January of this year, 20-year-old Euphemia Francis, a nursery school teacher from the village of Nappi, died due to a lack of transportation to take her to the Lethem Hospital on time. This was so after the villagers were informed that the driver for the vehicle in Lethem was not available.

This is not for the first time that this has happened; for not so long ago, the driver of the ambulance could not be found to transport a 14-month-old baby girl from Shea, South Rupununi to the Boa Vista hospital in time and she eventually perished.

The Hon. Sidney Allicock spoke of the 33-year-old Rosalind Stevens of Parishara Village who died just after child birth because there was no vehicle to take her to the Lethem hospital. It was while this patient was in labour and bleeding profusely that she had to be taken on a motorbike. She died that night, leaving six children for her elderly mother to care for.

The *All-Terrain Vehicle* (ATV) and the truck that was promised to the Mahdia Hospital from last year's Budget have not been provided to that Hospital as yet. How many have to die for something positive to happen?

The medivac situation that the Minister boasted so much about needs much more than just a "tidy up", to quote the Minister. We all remember - and I wonder if the Hon. Dr. Ramsammy would remember - the Hon. Minister boasting to the press that his assuming the helm of the Ministry will ensure that it will not be business as usual, and, in instances when it is not feasible to take certain services to the community, services needed would be effectively

accomplished through the medivac programme. This situation certainly is worse than business as usual.

In Region 1, for instance, especially in and around the village of Port Kaituma, the outbreak of gastroenteritis was a crisis waiting to happen. It was only after the death of three children and the number of cases reaching a total of 529 just two weeks ago that the authorities seem to act proactively with all the different agencies that were involved. This was all due to the contamination of water for domestic purposes, including that which is used for bathing purposes and for brushing one's teeth.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, your allotted time has expired. Someone will need to move that you be given an extension.

**Ms. Ally:** Mr. Speaker, before I move the extension, Mr. Norton was interrupted on more than one occasion and I would like to ask that he be given back that time. I also move that he be given ten minutes to conclude his presentation.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Chief Whip, whenever there is an interruption, the timekeeper next to me pauses; we have an electronic system. So his time has expired. As I have been doing with other Members as they speak, I would not just cut him off; he will have sufficient time to make his presentation.

You have an extension, sir.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Dr. Norton:** This was claimed to be as a result of the quality of water in the area affected by mining operations – and Mr. Speaker I crave your attention as I mention mining – and the lack of response by the officials at the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC). According to the Guyana Water Incorporation, the water pump ceased to operate due to the murky water from the mining operations in the area.

In the neighbouring village to Port Kaituma, Sebai, the river water was being pumped in the pipelines without being treated. So, even the water that was flowing from the pipes, when tested just three weeks ago, was found to be extensively contaminated with both faecal

coliform and *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) bacteria, meaning, the water is contaminated with human faeces.

As I said before, these situations were just waiting to happen. Unfortunately, not only in Region 1, but in Region 7, there is another situation where the residents of Bartica have reported the dumping of faecal matter along the Potaro Road, calling on the Ministry of Health for its intervention.

In Region 2, in early February, it was made public, the dumping of harmful hospital waste in Red Village, a village of about 1,000 persons located on the Essequibo Coast, which includes human bones and biological waste.

It is not strange that we seem to be having a national environmental crisis, since it was pointed out by the Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development himself, the Hon. Norman Whittaker, who said that the Environmental Health Officer has been found to be incompetent in several areas of health services.

In speaking about the improvement of the West Demerara Regional Hospital, the Hon. Minister Bheri Ramsarran heaped praises on Dr. Brijmohan, adding that the good doctor reports to him sometimes three, four or five times a day on not only what is happening at the West Demerara Hospital, but in the Leonora Hospital. Tell me colleagues, should it be necessary for a qualified professional such as Dr. Brijmohan to call the boss three, four or five times a day to make reports?

Why in the wake of the death of pregnant Tushana Cameron, 21 year old, of Bagotville, who bled to death with complications after the doctors decided to induce labour, and the death of 15-year-old Shemar Miggins under questionable circumstances at the West Demerara Hospital are processes of rectification now being engaged and improvement of services now being seen? Why in the aftermath? The Hon. Minister himself has confessed to the fact that the Berbicians are greatly dissatisfied with the health services being provided in both Regions 5 and 6.

The reason all this is now reaching the press even though it existed a long time ago is because of the effort of the Hon. Minister to convince the Guyanese public, particularly the relatives,

that a power failure was not responsible for the death of Tirtawattie Shoandeo while undergoing surgery at the New Amsterdam Hospital. The Hon. Member explained: "It was hours after the surgery that she died, not a few minutes after, so that was not the cause of her death. The doctors know there are ways of keeping a person alive and they did that."

Mr. Speaker, I remember, in his presentation last year, you asked the Hon. Dr. Mahadeo a special favour in admitting patients who you described as a resident of the National Assembly to the Psychiatric Hospital in Region 6. The situation now has become worse. That number has increased. We must remember the little school boy who was brutally attacked by one such person and another who killed a citizen in another part of the city. One gets the impression that the situation of the service of psychiatry in this country is certainly not one that we can be proud of. We call upon the Hon. Minister to make his plans of extending mental health services and treatment beyond the doors of the Psychiatric Hospital a reality. This is very much so because of the frightening issue of suicide. This should be a national approach.

*7.39 p.m.*

Only in today's newspaper, we read about the case of Janelle Ramnarine, 24 years old of Richmond Housing Scheme, Essequibo. There has been a notable increase in suicide rates, especially in that area. Just to mention a few: Nandranie Narine of Charity, Param Gansundar of Anna Regina, Roy Jones of Queenstown, not forgetting 16-year-old Safraz Sattaur and 15-year-old Natasha Nazamadeen. Of course, we can never forget the case of 18-year-old Ronnie Ramit from Mabaruma who hanged himself after slitting the throat of 15-year-old Bibi Zaleena Shadick.

Mr. Speaker, I can continue, for the rest of the night, to point out the inefficiencies of our health system and ways in which it can be corrected. But I just want to remind you of the salient points of my presentation.

It is necessary for us to scrutinise the functioning of the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC), because of its importance, and the network of health facilities across the length and breadth of this country. We need to follow, closely, the situation of the specialty surgical hospital. More emphasis must be placed on the environment and there needs to be greater inter-agency collaboration to ensure health safety for our citizens of all of the country.

Lastly, we ask that the Government adapt a more robust approach to the psychiatric service available to all citizens of this country.

I end by making reference to one of the famous Martin Carter's poem which states: "All are involved, all are consumed."

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, we are going to take a half of an hour suspension, but before we do, I have, through the benefit of modern technology, been able to get the transcript of Dr. Norton's statement which I would read aloud and then I would make a statement. Dr. Norton, in making reference to the specialty hospital, said:

"This caused the Hon. Minister of Health, the Hon. Dr. Bheri Ramsarran, to go to great lengths in his Budget presentation last year to differentiate between site preparation and land preparation and he even referred to certain Members as being racist because of questions asked.

Mr. Speaker, you would agree that we should be careful at all times not to label others as being racist when our own past actions can be best construed as such. No one on this side of the House was impressed by the Hon. Minister, Dr. Bheri Ramsarran, on his harping about the contract which was given to Bovell Construction Services...."

**Mr. Hinds:** Sir, if you go on, you would read that he went on to suggest that the People's Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) might have selected Mr. Bovell to obfuscate the allegation that it has been...please go on to that.

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes. Let me just say that, in the first instance, I did not construe that statement to mean an accusation that Dr. Ramsarran was racist. The Hon. Member went on to say:

"No one on this side of the House was impressed by the Hon. Minister, Dr. Bheri Ramsarran, on his harping about the contract for the site preparation which was given to Bovell Construction Services for Albouystown, naming every single official of the company probably to convince himself and the rest of his party that the PPP/C Government still gives contracts to companies owned by Afro-Guyanese."

That is the statement, but I do believe that it ought not to have been stated in that way because if, in fact, the construction company bid, it should not be on the basis of...the suggestion was that it was to establish that the contract was awarded on the basis of race.

He said that the Minister named the names as if to convince that the PPP/C is giving contracts to Afro-Guyanese. I am saying that in the context of this debate, we are all Guyanese of all hues, shades and colours and I would hate to think – I do not know Bovell Construction or any of its principals – that the company won this contract on the basis of race.

I do not believe that there was an attempt by the Hon. Member, Dr. Norton, to invoke racism, as such, but, as Speaker, I do not believe that it can, in a way, convey that impression. I do not blame or accuse the Member of making a statement of that nature. I would just ask that that part be removed but there is no sanction against the Member. I do not believe that the Hon. Member was being contumacious or contemptuous in any way.

**Mr. Hinds:** I would like to maintain that all contracts are awarded at the end of a competitive tendering process. There is no granting of contracts by this Government.

**Mr. Speaker:** Very well. That is not going to be included as replacing anything or otherwise. I just thought I would read it and I thank the person who sent me the transcript. I do accept that the latter part does convey that contracts could and probably are awarded based on race considerations, which I would not want to be the image going out from this House.

*Sitting suspended at 7.45 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 8.15 p.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, we will resume the debate. There are three Members listed to speak. I hope we can do so with dispatch and get through it. At the time when we took the suspension, I was deliberating on a matter raised about the contents of Dr. Norton's speech. I read from a text that I have seen but I have also requested to hear the actual audio recording which the Hansard Department would have and to have the Hansard transcript as well. I will review it overnight and return to the matter tomorrow.



**Dr. Mahadeo:** Mr. Speaker, we all, in this honourable House, are familiar with the immortal poem/prayer of Rabindranauth Tagore. It should set the tone, in my mind, and should be the guiding principle of this and all budget debates in this honourable House.

“Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high,  
Where knowledge is free,  
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments  
By narrow domestic walls,  
Where words come out from the depth of truth,  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection,  
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way,  
Into the dreary desert sands of dead habits.

It is an honour for me to stand and support Budget 2013. Congratulations are due to the Hon. Minister of Finance and his team for producing one of the best Budgets of free Guyana. In addition, I want to congratulate the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh on an erudite presentation that was done in simple language. The figures presented in his speech gave us a synopsis of what achievements were made over the last year and what are the goals and some targets that are set for this year.

I stand proud as a Guyanese and, even more so, proud to be a representative of the people, representing the PPP/C on this side of the House, being a part of the Government that presented the Budget that has introduced the first step that assists with electricity cost for all pensioners as compared to the rest of electricity consumers in the country. I am sure the Minister of Finance would have liked to do more but we have to live within our means.

Before I continue with my prepared presentation, I would like to divert and deal a little bit with some of the points raised by my Hon. Colleague, Dr. Norton, Hon. Member – he is not here – and to point out that I received a note from the representative of Region 7 which stated that it is not accurate that the Bartica Hospital does not have reagents to do laboratory tests. Reagents are available at the hospital and they were bought through the Region 7 health budget.

**Mr. Speaker:** I have asked that Dr. Norton return to the Chamber. I have noticed that Members are making presentations and leaving after. It is important, courteous and good debating to be able to hear both sides because there may be a point of clarification that may be needed.

Proceed please.

**Dr. Mahadeo:** I want to point out that it is not always the case that we get everything from the Materials Management Unit (MMU) of the Ministry of Health, but within each Region we have funds available that we could use to buy reagents, drugs, and materials to tide us over until supplies come from Georgetown. In this case, that is exactly what officials from Region 7 did.

In addition to that, I would like to point out that every death is one death too many, especially if it is deemed avoidable. But the reality is that people die. The reality is that whenever, in particular, medivacs have to be done, it just does not happen. It takes a lot of preparation and it takes a lot of coordination for a successful medivac. In the particular case that the Hon. Member mentioned, I am advised that to fly in the night, two Instrument Rating (IR) pilots are needed by law and that cannot be changed by the Ministry of Health. In that particular case, the pilots were ready and the plane was ready to leave at minutes to 6.00 p.m. but the patient succumbed shortly after.

In 2011, 105 successful medivacs were done, and in 2012, 112 successful medivacs were done. In addition to this, we heard the Hon. Minister of Health mention that there would be more professional teams going into the hinterland areas to assist people in those areas so that they would not have these issues that can be complicated later on.

The diarrhoeal outbreak had multiple causes, and any medical person would know that. There was not just a single cause. It was mentioned to me, also, that at that time when there was the diarrhoeal outbreak in the Interior, were ships with people in it and they were defecating in the water. That would cause the outbreak; also a lot of rubbish was being thrown in the water. The Ministry of Health's response was adequate and, as we saw in the newspapers, there have been no additional cases recently.

In his speech, the Hon. Member also mentioned staff shortages. But, as my Hon. Colleague Dr. Persaud mentioned, I really do not like to go back in time, way back in time. But if we are to compare the numbers in the healthcare system with when I started working in the health system in 1990, it is a major difference. My experience at the New Amsterdam Hospital is that there were two doctors.

In addition, I remember that when the issue of mental health was raised when I did my maiden speech in 2009 – that was the first speech I made when Dr. Austin, who was a Member of this House had raised the issue – I reminded Members that from the time when it was the Hon. Member Gail Teixeira, who was then Minister, to Minister Jeffrey and Minister Ramsammy, there was special emphasis placed on mental health. We have not resolved the problem and that is a fact. We have not resolved the problems but we are making progress.

I also remember that during that presentation, I invited the Hon. Members, Dr. John Austin and Dr. Norton to come, whenever they had an issue or situation that they thought they wanted to discuss, to discuss it with me and the Minister of Health and at the Ministry of Health. I had also mentioned then that we should not wait for occasions like these to raise the issue. Again, I am going to invite the Hon. Member. Let us not wait until Budget time and let us not keep all of these things like we are keeping secrets in our pockets to come at Budget time, one year after, to say, “Remember I said so and in the course of the year, this is what happened.” If a Member identifies a problem or issue, we are open and willing to discuss it. We want to share our ideas; we want you to share your ideas and we would really like to have your suggestions so that when it comes time for the Budget debate, we can all stand and say, “I made this suggestion; it was implemented; it worked and so we avoided...” I think that would be a better presentation to make.

I want to outline briefly how the Budget was prepared in Region 6. Each of the 5 programmes – Regional Administration and Finance, Agriculture, Public Works, Education Delivery and Health Services – prepared their own submissions. This was done after extensive consultations with the different areas and departments. In the case of Health in Region 6, for example, each of the hospital, the Maternal and Child Health Department (MCH), and the Environmental Health Department made submissions. All were then put together at a meeting of the Heads where

prioritisation was done. This was submitted to the Ministry of Health and then to the Regional Executive Officer (REO). It was put together with all the other submissions from the other four programmes in the Region and submitted to the Regional Democratic Council (RDC), then to the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, and then the Ministry of Finance.

At each step, questions were asked and justifications were given where necessary. The sum total of all the Regions is what is here after the Minister of Finance and his hardworking staff have done the hard work of fine tuning based on resources available.

The document we have as Budget 2013 has the input of the people from all ten Administrative Regions of Guyana. It details the proposed developmental works that can be achieved within the year, taking into account the finances we have available and, also, the capacity of the different entities and bodies to utilise the available finances for development in their specific areas.

I want to look at Region 6, along with my colleague, Hon. Member Jafarally. I am sure that Region 6 holds a special interest for quite a few Members in this honourable House with quite a few of us having our roots there.

In looking back at year 2012, I will be one of those who will openly say that there are areas that we could have done better in. Did we get complaints? Yes, we did. Did we hear that some staff were rude? Yes, we did. Should we have had a maternal death? No, we should not. Should we have had blackouts? No, we should not. Should we have had a generator that malfunctioned, even once? No, we should not.

From all these experiences we have learnt. We have gained experience and we have taken corrective measures as far as humanly possible. Taking all of this into consideration, Region 6 has progressed over the last year and I can say, with a clear conscience, that we are better now than where we were before. I will try to highlight a few instances of what we would have done and some of our achievements for the last year whilst, at the same time, indicate some of our plans for 2013.

Regional Administration: In Region 6, there are monthly RDC meetings, quarterly Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) meetings, and monthly Heads of the Department meetings within

different programmes. A monthly report is submitted to the Regional Executive Officer (REO) from the Heads of the different programmes.

Contracts are awarded for works to be done using the Tender Board procedure, a process that is transparent.

The Regional Chairman visits the community on a scheduled programme of visits and also on an as needs basis. There are regular face-the-community meetings with the last round just being completed. At these meetings, we get feedback from the community as to how they see the developments taking place in their area. Where there are issues, the opinion of the community is sought on how the problem can be best dealt with.

Within Region 6, there are some areas of concern that are being targeted by the Regional Administration along with the Central Guyana. One such area that I would like to mention is Angoy's Avenue, a very large community. The sad thing is that over the years, there have been some issues which are out of the hands of the Government and RDC and these issues are in court. This has hindered development in some areas, especially in the regularisation of the area. In spite of this, the RDC of Region 6 has managed to construct and staff a health centre – one that is fully functional – in Angoy's Avenue. In addition, seven roads were constructed and a playground was developed.

The Regional Chairman of Region 6, Mr. Armogan, has been in discussion with those persons who have the court matter pending and the news that he gave me yesterday is that those people have indicated that they are willing to withdraw the matter so that the Hon. Minister Ali can do the necessities. This will clear the way for the people to get electricity and, of course, to also enjoy the benefits of this Budget's subsidy to Guyana Power and Light (GPL).

A doctor is attached to the health centre at Angoy's Avenue and will be working one day per week from 1.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. to facilitate persons who are working the regular 8.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. shifts, especially working mothers. This, for us in Region 6, is an experiment although it was successfully implemented in other parts. If this experiment is successful, it will be implemented in other large health centres in Region 6.

In 2012, in the area of capital public works, \$115,700,000 was spent. Some \$26 million was spent on bridges. Just to give an idea, it was all across the Region. Bridges were built at Port Mourant, Warren, New Amsterdam, Letter Kenny, Friendship, Limlair, No. 19 Village, Crabwood Creek, Whim, No. 72 Village, Yakusari, Nigg, Belvedere, and Tain.

Some \$67.7 million was spent on community roads at No. 68 Village, No. 71 Village, Friendship, Crabwood Creek, Mibicuri, Cumberland, Manchester, Albion, Joanna and Auchlyne. And \$22 million was spent on existing and new housing schemes to set up road networks at Canefield New Area, Albion back and Market Street at Adelphi.

Each one of these roads and bridges were inspected by the RDC Works Committee before payments were made. I hasten to add that the Work Committee comprises of members of all three parties, PPP/C, the Alliance For Change (AFC) and A Partnership for National Unity (APNU).

For 2013, for urban and miscellaneous roads, 69 roads, at a cost of \$850 million, will be constructed through the Ministry of Public Works; 15 roads under the Urban Roads Programme in the three municipalities will be built at a cost of \$67.7 million; and 32 roads will be constructed in 14 Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs), under the Miscellaneous Road Programme, at a cost of \$262 million.

In the health sector, \$31.5 million was spent on buildings, \$6.5 million was spent on an ambulance, and \$21.5 million was spent on medical equipment.

A building was constructed to house a new X-Ray at the Port Mourant Hospital and a new health centre was also constructed at Port Mourant. Within the last few years in Region 6, we have had new health centres built in Siparuta up the Corentyne River, in Skeldon, at No. 53 Village, at Whim, at Port Mourant, and in Angoy's Avenue.

I have said already that we learn from our shortcomings and, along this line, I asked the REO of Region 6, Mr. Paul Ramrattan, if he has put any systems in place for better management and accountability. He replied that the regional administration will ensure that all programme

managers manage their voted provisions prudently in order to get value for money and to reflect greater accountability and transparency for all transactions.

In fact, after the last meeting with the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), held a few weeks ago, the REO is implementing a number of changes that were recommended by Mr. Greenidge, Hon. Ms. Gail Teixeira, Hon. Mr. Lumumba, and Hon. Mr. Manzoor Nadir. Some of the suggestions that they made and advice that was given include the stores and logbooks monitoring and the clearance of cheque orders within the stipulated timeframe. He has already implemented a stronger system of internal controls by boosting the internal audit department.

In addition, the regional administration has enforced the rule that all variations of works, whether it is a change of scope or additional works that involve the use of contingency and provisional sums, must get the relevant National Procurement Tender and Administration Board's (NPTAB) approval before the execution of such works.

Health Care Delivery: Although no one can claim to have achieved perfection in Region 6, the Maternal and Child Health Department, at the primary health care level, has done exceptionally well over the years and, in particular, in 2012. Whilst for 2011 the MCH Department won the national award for the best introduction of a new vaccine, for 2012, it copped all three national awards, those being best introduction of a new vaccine – the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, Best Immunisation Coverage, and the best Maternal and Child Health Department in the country.

I want to specifically point out immunisation coverage because the whole of Guyana has done well, consistently, under the guidance of the Ministers of Health, including our present Minister of Health. But Berbice Regional Health Authority (BRHA) got the Best Immunisation coverage because of the 16 vaccines the staff managed to get, 98.3 per cent vaccination coverage for one vaccine, and 100 per cent coverage in all 15 of the rest. Yes, Mr. Speaker, it was 100 per cent.

Please permit me to publicly thank the Senior Health Visitor ,Terry Davis, and her staff in the 26 health centres and health posts across the Region. Like the Hon. Minister of Health pointed out, the staff went out on holidays, Saturdays and Sundays, at 6 a.m. in the mornings, in the evenings and at all hours to make sure our children are vaccinated against vaccine preventable diseases.

I need to mention that the HPV Vaccination Programme has been a tremendous success in Region 6, with 100 per cent coverage for the first dose, 63 per cent for the second dose and already 30 per cent is receiving the third dose. I am also asking for help because there are some who are peddling misinformation about the vaccine. In fact, at one of our riverain health centres, a mother has indicated that her two daughters received the first and second doses but she will not allow them to get the third dose because of advice she got from someone. This, we need to correct.

In addition to this, at the primary health care level, the Berbice Regional Health Authority has been delivering health care guided by the package of publicly guaranteed health services in Guyana, using the primary health care team approach.

I also need to mention the 15 additional staff, including midwives, nurses, community health workers and health visitors, who have joined the primary health care team. This is across the board; it is not only in Region 6, but in all institutions, health centres and hospitals. Across the country, we have had an influx of trained, qualified staff. We had a successful health march across the Region. It was our third such annual health march where health education, health promotion and sensitisation for healthy lifestyles were the main focus.

In our Budget 2013, we are proposing to purchase All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) for the use of the health staff at Orealla and Siparuta. The midwife at Siparuta already has a motor bike and does her rounds and visits to Orealla using it.

*8.38 p.m.*

We are also purchasing a boat engine for use by that hinterland community. Baracara has its own boat and engine and Siparuta will have its own boat and engine; and taking into consideration the terrain, an ATV for the health care delivery to the communities of Orealla and Siparuta will be provided. Of course, we also provide fuel for the Government's work. It means therefore, that all our hinterland communities within Region 6 have the necessary means of transport to deliver quality healthcare.

We will be demanding of our primary health care staff that they provide the same and even a better level of care across Region No.6. And we expect them to again reach their targets.



Accountability to the Public for Health Care Delivery - for 2012 we had 25 Face the Community meetings at 25 different Health Facilities across the region where the staff reported to the public on the achievements and constraints of the last year. Of note, is that each one of these facilities organised a blood drive either on the day itself or just before; these meetings were highly successful and productive. Communities are slowly but surely taking ownership and the citizens are coming to the realisation that they pay the Public Servants and are, therefore, the ones to determine the quality of service they receive. The people of the community are empowering themselves. They are now more interested in the management committees of the different health centres and . In fact, our award ceremony has prizes of a trip for two to Kaieteur Falls for the champion worker, overnight trips for two to Mainstay Resort for the best eight workers, two peoples' choice award of \$50,000, and a best health centre award. All these prizes are donated and sponsored by private individuals and companies. And I want to thank them publicly. This annual ceremony proves to be a good incentive and a morale boosting stimulus to our workers.

Special projects:

- Blood Collection – last year we sent 1,006 Units of Blood to National Blood Transfusion Service. Of note, is that Orealla and Siparuta, two Amerindian villages located up the Corentyne River, demanded that blood drives be done in their communities and the drives were very successful.
- Basic Nutrition Programme – adequate sprinkles were given to all mothers and infants at all the different health posts and health centres.
- Diabetic Foot Care Centre – saw patients with diabetic foot in their hundreds and nearly 1,000 patients had the 60-second screening done at the health centres. This programme will be expanded in 2013.
- Visual Inspection using Ascetic Acid was offered at the New Amsterdam Hospital and the Skeldon Hospital with a satellite clinic in the Health Centre. This service will be expanded in 2013.
- VCT – this service continued to be offered at all the centres with a 100% acceptance in pregnant women. Our two treatment sites are now managed by our locally trained doctors

- Monitoring & Evaluation – 4 Patient/Client satisfaction surveys were done. Over 600 complaints were received by that department and were all investigated and 95 percent resolved within a very short time.

Our hospitals continue to get more staff to assist in the delivery of Health Care. At the National Psychiatric Hospital we have the specially trained Psychiatric Nurses and the Psychiatric Patient Care Assistants to boost Health Care Delivery. The compound is being improved and we hope within a short time the cricket ground will be used to play cricket again. The Occupational Therapy Department will soon be establishing a garden to assist with the reintegration of patients.

The New Amsterdam Hospital has additions to its complement of Doctors with some junior doctors improving their skills under guidance. Hopefully within the year the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit will be functional. And with the present Budget we will be able to replace some of the old equipment we have in the present Intensive Care Unit of the Hospital. We also propose to purchase two Ultrasound Units to be placed in New Amsterdam and Skeldon Hospitals.

We had four patient/client satisfaction surveys done, and we had external assessment and evaluation by Pan American Health Organisation/World Health Organisation (PAHO/ WHO).

Care for the elderly and bedridden - our special home-based care programme entered its third year. On our register we have 424 patients that are receiving visits from a doctor and a medical team on a planned, regular, basis based on their needs. The Programme has been expanded a year ago to include those over 70 years who would like to be on register. And six months ago was again expanded to include mothers and infants who do not come to the primary health care facilities during the first 11 days of the infant's life that is after delivery.

It is a well-established fact the average life span in Guyana has increased into the 70s, and this brings about its own challenges especially for health care delivery. In Region No.6 we have introduced a special day per month at the primary health care facilities to provide care for the elderly. This has started at a few large health centres and then will be spread across the region.

Taking into consideration the threat of chronic non-communicable diseases, within the month we will also be embarking on a new project using a village to village approach to check diabetics

using the 60 seconds foot screening test – a test that has helped to identify potential problems with diabetics. This has helped to drastically reduce amputations across the country. We will also be checking the eyes of the diabetics and the elderly based on a request from the Minister of Health. We expect to complete this exercise across Region No.6 within the next six months and to share our experience.

Environmental Health - with a staff of three Environmental Health Officers, one Port Health Officer and seven Environmental Health Assistants, the Department has managed to achieve quite a bit. In addition to being attached to the different NDCs and Municipalities they managed to do water sampling once per month from different wells plus the water filtration systems that we have at the New Amsterdam, Port Mourant and National Psychiatric Hospitals.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member your allotted time has expired. Someone please move for the Member to be given an extension.

**Mr. Hinds:** Mr. Speaker, I propose that the Hon. Member be granted another five minutes to conclude his presentation.

*Question put, question carried*

**Mr. Speaker:** Please proceed Dr. Mahadeo.

**Dr. Mahadeo:** In addition, 5,092 inspections were done and defaulters were advised and some even taken to court. 552 food handlers were trained. We plan to continue the same work in 2013. There are lots more to be said. For example, I heard one Member heckle saying that comparing the moneys public servants are getting now to before shows that they were better off. As a junior doctor in 1990 I received just over \$1,000 per month, at an exchange rate of G\$94 to US\$1, giving me just about US\$10 whilst now the minimum wage is about US\$200.

My colleague, Dr Persaud, said one should not go back to those days, so I will not. Those are the real days of black holes to quote Hon. Mr. Carl Greenidge; and scary budgets. However, one does not expect that the truth to be twisted. Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I have heard from both sides of this Hon. House Members stating that we need to be fair, we need to be honest and we need to be open. I agree with all of this. It is in that spirit I would like to ask the following questions:

- Who can deny sitting in this Assembly that 300 teachers had scholarships last year?
- That we have had over 2,450 new health care professionals?
- That we have doctors doing post graduate studies in paediatrics, surgery, obstetrics Gynecological , emergency medicine and orthopeadics?
- Who can deny that we now have heart surgery being done in Guyana?
- Who can deny that we have the largest rice crop ever in the history of Guyana?
- Who can deny that we had 518 Information Technology professionals added to our system?
- Who can deny that we have had 2,700 persons trained at the technical level? I dare anyone sitting in this Assembly to deny that we have had continuous growth over the last 7 years.

So in closing Mr. Speaker, we have not built all the roads, dug all the drains, built all the schools; we did the best we could with the resources available. The best description of this Budget is that it is an elections budget, meaning it has a special package for everybody. That came from the opposition. So this Budget throws at us a challenge to take Guyana to new heights. Let us accept this challenge in the interest of Guyana. Let us hold our head high, Let us not break Guyana into fragments, By narrow domestic interests, Let our words come out from the depth of truth, Let our tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection, Let the clear stream of reason not lose its way, Into the dreary desert sands of dead habits, Let us allow our mind to be led forward by thee, Into ever-widening thoughts and actions, Into that heaven of freedom my Father, Let my country awake!

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much Hon. Member for ably representing your region. Hon. Members we will have a presentation from Mr. Trevor Williams.

**Mr. T. Williams:** Thank you Mr. Speaker. I rise to make my contribution on this Budget Debate 2013 presented under the theme *Overcoming Challenges Together and Accelerating Gains for Guyana*.

If I had the honour of making any contributions to this theme I would certainly add the words “Accountability and Transparency”.

Indeed, there is an abundance of challenges in Guyana and I believe our recent experiences in and outside of this National Assembly have served to remind us that cooperation and togetherness is at an all time low.

Here in 2013 we are asked to “dream the dream”. I would like to say that dreaming can become nightmares when sleep is difficult.

We in the Alliance for Change stands supportive of any budget that seeks to address the needs of this nation in a very holistic way and in keeping with the principles of good governance. And I must add in keeping with our Constitution; and yet, again, one that is done in transparency, an ingredient, I must say, which seemingly poses a challenge for this present Government.

After discussing for the last year how we move this country forward I am surprised that this current Budget makes no allocation for the Public Procurement Commission, a very important watch-dog institution which will help us tackle the issues of corruption and malpractice.

I recently read the United Nation’s 2013 Human Development Report 2013 entitled *The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World*.

Permit me, Mr. Speaker, to share just a few, what I consider important quotes from this report before I get further into my presentation. Here it is pointed out that there are key drivers of a proactive and developmental state. Let us start with Driver 1, I quote:

“A strong proactive and responsible state develops policies for both public and private sectors based on long term vision and leadership, shared norms and values and rules and institutions that build trust and cohesion.”

I further quote:

“Priorities need to be people-centered, promoting opportunities while protecting people against downward risks.”

I move immediately in the said Report to another quote. Driver 3 which says:

“Few countries have sustained rapid growth without impressive levels of public investment not just in infrastructure but also in health and education.”

The Minister of Finance on Page 33 of his presentation, the Hon. Minister may I add, said:

“This government recognizes as essential for reducing poverty, supporting personal empowerment, and achieving national development”.

It is almost ten years since the subvention for the Critchlow Labour College has been removed by the Former President, then Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo. This collapsed three campuses countrywide, bringing an end to the dreams of nearly 2,000 students most of whom were seeking a second chance. I, being a former student of this institution and I am so informed on which I stand to be corrected, that there are Members on the opposite side who also benefitted significantly in their academic pursuits at the Critchlow Labour College. I saw the heartache, felt it, and witnessed the drastic fall of hope of hundreds of young Guyanese.

In her very detailed presentation this afternoon the Hon. Minister of Education, Ms. Priya Manickchand, made a plea and a cry for the students and the children of Regions 5 and 6, reminding us of what they deserve and what they are entitled to. This was done with a hope of persuading the Opposition not to cut this Budget or else our children will suffer. In the same breath I ask the question honestly, have we not suffered the students past and future of the Critchlow Labour College enough?

I have heard many quotes in these budget presentations. I have heard many inspiring presentations and proverbs read. I will say in this presentation I would rather be guided by the saying, “speak the truth and speak it ever cost it what it will.”

I quickly return to the United Nations Report for yet another quote. Driver 3, *Enabling Voice and Participation*, and I quote:

“Unless people can participate meaningfully in the events and processes that shape their lives, national human development paths will be neither desirable nor sustainable. People should be able to influence policy making and results, and young people in particular should be able to look forward to greater economic opportunities and political participation and accountability.”

I enjoyed my readings in this Report so I will give another quote, and it says:

“Dissatisfaction is on the rise in both North and South as people call for more opportunities to voice their concerns and influence policy”.

It is no secret that for the last year the combined Opposition pursued this Government relentlessly to have meetings and consultations to hopefully influence how this Budget was crafted. We all know the outcomes of those meetings that happened and probably never did.

One of the most disturbing acts of Executive lawlessness was displayed when the Former President, and I give my word, “frequentised”, his buddies, friends and colleagues by handing out secretly, in the dark, about 18 licences to have his friends dominate the communications spectrum. Region No. 10 has been long ago in need of its own radio and television stations. I take this opportunity to call on the Government, the administration, to reject this lawlessness at every level and rescind the inequity and demonstrate fairness.

I have friends in this National Assembly and I am sure on the side of the Government. One such friend is my Hon. Comrade Mr. Kwame Gilbert, the Hon. Reverend. I listened to his impressive presentation on the opening night. If I recall him correctly he said the Opposition seemed to have a proclivity to cutting branches which may fall on the head of others. However, I wish to share with my Hon. Reverend that cutting seems to be very scriptural because in John’s Gospel Chapter 15 it says that God the Gardener cuts off every branch that does not bear fruit and of course, he disposes of them. In that spirit should we have cause to amend the Budget it will be wise pruning, such is the rationale for appropriate mending and avoiding waste.

I quickly turn to the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), an area on which the Hon. Minister had much to say. In the discourse on accountability and transparency, from which I

intend to base my short presentation, the Minister gave us a very inspiring lecture on responsible forest stewardship and accelerated economic growth. I wish not to go through all the details.

“Under our visionary Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), at the end of 2012

Guyana fulfilled all the requirements for a third tranche to bring a total of US\$115 million...”

He said in 2012, funds began flowing from the Guyana REDD+ Investment. He said in 2013, Guyana will work strategically with the leadership of the Coalition of Rainforest Nations. I am still under the GRIF Fund; sums totaling US\$17.6 million are allocated. We in the AFC are pro-development, but we are also watchdogs of the “nation’s purse”. The Hon. Minister announced that US\$15 million has been disbursed to the Low Carbon Development Funds. We in the AFC would like to ask what about the consultation and the terms set by the Norwegians for this country.

From my short reading, I wish to quote an article by one Chris Lamb on the 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2013. These are the comments of the Norwegian official.

**Mr. Speaker:** Does it have a title or source.

**Mr. T. Williams:** The name of the article, *It’s a Mystery Why We Choose Guyana*.

**Mr. Speaker:** It is contained where?

**Mr. T. Williams:** By one Chris Lamb quoting the Norwegian Government official. This Low Carbon Development Strategy has received as much criticism as that of praise. How did Norway choose Guyana was one of the questions. It was pointed out and I do not have to take this next statement particularly from this article because it is well known around the world, that Guyana is also a very corrupt country, ranking 133 in Transparency International Corruption Perceptions of 2012. Comments were made that it was aid in a rush; it was ground breaking. Comments were made that the current and Former President Mr. Jagdeo, apart from what the Norwegians consider...

**Mr. Speaker:** Mr. Williams, one second please.



**Mr. R. Persaud:** I rise on a Point of Order and also a Point of Correction. First and foremost, the article that is referred to - and I allowed Mr. Williams to read on to confirm that it was in fact the article that was brought to my attention - was carried in one of the local newspapers. The Former Norwegian Minister who now heads an European Union (EU) body himself responded to the article and corrected the assertions in the article as not representing... *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** The Point of Order has to be precise.

**Mr. R. Persaud:** The Point of Order is that this is a matter that the Norwegian Government Minister has pronounced on, that is a misrepresentation. Members of the media who are here representing news outlets can confirm that this matter was publicised. For us to bring that now without reference to its clarification is a gross misrepresentation. Those are the facts. *[Interruptions from both sides of the House]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, may I be heard please. The Hon Member has sought to quote from an article that he has in his possession setting out the opinion of the writer. If in fact that article has been impugned we welcome it to be brought here. It is an opinion and if there is a counter opinion which is a more official opinion that second opinion should be brought and laid before the House. If a writer gave an opinion even in error it is not improper for someone to quote from it, but that person having been advised there is, or has been, either a retraction or something regarding that article should be open to receiving it. But there is nothing improper about quoting from something where...

**Mr. R. Persaud:** But Mr. Speaker, just to give a background. When Mr. Williams spoke he preceded his quotes by stating the Norwegian Government itself was questioning the process and the decision and then he went on to quote "Mr. Whatever" is his name, who the Norwegian Government subsequently said does not represent the views of Norway. That is my Point of Correction.

**Mr. Speaker:** Very well. The point is noted but cannot be acted upon in the absence of the other official document. In the meantime we have a statement, whether, as I said, that statement was ridiculous, erroneous, misguided or otherwise, it was a statement made and recorded. I think what the Member is doing is quoting from that statement. I am inviting and asking for the official statement to be brought and I will have it circulated here. Go ahead Mr. Williams.

**Mr. T. Williams:** Thank you Mr. Speaker. I could understand the nervousness and the tensions. To conclude my point on introducing this article in which, of course, a number of persons were interviewed including one student in Norway who was doing her Master's thesis on this Low Carbon Development Strategy.

9.08 p.m.

The main point I intend to make here and I read this and I quote it:

“One of the people they had interviewed described Norway as being quite naive with its involvement in Guyana.”

Another described the partnership as, “bad aid”, adding that Guyana is one of the most corrupt countries in the world and that Jagdeo was steering it like his own farm. [**Mr. Lumumba:** Who are you calling Jagdeo?] [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** The Hon. Member is quoting something as stated, allow that. He said he was quoting. He is quoting. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. T. Williams:** Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, you would note that I did say in other instances, Former President and Mr. Jagdeo, here I am just quoting.

My final point from that quote is that it was highlighted globally that even then. We do not even have a Public Procurement Commission. It was a matter of great concern for how Guyana was going to account for these funds in a very transparent manner. The fundamental flaws were pointed out, leaving the transaction and the arrangement to be very questionable.

I wish to move on and say that the year 2012 saw the lowest production of timber since 1999. So we got US\$115 million, but we lost US\$60 million in 2009, as a result of declining forestry production. Let us not fool ourselves, the managers of this fund, the World Bank and the UNDP; they too must have their take. So US\$115 million could eventually be about US\$95 million. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I do not think it would be paying any courtesy to the Member who is trying to speak. Mr. Williams please proceed.

**Mr. T. Williams:** Mr. Speaker, I thank you and I will proceed, the best I can. I quickly turn my attention to the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture. I will ask the Hon. Minister, where is the National Sport Policy? I ask again, do we have a plan to develop sports across the regions of Guyana? What sort of jobs are we creating for young people and if so how many? What percentage of our graduates of higher education would like to and wants to remain in Guyana? Many of them who stay are tied to a contract of which to hope to see through quite early. I also ask, what is the Government's plan to deal with an upsurge in teen violence? Violence I might add and substance abuse. Armed robberies among youths have increased significantly in this country.

I come back to the Minister of Sports. Where do our interior athletes disappear to after a good showing at the National Championships? In 2012, I had a very sad experience with one of our top teams in this country. The Kwakwani High School basketball team had won the championships at the National Gymnasium. As a result of winning the championships, they were invited to Antigua to take part in a tournament. I saw the letters; I was keeping them for some time. I do not know where they are now, but I can find them if need be. The coach of that team wrote the Hon. Minister, asking for financial aid. It was the cost of \$2.1 million to take the students to Antigua to play basketball. Of course, they did not get it from the Ministry; they got a wavier in Airport Taxes. The Private Sector had to step in. That is the love we have for our children. But let no one fool themselves and talk about the cutting because I cannot remember cutting the allocations for sports in 2012. So, as I said from the beginning, speak the truth and speak it ever, cost it what it will.

Let me tell you something more about the allocations of 2012. The Hon. Minister of Sports explained to us last year that the Sports Development Fund of which \$100 million were allocated for last year and before, was to be used to develop grounds and sport facilities. Let us talk about the Fund because I believe it is only fair that the Minister in his presentation give us some details on what was done with that money. I saw in the newspapers the Minister presenting a number of wedding machines and he said they were valued around \$400,000 or \$435,000 each. I do not think they were more than eight machines, but we are talking about a very large Fund. What happens to this Fund?

This is the experience of one community. In the village of Whim, where our beloved Mr. Moses Nagamootoo is from; where Dr. Ramayya represents the people, they got a gift from this Government. After rejecting this Government at the last elections, the ground of Whim was dug up, half done. Here is the article. The Regional Chairman had this to say, here is what he said and I quote and I have to quote very carefully for my friends:

“It does not have anything to do with politics it is strictly a question of economics. We do not have any money to expend on the ground right now. It makes no sense pulling out the whole fence and getting machinery to do the work there.”

\$100 million allocated in 2012 to look after ground, in a year when outdoors sports, particularly cricket, suffered in this country. Grounds were hardly used. Would you tell me this is not vindictiveness? That is not proper use or accountability of our moneys.

In this age of development we are still the last country in this Region to live in a monopolistic telecom sector. Our young people pay more for basic telecom service, which remains quite limited. They pay more than all our counterparts in the Region, but we are tough and sacrificial. Since most of us carry two cell phones or two sim cards, banking on free weekends or \$1 a minute, I take this opportunity... [**Mr. R. Persaud:** Digicel or GT&T?] Yes, both Digicel and GT&T. I call on this Government to end this slavish monopoly of this sector and pass the Telecommunications Bill.

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes, Ms. Teixeira.

**Ms. Teixeira:** I would like you to caution the young Member of Parliament. He has a pecuniary interest in the company which he is speaking on. I think you should just be cautious on that; that is all I am saying.

**Mr. Speaker:** I believe the Member is quite aware and has declared that interest. He was echoing the Hon. Prime Minister's words that the Government is soon going to bring the Bills and the negotiations will be completed. I see nothing wrong with him making that stated opinion. It has been stated in this House that Government is meeting with the stakeholders and hopes to bring the legislation shortly. If it is that he seeks to benefit from his association is a different matter, but all afternoon, in fact and for the next few days, you will be hearing Members speak of

their prowess in courts and arguments they have advanced for and against matters that arose in this House. I see nothing wrong with that as well. Proceed Mr. Williams.

**Mr. T. Williams:** The Marriot – we speak in this House to this Government about creating jobs, particularly for young people. I need not say much on this project, except, it remains an insult to the most ordinary Guyanese construction workers or graduates from University of Guyana (UG), the Government Technical Institute (GTI), Guyana Industrial Training Centre (GTIC) and all the regional vocational schools, when it appears we do not even have the skills to lay a few bricks and bend some steel, so we must import every aspect of our labour.

I call on this Government to pay heed and close attention to how they aim to spend and disperse moneys in this budget of 2013. We in the Alliance for Change alongside A Partnership for National Unity and all those stakeholders who wants the best for Guyanese will leave no stone unturned in getting value for money. I thank you. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much Mr. T. Williams. Hon. Members, I have seen an article carried by the *Kaieteur News*, which was in fact a rebuttal by the Government of Norway to the article quoted and cited by Mr. Williams. I am having that article reproduce and I am going to share it. I believe as a House we should be edify as to all the sides. Thank you. *[See Appendix]*

Hon. Members, we now will have our final, but very important presentation by Mrs. Indranie Chandarpal, our esteemed Member.

**Mrs. Chandarpal:** Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members. The Budget theme, *Overcoming Challenges Together, Accelerating Gains for Guyana*, speaks to the challenge that confronts us and points the direction we need to go in accelerating the gains for Guyana.

This Budget aims to fulfil the promises made to our Nation in the Manifesto of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) in the last Elections. In his message introducing the 2011 Manifesto, His Excellency President Donald Ramotar, who was then the Presidential candidate, set out the direction of the new term as follows:

“The Guyana that the next PPP/Civic Government will build will be a Guyana where the world’s most modern technology is available and accessible by all Guyanese. Where connectivity with the rest of the world is assured and affordable; where very single

Guyanese will have the opportunity to acquire the skills needed to use this technology for personal and professional development; where tens of thousands of world class jobs are created and filled by Guyanese harnessing this technology and; where aided by technology, the barriers of geographical distance from our traditional trading partners and the vulnerabilities that arise from our smallness will be overcome.”

The Minister of Finance in analysing the macro economic factors refers to a number of achievements that were made in 2012. The key among them is real Growth Domestic Product (GDP), which grew by 4.8% for the seventh consecutive year and varying percentages of growth in all the other sectors. Prudent management of the economy has borne dividends for the country and we need to collectively thank the Hon. Minister of Finance Dr. Ashni Singh for his stewardship.

The Minister points to the challenges that we need to overcome together and I want on the onset to encourage the joint Opposition to support the Budget which seeks to accelerate growth in a number of key and critical sectors and has also provided a number of positive budget measures.

The PPP/Civic Government has always sought to manage the economy in a way that provides development at a macro level, while satisfying the needs of people at a personal level. The allocations of resources in the social sectors such as Education, Health, Housing, Water and vulnerable groups were sustained throughout our tenure in office. However, we have sought over the years to strike a balance between the needs of the people and the physical infrastructure of the country while ensuring macroeconomic stability at the same time.

As legislators, we need to recognise the difficulties facing young people who are coming out of schools and university and who are being challenged continuously as they seek to enter the world of work and careers. Globalisation and the influence of external values and way of life have permeated all sections of our society.

Citizens will be demanding more and more facilities from Government and society at large. Already competition is changing the way how businesses are operating. Generally, people are demanding better services, more recreation and more access to all types of facilities. This new attitude will keep challenging us to reform and to do so quickly since people want to see development now.

Who will dispute the fact that our country has been growing in a number of ways. One of the most visible signs of that growth is in the development of our infrastructure. This transformation is in all regions and includes both the public and private initiatives. The Government as the facilitator has laid the ground work for a number of important developments that have taken place over the years. Last year alone Government expended \$9.4 billion on land transportation network.

Many communities are happier now because they were able to see improvements in some of their local roads in all the regions of Guyana. There are other areas where people would like to see more development. We are mindful however, that there are still contractors who do shoddy work and it is necessary for citizens to be alert to what is taking place in their communities.

The various initiatives that will be taken this year will give yet another boost to this important sector that seeks to bring people closer, expand production and provide goods and services at an affordable cost to all Guyanese. The difficult terrains pose a problem to development. Therefore, the Government is grappling with this reality as it seeks to develop the far flung areas of Guyana.

I would like to digress for a moment to respond to the statement by the Hon. Member Mr. Morian when he said that, "We got Linden locked down like Fort Knox." This type of statement and threat do not augur well for the future development of Region No. 10. I would urge the Hon. Member to desist from this type of threat.

I want to return to my presentation and say that, the steady and continuous economic growth achieved by Guyana under the PPP/Civic Government would not have been possible without our substantial investments in infrastructure. It is for this reason that we will continue to invest in this critical sector. It is also for this reason that all Members of Parliament must support the budgetary measures required to invest in critical infrastructure.

The year 2013 will see a massive injection of resources to help in this sector which will improve the lives of those persons who have to use the air and river transport. When the Minister of Finance points to the acceleration of gains made, these are some of the measures that will help to modernise Guyana and make it easier to travel from region to region. Unfortunately, there are still far too many people who have not had the opportunity of visiting some of our hinterland

communities to see and appreciate the beauty of these regions; while a large amount of Guyanese travel regularly to Suriname because of easier access.

The Hon. Minister of Finance reminded us of the type of Guyana we are seeking to build in Page 14 of his Budget Presentation when he said:

“It is a Guyana that is modern and prosperous, whose economy is strong and resilient, whose institutions inspire confidence and provide protection and whose citizens are motivated and accomplished. It is a Guyana that is physically integrated with its neighbours in South America and economically integrated with its neighbours in the Caribbean Sea. It is a Guyana whose comprehensive infrastructure network allows easy access to harness our resources and to move our goods and our people. It is a Guyana where all citizens have access to high quality education, health care and other social services and where the Millennium Development Goals are met.”

These are indeed lofty goals which all of us should want to work towards. Not because we are poor and underdeveloped means that we should not be strategic in our thinking. We have heard about the very many initiatives by Minister Ali, when he spoke about the need to promote and showcase Guyana. There is still much more to be done, but at least let us be honest and acknowledge the progresses that have been made thus far.

I have alluded earlier to the need to strike a balance and in this regard I wish to refer to various initiatives that have been taken and sustained as well as those that are being introduced and will be sustained by our Government.

Minister Webster, in her presentation, referred to the advancement that has been made in terms of Woman and Gender Equality and I want to quote from the PPP/Civic Manifesto of 2011, page 36, when we said:

“We have stated our unequivocal commitment towards the improvements of the lives of women, children, the elderly and those that are physically and mentally challenged.”

The Minister went on to provide the statistics as to how we have progressed. I will not repeat those.



I will now refer to the targeted and direct initiatives to citizens for 2013.

- The \$2.5 billion hat has been allocated for the One Lap Top per family, where 34,000 laptops will be distributed, of which \$500 million is earmarked for the implementation of the programme in the hinterland.
- \$500 million allocated to fund the establishment of a farmer fertiliser and planting material facility, which will target more than 3,000 farmers.
- The Woman of Worth (WOW) programme will be launched in un-served or underserved areas including Region 1 to include 100 applicants.
- Training for 1,000 business owners specific to their needs.
- \$1.1 billion is budgeted for the School Feeding Programme which will see 64,000 children benefitting.
- The School Uniform Programme will continue to provide one school uniform for every child attending public school from nursery to Grade 2.
- Procurement and distribution of over 6,000 long lasting insecticide treated bed nets for hinterland communities, primarily in mining areas.
- The expanded Mahaica Children's Home is set to open this year targeting 100 boys and girls.
- 2,500 young persons will benefit from the National Training Programme for Youth Empowerment, the Apprentice Programme and the Youth Entrepreneurial skills training.
- 4000 single parents will benefit from the Board of Industrial Training (BIT) single parent programme.
- \$54 million has been provided for the Centre for Rehabilitation and Reintegration of 180 street dwellers. We heard the Ministry reminding us about all the things that are required to be done in that regard.
- \$350 million is provided to finance the implementation of 180 Community Development Plans.
- \$66 million has been allocated to benefit 388 students.
- 42,500 senior citizens will receive their old age pension of 12,500.
- Each pensioner, who is a recipient of Guyana Power and Light (GPL), will get assistance of up to \$20,000 per year with the GPL bill.

I am sure my colleagues on the other side will say that is not enough and we should do more for people. That will always be true. However, we always have to be mindful of the finite sums available and the need to sustain and keep increasing allocations.

As one of the Regional Representatives for Region 4, I wish to speak to some of the developments that are taking place. We are all aware of the dynamic nature of this region not only in terms of population, but also its inclusion of the capital and the seat of Government.

Substantial sums of money have been expended for important work in this Region from Central Government as well as the provision for Regional Development.

Under infrastructural work \$4 billion is allocated for the completion of the four lane access road to Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA); the continuation of the East Bank Demerara (EBD) four lane highways; the completion of the designs and commencement of work on the Sheriff Street to Mandela Avenue roadway and; the continuation of the widening of the highway from Better Hope to Golden Grove. The design for the extension of the four lane highway from Diamond to Timehri will be completed. Preparatory work will commence for the design of a parallel secondary road to the EBD. Expansion and modernisation of CJIA will continue and \$5.3 billion will be expended for this. A safety feasibility study analysis will be completed for the East Demerara Water Conservancy Dam (EDWCD). \$600 million is allocated for rehabilitation work on nine sewer pumping stations in Georgetown. This will benefit 40,000 households. Over 900,000 tablets to treat filarial and other tropical diseases will be distributed to residents between Enmore and Timehri. Seven hundred and thirty two million dollars is budgeted for Haags Bosch Sanitary Landfill, which serves over 300,000 residents from Cane Grove to Timehri. The National Aquatic Centre at Liliandaal will benefit from \$52 million for the warm up pool, while new fire stations were completed at Diamond and Mahaica. The Magistrates Court, the Court of Appeal, the High Court and the High Court Registries in Georgetown are identified for rehabilitation in this years' budget. These are just some of the main activities that will be undertaken by Central Government for Region No. 4.

The Regional Democratic Council of Region No. 4 has been allocated \$206,534,000 for 2013. A number of sectors will benefit from this allocation. Agriculture will benefit from \$37 million, which is earmarked for Agricultural Revetment.

The Ministry of Public Works will receive \$58 million for the construction and rehabilitation of bridges and construction and rehabilitation of community roads. The communities that will benefit are Nabaclis, Paradise and Melanie Damishana on the East Coast. On the East Bank of Demerara residents of Eccles, Covent Garden, little Diamond and Diamond will be the beneficiaries.

I know that there are some very bad roads on the East Coast of Demerara and as one of the Regional Representatives I wish to encourage the Regional Authorities and the National Democratic Councils (NDCs) to pay more attention to some of these roads, such as a number of roads in Enmore, Enterprise, Mon Repos, Better Hope among others.

The Education sector will benefit from \$44.448 million for the construction and rehabilitation of schools, living quarters and sanitary blocks. A new nursery school is identified for Good Hope on the East Coast of Demerara (ECD), while Bladen Hall will benefit from the rehabilitation of the teachers' quarters. Providence Primary School and Annandale Secondary School will be rehabilitated.

The Health sector will also benefit from \$37,644 million. This sum is earmarked for the construction of a patients' waiting area at Lusignan and Enterprise Health Centres and the construction of a Health Centre at Moblissa among others.

Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members, the 2013 Budget will bring relief to those who are vulnerable. To the young people who are aspiring to become students at the University of Guyana; to the first time home owners; to the student whose parent sometimes cannot afford to send them to school; to the entrepreneurs who want to shape their respective destinies; to the elderly and; to all those who want to see Guyana as a nation on the move.

This Budget is based on the philosophy of the PPP/Civic Government as set out by Dr. Cheddie Jagan, when he said on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1993, in his address to the 109<sup>th</sup> Annual Delegates of the Guyana Teachers' Union, and I quote:

*9.38 p.m.*

“We see development as people-centered. When some speak of development they see only foreign capital and private investment. We see, also, social capital and human

resources and when we talk of development we mean development with a human face. For us people come first. They are the center of everything and education is important for the all-round holistic development. By 'people' we mean all of the people of this country, across the barriers of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, political affiliation, whether they live in the hinterland or on the coast; whether they are able bodied or handicapped, rich or poor.”

President Ramotar in his 2011 manifesto message also emphasised the PPP/Civic Government's commitment to working together when he said, and I quote:

“Development for us is an all encompassing process and while over the years significant progress has been made in deepening and entrenching an inclusive constitutional democracy the PPP/C remains open to working with all stakeholders, including political parties, civil society and labour.”

I would like to encourage all Opposition Members, who in the budget debate of 2012 used their one-seat majority to cut some budgetary allocations, to take a responsible approach this year. I guess the novelty of the situation last year accentuated the hype and fanfare. Now that a lot of water has gone under the bridge I hope that the Combined Opposition would support this budget aimed at overcoming the challenges together so that we could accelerate the gains for the betterment of our people.

I wish to conclude by asking that we put our hands together for the Minister of Finance and his team for the hard work in crafting a budget that seeks to propel our country forward. I commend the budget to the Assembly and urge support in its entirety. I thank you. [*Applause*]

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Members. That concludes the persons making presentations tonight to the budget. Before I invite the Hon. Prime Minister to speak just to say by way of some housekeeping matters we do resume at 1.00 p.m. tomorrow and I am asking Members to be punctual. I have as well seen, as I have said, both the article quoted by Mr. Williams and an article by the Government of Norway and I have directed that both be placed into the record of these proceedings so that we have both views.

Also, I have received, as is known, an official and formal complaint by the Hon. Member Keith Scott about statements that were attributed to him last evening. I have perused in detail the transcript of his words and tomorrow, when we resume, I will be making an announcement having seen the transcript as against the story that carried and, I believe, was replicated in today's *Guyana Chronicle*.

I have also received today a letter of protest from the Hon. Leader of the Opposition and I may invite him to speak to it pertaining to the coverage of the debates, thus far; even though we have only had one night, as of last night, that the coverage by the Government Information Agency is not balanced, it is not fair and we did have this issue last year and I did write to the editors about it but, Hon. Leader of the Opposition, if you wish you may formally state your contentions, please.

**Leader of the Opposition [Brigadier (Ret'd) Granger]:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the Opposition, we were quite distressed at the content and the quality and the character of reports of the budget day on the first day, Tuesday, particularly by 'the Government News Agency'. 'The Government News Agency' sought to ignore the presentations of the main spokes persons on the Opposition's side; only referring to them in order to criticise or denounce a particular statement that they might have made.

You would recall, Mr. Speaker, that last year I had cause to write you on behalf of the Opposition on account of the poor coverage of the presentations made by the Opposition to this budget debate. This is a National Assembly. This is a national debate and the people of this country are concerned about how the money will be spent. It is a danger to democracy to report only the speeches of one side. The Government News Agency is playing a dangerous game of disinformation and we will not accept that level of reporting because we are depriving the people of this country the ability to listen, to hear, to read and to receive information in order to make decisions which affect their lives.

This House of Assembly, this National Assembly, this Parliament, must seek a remedy to this travesty and we must aim in the longer term to establish some independent broadcasting mechanism so that the people of this country can hear the truth and not only one side of what is taking place in this House.

Mr. Speaker, I urge you to write to the President of this republic who has retained responsibility for information and to advise him of the view of this Assembly that ‘the Government News Agency’ is not reporting fairly and ethically what is taking place in this very important debate and if this cannot be done I will urge the Members of the majority to take more decisive action to ensure that their contributions to this national debate are fairly reported. Thank you.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the speeches of Mr. Greenidge and Minister Irfaan Ali were covered in total on the Government media, Channel 11, and later in the evening the speeches of the other persons, who spoke yesterday, were also covered and therefore the full coverage of the speeches were given on national television. I therefore would caution that this complaint, which the Leader of the Opposition has a legitimate right to make... Before we jump, we validate that “the National Television”, National Communications Network (NCN), covered this – the speeches of both the Government and Opposition – yesterday on the television and on radio as well and the print coverage.

We on this side of the House have refrained from complaining about the lack of coverage on many issues in many other newspapers of this country and in other media and I find it rather odd. I have a difficulty that whenever some of us on this side of the House attempt to speak there is this total disrespect. It is just disgusting, but anyway it is late in the night.

Mr. Speaker, just let me say this.

**Mr. Speaker:** Go ahead, please, Ms. Teixeira. Allow Ms. Teixeira to speak, please.

**Ms. Teixeira:** The one particular... I have heard the complaint of the Opposition to do with the *INews* coverage and just as we experienced tonight where there was one written presentation of a speech and the video recording of the speech are two different things. I would like to ask that again, in relation to the issue that was raised earlier yesterday by Mr. Scott, we look at both the video recording and whatever transcript you may have received.

Also, certain newspapers and certain websites that normally cover the budget were ‘blackout’ last night. One very popular one had absolutely nothing on anyone – not the Government or Opposition – in this House; up to this morning. We have to not, as they say, jump the gun but

Channel 11 covered... No other channel, as far as I know, covered in its entirety the speakers of this House yesterday. They did not cover in entirety Mr. Greenidge or Mr. Irfaan Ali or anyone else in this House. Therefore, again, I am cautioning that before we jump and write the President could there be a proper assessment of the coverage yesterday in the papers and all of the stations – Government and nongovernment. Thank you.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I propose, as I did last year, to speak with the editors and the responsible persons at NCN to see what programming was there and how it is progressing and to express concerns but not to move immediately to making a complaint without satisfying myself. I have seen some evidence of printed material that does raise some concern but I will ascertain... We are all capable of doing better – private and public media – and I know that we can do better and I urge us to lift the standard and report fairly.

All that we say here is being streamed live so thousands who have computers are seeing it unadulterated, unedited, all day, all night. If NCN could provide that live streaming they should be no problem with providing full coverage because they are already doing it.

With that said Hon. Members, I wish you a good night.

**Ms. Shadick:** Mr. Speaker, may I just, on a mundane matter...

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes, please.

**Ms. Shadick:** The internet access in this Chamber...

**Mr. Speaker:** It is terrible.

**Ms. Shadick:** ...has been interrupted and it seems as if there is a problem that there is enough... There is not enough “whatever they call it”, bandwidth, or whatever it is, so we are sitting here with computers and we cannot get online. If there is something you, Mr. Speaker, can do or the Clerk so that Members of the National Assembly could access the internet uninterrupted... It is not that the system was down. It is that, I understand, there was some kind of overload.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you for brining that to my attention. In our pre-budget meetings with the Clerk this was certainly one of the areas that we looked at and I can tell you that the Clerk... We have even been paying for extra coverage and it has not been living up to expectations and we

may have to, I believe, go elsewhere but it is something that we continue to engage in at every meeting that we are having and several times for the night I have been unable to access the internet.

Thank you, have an early night. I suspect that tomorrow we will probably go until after midnight. Hon. Prime Minister, please move the adjournment motion.

**Mr. Hinds:** I move that the House be adjourned to tomorrow at 1.00 p.m.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Members. We are adjourned until 1.00 p.m., Thursday, 4<sup>th</sup> April. Thank you.

*Assembly adjourned accordingly at 9.51 p.m.*