

Official Report

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

7TH Sitting

Tuesday, 10TH April, 2012

Assembly convened at 1.06 p.m.

PRAYERS

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Members to preside for brief period

Mr. Speaker: Good afternoon Hon. Members. It is just for a few announcements. The first is that during the debate, unfolding over the next six days, I will invoke Standing Order 4 (4) which permits me to invite Members from both sides of the House to take the chair and to preside over the Assembly for brief moments.

Deputy Speaker to preside over the next sitting

Mr. Speaker: Secondly, tomorrow, Wednesday, April 11, owing to a funeral and cremation that I have to attend, I would be unable to take the Chair at 1.00 p.m. precisely, so I have asked the Deputy Speaker, the Hon. Member Mrs. Backer, to preside over the sitting tomorrow.

Welcoming former Member of Parliament, Ms. Yvonne Yearwood-Benn

Mr. Speaker: Thirdly, in keeping with the Parliament Office desire to engage former Members of Parliament, invitations have been issuing to former Members, some have been able to attend

and some have not, and today I believe our guest is former Minister of Information, Ms. Yvonne Yearwood-Benn, Member of Parliament and Minister, and we are happy to have her. Thank you.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

[Written Replies]

1. STUDENTS PRESENTLY ENROLLED AT LEVEL SEVEN IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

Mrs. Hughes: Can the Hon. Minister say how many students are presently enrolled at the Level Seven in the public school system?

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: There are nine thousand seven hundred and twenty six (9,726) male students and eight thousand five hundred and twenty-five (8,525) female students, making a total of eighteen thousand two hundred and fifty-one (18,251) students presently enrolled in the Grade 7(Form 1) in the public school system.

2. LEVEL SEVEN STUDENTS PROVIDED WITH TEXTBOOKS IN THE FOUR ‘CORE’ SUBJECTS

Mrs. Hughes: Can the Hon. Minister say how many Level Seven students have been provided by the Government with individual textbooks in the four ‘core’ subject areas?

3. ACQUIRING LEVEL SEVEN TEXTBOOKS IN THE FOUR ‘CORE’ SUBJECTS

Mrs. Hughes: Can the Hon. Minister say how much money was spent during the period January 1, 2007- December 31, 2011 on acquiring Level Seven textbooks in the ‘core’ subject areas?

Mr. Speaker: No answers have been received for questions 1 and 2, so far.

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, I spoke to my honourable friend. I am asking that those be deferred in the interest of providing answers that are most truthfully.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much. You are most welcomed, and thank you for that notice.

Replies to questions 2 and 3 deferred.

4. ANNUAL REPORTS OF MINISTRIES AND DEPARTMENTS FOR THE YEAR 2007

Mrs. Hughes: (i) Can the Hon. Minister say how many Government ministries and other departments are yet to table in the National Assembly their annual reports for the year 2007?

(ii) Can the Hon. Minister provide a list of any defaulting ministry or department?

Minister of Public Service [Dr. Westford]: As of 2003, the submission of annual reports to Cabinet and the National Assembly by Government ministries and departments was discontinued.

It must, however, be noted that constitutional bodies, as well as Government and public companies and corporations, are still to submit annual reports to the National Assembly.

5. ASSESSMENT OF PROPERTIES FOR THE PAYMENT OF RATES AND TAXES

Mrs. Hughes: (i) Can the Hon. Minister say what measures are in place to effect the valuation of properties constructed in and after 2007 for assessment for the payment of rates and taxes to the Georgetown municipality?

(ii) Can the Hon. Minister say what measures are in place to effect the valuation of properties constructed in and after 2007 for assessment for the payment of rates and taxes to the other municipalities and Neighbourhood District Councils?

Minister of Local Government and Regional Development [Mr. G. Persaud]: (i) The Valuation for Rating Purposes Act, chapter 28:04, makes provision for the valuation of properties all over the country at all times and also at specific time fixed by the Minister. This provision is found at part 11, section 4 of the Act.

Section 4(1) states:

The Minister may by order, direct the Chief Valuation Officer to prepare a valuation list in any area of Guyana administered by a local authority and he may, in such order, appoint a day when

the preparation of the valuation list shall commence; and he may, by a further order, appoint a day which the valuation list shall come into force.

Section 4(7) states:

Every valuation list shall remain in force until it is superseded by a new list.

Notwithstanding, each municipality is authorised by the law to apply to the Minister for approval to proceed to value any individual property, whether new or old, renovated or extended. A municipality is not compelled to await an order from the Minister to the Chief Valuation Officer, for a valuation list to be made of the properties in the entire rating district.

This opinion from the Ministry of Local Government was communicated to the Georgetown municipality on several occasions, at meetings held at the Ministry, between the municipality and the Minister. Nothing prevents the Mayor and City Council from moving in this direction.

(ii) In relation to the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils, the same provisions in the Valuation Rating Purposes Act, chapter 28:04, apply. Each NDC applies to the Minister for approval to value any property, whether old, new, renovated or extended. The Minister thereupon issues an order to the Chief Valuation Officer, to proceed with the request. If it is for a list for the entire rating district, the order to the Chief Valuation Officer will so indicate.

It must be noted that nothing prevents Town Councils and Neighbourhood Councils from proceeding to have each property valued or “appraised” for rates and taxes purposes.

INTRODUCTION OF BILL AND FIRST READING

The following Bill was introduced and read for the first time:

INCOME TAX (AMENDMENT) BILL 2012- Bill No.4/2012

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to amend the Income Tax Act.” *[Minister of Finance]*

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

BUDGET SPEECH 2012 - MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2012

“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 expenditure;

AND WHEREAS Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of Guyana for the financial year 2012 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 2012-03-30;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2012, of a total sum of **one hundred and seventy nine billion, six hundred and ninety six million, five hundred and forty six thousand dollar (\$179,696,546,000)**, excluding **thirteen billion, and eighty four million, seven hundred and thirty five thousand dollars (13,084,735,000)** 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: Hon. Members, before we proceed with the debate on the budget for the year 2012, I wish to make a brief statement to say that the nation is watching and waiting and, over the next weeks and days, will expect to see unprecedented levels of respect, decorum and tolerance commensurate with the title of Honourable that Members of this august House are privileged to carry. There are great expectations and apprehension about this process on either side of the house, and amongst the populist. In this Assembly, there is, in the opinion of the Speaker, and of many, the largest concentration of representative leadership, so I urge that we all remember this.

The Budget 2012 should not be seen as written in stone to be passed or to be defeated in a zero-sum winner takes all competition, but rather as estimates to be debated, adjusted and distilled and finally, and hopefully, adopted. Each of you has a stake in the outcome and on this occasion, unlike any other, each of you has an option and opportunity to exercise the right to plant that stake. The Government should not therefore approach the defence of this budget as a do or die, but see it as its best opening position. Likewise, the Opposition should not see these estimates as being there just to be destroyed, but rather as a framework on which much can be added. It is against this backdrop that I encourage everyone to deliver to the people the best budget Guyana has ever had and to see this process as a necessary and a refining one. I will do my utmost best to ensure that we have a lively and fiery, but not destructive, debate. I wish to say that my doors are open to assist with bridge-building, facilitating and mediating, if I am needed at any moment of crisis or gridlock.

I take the opportunity to remind veterans, and newcomers alike, of the time-honoured tradition that spears first time presenters from heckling and remember, all, do unto others as you would want done unto yourselves. Whether we all recognise it or not, this exercise of presenting, debating and distilling the budgetary estimates is power sharing and inclusive governance in its purest form and it is meant to be embraced and utilised for the national benefit, and for the good of all. Article 13 of the Constitution states that citizens and their organisations have a right to participate in the decision making, and I quote: "...for particular emphasis on these areas of decision-making that directly affect their well-being." This is one such area.

So, I say let the debate begin, and I call on the first speaker for today who is the Hon. Member, former Minister of Finance and now shadow Minister of Finance, Mr. Carl Barrington Greenidge. So I invite you, Sir, after many years of absence, to address the National Assembly of Guyana. Bearing in mind, Hon. Members, we will go until 4. 00 p.m., this afternoon. Thank you.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. I take the opportunity to express my appreciation to colleagues for the warm welcome.

I rise to respond to the budget speech of the Hon. Minister in this Budget 2012 debate. Before I do so, however, please allow me to extend to my colleagues in the House my sincere and warm wishes for the season. I hope that we have been sufficiently rejuvenated and inspired by the spirit

of the resurrection and the spirit of the season to work together in this House to overcome the challenges identified by the Hon. Minister.

The key to the resolution we seek is choice and sacrifice. Just out of abundant caution, let me say that I state the obvious because some among us may obviously think that the key is sin rather than choice and sacrifice. We therefore need to ensure that the spirit of sacrifice is not similarly misapplied in the sense that our policies require sacrifices to be borne by those of our citizens least able to bear them.

Before I turn to that matter, I would like to first extend unto the Hon. Minister congratulations on the presentation of his annual budget. An annual budget is today an instrument of economic planning and financial management. That said, it is supposed to identify measures for achieving agreed goals and targets of the country. When the Hon. Minister rose to move the motion for the approval of the Estimates of the Public Sector and the budget for 2012, on Thursday, they were no prizes to be had for predicting that it was going to be largely self-congratulatory and backslapping. Few would have been brave enough, at that time, to bet on the balance that would have struck on the distribution of the benefits of recent growth which the Government has been signalling for so long. Many of us hoped, however, that he would have taken the opportunity of a relatively soft financial constraint to address some of the more glaring needs of the country.

The economic and financial goals and targets pursued by the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government, under Mr. Jagdeo, have increasingly been the object of criticism because they have been characterised by growth without employment, growing income disparities and the related and contentious issues of corruption and abusive power.

The allegations carried in the last Sunday's *Kaieteur News* newspaper about Georgetown Public Hospital is part of a long history, not only within the Ministry, but even within previous PPP/C Governments. In that sense, at least, the greater part of the theme chosen for the Budget 2012 is at, *Remaining on Course, United in Purpose, Prosperity for All*, as we would say, nothing has changed. Of course, the "Prosperity for All" has to be a tongue-in-cheek afterthought, for the worsening of income distribution at the personal and community level in this country is very plain for all to see. At the last count, the top twenty per cent of income earners in Guyana

accounted for forty-seven to sixty per cent of incomes, whilst the bottom twenty per cent accounted for less than seven per cent.

The Hon. Minister prefaced his budget proper with some observation of philosophical nature. He offered seven pillars that he asserted are the foundations of the PPP/C economic policies and those pillars were strong democratic credentials - if you do not mind me paraphrasing - building faith in institutions responsible for safety, security and justice, a stable macroeconomic framework, which was to be the basis for growth and foreign confidence, diversification of the economic structure, investment in infrastructure, continued high quality social services and environmental sustainability. However much these might be the intended foundations of PPP policies, they do not, for the most part, confirm to reality. That is why the PPP/C Government policies were subject to such criticism by the electorate during the 2011 General and Regional Elections.

I fear, Sir, that my colleague Dr. Rupert Roopnarine may have been closer to the mark than he realised when he reacted to the budget presentation being delivered by describing it as “Ashni in Wonderland” because many of the items, on that list of seven, and, if I might just highlight this one, “High Quality Social Services”, for example, can currently only exist in the minds of colleagues on the other side.

Whilst acknowledging that the political dispensation has changed, the Minister made great play of the Government’s commitment to tripartite consultations initiated last December. In fact, the five months of meetings have yielded very little, except committees which conveniently diverted urgent matters to bodies. Two such bodies are the budget committee and the tax reform commission. In the case of the latter, the President appointed, without consultations, a distinguished industrialist and that industrialist’s accountant as two of the commission’s three members. Apparently, that commission has yet to meet, and we have been informed that it was never intended to report prior to the laying of the Budget 2012. I do not intend to, again, relate the saga of the budget committee and the frustration of the announced decision by President Ramotar. All I will say is so much for consultation and democracy.

Having said that, let me confess that I was rather pleased to receive, last Thursday, I think it was, a copy of *The Official Gazette*, numbered 20/2012, which has been made unto the Fiscal

Management and Accountability Act. I am rather pleased to see this here, Mr. Speaker, because you may have noticed that I, myself, and Minister Robert Persaud had been engaged in a public exchange over the relevance of the Act and the necessity to have his new agency named a budget agency specifically, other than simply being gazetted. I am delighted that at least that consultation, which was not official, has yielded fruit, even though, I am sure, it was not the intention to give us credit for it, but we can give the credit to Accountant General (AG). It is no problem.

If I may touch on another point on the list seven beatitudes, on the environment there are many questions. The failure to announce the signing of agreements with the number of Canadian firms, or to make arrangements to undertake, or to have made available the results of impact studies, for example the uranium and rare earth ventures, is bad enough. The report that one Minister has even said that there are costs to development which presumably mean that we should bear those without giving them a thought fuels the suspicion as to how tightly the Government is actually committed to these goals that are set out as pillars, or as foundations, of its policy. It also fuels the suspicion, which has been aired publicly, that the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) policy, itself, is not really being seriously pursued and is likely to be dropped as soon as petroleum exploration yields positive results. All of this is taking place in a context where the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), itself, is so weak that... As you know, Mr. Speaker, an officer was executed in effect, over what might have well been something quite trivial, and to date there has been no attempt to arrest anyone.

In that sort of lawless circumstance, the idea that we have to have faith in the institutions, which have proved to be highly politicised and inefficient, where they are not corrupted, needs to be reviewed. Those who have studied Guyana and its workings seem clear about the situations and what is needed and, might I add, so are we on this side of the House.

The question of law and its importance - the rule of law, the terminology here - and the institutions responsible for justice is also an issue that clearly affects our economic prospects. I do not have to refer you to the details of the current saga taking place within our courts embroiling the Chief Justice, Commissioner of Police, Director of Public Prosecutions and implications they have for the morale and efficiency of the justice system. At the moment, as you are probably aware, Mr. Speaker, that the Chief Justice seems to be asking himself aloud whether

he should hang on to his post. This is just to indicate to you, Mr. Speaker, that whilst we speak very eloquently at one level about institutions, at another, the workings are such as to be close to chaotic. What I would add is that if the Government of President Ramotar is serious about these pillars cited by the Minister, then I would have expected it to do something about it in the course of this current budget. The Minister could, for example, have started the process of removing the constitutional offices from the schedule of budgetary agencies under the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act.

There is another dimension to which I would like to draw the attention of the House. This Act, the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act, has set out quite clearly, section 15, for example, a number of obligations which, as far as I am concerned, the Minister and his Ministry in particular are obliged to adhere to respect. Unless I am missing something, not all of the elements of section 15 have been met. I am thinking in terms of the..., if I might turn to the wording itself. Section 15 requires that the budget submission should be approved by the concerned Minister for each budget agency prior to be forwarded to the Minister, but the annual budget proposal is supposed to include a number of things and amongst them are six-year projections, and also the assumptions underlying the submissions associated with the estimates. You will find that, Mr. Speaker, at section 15 which runs from pages 19-20 of the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act. I am not, myself, clear that all the obligations and requirements there have been fully satisfied. So we may well have some difficulties there.

Assessing a budget should involve more than reciting the positive figures which emerge from year to year comparisons, or are the results of cherry-picking due to the choice of dates so as to show favour of the performance. I note, for example, the continued choice of 1991 for many comparisons made by the Hon. Minister, and by his President, and, as far as I am aware, the year 1992 carried twelve months and I find it passing strange that the PPP/C would take the credit for performances in 1992, a year during which it was in office only for the last two months. But there it is; that is how things go. In his obvious enthusiasm to impress, by citing large numbers, the Minister has overlooked the fact that there is growing concern over the economic data being produced by and on Guyana.

At home, Professor Clive Thomas has pointed to the unacceptable quality and the paucity of relevant economic data, and, indeed, the studies of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

(PRSP), World Bank and the University of Eurasia all point to the fact that although the Government has signed obligations for putting in place institutions which can monitor financial management and that they would deliver and analyse the financial figures, in most instances, one finds that the relevant economic data is not available or it is not properly analysed. In relation even to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) figures you will be aware, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister and one of the international institutions, which specialises in international economic profiles, were in some rather heated exchanges in 2009 over those figures for Guyana. We have heard the Minister spoke at length on the rapid rates of growth experienced, especially after the modification of the base in 2006, the base on which GDP is computed, but the disputes continue, even in the post-2006 period, as to the accuracy of GDP figures which we are provided with. This is a dimension which needs to be borne in mind when reviewing performance.

As we saw from the Financial Papers 7 and 8 – if we need to be reminded - significant volumes of current and capital expenditures are routinely omitted from the estimates. Transfers to public corporations are also not always shown and cannot always be found. Some of the exchanges we had, on those two papers, pertained to transfers to Linden and elsewhere. Well, you would have noted, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister would have announced two additional transfers; but whether that is the sum totalled of the transfers to the entities in 2012 is another matter. So what I am saying is that in reviewing our performance part of the challenge we have is the inadequacy of the data available to us and the absence of an independent arbiter, in looking at some of these figures.

Might I add, that the matter of misleading accounting has been attracting the attention of the relevant international agencies. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) recently published a working document on the growing incidence of what it calls questionable government accounting practices. [Mr. Nandlall: Is it Guyana? Did it speak about Guyana?] You want to know the source again. It is from Timothy. C. Urwin. Many of the findings, since it has been asked, applied equally to Guyana. I trust that, under the new dispensation, the Government can...

I see our colleague is getting very excited over the mention of accounting. We recognise that he has a professional interest in that area. I am merely referring to the findings of an international agency. I do not know why it should make my colleague so excited, but I trust, and I mentioned it for this reason, that, under the new dispensation, the Government can, with the support of this

House, see its way toward pursuing a more conventional approach to this aspect of financial management. After all, it was with this in mind that Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) funded the work behind the passage of the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act in 2003.

Data aside, in the light of the Hon. Minister's claims about larger and more beneficial budgets, one has to look at question of value for money, even if his figures are right – all his figures are right - and in that chasm between higher levels of expenditure and greater benefits to the populace lies the phenomena of corruption, incompetence, inefficiency and waste. They are not peculiar to Guyana, but what I am saying is that before a conclusion can be drawn to the effect that higher expenditures are constant with higher benefits there must be a check to make sure that, apart from inflation, the efficiencies, waste, incompetence, corruption, and so forth, are taken in account, and as it is known, we have more than our fair share of those items.

1.36 p.m.

Recent revelations about the Guyana Power and Light (GPL)'s annual rental, for example, of a \$900 million generator for, I think, \$700 million a year is about one case and another for which, judging by past performance, the President's expression of concern will end with his promise to enquire into it. As this phenomenon becomes more widespread, the cost to the taxpayers and the citizens grows more burdensome day by day. I am sure, Mr. Speaker, you, as well as the Minister of Finance, will agree that that is the case. We need to ensure that resources are properly used in order to be sure that the benefits that he has planned, when he is putting his budget together, can be enjoyed by citizens and the services associated with those expenditures can be available to our citizens. All of this makes more urgent the need to strengthen many of our local institutions. I am thinking specifically of the Audit Department, for example, where the situation currently stands in a very lamentable state, with the bulk of the staff being not qualified to undertake the duties which are required of the office, under the Constitution. These difficulties also point to the need for what might be called an office of the budget which could service and lend support to the parliamentarians in their own efforts to try and ensure that they play a role in this exercise of getting value for money out of the resources made available by the taxpayers and also by the international partners with whom we work.

I did say it, Mr. Speaker, I do not have to remind you, that again the reports reviewing the PRSP in the past have, themselves, urged that we put in place mechanisms that ensure that the legislature can play its part in ensuring that resources are properly and fully used in Guyana. The challenge facing us, therefore, is what is being done to make these unprecedented levels, I am sure that the Minister is not going to challenge that, of spending cost-effective and to ensure that the benefits enjoyed by those in whose names taxes are raised and moneys borrowed are materialised.

I submit that to the extent that the figure of \$192 billion, as a budget, is the highest, what matters in not that it is the largest ever, but that the implied increase in the Government of Guyana share of the GDP cake, an increase which has implications that may be costly for us, is fully understood. Let me put it another way: Underlying that increase is also an increasing share that the state takes of the national cake. That is, the bundle of goods and services produced in any one year, and to the extent that the Government takes from us resources which we would either use more efficiently or simply use to benefit ourselves, to the extent that it takes that additional dollar from us and then either misuses it, loses it or uses it inefficiently, then we are all the worst off for it. That process also contributes to inequalities in our country and in incomes and wealth amongst our citizens. I am sure you, Mr. Speaker, would agree that that is not desirable, so as the state is taking a larger share of this cake we need to be especially vigilant to ensure that capital output ratios and its own uses of these resources are at the levels that we would deem desirable.

The Minister informed us that two corporations alone accounted for a significant proportion, some twenty per cent of the Value Added Tax (VAT) revenues, and, in turning to VAT, I just want to remind Members that the Government had promised that in levying this impost it would not been seeking to garner additional taxes from us. In fact, that is exactly what is happening and I mention this because it is related to the issue of the larger share it is taking. I am saying sometimes that share is taken by stealth even when we are promised that is not the intention, and I will refer you to the budget debate of 2008 in which, the then Member of Parliament, the late Mr. Winston Murray dilated a great length on this particular matter.

There is, in other words, a cost of larger Government, especially when it is inefficient, and that I would like to emphasise is why the international community ranks Guyana so unfavourably under the indices of economic freedom. Let me just refer you to the *2011 Indices of Economic*

Freedom, subtitled, *The Link Between Economic Opportunity & Prosperity*, a product of The Heritage Foundation & The Wall Street Journal. So these are not fly-by-night institutions. Those institutions ranked Guyana, in relation to the rest of the world, within the region, twenty-six out of twenty-nine. That is not very high. In other words, it performed poorly by that particular index. This is in Latin America. Its rank in the world of one hundred and eighty-one, or so, countries is one hundred and fifty-one. So the point I am making is not simple a theoretical one about the use of resources and the need to be concerned about how resources are used when the state takes a larger chunks of resources. It is an issue recognised and monitored by the international community and an issue that we need to be cognizant of, an issue in which the index was revised as recently as 2011. That is the figures for 2011.

Mr. Speaker: Sir, your time is up. One of your colleagues may...

Ms. Ally: I move that the Hon. Member be given fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Greenidge: In terms of the value for money, I would also like to draw the attention of the House to the respect for the rules under which the Ministry operates. In 2010, our own Auditor General wrote that the Contingencies Fund continues to be abused with amounts totalling \$500 billion drawn from the fund and utilised to meet expenditure that did not meet the legality criteria as defined by the Act. Of course, we know from the Financial Papers 7 and 8 that this is not something that is ended in 2010. So, again, it is something that we need to pay attention to. Speaking of this Fiscal Management and Accountability Act which was passed in 2007, an International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) report noted the introduction of multi-year budgeting and programme performance statements, including performance indicators, and also referred, I quote, "...to the heavy reliance on contingency and other supplemental funds and increased reliance on income generated by agencies." Clearly, it was thinking about agencies such as National Industrial & Commercial Investments Ltd. (NICIL), here, Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC), and the like.

On page 15, the report goes on, "This often...", I am speaking now about the tendency to have so much dependence on the Contingencies Fund, "...results in large deviations of actual from budgeted expenditure, which can be a symptom of poor budgeting or of deliberately inaccurate

budgeting". This is from the World Bank and I go on to say, despite the policy,... [Dr. Singh: What is the date of the Report? He cannot say the date.] It is the PRSP. I do not know why I cannot say the date. The attention being paid to budgeting in practice also was highlighted by a study undertaken by De Jong *et al* in 2010 from which the previous figure was also taken. [Dr. Singh: That is not the report you are quoting from.] I will be happy to send you anything, Mr. Minister of Finance.

In putting together the economic measures, the Minister is only likely to solve an economic problem if he caters explicitly for it. In the absence of a set of goals, which includes unemployment, then it is not surprising that we find that the budget measures really do not deal with this area satisfactorily. It is interesting that last year the Minister made, before this House, I believe in August, a revised PRSP which was the basis on which Guyana had, based on its predecessor, attracted funds in the past and under which much of its debt relief was received by the last administration. It is interesting that there seems to be..., and I can find no significant mentioned of the document and its import in the budget statement.

In the review presented by the Minister, in which he looked at the circumstances in which we operate - the international arena, the asymmetry between the Caribbean region's contribution to the crisis, the global economic crisis and its impact on our economies, between the benefits we enjoy from the system and the amount of adjustment we are called on to undertake - I have no difficulty with his patrol of that.

Equally, I accept that the future, as we stand, is one that is characterised by uncertainty, particularly given the ongoing Euro crisis and possibly the displacement of that crisis by the oil price rise crisis. The movement of commodity prices, therefore, is something that we will have to keep our eyes on in the coming year, and that has implications for our analysis. I would think that it makes it imperative, not only for the Government to look at alternative and renewable sources of energy more energetically than was done in the past, but to increase the efficiency in the arena of production, because part of the weakness of our export sector is attributable to administrative cost and red tape - what the economist calls "transaction cost". The cost for importing, for example, and of doing business in general has also been the subject of international studies, and regional studies, in which Guyana has not fare that well. There are a number of recommendations from these agencies and their associates as well as from

independent studies for attenuating the deadweight burden of administration. It would have been helpful to hear from the Minister what he proposed to do about the uncertainty in that context, as well as the productivity issue. Perhaps the Members on the other benches will address this when they come to speak, as part of the debate.

I am going to eschew the opportunity to review the sectoral analysis which the Minister has presented. I want to go straight to an area that I mentioned just now and the implications. As part of the difficulty that we encountered, in relation to production, inefficiencies and lack of competitiveness internationally, is the quality of our administration. At the heart of that lies the public service and it is, I think, rather unfortunate that in undertaking the review, the sectoral review of the real economy and of other international arena, we have not been provided with any analysis of how the Government intends to improve morale and the quality of the public service on which so much of our development thrusts depend.

An efficient public service is the bedrock of any administration and what we required in Guyana to safeguard and to stimulate growth is a non-politicised professional public service, which this Government has gone a long way to destroy. Even if, Mr. Speaker, you had not recognised this problem you will notice of late there have been a number of debates which have reached the press. I refer you to two articles produced last week referring to the capacity of the engineers retained and working in the public service and the consequences of inefficiency, inexperience, political bullying and political interference, in terms of the quality of the facilities that we have constructed or ordered to be constructed.

May I also say that the very report of 2012, which I referred you just now, written by the De Jong and company, referred to the poverty related programmes that the Government had been pursuing and identified this weakness in administration having consequences for our ability to monitor and implement programmes. There is, therefore, a crying urge for us to pay attention to the public service. May I just say to you, Mr. Speaker, that when you look at the estimates and the numbers in the public service you will see very many disturbing things: you see the rise of contracted employees. Often it would appear thought that the logic seems only to be that they are recruited to displace properly qualified public servants and to be able to be paid more than the specification for the job justifies. This is a major problem which needs attention. If you look, Mr. Speaker, there is a total absence of advertised jobs and qualifications in the system for those

persons.

The Public Service Commission is allocated more money at a towering... because of the contract offices. The Public Service Commission is becoming redundant. In other words, money is put into the Commission, but the work that it would normally do has been diverted and undermined simply by the process of appointing a whole set of consultants, contracted employees, many of whom are not qualified to take on the work that they are paid for. If you look also, Mr. Speaker, when we come to look at the estimates, you will see that the scales of pay for these employees stand in mark contrast to the members in the public service itself. May I say so, that in one of the worse cases of this applies in the Regions where regional employment, Regional Executive Officers, appears to require no qualifications that are not political qualifications, except adherence to the PPP, and also are paid by a schedule known to no one. It certainly is not reflected in the estimates.

If you have a look at the estimates, Mr. Speaker, you will find that there is a schedule of persons and the salaries that they are paid. That schedule excludes all of those contracted workers. So we do not know on what basis they are paid; we do not know how much they are paid; we do not know whether they have any qualifications other than political qualifications.

I see in the estimates, which clearly the Minister has not read, that there are ranges of employees going from zero to fourteen, and increasingly a large number of those employees are designated zero - not defined. So let the Minister engage in all the astronomic she wants, the estimates tell their own story. So if you leave those current estimates, Mr. Speaker, and you look at the capital estimates... [Dr. Singh: That is ridiculous.] I agree. It is ridiculous and you should be ashamed. Just as I am saying, Mr. Speaker, we find difficulty with the criteria upon which persons are employed, other than their political allegiance in this quasi public service, in the capital programme we also find that there also difficulties pertaining to the criteria for the selection of projects. When we deal with these, at the levels of economics, it is normal to ask, "Well, why one project is chosen as opposed to another? Why one is early in the sequence as opposed to another?" This, in economics, pertains to the question of opportunity cost. One example is why the Government should be undertaking the building of a new hotel instead of a new road, or a bypass, or looking at the resources needed by the University of Guyana, or dealing with what is required at Ogle airport? There needs to be criteria used for these. The

hydro project also falls in this category.

Let me make some points about three of the major projects which the Minister identified as being so very important. In relation to the Atlantic Hotel Inc., it is a short time place for which the Government has signed a contract and the Minister sitting in front of me...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up again.

Ms. Ally: I move that the Hon. Member be given fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Greenidge: Just quickly on the three capital projects. What I am saying in the case of the Atlantic Hotel Inc., we find a situation in which there is no feasibility study, in which the finance and contractual arrangements are obscure, and there is also a situation in which, although other documents were circulated, we did not have the privilege of the management contract and the operating arrangements under which the hotel is to be run. There is the question of an incentive fee, and finally, the establishment agreement between the Government of Guyana and the Atlantic Hotel Inc. is not sufficiently emphatic in relation to the transfer of technology and the creation of value added.

If the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project is looked, which has also been the subject of extensive debate in public, a whole list of questions arose, even apart from the difficulties that arose in relation to the road and the contract awarded to a friend of someone in the administration. There is a considerable amount of uncertainty associated with the financing of this project arising in part from the link to the Chinese currency and a number of factors pertaining to the implications that this would have for the generating costs that the hydro is likely to be able to provide. We have also the question why this project has been chosen ahead of one announced by the Government as part of the discussions with the Brazilians, Tortuba.

There is also the Cheddi Jagan International Airport which is mentioned in the context of the capital projects and a number of questions arise here as opposed to why one would give this priority to the extension of the runway. Yes, I know that this may be partly as a result of the accident which occurred there, but there might be other ways to deal with this particular problem rather than the specific proposals which are before us here.

When one looks at the measures that the Minister offered, I think those are so few, they are so mean in many ways, that is it, I think, not really worth the time for us to spend too much time here. Let me simply say that I think that the income tax threshold which has moved is a most welcome one; it is not, however, sufficient. The question of VAT and its reduction in stages is one that I would commend to the Government. It is just to remind it that not only had this Government committed itself, as I indicated earlier, to implementing a rate that was not a net increase intake but it also is a burden on taxpayers - it is a heavy burden - and we need therefore to ensure that a reduction in this rate is effected.

The other observation I would like to make pertains to the need for tax relief measures. In addition to the nominal relief provided to pensioners and the recipients of the public assistance, there is the question of special tax exemption for elders. This is something that could quite easily be taken on by the Government, given the figures that the Minister cites of twenty-five to thirty per cent increase in the overall budget from one year to the next, sixteen and ten per cent increase in revenue over the years 2010, 2011, and so forth. It seems rather unfortunate that the Government could not find a way to deal with those persons who have served their country long and well and are vulnerable in the context of the difficulties which we faced today.

The same may be said of the toll on the Berbice bridge. The toll on the Berbice bridge currently is twenty times that of the Demerara Harbour Bridge. It carries particularly a heavy burden for the students of the University of Guyana and the businesses of Berbice, and attention should be made to that.

The expenditure measures that I would commend to the Minister also pertain to the public service - that the public service wages need to be increased, and at least as sensible across the board increase should be effected. In conjunction with that across the board increase, there should be a set of measures to reform the public service in line with recommendations submitted by consultants who have been retained by the Government itself. We seem to have a situation in which routinely the Government contracts consultants to undertake studies and then ignores their findings.

2.06 p.m.

I would urge, also, that the Government reinstates acceptable training and recruitment standards in all branches of the service, that we adopt internationally accepted standards of customer service to be provided by the public sector and that we restore collective bargaining for all relevant public service categories. In addition to that, there should be a 20% increase in the minimum wage in the first instance. I urge the Minister to revisit these matters and I would urge him to undertake, in relation to the pensioners, at least a doubling of the old age pension, which is what APNU would have done in his place.

On the question of employment and growth, which I touched on earlier, there is a need to ensure that there is an intense and detailed programme that would enhance employment in the short and long term and that investment and programme of employment be associated with projects under these programmes. The functions would be two-fold: to restore infrastructure and enhance the environment and, at the same time, to provide wage and self employment for residents of depressed communities. Such projects can assist local authorities in removing solid waste and other garbage which can be found in great volumes in the city within indoors and outer doors. There should also be a training programme associated with this.

There is also the need for something to be done in relation to the house renting initiative. In relation to house rentals, APNU is arguing that there should be some innovative financial measures, mortgage interest support and incentives for aided self help in that regard.

The National Insurance Scheme (NIS) is another element that is important in this regard. There is a situation in which, first of all, the Chairman of the Scheme denied that a financial crisis was looming and now admits that such a crisis is looming. The recommendations made by a number of Commissions, including one in 2007, also by the actuaries, seem to have been ignored. What I am saying is that the Minister needs to show, beforehand, what it is that he is going to do about the National Insurance Scheme, not turn up at this House some time in the middle of 2012 to demand contingencies in order to fund the rescue of the NIS. It is obvious that NIS is experiencing financial difficulties. Recommendations have been made and they should be implemented. In the long term, we believe that the Scheme itself needs to be more comprehensive. It needs to be widened so that it can be a social security and insurance scheme.

These programmes obviously cost money and I hear, on the other side, questions as to how they will be financed. I would like to say that it is very simple. Our biggest challenge in this country has to do with the abuse of power in respect of revenues. We have Ministers sitting here who know very well that whilst the law... [Member: Minister who knows...] Ministers who know, my dear... I know this language. The point here is that the revenues that the Government currently eschews by the gifts it makes to associates like the former President, for example, who enjoys duty free importation of a variety of things and some who are in prison and still receive duty free access of spare parts and so forth in Guyana. Also the abuse of funds, the lotto funds, for example, for which the Minister is yet to organise an investigation and the funds associated with extra-budgetary agencies which do not report on their use of funds, are areas for which, if the Minister does his work properly, resources can be used to fund pensioners and sorely needed projects and initiatives for the poor. I think that if the Minister has looked at his programmes and thought that he could not have found the money, it would not have taken a great deal of effort to look beyond the normal plane to find those resources in order to ensure that he can fund what is an urgently needed programme.

The absence of criteria for determining expenditure increases is a glaring one in relation to the Budget. As one looks at the Budget and the Estimates of Expenditure, it is not clear what has informed the differences in expenditures, whether it is capital or current, within those categories. They seem, on the capital side, to be largely driven, as indeed in one case, the agreement is saying that the Chinese contractor submitted a proposal. If it is sufficient to submit a proposal in order for one to choose a project as a priority, there will be a lot of difficulties.

There are priorities which should include stimulating productivity, attracting foreign investment, reducing poverty and inequality, and providing basic needs and the macro-economic conditions for basic health. I am suggesting that in fashioning these budgets, the Minister pays more careful attention and includes these, specifically, in the criteria that informed his expenditure increase, in future. It is not clear that that is what is happening at the moment. But in order to ensure that he makes the best of it, we need to do some specific things, some of which have been approved by this House already: better procurement and a procurement commission, for start, is major and primary; fewer white elephants, including those that may emanate from the Ministry of Natural Resources; less expenditure wasting; more careful prioritising; strict monitoring of expenditure,

which is widely accepted, is not done well enough; regular reviews of the Public Sector Investment Programme; and ethnic and location impact assessments.

I would say that these are amongst the key areas which I would have liked to see in the Minister's submission. In APNU's proposal, one will find a variety of those principles captured and in both terms may I say that we respect the right to earn a decent living wage for legitimate work, the right to a consistent and appropriate policy framework towards youths and we do not see elements of that in the proposals, the right to enjoy...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up.

Ms. Ally: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given 15 minutes to conclude his presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and might I thank my colleagues. I am saying that amongst those things, if one tries to follow the principles I set out, APNU would ensure that the citizens have a right to enjoy the services of a professional, non-political and cost effective public service, including a diplomatic service; the right to have an equitable tax burden, restoring the institutions and mechanisms that can represent workers' rights because this is an area that is much abused; it is also the case that within that, one would seek to restore government subvention to the Critchlow Labour College which the Minister should have ensured happened a long time ago.

The communities in our country have a right not to be left behind and we would establish a Hinterland and Depressed Areas Development fund to be controlled by the leaders of the relevant communities.

In addition, we would wish to maximise the sustainable utilisation of the nation's resources for the benefit of all Guyanese. In that regard, it would be appropriate to appoint a commission to investigate and propose solutions to the problem plaguing GuySuCo. I am speaking about transfers to two major corporations and making subsidies to these corporations that the Minister suggested, as happened when we looked at the financial paper that no thought had been given to how we would ensure that having received the subsidies that the agencies will not continue to

suffer from the haemorrhage they are currently suffering. And I would recommend that the Government takes account of the complaint by the Guyana Agriculture and General Workers Union (GAWU) about the way GuySuCo is managed, and that it looks also at the Board of GuySuCo, depoliticise it and find means of increasing the efficiency of the Corporation.

Might I also take the opportunity to say that the same problem arises in relation to the Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL) but in the GPL case, there is a most interesting, and I will be interested to know how the Government will explain the fact that it is proposing to give a \$6 billion subsidy to GPL with no particular instructions, without trying to ensure that the GPL subsidy benefits the poor as opposed to those who are better off enjoying the subsidy.

There are possibilities for looking at the tariffs and ensuring that the tariff structures are modified so that those who bear the heavy burden can enjoy a greater relief than others. At the same time, I draw the House's attention to the fact that the subsidy is to be withdrawn, in the case of GPL, for Linden. According to the Minister's figures, it may lead to tariffs moving from anywhere between \$5 and \$15 per kilowatt hour to \$64. I think that needs to be reconsidered because it is unacceptable to have this asymmetrical treatment of different communities, especially when one is a depressed community in the first place.

The other area is the need for a long-term plan for the mineral sector. The mineral sector has been subject, as you know, to a lot of complaints about what appears to be the lack of priorities, arbitrariness in the allocation of licences, taking away of licences and so forth, and it does appear that a high level team would be a useful initiative to oversee plans, to revitalise and redevelop the sector, including the bauxite sector, notwithstanding the proposal that the Minister mentioned in the Budget document.

Finally, I would like to make reference to the right to live in a city free from unreasonable and unavoidable public health hazards. This, we know, remains an urgent need for those of us who live in Georgetown.

Mr. Speaker, this is where I would like to bring my presentation to an end and I wish to thank you and my colleagues for your patience. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: I thank you Hon. Member. I wish to call on the Hon. Minister, Irfaan Ali. Before Mr. Ali speaks, prior to the commencement of the debates this afternoon, I was advised by the Chief Whips that the Members of respective parties in the front benches will speak for 45 minutes. I know that there are exigencies of situations, but let us try to keep within that timeframe please.

Thank you very much.

Minister of Housing and Water [Mr. Ali]: Mr. Speaker, I promise you that I will stick to the trend and standard set by the Hon. Member, Mr. Carl Greenidge.

Mr. Speaker: You are entitled to extensions if a Member requests it.

Mr. Ali: Mr. Speaker, after listening to the Hon. Member, I believe that we can safely say, “Greenidge is in the wilderness.” I will show to you that this Hon. Member, Mr. Greenidge, was in charge of the Ministry of Finance for a long period in the history of this country, and that period is often referred to as “the lost decade”.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to present to you two sets of information and I wish that you would put yourself in the position of an investor listening to a government proposing policies and programmes that would motivate you to invest in that economy. A former Minister of Finance had this to say to that country and the investor:

“In retrospect, as we examined the performance of the economy in 1988 to 1989, two fundamental problems faced us: severe fiscal imbalance and severe external disequilibrium. There was also uneven economic growth and a decline in GDP”.

He went on to say:

“The human resource problem (which was cited in 1989 as a test of the management of the ERP) has been compounded by higher and unanticipated rates of inflation. This problem will continue to bedevil us until the rate of inflation can be reduced.

Inequity is arising in the fiscal system because too many people and companies evade the payment of taxes, although they seek to benefit from the government expenditures that these tax revenues permit.”

It is important for us to understand this context because today the situation is drastically different. I have just quoted from the Budget Speech of the Hon. Carl Greenidge, 20th February, 1991.

I wish now to quote from a distinguished Minister of Finance, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, in the 2012 Budget. This is what he had to say:

“Mr. Speaker, Budget 2012 comes to this Honourable House when the Guyanese economy is at its strongest in recent memory. Our productive base is showing increasing signs of resilience and dynamism and is more diversified than ever before, with real growth in gross domestic product averaging 4.4% over the past five years. At the same time...”

The same issue that Mr. Greenidge examined...

“...our external balances are at their highest ever with our external reserves rising threefold since 2006. We are much less indebted as a nation than we were twenty years ago, with external debt being reduced from 658% of GDP at the end of 1991 to 47% at the end of 2011.”

Those are the contrasting realities of the economy of this country. Having said this, I wish to congratulate the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh and the team at the Ministry of Finance for piloting Guyana to successive economic growth and social development and advancement.

This Budget comes at a time when we celebrate our twentieth year of democracy. We must not forget that there was a period of dictatorship in this country. This Budget is formed on democratic rule.

The success of the fiscal programmes that we are here, to present in this Budget today seeks not only to consolidate the policy gains, but also to advance the social and economic programmes which were initiated when the Government assumed office in 1992, achieving the various national priorities as set out in the various development paradigms such as the Economic Recovery Programme, the National Development Strategy, the recently launched National Competitiveness Strategy and the Low Carbon Development Strategy. The question that faces us today is: *should we continue on this course which has seen Guyana withstand the difficulties*

of the global financial situation and that has seen Guyana successfully overcoming a lot of the challenges that the financial crisis posed, or do we fall prey to wishful policies that seek to score cheap political points? For example, we have been continuously improving the salaries and benefits of public servants, but when the Hon. Member, Carl Greenidge, says that we can increase salaries to public servants by 20%, he does not go on to give the analytical reasoning as to how this can be done and what are the implications of this. Dr. Ashni Singh has not only presented realistic numbers, but he has given the implications of such numbers on the life and economy of the country.

The Hon. Member, with his skewed statistics, mentioned that the top 20% of the population takes up 40% of the wealth, the space, and the last 20% takes up 7%. That leaves 53% and this is what we have been saying. He has proven the point that there is a growing middle class in the country. Furthermore, the 7% that he talked about is not a number that has been plucked out. We must not forget that we came into government when 38% of our people was below the poverty line. These are the realities; these are the facts.

Most of us in this honourable House would agree that the post-colonial growth story of Guyana, prior to 1992, has been one of decline and stagnation. Even though at the time of independence, and as the Hon. Members asked the question: *what is the relevance of the history?* Well I will tell you and I will prove to you how relevant the history is today. Guyana was not always the second poorest country in the western hemisphere. When the People's National Congress (PNC) grabbed government, Guyana was one of the fastest growing economies. Guyana was one of the strongest economies and that government brought it down, in 1991, to one of the weakest economies and one of the most sluggish economies in the western hemisphere. This is the reality. That is why the historical context is so important and that is why the Guyanese people must understand that the gains that we have made, the accomplishments that we have made, and the strength of the economy today can easily be washed away with bad planning, bad policies, and mismanagement. And we must never allow this country to ever again fall in the hands of dictatorship that will allow mismanagement and bad policies to erode the economic progress that we have made.

Mr. Speaker, it is important for us to evaluate the Curriculum Vitae (CV) of various specialists. When someone professes to be a specialist in a particular field, we must evaluate the CV of that

person to understand the background of that person, to understand the experience and knowledge of that person, and probably the worse period of our political history - I knew that the Hon. Member, Carl Greenidge, would have left because...he would walk away from his own legacy when we are finished here.

The Hon. Carl Greenidge was the Minister of Finance during the period often described by most academics as “the lost decade”. To better understand what occurred during the 1980s, allow me to provide some important statistics; According to John Gafar in his study entitled *“Income Distribution, Inequality and Poverty during Economic Reforms in Guyana”*, the following statistics were provided:

“The country recorded negative growth for five of the ten years during the decade that the Hon. Carl Greenidge was the Minister of Finance. The average GDP growth between 1981 and 1990 was -2.2%; GNP per capita declined from US\$720 in 1980 to US\$290 in 1989; approximately 67% of the population lived below the poverty line in 1989 compared with 55% in 1980; by 1988, the GDP was just 68% of the 1976 level and the external debt was in excess of 600% of GDP; the minimum wage which was US\$2.89 in 1980 fell to US\$1 in 1989; inflation was averaged at 28.9% between 1980 and 1990, peaking at 66.3% during 1990; the lending rate moved from 12.5% in 1980 to 35% in 1989; the exchange rate moved from 2.50% during 1980 to 111.8% in 1990; the fiscal deficit as a percentage of GDP averaged 39.4%, peaking at 66.2% in 1992; the external debt of the country moved from US\$639 million in mid 1980 to US \$1.391 billion by the end of 1989.”

2.36 p.m.

The fiscal infrastructure was in total disrepair; there was a pronounced shortage of essential items. This was Guyana, this was the reality.

There was once a time in this National Assembly when the population listened out during budget time to hear which items will be banned, which would be prohibited, and to hear about the further erosion of democracy and freedom of choice. Today that is of no more. [Ms. Wade: What about 16% VAT, are you not going to talk about that?] I will!

Mr. Speaker, I wish now to talk a bit about transparency and accountability. The Opposition would want us to believe that they come from the bosom of transparency and accountability. I would like to give you three examples of how transparent they were. I will give you three examples in the privatisation deals. Demerara Woods Ltd., the one that received the most publicity, was sold to Lord Beaverbrook, a former treasurer of the British Conservative Party. He bought the entity in February 1991 for £9.7 million. He negotiated and obtained a fifty-year lease for 1.1 million acres of rainforest. Just months later in 1981 he sold his interest to the United Dutch Company for £61 Million.

Beaverbrook had up to mid 1992 to finish paying the Guyana Government for Demerara Woods, and while he still did not pay the Guyana Government, the then Government allowed him to merge the enterprise into the giant United Dutch Company which took control of Demerara Timbers of which he remained a major shareholder. [Ms. Ally: Tell them Guyana's (*inaudible*) on the paint company now]

I am happy that the Hon. Member raised the issue about the paint factory. I will tell you about it now. The National Paint Factory was an efficient profit making entity. It was sold in May 1991 to Steven Giddings, an overseas based Guyanese for US\$1.15 Million. Giddings lodged US\$200,000 down payment and was given until 1993 to pay the rest at 6% interest at a time when the market interest rate for industrial loans was 35% - 40%. Worst than this, the workers of the company offered to buy the same company in what would have been equivalent to \$150.2 million in 1991, but the Government accepted \$142.6 million. This is the same set of people who want to lecture us on accountability and transparency. This Government has no apologies for investing any resources that would bring benefits to our people and would improve their equity and asset position. The \$4 billion that was invested in the housing sector was done to improve the living conditions, the housing conditions, and equity position of the people of this country.

Since 2006 real GDP growth has been strong and positive in each year over the six years ending 2011 averaging 4.4%, while per capita GDP growth reached US\$2,501.07 - the highest average in 2010. All of this was achieved in the midst of severe global economic recession, a recession that is compared to the Great Depression. While not being completely spared from the negative effects of the crisis, we were able to post real growth. In the context of deep and widespread

economic contraction across the Caribbean economies, Guyana's performance may be regarded as remarkable.

Let us look at the statistics of Guyana's performance versus that of the Region. In terms of Gross Domestic Product, Guyana had 4.4%, Jamaica - 1.3%, Barbados 0.2%, and Trinidad and Tobago -0.0%. In terms of Per Capita GDP Growth, Guyana had 4.2%, Jamaica 1.6%, Barbados 0.2% and Trinidad and Tobago 0.4%. In terms of Net Foreign Direct Investment, Guyana had US\$270 million, Jamaica US\$169 million, and Trinidad and Tobago US\$549 million. With regards to the Total Gross External Debt Ratio Guyana had US\$1.043 billion, Jamaica US\$8.390 billion, Barbados US\$4.485 billion, Trinidad and Tobago US\$1.561 billion. These are the facts. You can go and check the ECLAC Report of 2011. Guyana's performance has been one described by many Caribbean leaders, not only as remarkable, but the Hon. Ralph Gonzales said that Guyana was "the only shining light in all of the Caribbean".

These are the realities we may want to wish away; these are the facts we may want to wish away, but today as Guyanese we can proudly say we are living under better conditions. Our standard of living has improved, our access to resources has improved and wealth at the household and individual level has improved drastically. These are the realities. We agree that there is still a lot more to be done. There is still a lot of investment that needs to be made. The Government must still widen its social programme so that greater benefit can resound to the Guyanese people, but we cannot widen our social programme or expand our social programmes if we follow the recommendation of the Hon. Member Mr. Carl Greenidge. When he used the Heritage Foundation Index on Economic Freedom to judge the Government, he was making a fundamental mistake. The Heritage Foundation scores Governments that have a huge social programme poorly. If you have a big budget on the social side, they score you poorly. Even when the United States was bailing out the financial sector so as not to deepen the financial crises, there was a big row on scoring the United States Government very low. On one hand you cannot ask the Government to improve access, to expand the social safety net, and to expand social infrastructure, and then you are using the tool that would require the Government to reduce such investment to judge the Government. That is double standard and hypocrisy.

Mr. Speaker, over the past five years the domestic financial sector has also played an important role in extending credit to the local private sector due to easy monetary policy stands of the

Central Bank. Based on the official statistics of the Bank of Guyana, domestic credit to the private sector increased from \$67.2 billion in 2006 to \$94.2 billion in 2011. All the major sectors of the economy including the agricultural, mining, quarrying, manufacturing and services sector benefited from higher loans and advances from the commercial banks. The household sector has also benefited significantly from the expansion in credit from commercial banks.

Interest rates also trended downwards during this period. The average lending rate declined from 13.2% in 2006 to 11.68% at the end of 2011. Mortgage rates declined to 4.2% at the end of December 2011. It was also noteworthy that the banking system is extremely sound, ranking at 53 out of 153 countries in 2010. According to the global economic forum, the capital adequacy ratio and tier one ratio of licensed depositary institutions which reflect the ability of LDIs to cope with risks were well above the established international benchmarks. Further, the ratio of non-performing loans to total loans has trended downwards from 2006 to 2010. This has a lot to do with the strong regulatory framework that the Government has put in place in the financial sector. These benefits are as a result of Government's commitment to modernise the financial sector.

If you look at the statistics from the Bank of Guyana – this would demonstrate how prudent we have managed the economy – Capital to Risk Adjusted Assets in 2006 was \$15.7 billion, in 2010 it was \$18.8 billion. Return on Assets in 2007 was \$2.3 billion, in 2010 it was \$2.4 billion. Liquid Assets to Total Assets in 2007 was \$25.9 billion and today it is \$30.1 billion. These are the realities. These are the facts. What is the impact of this? Poor household and the business sector generally are now able to access mortgages at historically low interest rates.

Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Minister of Finance also pointed out a key issue, that is, that Guyana's accomplishment of a number of targets in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Amongst the MDG's already achieved are nutrition and child health. We know what the situation of child health and nutrition was in this country. Of course if you just reflect on some of the old speeches of Hon. Moses Nagamootoo he would have outlined in detail what the state of affairs was then.

Based on the result of Government programmes over the last six years, there should be no reason for change in course at this juncture of our history. Instead, we should continue to pursue the programmes and policies set out in the 2012 Budget in order to achieve the following national

priorities. These are the national priorities which Budget 2012 seeks to achieve. Firstly, the creation of jobs for our people; secondly the provision of housing and shelter for all especially the poor and vulnerable; thirdly, the transformation of the economic base so that the economy is more resilient to external shocks; fourthly, improve the competitiveness of the economy; fifthly, the improvement in our human capital; sixthly, the delivery of better quality social services; and seventhly, the strengthening of the national institutions responsible for safety security and justice.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister your time is up.

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

Question put and carried.

Mr. Speaker: Proceed Hon. Member.

Mr. Ali: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. The eighth priority is the promotion of positive and stable economic growth; ninthly, the creation of a friendly business environment to encourage both domestic and foreign investments; tenthly, maintain fiscal prudence; eleventh – equitable distribution of the country's wealth and; twelfth – the protection of our environment.

How is this going to be achieved? How could we measure the impact? How can we calculate the multiplier effect of these programmes?

I wish to now look at some of the sectors and to do a socio-economic analysis as to the impact of these investments on the economy and the living conditions of our people.

Let us look at priority number one, job creation, and take one sector, the Information Communication Technology (ICT) sector where \$2.6 billion will be invested to lay high speed cable. Guyana \$3.1 billion will be invested in this year's Budget to continue these works. What policy is this linked to? The policy priority of Government is the technological advancement of the economy and to give every Guyanese person the opportunity of the benefits offered through ICT, more especially the accessibility to ICT and development opportunity for all Guyanese. What is the impact of this policy? What is the impact of this investment? More than 3,000 new

jobs have already been created from investment thus far. This additional investment will create 6,000 in the near term and 15,000 new jobs in the medium term. More persons will have access to the internet and new methods of educating, reaching all Guyanese in every corner of the country with 90,000 families benefitting from having a laptop. We are going to achieve in Guyana what even the developed world is fighting after, that is, to have a 100% Information Technology (IT) literacy. These are the linkages. [Mr. B. Williams: What about water and housing?]

Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member has asked about water and housing. I am very happy that today my Party in Government has seen the value of young people and have called upon me to do bigger jobs. I take this opportunity to thank my Party for the confidence that they have posed in me.

Let us look at the mining sector. Our national priority is for the protection of traditional sectors and to expand the economic base. Private investments from BOSAI would see US\$100 million, BGI US\$80 million, First Bauxite Inc. US \$120 million, Guyana Gold Fields US\$600 million, Sandspring Resources Ltd. US\$800 million. These are the private investments and capital that would be flowing through the economy as a result of Budget 2012. What is the impact of this? The creation of more than 3,400 jobs from the new and expanding investments in the private sector in the near and medium term; expansion in the output of bauxite and gold, the respective revenues and royalties, plus the new oil exploration ventures and manganese discovery, showing the development of new sub sectors in mining, all contributing to the diversification of the economy. This is a mainstay of the economy, the diversification of our economy.

Mr. Speaker, let us look at the tourism sector and what is the policy position of the Government. The policy position is positioning and maintaining tourism as a national priority with a commitment to the sustainable development of tourism, creation of a “One-Stop-Shop” for tourism investment and tourism specific investment guide outlining tourism opportunities, and identification of tourism investment zones. One very welcomed development is the mining sector. Local investors in the mining and natural resources sector are now ploughing their excess liquidity into eco-tourism and into other forms of tourism. The times when local investors were seeking opportunities to hide away their funds are long gone. They are now looking inwardly at Guyana as the preferred destination for their investments.

We are also looking to launch the Visit-Guyana-Year 2013. In 2012 we encourage Guyanese in the diaspora to come home for vacation, to invest, volunteer, re-migrate or retire in Guyana. Training of 1000 individuals in hospitality management - Guyana was one of three Caribbean countries to register increased tourist arrivals during the crises of 2008/2009. Increasing visitor arrivals, improved hotel occupancy and increased tourism revenue are outputs of the policies followed by Government.

There is a lot of talk about Guyana's \$75.8 billion investment that is directly related to the expansion of the tourism sector. That is a development of a new airport, the Marriot Hotel and the Amaila's Falls hydro project which would see opportunities to invest, reduce costs and offer opportunities. What is the impact of this is? Once the Marriot Hotel comes to Guyana it will give Guyana free marketing time because the there is what you call the Marriot magazine and Guyana will then be featured in that magazine. The investment in the airport will allow us to become a regional hub for refuelling. As a result of investment in the hydro project, we will have reduced energy cost that is necessary to ensure our competitiveness. We will attract investors to the manufacturing sector and reduce the amount of small and medium scale manufacturers to larger scale manufacturers. These are the impacts and this is why such investment is critical for the economic advancement of our country.

I would like to deal briefly with the issue of old age pension. Whilst this Government has increased the old age pension by more than 700% we are still not satisfied on this side of the House, but we must balance political ambition with prudence. There must be a balance. What is the reality? The reality today is that we have 42,000 pensioners and the cost on the Budget of this increase is almost \$400 million. Where have we come from? The amount of pensioners that we have now is 75% more than what we had in 1991. For a matter of fact, the life expectancy in 1991 was 59 years, therefore Guyanese could not even live to receive a pension. Today, life expectancy is 70 years.

Let us look at the Housing sector. \$3.6 billion dollars will be invested in the housing sector. What is the Government policy? The national priority is to increase access to adequate and affordable housing. The Government has contributed approximately 82,000 house lots between 1993 and 2009 and continues to treat the provision of housing to less income families with utmost importance. 6,500 house lots are to be allocated and 4,000 titles will be processed and

distributed; the instillation of approximately 16km of pure water distribution network; the upgrading of 15km of roads in existing and squatting communities. We will distribute more than 190 housing subsidies for housing improvement. 200 core homes are to be financed and built by the Government. We will construct more than 200 additional core homes in the Hinterland communities, and we will activate the facilities that will see the partnership with nurses, teachers and police, in the first quarter we are targeting 200 such houses.

Mr. Speaker, it will not be practical, reasonable or politically correct for the Opposition to oppose policies like these that seek to transform and improve the lives of our people. Should the attempt to do anything that will take away the rightful benefits that the people will derive from this budget, then they must be judged very harshly.

3.06 p.m.

[Mrs. Backer: Who will judge us? Minister Edghill will judge us?]

What is the multiplier effect of this investment in housing? The multiplier effect of the \$3.6 billion is estimated to be \$1.8 billion value added; direct employment of 1,000 persons of various skills; sustained employment for 30,000 across the economy who support the housing and construction sector; an improvement in the road network which will benefit more than 21,500 households. This is the impact of Budget 2012.

The Water sector has an investment of \$2 billion. What are the national priorities? The national priorities are to increase coverage and quality of water supply across the country; 98% water coverage along the coast; an increase in treated water coverage from 25% to 49%; improvement of the level of service across different regions to above five metres. In addition, the coverage in the hinterland has increased from 25% in 2006 to 71%, presently.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member your time is up.

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon Member be given another fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put and carried

Mr. Ali: Thank you Mr. Speaker.

What is the impact of these investments? Employment creation for 2012 in the water sector, as a result of the investment in the water sector, will be 1,590 jobs. There will be the laying of 85km of pipelines including for new communities in Providence and Hope; drilling of four new wells; upgrade of approximately 25,000 service connections; installation of eight new water supply systems in the hinterland; upgrade of water supply system in two small hinterland towns; and the commencing of construction of two water treatment plants in Linden.

Let us now look at the national priority in maintaining fiscal prudence - an investment of more than \$192.8 billion. The policy priority is to increase investment without new taxes while maintaining healthy fiscal balances, and provides more social goods and services, especially for vulnerable groups - only a deficit of 4.6% of GDP below the 2006 level. The private sector in overall economy will benefit and more significantly, the well-being of the poor will be improved through jobs, housing and healthcare – just to mention a few. \$120.9 billion in tax revenue - the policy priority is no new taxes, but efficiency in revenue collection and redistribution of income.

The income tax threshold has doubled from 25,000 in 2006 to 50,000 in 2012. The list of zero rated Value Added Tax (VAT) items expanded in 2010. And Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment to remove the myth that VAT is solely responsibility for the additional revenue flow. As a matter of fact, since the implementation of VAT only 27.6% of the tax revenue came from that system. Worse than that, the consumption tax which VAT replaced represented 40% on average of total tax revenue. In fact, the percentage share of VAT on total revenue has decreased from 32% to 26%. [Mr. Nadir: Tell them! Tell them!] These are the facts. What is the impact? 21,000 persons will be removed from the income tax net. VAT is merely a more efficient tax. Tax revenue increases represent a broadening of the tax net and not a burden on the taxpayer. With an increase in domestic consumption who benefitted? The poor benefitted from the extensive range of zero-rated items.

National priorities – equitable distribution of wealth – pro-poor policies- what are these? An investment of \$4 billion for GuySuCo- this will directly benefit 18,000 workers and indirectly benefit 120,000 persons connected to the sugar industry. Are we willing to oppose an investment like this which would secure 18,000 jobs? Which would ensure that the livelihood of 120,000 persons remain secure? [Mr. Ramjattan: You are only fooling the sugar workers.] This has nothing to do with fooling the sugar workers; this is about protecting the well-being and welfare

of sugar workers. We do not have a double message. When the \$4 billion was announced the Hon. Member Mr. Moses Nagamootoo said, “Bail out”, then he appeared on a television programme in Albion and said the Government is not doing enough. The hypocrisy, the double standards, how much more are these Hon. Gentlemen willing to impose on the Guyanese people.

[**Mr. Ramjattan:** Why do you not increase the salary?] The Hon. Member is speaking about increasing the salary when we are trying to secure the jobs in the first instance. How can one increase salary if there are no jobs? This man is sailing; he knows nothing about economics.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, who were you referring to when you say, “this man”?

Mr. Ali: The Hon. Member.

Mr. Speaker: You said someone is sailing. I just want to know who.

Mr. Ali: The Leader of the AFC.

Mr. Speaker: That would be me.

Mr. Ali: Sorry, the Deputy Leader. Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge that you are in charge.

Who will benefit from the \$6 billion investment in Guyana Power and Light (GPL)? - The 164,000 subscribers. If we did not provide this subsidy for GPL what would have been the consequence? No subsidy would have meant an increase in the tariffs of more than 20%. This Government, being a caring Government, being a Government that believes in equality, being a Government that has promoted pro-poor approaches to growth, saw it fit to absorb that 20 % by plunging a \$6 billion subsidy into GPL.

Is the muttering from the opposite side an indication that they will vote against this \$6 billion for the people? [**Government Member:** Let them say] That they would vote against this 20% cushioning? If it is that they will vote against this \$6 billion let them say so. Let the Guyanese people see them for who they are. I am proud to say that the Guyanese people have seen what this Government stands for. That is why we are the only Government in the Caribbean and Latin America which can boast of presenting the 20th National Budget for the people of this country. So, yes, let there be no illusion. This is the Government that has developed policies and priorities

that will benefit and bring ease to the Guyanese people. [Mr. Williams: What about Linden? They are not people.]

We must also not forget that the public assistance benefits more than 9,000 people.

Let us come to the income tax threshold. Approximately 21,000 people will be removed from the income tax net. Additionally, \$3 billion in disposable income will be reinvested in the economy. The doubling of the threshold will ensure that spending, accessibility to income, increase and improve to \$3 billion. Some of the other initiatives that will ensure the gap and will ensure that we never go back to the days of inequality, that will ensure we never go back to the days of disparity... [Opposition member: The days of Roger Khan] Be careful the man's father-in-law is watching us.

The days of "hook-up" are long gone. Do not bother with Roger Khan, the days of all that must be gone. [Mr. Williams: Ali Baba time] The days of turning the attention away from "awee" are long gone; Mr. Basil diversion gone. It is now time for seriousness, that is, to develop Guyana in a secure environment, not an environment infiltrated, not an environment where the security is compromised; and we know the role of the "who and what".

Mr. Speaker, approximately 90,000 poor families will benefit from the One Laptop Per Family Programme. The National and Hinterland School Feeding Programme will benefit over 63,000 children. I am not even counting the uniform for all programme – all the school children having access to and benefit from uniforms. These are the policies that ensure we have balance in the economy.

The Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) initiative is expected to double GDP. Currently the agreement with the Kingdom of Norway of US\$250 million would inject new development in the sector. A lot of this money will go towards the expansion of the University of Guyana – the modernisation and expansion of the University of Guyana. (*Noisy interruption*) [Mrs. Backer: He is the Minister of everything]

Mr. Speaker: Proceed Hon. Minister. Do you need protection?

Mr. Ali: Thank you. I think the case has been adequately made. Guyana is on the right trajectory. We have the perfect balance with growth and development. We have the right

policies; [Mrs. Backer: Amen] all it takes now is the political will. That political will must see a mature political opposition; a political opposition that puts country first before self; a political opposition that separates pettiness from national good. Even my friend on the opposite side of the House knows about entrepreneurship. He ran a car dealership once. He ran an auto sale once, so he knows about the benefit and empowerment the economy offers to the Guyanese people.

We must be responsible. We cannot take money from the ordinary poor people of this country to represent them and then never represent them. We cannot take money from the poor and never represent them. We have an obligation, a responsibility, to represent them.

Mr. Speaker: On that point, your time is up.

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I pray for 5 minutes for the Hon. Minister to conclude his presentation.

Question put and carried.

Mr. Ali: Mr. Speaker, I wish to conclude by applauding the Minister of Finance for his excellent stewardship of the economy of Guyana and wish to support this budget. Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Minister.

Before I invite the Hon. Member Mr. Nagamootoo to speak let me just point out that Members would have noted that Mr. Greenidge is absent. He did ask to be excused because it was brought to his attention that the manner of his dress may not have been entirely in keeping with the Standing Orders... [Mr. Benn; Why he did not go in the market and buy something?] ...and so his absence should not be seen as disrespect to any of the speakers or to the Minister.

Thank you Hon. Members.

Mr. Nagamootoo: If it pleases Your Honour, when I listened to the harangue of the last speaker, I would have thought that he had given all the reasons why this country should not be fooling the working people anymore. [Mr. Neendkumar: Last year you did not talk. You were dumb last year] The last speaker painted a picture of Guyana as a paradise on earth. He said that we have GDP greater than the Caribbean countries. Then he painted a rosy pie in the sky of where we will go in the next five years and beyond. He tried to corral us into supporting this

budget by saying that we will be judged if we did otherwise. Well, the good book says, “judge not lest ye be judged”. For us, the judge who is the best in Guyana is the people, and the people have judged them. The people have condemned them. The people were not satisfied with their explanations of growth, development and prosperity, and the people have said, “stand down, become a minority and repent”.

My friend, Your Honour, has said - for fooling the Guyanese people and the electorate - that if we in fact have achieved the benchmark of development and we are ahead of our neighbours including Trinidad which has oil - I have seen recently that President Chavez of Venezuela has announced a 20% increase in salaries per month - but we still have our pensioners on US\$37 per month - for all the statistics, all the juggling of figures, all the reports of where we are in the millennium goals and our projections! We have now boasted that it is a great thing that Guyana has longevity. It must be a great pleasure for all of us to live long but the greatest tragedy is for us to arrive at the age when we would receive an old age pension and be given a pittance and an insult for our contribution to this nation. I say this Government, the Post-Jagan Government, should hang its head in shame, in utter shame for trying to come to this National Assembly with all the fancy talks, all the foot works and mouth works to tell us that the Opposition should be judged.

[**Mr. Neendkumar:** You should be shame because you were in the Post-Jagan Government. You should be shame. Sit down.]

My friend has said... [**Interruption**] ...the Hon Minister seems to be the glorious “pot salt” in everything, “Minister of everything”. He tried to essay into the Value Added Tax, the vampire tax, which we were told when I was over on that side and in good faith I believed...

[**Government Member:** You too were fooled.] Of course, of course; the “charlatans” could fool anyone... that it was a revenue neutral tax. And yet for all in 2010 it raked in \$27 billion; in 2011, last year, it raked in \$28.5 billion, and this year the neutral base tax, the revenue neutral tax, will rake in \$31.1 billion. A function of growth is development and the core of development is social development – take the money that you have increased from VAT and give it to the pensioners, give it to the workers, and give it to the people who deserve social assistance. That is the proof of growth. It must be people centered.

If all that was said today from that side were to be believed and we stretch credibility to its zenith, if we could stretch credibility to its zenith, we would have said then we did not need to be

perhaps the heaviest taxed people in the world. This country in 2010 collected, according the Government's own estimates, \$107.8 billion dollars in taxes. This year we are going to collect \$146.8 billion in taxes. We are earning more from the people; we are taking more from the pockets of the people, from the food from their tables and yet you cannot come here with a good conscience and tell the working people that you owe them something in return. That is where we find the fundamentals of this budget are wrong. It has turned economics on its head, it has turned the people on their heads and it has turned logic into an abuse.

I asked the Minister twice in this National Assembly... [Government Member: Which one?] The Hon. Minister of Water, for all the money he boasted that we have spent on the water sector – they love that sector; it is a favourite sector for them – to tell us in the National Assembly, to assure us, to assure the Guyanese people from whom they raked in \$146 billion, that they can drink the water from the taps. I want them to make a pronouncement that is open, that is public, that is a guarantee to this Nation. I have gone to Linden and I have seen the water that is as red as blood. I have gone to Ithaca on the West Coast of Berbice and the people came with bottles and jars of water and apart from contamination there are worms in the water. You tell the people in Ithaca they can drink that water! You tell them here in Georgetown! The water when it is put to settle it is like paint. The sediment at the bottom of the water, red sediment, is like paint. And we talk here so glibly about development, so glibly about the money we spend on the people of Guyana but we still have people in this country fearful of opening their taps for a glass of water. They resort to spending billions of dollars every year on bottled water. We need this Minister to tell us why people in this country are forced to buy water from bottles to drink and how much it costs the people to do so.

This 2012 budget was presented in a backdrop of a distressing challenge to the independence and sovereignty of this Tenth Parliament. I fear that the futility of that challenge will play out here in this debate and in the conclusion of it, and that the majority, in true libertarian style and fashion, will and must prevail. This is not intended as a warning but as an advice to the Government benches that we should engage in this debate not by the gestures and the pomp and the theatrics that we are seeing. We must engage constructively and wisely, and thread cautiously and make sure that in the end Guyana becomes the winner.

3.36 p.m.

Your Honour, no one, in his or her right mind, would doubt that this 2012 Budget was also presented under the shadows of endemic corruption, mismanagement and lack of accountability.

Decent Guyanese are burdened with a heavy heart as they are unwillingly and unwittingly saddled with the cross of corruption. I try to look at the budget here, I was looking at it, and I saw a cross there. It appears superficially as two coffins, but on a more penetrating glance it may be two bars of gold. Certainly it is a cross that this nation has to carry - this cross of corruption that we all have to carry. We see every single day in the daily newspapers which reads like x-rated crime thrillers; with each day they bring a new narrative of sleaze and cronyism.

I do not have to go back to the past, we here have no baggage. I did my duty, I discharged my responsibility, I contributed to what was called the dawn of a new era and so I cannot go back there. [Interruption]

This, of course, places doubt - the corruption that I talked about places doubt over the creditability of this budget. The \$193 Billion for this year could be in jeopardy of being washed away in the torrent of waste, mismanagement, bureaucratic and political inertia. [Interruption] You should name him also; the Minister of the Essequibo River – ‘broad at the mouth, very narrow at the source, lots of water’.

The central issue before us, therefore, is whether, in good conscience, on a balance of probability that things could not possibly get worst, that we should vote to approve this budget.

For many years I have been in self-denial that we could come to this sad state, where the gains of an entire generation of fighters, for what were the good cause and the values of public life could be eroded irreversibly and that we could plunge in the abyss.

I share the anguish and disappointment of Nadira Jagan-Brancier, as reported in the *Kaieteur News* on Thursday, April 5, 2012, under the banner headline,

“CHEDDI, JANET JAGAN MUST BE TURNING IN THEIR GRAVES

They didn’t have big ostentatious homes that you see nowadays that government officials and party officials have.”

The daughter of our late Presidents, Cheddi and Janet Jagan, lamented,

“My parents were probably the most incorruptible people you would ever find; their honesty and integrity were of very high standards, but unfortunately do not exist or I do not see it in many of the leaders of the party and government.”

She said these leaders lack the high moral standards of the Jagan’s and though they are using the Jagan names, they are not living up to these standards.

Not Moses, but Cheddi and Janet Jagan’s daughter spoke about the betrayal of the Jagan’s legacy of fighting for the working class, *Ma* and *Pa*, the sugar workers being at the heart of the fight. She made this indictment,

“I think the party has moved away – not the party, but certain elements in the party - from these very, very important values that held the party together... and so for me, when I look at some of the things happening, my parents must be turning in their graves - but they must be churning up in the waters of the rivers (in which their ashes were sprinkled)”.

These words, “**...my parents must be turning in their graves**”, will forever haunt those who have betrayed the Jagan legacy, and will shame them forever.

Like some of us, Ms. Jagan-Brancier has a compassionate heart, and would rather the renegades restore the non-corruptible party, and return to the humble example of Cheddi and Janet Jagan. She reminded us that, “...they lived a very simple life; they didn’t have big ostentatious homes that you see nowadays that Government officials and party officials have, which is a very, very, sad thing, personally.” She did not speak to Prado Ville 2.

The self-denial I spoke about extended in the daily ritual of accusations that all is not well; because I still have a few friends over there, I have been tempted to wish away many actual and perceived sins. But the accusations will not go away and they would come back, like a nightmare, in the daily headlines about one scandal after the other – over contracts for drugs, the Amaila Road Project, computer and books scams, secret deals, etc.

I did not go back over 20 years. I looked over this last weekend’s newspapers, a sample of recent headlines. I had been tempted to go back to history, because we are told that he who does not remember the past is condemned to repeat it, except for those who resort to the past do not remember it carefully because they are repeating it every day. History we were told is like a

prophet that looks back at what was, analyse what was and what caused what was, then it foretells the future. These have not been able to learn from history and so they cannot see the future, all they can see is the magical slogan, “*in the next five years*”. We have finished four of those five years, but we are promised the next five years. It is like a child – in the vehicle when we travel from my home, my grandson would say, “Are we there yet?”. “Are we there yet?” and I would tell him, ‘*shut your so and so mouth*’, because it goes on from the beginning of the journey to the end of the journey. That is what they remind us of; *Are we there yet? The next five years...* [Interruption: child abuse, child abuser] I am tempted to tell them that, but I will leave that for the next few days when we go back to the hustlings; I will leave that for...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, allow Mr. Nagamootoo to complete his presentation, please.

Mr. Nagamootoo: ...when I go back to the street corner and when I talk to the Guyanese people... [Interruptions]

Mr. Speaker: Allow the Hon. Member to do his presentation, please.

Mr. Nagamootoo: A sample of the recent headlines will suffice to tell the story graphically:

- \$300M *Hydroclave (waste disposal) system...huge difference in cost*” – *Kaieteur News*, Sunday April 8, 2012, which states that a unit of the system commissioned at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation was quoted by the Canadian suppliers at a price of one-half what it was said to cost. We should be worried that the funds used were from the World Bank, which would add to donor suspicions and eventually, donor fatigue, over perception of waste and corruption, even if the allegations were proved untrue.
- Rental instead of purchase of generators, in which we were told that the state-run Guyana Power & Light Company (GPL) paid \$1.6 billion last year alone to rent two sets, when they could have purchased each set for \$400 million. Here again even if proved untrue, it is damaging because we are using donor’s money in most cases to do these things.
- Marriot Hotel/Casino fiasco had several headlines, in which our people’s money, estimated at US\$20 Million, being held in non-accessible accounts by NICIL, was going to partially fund the project.
- IDB still has Amaila Falls -doubts about GPL, says another headline. Even a project as clean as hydro-power, and likely to cost more than US\$850 million, has been

contaminated, firstly by the Fip Motilall road scandal, and secondly a credibility issue as to whether GPL could control efficient distribution and manage technical losses for hydro-power, as its present record is so dismal in managing the system.

Then the last among the weekend's x-rated news:

- “*Government sells GT&T shares*”. This reports the sale of Guyana’s 20% shares in the giant GT&T to a Chinese – but we do not know, they say in bracket – (Hong Kong) company for US\$30 million, I read what they said, no mention was made of this sale in the Budget though our coffers have been getting some \$500 million annually from our GT&T shares. We are told today in the newspapers, I just perused it very quickly, that really this is something in the pipelines. This is a work in progress and that before, because of confidentially issues, the company could not have come on board to do the deal. We heard after the budget that there is in fact a deal and, of course, we are learning this from almost the shadow presidency - Dr. Luncheon at a press conference – it slipped out of him and he mentioned this.

We are waiting for the papers to be tabled here, because we want to ask some questions. Was this a good deal? Why it was not mentioned or even hinted in the budget or in the President’s address to this August Assembly? Was there an offer of US\$35 million and would the Parliament see the original MOU? We need to see the genesis of this deal and we also need to see whether or not there has been adequate advertisements and whether or not an offer of any type has been made to the Guyanese people and business community to invest in these shares. Charity begins at home.

The Hon. Finance Minister was intimately involved as the Chairman of NICIL’s Board. He could assure this Parliament that the purchased sum estimated at G\$6 billion would eventually, whenever it comes to fruition, be paid into the Consolidated Fund. We want that assurance and all other sums held in NICIL accounts, estimated conservatively at G\$35 billion, handed over to the Consolidated Fund, because the Guyanese people deserve to access that money.

It is in the interest of all the working people why we are talking about the NICIL funds; it is in the interest of all the working people, which I performed with dispatch and competence; it is in the interest of all the working people that all funds held in special accounts like NICIL and the Lottery, be paid into the Consolidated Fund. Since, the reasons I know have been advanced year

after year for the wage restraint, was that there was a lack of affordability. We could not afford if we hide some of the money. We cannot afford to give our parents more money for pension if we hide it under the bed. Bring it out to the daylight, let us see the whole purse, and let us see the whole *piee*, as the people in Berbice would say it.

During 1996, it has not always been this vulgar excuse of lack of affordability, there has also been attempts at trying to gain credibility in budgeting what we budget for workers. In 1996, we all remembered when the Public Servants demanded wages, the then President, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, made an advance I believe in that year, of 9% and invited the Trade Union Congress (TUC) to meet with him. I was there and several others were there as well. He invited the TUC to sit with him and the question he asked was, “Will you join us in the Government to look in the budget where we can find money to pay more to the workers?” That is what a politician who has the people in the centre of his heart will always do. They will consult with the workers’ representatives and then the Government set up what was recounted afterwards.

I will read from a speech from May Day of 1999, by the then President, Mrs Janet Jagan. She recounted this episode of a caring and compassionate leader.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, before you quote, you are out of time.

Mr. Ramjattan: Hon. Speaker, could I plead with you for fifteen minutes for the Member to continue his address?

Mr. Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Nagamootoo: ... she said:

“During January 1997, the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) had threatened to call a 40-day strike, just two weeks before he was to fall, fatally ill. The then President, our late Dr. Cheddi Jagan met with TUC leaders. He made the unprecedented decision that a joint labour government technical team should examine the Government’s book...”

Listen to this Dr. Singh.

“...to determine whether money could be found to meet further increases in salaries... It concretized government-labour partnership, which Dr. Jagan had fought for, and always wanted.”

That moment died with Cheddi Jagan. Today, we deserve no less and demand the inclusion of labour on a team to find out where moneys are stashed away and examine whether workers could be given a living wage.

Mr. Speaker, we must not only bring in the NICIL, wild life, lotto funds, etc. We also need to be frugal if we want to sing this song about affordability. We have to comb the budget for waste and to eliminate inexplicable bloc votes, such as that for the Office of the President, because this is finally the President’s budget and we have to lead by example. Where all manner of people are recruited as advisors and consultants at super salaries, sinecures are doled out to old faithfuls, who enjoy double salaries along with fat perks and privileges, and propagandist-manipulators and phantom letter writers are kept well fed by their masters.

Pruning the budget would help to get the pennies needed for workers, pensioners and the critically disadvantaged. We have to use the cutting knife on salaries for the over-bloated Ministerial bureaucracy, on travel on first-class tickets and allowances to stay at 5-stars hotels. We must end the travesty of producing champions in globe-trotting, whilst our pensioners go without bread.

Allow me once again to quote, I had referred to this in an earlier speech, to the Addressed to this Assembly by Cheddi Jagan, the then President, on December 17th, 1992, he said... **[Interruptions]** You no longer hold the Jagan standards. Do not lament, do not cry, we have it over here, the Alliance for Change, the high ground. We are on the mountain top, the high mountain top where we can uphold these values.

“The first time I entered the Legislative Council,” Dr. Jagan said, “I spoke on the issue of pension.” this was Cheddi Jagan I am quoting from. **[Interruptions]** “It grieves me to know that there are so many Guyanese, who as senior citizens get so small a pension. I think they deserve more for the contributions they had made to the society.”

Today, I say in this House, ‘*speak Cheddi, speak*’. Speak to these undeserving disciples who are unwilling to remove pensioners from extreme poverty and ensure that they enjoy their last flicker of life in some type of comfort.

The last speaker, the Hon. Irfaan Ali, spoke to the issue of poverty and one would have thought that this country is enjoying manors from heaven. We are all happy, we are all content and no one goes to bed hungry. At the heart of any budget must be poverty reduction. That is the social responsibility of those who govern and of this Parliament. The Finance Minister boasts, “The Guyanese economy is at its strongest and we are showing resilience and dynamism”. Yes, I agree that our economy has grown, due to many factors... [Ms. Teixeira: Inaudible] ... You know them best Ms. Teixeira, you used to call to boycott their business – that there is energy in construction and movement for the better in social services – Do you remember that? But notwithstanding the boast of achievements, there is still acute poverty in Guyana. The question is, was it addressed adequately or at all by this Government and in this budget?

On page 7 of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, a copy of which I have here, it states that, “the extreme poverty line is based on the normative food basket... The average cost of the food basket across the ten regions for 2006 was \$7550 per month, male adult, approximately US\$1.25 per day. The average cost of the normative food basket quantifies the extreme poverty line.”

[Ms. Teixeira: That was in 2006, it is now 2012.] Yes. That extreme poverty line at \$7550 was for 2006. Yet six years later, in 2012, the old age pension remains at \$7500. Six years after, six years ago, the extreme poverty line was put in this report at \$7500, and today, six years after you are giving them that. This is a criminal neglect of dynamism. This is a national disgrace.

To add insult to poverty, the Finance Minister promised that from May 1st, 2012 old age pension will be increased by the princely sum of \$600 per month, or G\$20 a day. Give a beggar on the streets \$20 and he will tell you “*haul you*”. He will tell you “*haul you*” – give them \$20 on the streets. [**Interruptions**]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members could you allow Mr. Nagamootoo to make his presentation... What is happening? Continue please Mr. Nagamootoo.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Yes Sir. Social assistance is below the extreme poverty line at \$5500, but the Hon. Finance Minister, in one of his acts reflecting dynamism, has promised G\$400 more per

month. US\$2 will be paid from May 1st. So miserly have we become in this rich country they boast about, with the highest growth rate in the Caribbean, the highest credibility/credit worthiness in the world and the greatest attraction for investors, my God that we could not give them from the 1st January, we had to pay them from the 1st May, 2012. There is something called retroactivity, it is not a big word. It look like this pension package and social assistance package is not a lifeline, it is like a suicide belt that you hand to these poor people and ask them to do what you will.

By their own admission, when you look at the 2006 extreme poverty line you will find their admission, that 42000 persons in Guyana are on the extreme poverty line. Mr. Irfaan Ali reminded us about that, that they are giving social assistance to 42000 of them, this miserly pension. It is bad enough.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for 2011, showed that overall – this is their figures, the Government's figures, whoever prepared this... – 19% of the people in Guyana lived in extreme poverty in 2006 and 36% in moderate poverty. [Member: Is it 90%?] ...19% and 36%. This is stated in the report, so you have to learn to read your own report. The more serious impact of poverty is in the rural and hinterland communities. They must come to this Parliament to say what have they done to impact on the poverty base to bring it down. That was five years ago, they have an obligation to come to this Parliament to say where is the poverty line, both extreme and moderate poverty. They have an obligation to come to this Parliament to say what are the unemployment statistics. What is the number? I said the last time it was a State secret. They have a responsibility to do that, otherwise, we could draw reasonable inference that they have done nothing to reduce poverty and they have done nothing to reduce joblessness in Guyana. If nothing else, this is an indictment of the failure of the Government. It is a failure of policy; a failure of sound budgetary planning; a failure in retributive justice.

Today, I submit with pain that the numbers in extreme poverty have increased. You have to just look at the destitute in the streets based on that; based on the hordes of beggars sleeping on the pave –just outside this very Parliament, the market places and elsewhere. Look at the children who cannot go to school because their parents cannot afford to pay bus fares. Look at the figures of desperate youths forced to petty crimes of house-breaking and “choke-and-rob”.

I have here, in my heart, a photo of a young woman, who is afflicted with filaria and is mentally challenged. She is from Hopetown, West Berbice. She is a single mother of a six year-old child.

4.06 p.m.

She told me that she used to get \$5,000 per month from the Region 5 Administration. They stopped it. She was told that too many people are on social assistance. This budget does not speak to her misery nor to the death of the dreams of a young child who cannot go to school. This story replicates itself in almost every village, yet our economy is at its strongest and we have dynamism – what a shame.

This Budget speaks not to the poverty of the people but to the poverty of conscience, the poverty of vision and the lack of heart. There is no better appeal than the dreams of this child to make us re-examine budgetary allocation. We need to get back to the drawing board, cut the fat and rework the figures.

Real progress in any country is measured by the level of human development. On the human development index, according to the UN Human Development Report 2011, Guyana ranks 117 out of 187 countries as a medium developed country.

Guyana falls below tiny Grenada (67), St Kitts (72) Dominica (81) and nearby Suriname (104).

The Finance Minister said that the Caribbean economy, estimated to contract by 2.2%, much of what the Hon. Member Irfaan Ali said in 2009, grew by 0.2% in 2010; 0.7% in 2011 and projected to grow by 1.7% in 2012. Guyana by comparison has economic growth higher than all of our partners, they boast, yet all these countries show human development indices that are higher than Guyana, and all of them continue to be migration havens for Guyanese who have been and continue to escape from “Paradise”!

No doubt there has been growth over the years but this has not been balanced or proportionate. Whilst hundreds of billions have been spent on infrastructure, agro-industrial development has been neglected. Coldingen and Lethem have stagnated. The Industrial Sites at Diamond, Ruimveldt, the pioneer private sector “colony”, is neglected and run-down.

Our growth must be linked to job creation. Even our much vaunted new housing projects, whilst commendable, are not linked to production centres or agricultural schemes.

This budget has failed to provide any innovation in new agricultural schemes and industrial zones that would alleviate the problems of joblessness and lack of sustainable livelihood, and guard against the “housing revolution” becoming a bubble.

Instead, we continue to pour large sums into capital infrastructural projects, mostly with borrowed moneys. The latest is for a new international airport for air buses and jumbo jets, when we do not even have a national carrier or even a domestic plane; they do not even have a fleet of jackass carts.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member your time is up.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Speaker, may I request 15 minutes for him to complete his address?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, may I enquire how much longer you have?

Mr. Nagamootoo: I will try to wrap up in the fifteen minutes, Your Honour. I will cut my speech.

Mr. Speaker: I have just been informed that the caterers have not arrived so immediately after Mr. Nagamootoo completes we will take the break.

Mr. Nagamootoo: I said that I am afraid. I speak about the new airport that they are talking about which is like a “Panday-like”, “Piarco project”, the likes of which got him into all kinds of troubles, Mr. Irfaan Ali, that have attracted criminal charges. The mantra seems to be: “bigger, the better!” But for whom?

The Finance Minister said that “we are less indebted as a nation than we were twenty years” ago. Is that true, Mr. Finance Minister? Is that true? [Interruption]

I am not a brilliant economist neither am I an economist by any standard but I have read the figures. In 1992, when there was a change of Government, the dawn of a new era, the debt stood at US\$2.1 billion. In pure Guyana dollars terms, without looking at percentage of GDP or other factors, at the then prevailing rate of G\$125 to US\$1, the 1992 debt was \$252,500,000,000(Two

hundred and fifty two billion, five hundred million). Today, 20 years later, and in spite of write-offs, cancellation and rescheduling, our national debt stands at US\$1.2 billion which, at the current buying rate of G\$207 to US\$1, amounts to G\$253,400,000,000 (Two hundred and fifty three billion, four hundred million) –nearly \$1 billion more than what it was in 1992. You do not like that. You come here to tell us about the debt that we have being the lowest debt. Go back to your figures and in Guyana dollar terms our debt is more than what it was in 1992. If I were you I would resign right now for lying to this Assembly, for misleading this House. [Interruption: *lots of noise and shouting*]

Mr. Speaker, no amount of statistical juggling would hide the reality that in fiscal terms, we are like a dog chasing our own tail. We are once again in the middle of the vicious debt circle.

There is no comparison between the effects, impact and miseries caused by the old debt and the new debt, amortization of which has not started to kick in. But there is no pride in boasting about our debt stock, and with borrowing expected to exceed \$26 billion this year alone, we will set a new record high national debt ceiling ever!

A sad caricature of our debt tragedy, with our population standing some at 750,000 people, Guyana has one of the highest per capita debts in the world at roughly \$333,333 – the unholy trinity. Each child born in the Jagdeo-Ramotar era would henceforth carry a debt tag at birth of \$333,333! As soon as a child says “*Whaaaa!*” it is slapped with a debt tag forever. That is the record of fiscal management and fiscal prudence.

The Hon. Minister likes to make comparisons, but one can also look at the deficit in the Consolidated Fund in 1987 it was \$6.5 billion. Now, before grants, our deficit in the Consolidated Fund \$42 billion and after grant, when we stretch out the begging bowl, it will be \$26.4 billion. What a shame. What is the comparison? You come here with all this big boast and bluster of presenting a good Budget and trying to hoodwink the people of this nation.

Let me say this, Mr. Speaker, this same impetus that drove those who mismanaged the economy in the past is driving us again today, that is, “a little borrowing is not bad”. So, again, this year, like the addict hooked on morphine, we continue to ease the pain of deficit financing with external borrowing in the sum of \$26 Billion, and domestic borrowing, at almost \$1.5 Billion. This could be more, if we cannot draw down the so-called “Norway Funds”.

Debt servicing in 2012 will be \$6.7 billion. In 2010 and 2011, it was in excess of \$7 Billion and \$8 Billion respectively – over \$20 billion we are paying to service our debt in three years and you cannot find money for pensioners and you cannot find money for workers and you are paying \$20 billion in debt servicing alone and you call that fiscal management!

Mr. Speaker, I want to skip some parts but if you will indulge me, I have to speak to the issue of mismanagement, and nowhere else is the mismanagement more evident than in the sugar industry.

GAWU appeared before the “Gobin Tribunal” in 2009, it pointed out since then to “poor management of the Corporation” which was the main factor responsible for fall in production. Production fell from 325,317 tonnes in 2004 to 226,267 tonnes in 2008, and it tipped up a little bit to 233,736 tonnes in 2009. This year in the Budget I tried to find out what the exact production figures were. I have seen that we of course export just over 211,000 tonnes of sugar.

GUYSUCO, since then, was running at a loss of \$4 billion; it started to generate the loss from years before. GAWU had argued that had it achieved production target in 2008 of 315,000 tons, it could have netted \$10.2 billion more from the sale of sugar but they did not get it that year because of low production due to mismanagement and the bungling of the sugar industry and you come here now with your begging bowl, with your *pagri* in your hand asking us to give you money. What a shame. GUYSUCO has not achieved that target since then.

GUYSUCO had continued to blame rising fuel and fertiliser price, but every year it has been spending billions of dollars and yet we have here the report from GAWU saying that the yield per hectare fell from 72 tons in 2007 to 58 tons in 2008. Under its very nose, the Demerara estates produced 50.7% less in 2008 as compared to 2004. Right here the Union asked the Tribunal why the workers should be the scapegoat for this mismanagement and this fall in production that is due to GUYSUCO’s management. If they wanted to solve the problem, it was easy – just sack the board; but the Chairman of the Board was promoted and made Minister of Labour and awarded – member of the board made President. So we do not have a solution in sight.

Mr. Vic Oditt, who was the Chairman of a Commission of Inquiry in that year, said, and I quote him:

“There is complete disconnect between management and workers. Responsibility for the decline of this estate rests entirely with management...” he must have been speaking about Ogle “...whose members have lost their way over the last five years. Leadership seems non-existent, morale is low and the culture is to find other persons/departments to blame.” – The blame game.

Now they have the audacity and worst of all, because you come here to ask for money to prop up the bailout, they were not kind to the sugar workers. Mr. Komal Chand, who is a Hon. Member of this House, had to talk last year on May Day and he put the workers on guard because he warned about the anti-working class champions in the Government and he said:

“GAWU urges this vigilance based on our experience in recent times. Mainly, I refer to the threat last December to derecognise GAWU. We will recall that the blood of the Enmore Martyrs was spilled in their quest for the recognition of GAWU’s forerunner...”

“On 16th December, 2010, in an unprecedeted and outrageous act...”

GAWU was sent a letter and it said this:

“The Corporation wishes to inform you that it is considering to terminate the Recognition and Avoidance and Settlement of Disputes (Agreement) dated 27th February, 1976 that currently subsists between your Union and the Corporation”. [An Hon. Member: Who signed that letter?]

That letter was signed by Mr. Jairam Pitam, Human Resources Director. Of course Mr. Gopaul then was Chairman; he described it as a tactic. The Hon. Robert Persaud, Minister of Agriculture, that goodly gentleman, I believe him; he had nothing to do with the letter. President Jagdeo distanced himself from GUYSUCO’s decision and, Mr. Speaker, if ever there was a classical case of the classical proverb, “I see not, I hear not, I speak not”, this is the case of the proverbial monkey. They threatened GAWU to de-recognise it then they washed their hands like *Pontius Pilot*

Mr. Donald Ramotar, our President now, he was then General Secretary and a member of the Board... [Mr. Neendkumar: Jealous!] I could not be jealous of him with this kind of behaviour. He threatened me with discipline when I wrote an article “Light a Candle for Sugar

Workers” and the Stalinist wolf-pack over there, some of them, called for my dismissal, expulsion from the PPP for coming to the rescue of the Sugar workers.

Mr. Speaker, I crave your indulgence very quickly, there is no easy fix. The time for a new governance mechanism is now, not tomorrow, not in the future, not in the next 5 years. It must not depend on whether we discover oil or harness hydro-energy.

There is need for urgency as new dangers lurk where the economy is bolstered by illicit funds via money laundering, narco-and-gun trade, fuel smuggling, piracy, and the criminalization of political processes.

The disclosures last year by Wikileaks of complicity in narco-criminal activities have hurt Guyana and its economy.

I echo the conviction of President Ramotar in his address, and I sincerely do so, in this Parliament on 10th February, 2012, that “our people deserve better” and that “workers in Guyana are not left on the sidelines of development”.

With political courage, we could re-work this Budget to find, for now modest relief for the Guyanese people, and we can resolve and find answers for some of the more pressing problems.

Can we reform the Value Added Tax? Yes we can, if we have political will. Can we reform personal taxes as was promised and introduce a progressive taxation system where those who could afford pay more and those who cannot pay less or none at all.

Can we reduce the toll on the Berbice Bridge to bring ease to school children, farmers and business people? Yes, we can!

Can we enhance public transport for school children? Yes, we can!

Can we create a Flood Compensation Fund for farmers in affected areas as MMA, Black Bush Polder and the Canal Polders? Yes, we can!

Can we reduce the Travel Tax and abolish the Airport Voucher Tax to make travel less expensive, and help Guyanese access goodies from the diaspora while giving the airlines

breathing space to avoid the periodic shutdown from not having capacity passenger loads? Yes, we certainly can!

Can we reduce bloated state and government emoluments and find moneys to give public servants a double-digit minimum wage? Yes, we can!

And certainly, can we increase old age pensions and public assistance, I am saying modestly, to \$10,000 per month? I want you to say “Yes, we can!”

We can do these. And, yes, we can do more. We can hasten appointment of the Procurement Commission, we can bring the DEA to Guyana to help us fight narco-crime and money-laundering and enforce forfeiture laws that could strengthen our revenue base. We can rigidly enforce our laws, including our Integrity legislation, to police the assets of public officials, as well as prosecute those implicated in corrupt dealings for misfeasance in public office, and surcharge them for public moneys stolen or misspent. Of course we can!

Nothing is wrong to quote from one of the best and finest minds and intellect and honest leaders of the world, the first black President we have of the United States of America, President Obama. He is a worthy example to quote from.

Mr. Speaker, in all of this we need partnership; partnership with the political parties, with Labour, Business and Civil Society.

We need certainty in our relations, not opportunism and vacillation. This Government that says it is Marxist-Leninist, but insists that the private sector (capitalism) is our engine of growth. This is confusion, which is played out when Government bails out public corporations and degrades, for example, genuine patriotic capitalist ventures like Pegasus; and promotes with state funds local cronies and foreign capitalists to build Marriot in competition with local business. This is a shame. This is a contradiction. It is a contradiction in term and abandonment of ideology.

We are, sadly, ideologically, neither fish nor fowl. This confusion affects budget planning, and sadly it is reflected in this Budget.

Mr. Speaker, I repeat, this is indeed a Big Bang Budget but in spite of the staggering figures, the Guyanese people are still asking: “What is there in it for me?”

In conclusion I want to say this... [Mr. Neendkumar: He is a child abuser, in conclusion.] The common question being asked: “Why support this budget?” [Ms. Teixeira: Promise that you will never curse a child again] And the easiest thing to do is to vote it down. But, Mr. Speaker, the Alliance For Change does not subscribe to nihilistic politics, and does not wish to practice political blackmail or see a dead-end that would send us back to the polls. Fresh elections now would require about \$2 billion for the Elections Commission, perhaps \$2 billion from contesting parties, and loss from business activities in another \$2 billion. Snap elections would be a costly thing we can ill afford at a time when workers need wage not waste. [Dr. Westford: No, vote it down!]

For us, Mr Speaker, the job of Government... We can. You keep saying “vote it down”. Say in a chorus “vote it down”....is to govern, even a minority government as this cannot govern without money, without approved budgetary allocations. However, the power to allocate money resides with this Parliament, and we have to ensure that moneys are allocated judiciously, within our means, and in a balanced and proportionate way.

This for us is a superior political message that we can together correct the wrongs and do better for our people. Our first interest is to ensure that the people’s gains made over many years are not eroded and that we maintain the allocations for the social sectors.

The AFC comes to this Parliament with an objective mind and calls for partnership for Guyana. This is a Government budget, but this is people’s money. The partnership is that of using fiscal prudence to make our money work for Guyana.

Outside of health, education, housing/water, we need to make cuts. We will use the scissors and not the sledgehammer. We will prune excesses and extravagance, and we will avoid waste on projects that we cannot undertake at this time. How well all of us do this, will test whether we are nationalists or just petty hustlers, unmindful of the needs of our people, and unresponsive to them.

This reality requires us to recognize that we need each other and that we should work together. Remember that, Mr. Samuel Hinds. *No more platitudes, no more arrogance, no more politics of disdain and “cuss-down” modes.*

We are in this thing together and invite this Government to get the numbers right. If we have to fix this country the job begins now with making this a people's budget. Our support is assured once the Budget meets the threshold of distributive justice, balance and equity.

Long Live Guyana! Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: Sir, I note with pleasure and by the way, your pleasure admonitions to us at the beginning asking us to behave like leaders and I am cautioning us that the country was looking at us and I thought that something was said earlier that I think the House should distance itself from and it was a confession of a particularly violent statement to one's grandchild was made and I believe, Sir, that it is incumbent upon us as leaders in this National Assembly not to send the message that that is okay in this country and I ask, respectfully, that you as Speaker send that message on behalf of us all in this National Assembly.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Member, this House cannot and will not get into the private business of Members. If in fact Mr. Moses Nagamootoo speaks to his grandchild lovingly or otherwise that is a matter that he will deal with and that could be taken by you on the Government side to the hustings or wherever. I know the Hon. Member and he remains honourable in my eyes and I have seen him with his family and I know that he has the highest regard for his family and his family has the highest regard for him. I do not know the context in which he may have made those statements. Thank you.

I think that this is an appropriate time for us to take a suspension. We are suspended for one hour. Thank you very much.

Sitting suspended at 4.30 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 5.27 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting has resumed. Please be seated.

Mr. Nadir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First let me offer my congratulations, once again to the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh on his sixth Budget Presentation and to commend him and his staff for remaining on course, uniting in purpose and for laying the foundations for the prosperity of all of our people.

We were just treated to a most hilarious presentation by the Hon. Member Mr. Moses Nagamootoo and had we not been in this August Assembly I would have thought we were at the show “*Laugh Til Yuh Belly Bust*”. There is one very popular television presenter by the name of Mr. C. N. Sharma who normally, when people behave like the last speaker did in his presentation, Sharma would say he did not take his medication today. [Mr. Sharma: Inaudible] That was a compliment to the father of the Hon. Mr. Jaipaul Sharma on the other side of the House.

The presentation was also one of a person who is very confused and when you listen to him he was going to please everyone all of the time. In his presentation he was going to cut expenses and he was going to deliver still better quality of service. He is going to cut taxes and he is going to give more to pensioners, the public servants and also to the social sector which shows how that is a confused person. That is a person who needs a lesson in “*graspmatics*” to grasp the concept and not “*grassmatics*” to let the ordinary person understand what this budget is about and what the debate is about. That is what we expect here and that is what you cautioned all of us to do as you started.

We cannot do all of the things at the same time and what this sixth budget of the Hon. Finance Minister does, it continues to keep us on course for another year of positive growth in our economy.

The last speaker, as I listened carefully – I had some amount of admiration for him – one felt the anger at having this party for whatever reason, I was not inside. Also, as he started speaking, one could see the narcissism in him falling in love with his own voice and I think that is where he lost the concept, because he plucked some nominal figures out of previous Budgets and this one and says that the Finance Minister is incompetent and he should resign because today Guyana is a more indebted country than it was previously. So, he goes back to 1992 and he takes the US\$2 billion in debt that we had and he multiplied it by the rate of exchange at the time, GD\$126 to US\$1, and he came up with \$252 billion.

5.32 p.m.

He went to the budget presentation and said that today Guyana now owes \$253 billion, an increase in our debt of \$1 million.

Today the nominal value... but clearly the other leader of the Alliance For Change (AFC), who just seemed also to be in the same kind of position of not understanding the numbers... because the time value of money twenty years ago as to today is vastly different. If the US dollar figure is looked at, today our debt is almost half as it was twenty years ago. The nominal value and the US dollar value are all different; but what we know today, as a fact, is that we can service our debt and this PPP/C Government has restored creditworthiness to this country. That is why we are getting more money to borrow. It is because we have restored creditworthiness.

Then he plucked another set of figures – the deficit – and he said that we have a bigger deficit in nominal dollar terms. Yes, we do! But he did not say nominal; he said that today we have a bigger deficit – the biggest that we have ever had. The Minister of Finance said that our deficit is going to be about 4.4 per cent of GDP this year. The United States of America (USA), today, for every dollar it spends it has to borrow forty cents. The deficit that it is running is close to twelve per cent of GDP. Guyana, last year ended at 3.5 per cent. This year, it is projecting 4.4 per cent of GDP as its deficit. It is a more than manageable amount.

If one goes to Europe... I was looking at the *Daily Telegraph*, last night, Britain runs, today, a 10.4 per cent deficit; Greece is at 10.5 per cent; Spain runs at a 9.2 per cent of GDP as a deficit. Guyana's projection is at 4.4 per cent. That is a credit to the management which this PPP/C administration has brought to the Government, to this country and to the policies which have worked to grow this economy. I can go on and on, but I would challenge the last speaker, the Hon. Member, to run his business, to run his household, as he is asking this Government to run the country, by eat less, by use less light, by use less technology - cut all of those things, pay his workers better, and he does not have greater income because he is cutting taxes, and let us see how long he will rally out.

Let us talk to the pensioners... One of the other issues that Members of the Opposition played up. Every party in the Opposition, I usually say, has the luxury to be ridiculous because the Government is going to give the public servants a twenty per cent increase, and the last time that level of increase was given - the thirty-odd per cent - it drove inflation by eighteen per cent and every single dollar in the whole economy suffered. It was not only the public servants who got that increase. So you have to be prudent and responsible. Mr. Speaker, you have to be very prudent and careful. You cannot start sharing up the pie before you baking the pie. You cannot

start chewing before you having something in your mouth, and before you do that you have to work hard. While, yes, “...man shall not live by bread alone...”; it is “By the sweat of thy brow thou shall eat bread.”

I will go back to the issue of the pensioners. Almost every single person in this country who gets an old-age pension..., and in no country an old-age pension from the state is going to be a pension for a person to live on. That is why there are contributory pension schemes; that is why there is the National Insurance Scheme (NIS). The average public servant will get three pensions. At age fifty-five the public servants will get the Government pension; at age sixty they will get the NIS pension, and at age sixty-five they will get a top-up from the state. People are not talking about that. Those people who did not even work would still get this pension, and including in it is also a waiver on the water rates. [Mrs. Lawrence: How many people actually own their homes?] Forty-two thousand persons enjoy this right now. Yes, the Hon. Minister of Finance would love to do more. Taking the old-age pension to \$10,000 will cost this country \$630 million more annually. [Mrs. Lawrence: So what?] We may ask, “So what?”, but no country gets loans and gifts to pay pensions. It has to come out from current revenue. Let us take the \$5 billion, if we are going to give that, and divide it by the \$128 billion in current revenue and we will see the percentage of our own money that is going to the pensioners. Yes, this Government would like to do more but it has to be able to deal with all of the people. When there is more expenditure in health care, and there are the free services from Lethem to Suddie, and all the way down to the ophthalmology centre, it is costing money. When it is going to provide the \$6 million, as Minister Ali mentioned, to subsidise the electricity cost to ensure that if there is an increase in electricity rate it will be cushioned and every single person enjoys that - every single household enjoys that. The \$4 billion to Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) is protecting twenty thousand jobs. When the Hon. Prime Minister, earlier in the 90s, negotiated for the billions of dollars so that the Linden Economic Advancement Programme (LEAP) could get on stream, it was because we also cared for that community. For more than two decades, the people in the bauxite sector, the workers, the people in Region 10 and Linden were given the support because they needed it, and this caring Government ensured that it could have held their hands while, at the same time, it tried to revive the sectors in which the resources are. So bauxite has rebounded; 1.8 million tons of bauxite was produced last year. The Hon. Minister of the Environment and Natural Resources, just recently, was part of the commissioning ceremony for

billions of dollars worth of capital equipment that is going to go more into the bauxite production sector. This is what this Government has been doing. It has been staying on course; it has been producing the results. That is why we were able to move from a per capita income in 1992 of US\$300 to, today, over US\$2,500.

Yes! We are not as prosperous as Grenada...and the last speaker, the Hon. Member Mr. Moses Nagamootoo, mixed up what the Hon. Member Mr. Irfaan Ali was saying. The Hon. Minister of Housing and Water and Tourism, Industry and Commerce was not saying that we have the biggest economy. He was saying that we have the highest growth rate in economy. The Hon. Member confused that and said that we have the biggest economy. The Eastern Caribbean countries, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago enjoy middle income status, a per capita income of over US\$6,000. This is the fact, Mr. Speaker, and you have heard me say this over and over, again. I like to establish what the facts are and fight with the facts; it is not over the facts. The fact is that we are still at US\$2,500 per capita and the Eastern Caribbean countries, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago...Trinidad and Tobago's per capita income is about US\$12,000. It is two different levels of society, but still we can ensure that we can put significant resources to help cushion the impact of the market system for those who cannot go along with it. The social safety nets continue to be in place.

I do not think that I need to beat the presentation of the Hon. Member Mr. Moses Nagamootoo further because it is there for what it is. [Mr. Nagamootoo: What it is?] It was a good laugh and I enjoyed it internally, in my belly. My belly did not burst. I enjoyed it internally; but we have to be a bit responsible. We cannot raise the level of people's expectation just because we want a vote.

If you listened carefully, that Member pontificated as if he were the Government - that he won thirty-three seats alone. That is what it sounded like. I am saying that the single largest party in the National Assembly today, people seem to forget, is still the People's Progressive Party/Civic.

Hon. Member Mr. Carl Greenidge... I have a certain amount of pity for Mr. Greenidge, because clearly, while Mr. Greenidge has returned to Guyana, he is still mentally away from Guyana. He does not know what is happening in this country. He said, at the very opening, that he cannot give any prizes for the targets. I was just reading the *Declaration of Sophia*. [Ms. Ally:

That is a good book to read.] Ms. Ally was not around at that time. At the Sophia's declaration, the People's National Congress, when it was talking about increasing rice production in Region 5 and Region 2, resolutions of the whole congress, the comrade Mrs. Philomena Raymond from Region 2 said, in 1979, that in 1977 the rice farmers... [Ms. Ally: It was Region 3. You do not know your geography.] Yes. It was Region 3... who did well were promised incentives and she said that two years later all they got were medals. The Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge said that there were no prizes to be given out. Mr. Speaker, I want to say to you that the Hon. Ministers of Finance that this Government has had and the staff, and this particular Government, need a lot of prizes for maintaining the course and achieving the targets.

I was listening to hear the Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge mention in his analysis where he felt that this budget was too optimistic, in terms of its projection, and to lay the basis that because of the optimism in the projections we are not going to achieve the revenue targets, and if we do not achieve the revenue targets some of the programmes which we may go into may have to be postponed or cancelled, as is happening in some economies. I looked at the targets over the past years, and I am not going to go to 1992; I am just going to go to 2011. The budget laid by the Hon. Minister of Finance last year stated that we were going to target growth at 4.6 per cent. What was the growth rate last year? It was 5.4 per cent. He needs a medal. It stated that the non-sugar economy would grow by 2.8 per cent last year. It grew by 5.6 per cent. He said that rice would have achieved 379,628 tons, a 4.9 per cent increase predicted. What was the target achieved? It was 401, 904 tons, an 11.3 per cent increase. [Ms. Ally: He needs a medal again.] That is a gold medal now. He said that forestry would have declined by 4.1 per cent and fishing would have sluggish growth at 0.4 per cent. We did not achieve that. Fishing declined by 5.3 per cent and forestry by 9.3 per cent and there is a reason for it, and in his budget presentation, this year, he mentioned it. It is because we are allowing the stocks to regrow out there and we are looking at the sustainable use of our forest and so new rules and regulations are being put in place incongruence with the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). So we expect that those two sectors will perform a bit sluggishly, but mining and quarrying, last year, was predicted at 2.8 per cent and it grew by 19.2 per cent - 19.2 per cent!

In every single area being looked at there was growth, except in forestry and in the fishing sectors. For me, a person who is of the classical economist mode – Keynes - what I was

impressed about was the inflation rate. While last year the Minister of Finance projected a 4.4 per cent increase in inflation, there was only a three per cent increase in inflation. The six per cent increase that public servants got actually translated into a positive three per cent in terms of increases. This is why I have a lot of confidence in this particular budget. Why? It is because the Minister of Finance has now looked at...and he has become a bit conservative in terms of his projections. He is saying that growth will be 4.1 per cent; non-sugar growth at four per cent; rice at 2.6 per cent; forestry, he said, will show a continued decline of 8.9 per cent; very conservative in mining sector, a 1.8 per cent increase and gold at 2.9 per cent. If you look, Mr. Speaker, at the projections which he has made you will see, Sir, that they have been conservative and at the same time it is very indicative that this economy continues to show real positive growth. That is why he can stand on theme of *Remaining on Course, United in Purpose, Prosperity for All*. So when one looks at the analysis of the growth...

Mr. Speaker: Your time is up Hon. Member.

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

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Nadir: While sugar did not achieve the projected growth rate last year, sugar production did increase by 7.1 per cent over the previous year, and it is pointing in the right direction. This supposed mismanagement that we are hearing about, in terms of sugar, ... We are going to see this year that the proof is going to be in the reality of the targets set. A very realistic target is set for sugar this year.

What does the budget have to offer? We have seen that the budget measures from previous years have been working. Last year there was a decrease in the tax rate for non-commercial companies from forty-five per cent to forty per cent and for the manufacturing entities, from thirty-five per cent to thirty per cent. Earlier this year, Banks DIH Ltd. said that its profits increased by forty-two per cent. The tax break that Banks DIH Ltd. got last year was equivalent to thirty per cent of that better performance. Thirty of that forty-two per cent could be attributed directly to the tax break. The policies and the measures are working. Banks DIH Ltd. is able to provide more income as shareholders returns on their investment. It means better wages and salaries for the

workers. That has happened to all of the companies that benefited from the \$2 billion of relief because of tax breaks last year.

The Minister of Finance is being extremely prudent. He is being responsible. We cannot be reckless on this because we are not out of the storm as yet. We have the global financial economic storm that is sweeping the world and we have been sheltered because of the better policies that this Government has implemented. It is much better than any other government has had in this country.

I will say what I like about this budget. This budget makes an allocation of US\$1.7 million for a Small Business Development Fund. In all, over the last three or four years, in excess of \$2 billion has been set aside for the Small Business Development Fund. I will say that the former Minister of Finance, the Hon. Member Carl Greenidge, is not here because he does not know all of the changes that have happened in this economy. He does not know about all of the changes that have taken place. [Mr. Harmon: That is why he came back.] He had to come back. Government is taking a bigger share of the economy. The share of the economy where Government is concerned is right now nineteen per cent of GDP and it has remained constant over the last eight years. It is not increasing. I can present him with those numbers and he can compute it himself, because there is not a paucity of economic data in this country today. The Hon. Minister of Finance and his staff know that information is available all over - by the website, at the flick of a finger. I am not going to browse... [Ms. Selman: You like to google stuff.] You do not say "google" anymore, you say browse. You do not say programmes, you say applications. [Mrs. Backer: You are selling it in the shop, your new job, at Gizmos and Gadgets.] I am proud to say that the Hon. Member Mr. Jaipaul Sharma's sister is the owner of Gizmos and Gadgets.

There is \$2 billion which is going to be set aside and...The honourable former Minister of Finance...Yes, for every single budget, before it reaches the Finance Minister, the estimates are approved by the Minister. When we see these estimates we will see that the Minister of Education signed them. We will see that the Minister of Housing and Water signed the estimates. Also there are, apparently the Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge does not know this, multi-year projections. One just has to flip the book and one will see it. Look at the revenue aspects. Today the budget comes in three volumes. [Mrs. Backer: What do you mean by "today"? It has

been coming like that all of the time.] Under this administration the budget comes in three volumes. One is narrative. There is so much information presented to us that we could analyse this budget and from it we could see that the policies and the programmes of the PPP/C, if we stay the course, are going to produce prosperity for all of our people.

I was talking to the issue...I know that the Hon. Member Mr. Irfaan Ali did not have an opportunity to speak to it, all of the activities that are happening in his sector, but the Small Business Development Fund is going to be a major boost. The Minister of Finance mentioned in his budget presentation that over eight hundred people will get direct employment, just this year alone, from the initiative of the small business sector.

There is more money allocated to the Competition and Fair Trading Commission. There is more money allocated to the Small Business Bureau. I am concentrating on those because there are a lot of speakers on this side who will deal with the other sectors. I know that the Hon. Member Mr. Ali did not get a chance to do it, but these are the sectors which are going to bake this bigger economic pie that we want to cut up in larger slices for our people.

Small businesses: In excess of forty thousand of them could benefit. Just as we have seen with the Women Of Worth (WOW) Programme, which Minister Manickchand launched, which has a credit facility for single parent women at six per cent financing, this Small Business Development Fund is going to be a guarantee facility. So those who do not have the collateral can get access to credit, and in particular the people in the Hinterland communities. My good friend from Surama, the Hon. Member Mr. Allicock, knows that Toshao Eugene Isaacs has now embarked upon acres and acres of cassava cultivation which he wants to do on a plantation scale so that he can do mass production of *farine*. The market for *farine* is big in Georgetown and in Brazil. What is his challenge? His challenge is access to credit because in the Amerindian communities the people cannot take their plot of land to the bank. It is communally owned. This facility is going to help even those communities, Member of Parliament, Mr. Allicock. There are policies and programmes being put in place to ensure that the economy can grow from the small and microenterprises to the big projects.

While some people may want to knock the Marriott Hotel project, and on one side of the House, it is only protecting those who endorsed a particular party, and funded that party, it is not about

closing any local business. The Marriott Hotel project is about expanding opportunities for all businesses. One of the challenges in the tourism sector has been to get a sector leading brand in Guyana and that is what the Marriott Hotel project will bring. We are not preparing in Guyana for the same level of tourism. The Hon. Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce is looking at numbers of one hundred and eighty and two hundred thousand and he is targeting a particular... I had the opportunity to speak with him a week ago [Mrs. Lawrence and Mr. B. Williams: Why did he not speak about it?] Time. He will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the plans we put down have been there for a little while but we had to tread cautiously. In 2005 there was a major flood in this country and we had to recover.

6.02 p.m.

The airport's expansion is not because there was a crash; it is because the planes are getting bigger and people do not want... There is nothing like poverty tourism. People who want to travel and those who are travelling from the First World expect to see first class facilities wherever they go. The World Tourism Travel Index - if you go on this site - will show that it is projecting growth in tourism in Guyana. Why? It is because the Government is making the investment in the infrastructure to make it better for people to come to Guyana. So the Marriot Hotel project and the airport's expansion are not to punish anybody but they are to build more opportunities for all of our people in the country. So this budget has a lot to offer to all of our people and in some areas Government will have to take that tough decision, as the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, and be involved, because without that we are going to continue to limp along.

This budget speaks to two particular sectors. It speaks to the Information Communications Technology (ICT) sector and also the energy sector. For any economy today the essentials are going to be electricity and connectivity which are being laid in this budget and by this Government.

It is an honour for me once again to commend this budget to the House and to compliment and congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance and his team.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Ms. Kissoon: It is with tremendous anger that I make my contribution to this Budget 2012. I must say, however, I am more than grateful to be a part of this Tenth Parliament under a new, yet challenging, dispensation which begins a historic era in Guyana's politics.

The residents of Region 10, the constituency of which I represent, are calling on the Government and the combined Opposition to re-examine and reconsider this Budget 2012 that is being debated before this honourable House. It was the late Dr. Cheddi Jagan who said, and I quote: "Development must carry a human face". For the past decade, under the Jagdeo's regime, there has been none, absolutely no development in Region 10, and this Budget 2012, which is before this honourable House offers nothing - absolutely nothing to the residents of Region 10. In actual fact it will cause added hardship and according to some residents stress and more stress. The residents are feeling victimised as the budget which they thought would have brought some sense of hope and scope for major developments in Region 10..., especially since President Donald Ramotar, during his 2011 Election campaign promised the residents, particularly those young people and single mothers, that he would provide one thousand jobs for the development of the Region and for their own individual upliftment. Instead he continues the Jagdeo's abusing and unacceptable behaviour as he accused the campaign team for the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) in Region 10 for using racial slurs during the 2011 campaign and so suggested that the residents of Region 10 voted race at the 2011 polls. So this budget is a reflection of pure aggression and vengeance on the part of the Government towards the residents of Region 10, who would have simply exercised their franchise. I would like this honorable House to know that it was hard work and consciousness on the part of the residents who were and still are fed up of being treated like the stepchild by its cruel stepmother; in this case it would be the Government. However, I wish to place on record that residents of Region 10 are demanding an apology from President Donald Ramotar and also to state categorically that we, the residents of Region 10, will not rest until we get what we deserve, and we deserve nothing but the best.

The PPP/C Government fails to promote economic growth for the past decade in Region 10. VAT remains the same. No subsidy for Region 10 means a dark future for our residents and more so no hope for our children; there is no significant increase for our pensioners and single mothers through public assistance. Shame on you, Ashni! I know many...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Ms. Kissoon, this is the Minister of Finance. If you want to say shame, you can say “Hon. Member”, but it is not by first name. It is not full-mouthed as we like to say.

Ms. Kissoon: Hon. Member of Finance, shame on you. I know many would say that if the rest of Guyana is paying \$64 per kilowatt for electricity then Region 10 should have no problem with doing the same. I challenge any one who dares to say such, as Region 10 still has a very high unemployment rate and there is no new growth and investment in development there, especially since it is this same Government which has caused us to be where we are today when it made a bad investment in the Texas-Ohio deal. All this so-called caring Government, according to Hon. Member Manzoor Nadir, is doing is taking away from the residents of Region 10, instead of giving and building.

I would also like to bring to your attention, Mr. Speaker, that the Government of Guyana refused to grant the Linden Utility Services Cooperative Society Limited (LUSCSL) an electricity distributor's licence after no less than three applications were made to Hon. Prime Minister who holds the portfolio for the electricity sector. The residents of Region 10 view this continued denial, of what is now being legislated to be a requirement, with grave trepidation, especially in light of the various moves being made in the electricity sector with regards to supply and distribution.

I now come to health. Over the last years we were told of the substantial allocations of the health sector. From 2009 to 2011, we heard about billions which were going to be spent. This year, we were also told that \$16.9 billion was allocated to the health sector. The Minister must tell this nation what value we are getting for these large allocations. Let me inform you, Mr. Speaker, that the \$2.2 billion hospital this Government claimed to have built, and called it the state-of-the-art hospital, is nothing but a disaster.

Sometime in 2002, the then Minister of Health, Dr. Leslie Ramsammy, after workers took industrial actions for various grievances, promised that instead of corporatising the hospital he would create a health authority. A draft was done, the matter was discussed at Cabinet and taken to the National Assembly, to create a health authority for Region 10. When the Bill was presented in the National Assembly it was named the Berbice Health Authority, since then the

hospital was then made a department of the Ministry of Health and the nightmare of the workers continues. There is no capital budget for the hospital, which hampers the ability of it to purchase important and sensitive equipment and to provide important services instead of sending patients all the way to Georgetown.

The first thing the Government did was to change the contractual arrangement and conditions of services. With these new changes, employees proceeding on the maternity or extended sick leave would lose their whole six-month gratuity. If they proceed on a one-month sick leave or no pay leave they will lose three months of gratuity, yet the workers were told that gratuity is in lieu of pension. Unlike what we are told, by a choice of workers to choose which category they prefer, contractual or the public service fixed pension plan, those workers were never given this choice.

It is also discovered that on many occasions drugs with short shelf life are dumped at the hospital. Doctors are complaining that, the essential drug list which is created by the Ministry, many of the drugs are outdated. Reagents and the equipment to carry out needed test in the laboratory are many times not available or in short supply. Those impact on the services which the hard-working doctors, nurses and medical staff would like to provide.

Challenges in the provision of health care by medical staff in Region 10 are urgently needed. There should be the increase in uniform and other allowances, housing schemes for nurses, reduction of cost for house lots, since many are single parents, retroactive payment and salaries increases must be applied to overtime, continuous availability of resources for the performance of nursing care, such as blood pressure sets, thermometers, special type of maternity gloves, modern delivery beds, scissors and simple medical tools. [Mrs. Lawrence: We do not have that.] We do not.

Mr. Speaker, the \$2.2 billion so-called state-of –the-art hospital has other issues that would cause you to raise your eyebrows. I am simply pointing out the fact that it is not always about the big figures, but it is about quality of work and services provided. At the end of the day, are we getting value for our hard earned money? I say no.

On December 24th, 2011, an employee very nearly suffered cranial injury from a fallen block. The maintenance officer stated that the incident was as a result of design the flaw - the state-of-the-art hospital we are talking about - and there is evidence of cracks in the walls of the building.

The hospital has no administration block, psychiatric ward, mortuary or cafeteria

[**Mr. Neendkumar:** You have to go to the psychiatric ward.] No. It is to put you. There is a non-functional Intensive Care Unit (ICU) room, as it is not equipped so as to function properly. Instead, there is a high-dependency unit where critical cases receive crucial care. There is also the need for functioning ventilators, monitors and a refrigerator.

Mr. Speaker, you and I know that everyday babies are born, and procreation is a major function of the family. It is a blessing that those innocent creatures are not aware of the conditions they are born under, or into, as the maternity ward is oftentimes so crowded that patients are cramped together in the room which comfortably holds only ten beds, or some patients are housed in the non-functional ICU room. It such a shame that a state-of- the-art hospital only has one ultra sound machine and, to add insult to injury, this machine has not worked since the commissioning of the hospital over two years ago.

Remember I alluded to the fact that this Government likes to call big numbers. Well, I will join it in letting this Hon. House know that the \$5 million dollars furnished for the destruction of sharps has been non-functional for eight months. Sharps are currently being stored in a shed. A garbage pile is situated next to the furnace which is located a few yards from the river. Residents who are across from the furnace complain about nauseated odours emanating from the furnace. Because of sewage backup, which was owing to plumbing problems, the X-ray room was non-operational for three days. In addition, the pump has been problematic, resulting in no provision of hot water to the patients, particularly those in the maternity ward.

Language barrier is also another issue at the hospital. There is continuous communication problem with the Chinese doctors, especially the gynaecologist - no wonder we are losing our babies - and so the paediatrician, who is also Chinese, often acts as the interpreter. Nurses expressed the need for a twenty-four-hour day care for their children and insisted that such a service will greatly stem the problem of absenteeism. There is also needs for lights to illuminate areas leading to the hospital and proper roads at the entrance of it. These issues highlighted here are not worker-friendly nor are we getting value for our money.

As the Hon. Member Mr. Moses Nagamootoo said water, the Government's favourite topic,... Similarly, as for the allocations made for the health sector, that for water is the same. There are

large increases over the period 2009 to 2011, and as we heard from the Minister, the same is for this year. Would the Hon. Minister tell the people of Region 10 how many additional households receive potable water? Sir, I am not asking about any kind of water; I am asking about potable water. The Minister spoke about some ten kilometres of transmission mains which were rehabilitated in areas such as Amelias Ward, Richmond Hill and Wisroc, benefiting over seven thousand residents, yet these same residents, including those at West Watooka, Retrieve and other areas, are still receiving mauby water through their taps. The main reason for this is simply because this Government refuses to pay attention to proper advice and it also refuses to train persons who will be able to properly mix the alum and lime which would cause the chlorination process to be effective so that the residents will receive pure drinking water.

Another contributing factor is the fact that of the six water plants, there is, only five are working. Very recently, as of last week, the West Watooka plant was, and still is, not working. The strainers have holes, and so the residents are complaining bitterly of receiving discoloured water, and the water also has elements. None of the water treatment plants have filtration in Region 10. All the plants need new pumps, so Mr. Minister, you need to seek advice from the right qualified persons and stop running around the place saying that “We spent billions.” We know that there is a plan to spend \$12 million on two new plants, one at Wisroc and one at Amelias Ward. It must be noted that new plants will ease the problem but a proper plant takes about a year to build. So the question is: What are your intentions with the existing plant during the time or period of building new ones?

I would like to bring closure and to also suggest the way forward to the much debated topic in the media, and that is funding for legal aid in Region 10. Let me start by saying that legal aid in Region 10 has helped approximately over one thousand residents. I would refer to a most recent case, where two children, a thirteen-year-old girl and her fifteen-year-old brother, had it not been for legal aid, would have been in a place where they do not deserve to be. The police entered the home and found marijuana. The male, who was present, owned the stuff and he was sentenced to five years in prison, but the children were remanded, and so was the mother. They slept on the cold floor in a cell at the Wismar Police Outpost. It was horrible. The children were placed on \$50 000 each bail and their mother, who was pregnant, on \$100 000 bail. Surprisingly, I am no lawyer, but I do not understand why, those children have to return to court on the 18th of April,

pending the Direction of Public Prosecution (DPP)'s position, especially since the stuff was owned and the accused sentenced. I hope that the Hon. Minister Jennifer Webster will look into this matter. I said all of this to state the importance of legal aid in Region 10. This is only one of them any cases.

I would like to place on record that the directors of legal aid in Linden do not receive a salary and they are serving the company and residents of Region 10 entirely *pro bono*. It is obvious that the Government does not intend to give any of the taxpayers' money to Region 10, as with the electricity tariffs. As far as the Government is concerned the company will have to be satisfied with what the aid agencies give to it since it has to approve it. But apparently taxpayers' money is too good for Region 10. This Government does not care that without continuous funding the continuation of legal aid in Region 10 can only be guaranteed with taxpayers, as you and I, Mr. Speaker, moneys. If this is not done, the centre will have to close; the clients will be abandoned and the staff sent home. In the best interest of the people of Region 10, I would like to propose, or suggest, that the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, Government and the Guyana Legal Aid Clinic, as they seem to be working together, to take over the legal aid centre with immediate effect, so that the people of Region 10 can also benefit from taxpayers' money which is allocated in this Hon. House.

It is the only way forward to remove all concerns of accounting practices. Though I am a bit reserve and taken aback, as I know for a fact that the Guyana Legal Aid Clinic is also audited by Ram and McRae Chartered Accountants. I only hope that it is not a deliberate act to discriminate against the residents of Region 10. As we read in an article by Mrs. Joan Mars, the former Minister said, and I quote: "*I ent givin you all nothing, and is nothing you all gon get.*" We, the residents of Region 10, really do not care about all the ego and shameless self promotions. We do not care who provides the service. Do not get me wrong. We do think that we are entitled to receive or benefit from taxpayers' money - our hard earned money - once it is approved and a legal aid centre is maintained in Region 10. So let us work together to remove all those obstacles which were identified by the former Minister of Human Services and Social Security, in her letters, so that the Region would, at last, be able to emerge from under the table and to take its rightful place at the table with respect to access to justice.

Mr. Speaker: Your time is up Hon. Member.

Ms. Ally: I move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude her presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Ms. Kissoon: The Regional Democratic Council must be given the scope to execute its mandate to seek developmental initiatives on behalf of the residents of Region 10 by the various boards and organisers empowered to address those issues. These boards include, but are not limited to, the land selection committee, BOSAI, RUSAL, Linden Enterprise Network, Linden Salvation Council, forestry, housing, the Linden Hospital Complex, Linden Electricity Company Inc, Kwakwani Utilities Inc., the Board of Guardians and National Procurement and Tender Administration Board. A regional housing authority, which allows for the Regional Democratic Council (RDC) to have an input, or be responsible for the issuance of house lots, should also be established. Also some mechanisms for the inclusion of RDC's representation on the work of the Guyana Water Inc. (GWI) in this Region must be pursued.

The constitution of the Tender Board and the Procurement Board is a sore issue. With the Government naming all, but one, of the five members of this Board, resulting in an extremely lopsided adjudication of these important matters. Note should be taken that, especially in the instance of the Board of the Guardians, but existent on all of the other Boards, we find political appointees from the Government doling out public assistance or other favours under the purview of the various Boards to perceived sympathisers to the discrimination of other residents who have given the APNU a majority mandate to govern their affairs with the expectation of the correction of these types of occurrences. This practice must be stopped expediently.

The National Communications Network (NCN) must have representation on its local board of management in Region 10 from the RDC. Indeed, the Government had recognised, during the course of the 2003 Mackenzie bridge protest, the position taken by residents that one of the television channels operated by NCN, at Linden, is actually the property of the people of Region 10. Originating, as it did, as a gift from the Green Construction Company to the people of Linden and providing the origin for television broadcasting in Linden. This channel must be returned to a committee of management comprised local stakeholders, and we the residents need more television stations, which will open views and create jobs especially for our young people.

I thank you. [Applause]

Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture [Mr. Baksh]: Let me join my colleagues, on this side of the house, to congratulate Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, for a well presented budget. There is an old saying that “When you are with the people, the people are with you”. I think that is the message I want to send to an old friend of mine, Mr. Moses Nagamootoo. I think, in this House, we are not here for political rhetoric; we are not here for half-truths, because that is what the oath of office we took stated in a very clear term.

Just now, we were told that there are no subsidies for Linden. I have, in front of me, that Kwakwani and Linmine would be receiving \$1.8 billion and \$23 billion in subsidies. I think we should really and truly study first and be honest when we are presenting our case to this honourable House. Also I want to say that the completion of distribution and transmission set, Christiansburg, Watooka, and the upgrading of services, in connection to metering, and supervision work, of \$105 million, all of these will be done simultaneously and ongoing in the Linden area.

I have heard also, many of us were speaking, about the question of old-age pension, but it must be seen from a different perspective. I see old-age pension as something that revolves from one point to another, and that is: How do they get other benefits, and their families get other benefits, outside of the pension they get? I have seen children of pensioners being benefited from school uniforms, in a form of assistance. I have seen also children in the Hinterland area - these are poor children I am talking about, poor people's children, in the riverine areas and in the Amerindian communities - receiving one hot meal per day. I have seen poor people's children in the most extreme remote areas of this country receiving free health services – those are of an extremely high cost. When we come to this House and speak about people having baggage we should assess ourselves on who are having the worst political baggage. I think, in history, since I know my friend Mr. Moses Nagamootoo, it is the worst political history for him, with the worst set of baggage. I see this, Comrades, and I am sad to say that I have been close to the Hon. Member Mr. Moses Nagamootoo for forty-odd years and I am sorry to know... *[Interruption from Members of the Opposition]*

Mr. Speaker: Allow the Hon. Member to speak please.

Mr. Baksh: ...how Hon. Member has deteriorated to such an extent. My dear friends and Hon. Speaker, permit me..., because sometimes we are very much isolated, in terms of what is happening all over Guyana, and that is because we are limited. A lot of our people in this House are limited in information. They do not have information because they are not on the ground; they are not really and truly seeing what is going on in other parts of this country, so they are limited with knowledge - they are very limited.

6.32 p.m.

I want the Hon. Members to recognise that when we took office in 1992 this country was like a man living in a broken house - the old house without even a *perah* to sit on, no chair, no bench, nothing. It was a big old house. Today we have made and renewed that house. That house we have renewed has very good furniture, very good infrastructure, better hospitals and better teaching facilities. That is the new house we are talking about; and if we are talking about the question of having a huge debt, it can be compensated for what we have achieved. We have achieved a lot. Therefore, my dear friends, I want to also give mention about some of the things which are going on at the moment, and I wish to ask every Hon. Member here, when we would have left here, completing this session, to visit those areas and if any one of you finds me to be lying, come back to this House and say "Mr. Alli Baksh, you are lying."

I want to say that there is an ongoing process of spending \$500 million to develop 5.5 thousand acres of land in the Aurora, Huist'Dieren and Good Hope areas. That, in itself, would give thousands of young people an opportunity, for the first time in their life, to own a parcel of land and they can be helping their families, and future families, and make them more economical viable.

We have recently constructed a road leading to one of the Amerindian communities - I am speaking as a Member of Parliament representing Region 2 - which cost \$30 million and a timber eight-pile bridge for \$8 million. Excavation of drainage canals in the Pomeroon to the tune of \$50 million and that is ongoing on, both on the northern and the southern sides of the Pomeroon which are called the upper Pomeroon and the lower Pomeroon.

We are also in Region 3, constructing sluice in Leguan \$54,732,000, at that Noitgedacht, that is at Wakenaam, \$16 million - these areas were neglected for a number of years - Palmyra/Ridge in Wakenaam, Bush Lot another \$21 million, eastern Hog Island \$15, 171,000.

In Region 4, \$45,360,000,325, this is for the construction of sluice Grove/Diamond, East Bank Demerara and an ongoing project at Williamsfield pumping station, \$202 million. Construction of a sluice at Profit/Abary, ongoing, of \$131 million, sluice at Cottage/Mahaicony \$104 million, construction of sluice at Mahaicony, again, \$166 million, at Mara, ongoing, \$31 million, Black Bush Polder, \$349 million, that is a new pump sluice in that area; rehabilitation of Lonsdale Sluice, construction, \$42 million, construction of a soak away structure drainage system in Linden, Block 22, \$12,830,000. These are all ongoing works at the moment, some of which have already been completed.

I could recall two decades ago, when I was a very young man, in Region 2, what was the plight of the majority of people in that Region, and this I am telling you, Members, is about ordinary farmers. There were approximately twenty-six thousand acres under cultivation and because of the negligence of the structures, such as roads, waterways, drainage system, we were only producing our crop around six hundred thousand bags or less sometimes. Today, there has been a change in the face of that Region. At one time it was called the Cinderella Region. I can tell you Cinderella has now become the princess. The thirty-two thousand acres, today, under cultivation produce an amount of 1.2 million bags of paddy, that is every crop, as compare to six hundred thousand bags prior to the PPP/C Government in office.

During the days of the Opposition there were only five rice mills in Region 2. Today we can safely say that that situation have been improved because paddy was found to be growing on the roadside. There were no opportunity for quick intake and as a result the paddy used to be destroyed; farmers were getting very cheap price for their paddy. Today there are seventeen mills, apart from the twelve mills which were there before. Five, the Opposition, when it was in Government, had before.

In the Pomeroon, because of the work which was done in excavation of new canals and trenches and drainage/irrigation system improved, eighteen thousand acres are now under cultivation for

coconut production; fourteen thousand acres are under cultivation with non-traditional crops such as citrus, ground provision and coffee.

Mr. Speaker, I should tell you also, I could recall, when the late Mr. Satyadeow Sawh was Minister of Agriculture I paid a visit with him in the Pomeroon River when we just took office and coffee was bartered for food stuff. It appears to be a dream, but that was the situation then. In other words, there was no money exchange for commodities produced in the Pomeroon. People used to give their coffee and they would have collected food stuff for their family. Today coffee price has moved up to about \$360 to \$380 per pound.

Coconut never used to be sold before. I am talking about *copra* used to be bartered, then, also for foodstuff, but I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, also today, because of the Government intervention to look for markets outside, we are now having water coconuts being bottled with a six-month lifespan and exported to not only communities in Essequibo or in Guyana, but in our schools, which has a better nutritious value than the things that we are using, bought from these companies, and so on. It is being exported also to Europe and the Caribbean, in hotels, and so on, and directly exported from the Pomeroon.

We have seen also, Comrades, that water coconut is being sold now because there is a market for it on the spot. Thirty dollars is for one water coconut and there is nothing which could be talked about as a commodity in the far-flung Region of our country where there is no market for it. At this moment, while I am speaking here, the information that I have gathered is that there are eighteen countries in which ninety-three different commodities are exported, including Europe, the Caribbean and Central America. This would clearly show that we are improving, we are exporting more. Gone are the days when we were importing bread in this country. We all can remember that. Today we are sending bread to people outside of this country, bread in terms of food and different commodity. I can name some of the countries we are exporting to, such as Barbados, Canada, Dominica Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, United States of America, Dominica, England, Lebanon, Mozambique, Grenada, St. Maarten, Jamaica, Antigua, Suriname and France. These are countries to which we are exporting commodities.

We have a great opportunity in Guyana - a golden opportunity in Guyana. While we are sometimes saying things in the same breath, sometime for political purposes and political

reasons, what we are doing is that we are trying to win out there. I notice some of the speakers, I do not want to mention names, were speaking not for this House, or they are not speaking for Guyana, they appear to speak for Guyana, but what they are speaking for...,because the television is there they are trying to have an audience out there and that is political trickery. My dear, Mr. Speaker, I think really and truly the oath that we took in office we should clearly understand that the populace outside there are not fools. The populace outside there are rich political thinkers and whatever we do in this House, whatever we say in this honourable House, they would take. The people would judge us outside there and certainly the rhetoric that we may be posing in the minds of those people they will come to the realisation that sometime... as they did in the past. The political history has proved in this country, where political rhetoric has never ever stayed for a long period of time. What stood the time was the question of clarity, honesty, dedication, principles and policies.

This Government has established policies from 1992 on. This PPP Government had a history of the 50s and the 60s when Guyana was called the breadbasket of the Caribbean. That was the time when we had a rich history where the people were united at one period of time and then the division came about because of race - racial intrigues. We have seen the division and the division today sometimes raises its ugly head and I want to ask those of us who are involved...because it would never ever lead to really golden future of this nation, and we should avoid... If anyone of us in this House has a vale in our eyes which see things in different colours we must not... We are taking oath by reading and holding up the Koran or the Bible or the Ramayan and we are seeing things and having a value in our eyes because of our special political reason. We must take that vale out of our eyes. Those of you who believe that there is a god should also believe that if you take that oath and you are speaking lies here those lies would one day...
[**Mrs. Lawrence:** That is an unparliamentary word.] I do not think it is unparliamentary, Comrade. Mr. Speaker, if it is unparliamentary...

Mr. Speaker: Just a clarification. If the Member is accusing another Member of lying then he is being unparliamentary, but if he is saying something is a lie, it is a noun. If you are accusing another Member, that is unparliamentary. Go ahead. You are not out of order.

Mr. Baksh: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. I did not mention the name of any individual. What I was saying, very honestly, was from my heart and my mind. That was the oath I was talking about - how we take the oath.

My dears friends, my dear Comrades, I think that this budget really and truly, presented to us by the Hon. Minister of Finance, gives us an opportunity to look ahead in the area where every aspect of it gives us many food for thought. In terms of the question of how the economy would prevail in the future, it gives us guidance. It tells us where the education policy would go in this new dimension, in the next period. It takes also into consideration of how our agriculture sector will grow more and more, in this budget. It also gives us very clearly where we are going, in terms of the future for our children. My dear brothers and sisters, colleagues of both sides of the House, I think when we have gone back and look at the budget in-depth we will see that there are merits in it.

I understand clearly from my former colleague and friend Mr. Moses Nagamootoo, when he was saying from his heart, at one point in time, that indeed this budget, in some aspect of it, has great merit, but as far as I am concerned every aspect of it has very great merit. I think what we need to do, instead of attacking and creating some level of fear and misguidance to the populace outside there, is that we should also take into consideration the serious nature and, from this House, send the right message, and when we go out there too we should go out with a unanimity, in terms of understanding what the budget really and truly means and how much it could benefit Guyana, and how much it can benefit our country as a whole.

I just want to, again, touch on one very important point which I want to raise here today and that is the question of the transportation system in our country. Not very long from now we will be having two roll-on roll-off ferries plying between Good Hope and Parika. I have heard many people saying many things, but as far as I am concerned I think that is a great asset for us, in Guyana. It is a great asset for the people in Essequibo.

For many a years, and you know since in the 60s, Mr. Speaker, *MV Malali*, *MV Torani* and *Makoura* were boats which were bought by the previous PPP Government and it is only now, by a gift from the Chinese Government, that there has been two new ferries. I want to say it has to do with a lot of touches, and the minds and hearts of the people who are living in Essequibo and

who went through a lot of trial for a long period of time. I say this because sometime there is twenty - because of the increase of production, and productivity, in that Region - full loads, canter loads, or truck loads, of perishable produce waiting for sometimes two or three days to reach to Parika or to reach to North America, because sometime those produce go out of Guyana, and therefore that would have advanced very importantly..., and the livelihood. It would have an impact on the Region in terms of more exportation and also to give more finance in the pockets of the ordinary poor people.

This also would give a lot of people the opportunity to expand and extend their crops. We have had some great difficulties not only in the Pomeroon area but we have had some difficulties in other areas. We went as much as possible to ensure that we were on the spot, whether it would have been be in the day, whether it would been in the night. We have always been there, because we have the people at our heart. We went up to two days in the Leguan/Wakenaam area where there were some minor breaches. I can assure this House that we went there within twelve hours and within twenty four hours both breaches were sealed. That is the kind of Government of the PPP/C. We are very proactive; we have been moving all over this country.

Mr. Speaker: Your time is up Hon. Member.

Mr. Baksh: Thank you very much.

Mr. Hinds: I move that the Hon. Member be given ten minutes to conclude his presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Baksh: Permit me..., because of the first time here, sometimes I need to know more about the procedures, and so on, but I think I have been learning very quickly.

I was saying just now that there is an opportunity which is being given for farmers in different parts of the Region. We went when there were difficulties in the Mahaica, Mahaicony and Abary areas - those were difficult areas - as a team and the teamwork that we went with was to see on the spot what we could have done to help the farmers in those areas. We did it diligently. We think the people were satisfied. The same thing occurred at the East Berbice. When there were difficulties in the East Berbice we went there. We did not go only when there were petty problems in the sugar industry. People go there to have political mileage and all those things. We

go there when we could find resolution and solution to simple problems that people face with on a day to day basis.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you also when we went on the West Coast of Demerara, a Black Bush Polder area, it is not in East Berbice area, and on the West Bank of Demerara, that is at Canals No.1 and No. 2 areas... I will tell you the reason why, Mr. Speaker. Some people were flooded and that is because Guyana is a very low-lying country. Guyana is a country six feet below sea level, and because there are markets for actually every single commodity, when the weather pattern is favourable... It is difficult to predict the weather condition. Mr. Speaker, why I can tell you this is when farmers find the conditions favourable, and once they know there are ready markets there, what they do is to extend their farms. Sometimes they took risk, as risk farming, and sometimes when there is a change of weather pattern they tend to lose. But that does not mean that we do not have a responsibility.

We have been responding very favourable. We have been assisting in whatever way we could have, and we will continue to do that because Guyana needs that tremendously. Guyanese need that tremendously, because of the vast amount of development we are seeing today taking place. We do not want that progress to stop. We will want to ensure that that progress continues because what is at stake is not what those of us in this House..., the majority of us who are now reaching the pensionable age and maybe that is why we are quarrelling for an increase too. But I think what we have to look for are those children who are the future generation of this country, which is a very high percentage, and they depend on much of what we in this House, the great planners of this House, have in mind and in store for them.

Guyana is moving apace in development. I remember many companies coming into Guyana, came through Timehri, going all over Guyana, being it in Essequibo, Berbice or going around Demerara, said that there is a serious transformation in this country as compare to many advanced countries. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that because of the turnaround of this economy in this country a lot of Guyanese are coming back from the Caribbean, North America, Europe. What we, in this honourable House, can do from this budget that we have got, a very realistic budget, if we put these things in place, is to encourage more of them to get here. We are a very underpopulated nation with a vast eighty-three thousand square miles. I can assure that two-third of our rich fertile land has not been touched as yet and our population is very small. I am sure

that if we move together, as a collective body, to ensure that this budget is passed, to ensure that this budget really and truly reaches down to the ordinary people, we can assure you that people will be coming back in droves - a lot of people will be coming back. Many of whom want to come back because they felt that when they went to the United States of America, or Canada, it was a bed a roses, but some of them who left here, probably, at that time, there was something to offer to them, because Guyana had nothing to offer at that time. But today Guyana has so many things to offer and that is why they are coming back; that is why they want to come back; and this budget would even make it much better for more people to come back and to ensure that we would have a population that would be able to move Guyana forward.

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

Dr. Norton: I rise to make my contribution in this Hon. House to the Estimates of Expenditure for the Public Sector of 2012 as presented by the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, Minister of Finance. This is the Minister's first of a maximum of five budgets for the Tenth Parliament, but we in the APNU are well prepared for those who wish for it to be less than five.

The Government in 2009 allocated \$12.8 billion to the health sector, \$13.2 billion in 2010 and \$14.5 billion in 2011. While this amount is increasing on an average of \$0.6 billion per annum, the percentage allocated to the health sector from the national budget decreased by an average of \$0.45 billion per annum, during the same period, remaining at nine per cent of the national budget in 2011.

This year, 2012, that allocation is \$16.9 billion. This large sum of money is for the health care infrastructure development, the training and development of health care personnel and provision of equitable access to quality health service. We do recognise the grand total of these allocations and hope that this amount will be sufficient for the different plans and programmes of this year. I say this to point out that it is the practice of this Government to come back to this Hon. House for approval of supplementary appropriation which has been already spent.

The Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh has brought five budgets to this National Assembly before 2012, totalling \$627.5 billion, but he has returned to this National Assembly with fourteen supplementary Bills totalling \$67.5 billion. With abated breath, we await to see what will happen this year.

In last year's budget, approximately \$1 billion of that \$14.5 billion for the health sector was allocated for the construction and maintenance of health sector buildings and infrastructure nationwide. Of this \$1 billion, \$235 million was budgeted for the completion of the two hundred and eighty-five-bed inpatient facility of the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, declared open on November 21st, 2011. The then President on that occasion repeated his recurring call of getting value for money. He said, and I quote: "In a country like ours, we have to make sure that we get maximum value for every dollar we spent, particularly in health care." Apparently, the President was not getting value for money in that sector by his insistence. However, what we found in this facility is a far cry for value for money, especially since it was constructed at a cost of US\$8 million. What we found: The floor is already cracked and peeled and stained by dirt because of poor construction work and the inferior quality of materials used for the finishing surface. A little gust of wind passed by that building and zinc sheets, from the roof, were blown off. More shocking, are the episode similar to that which took place in the so-called state-of-the-art \$2.2 billion Linden Hospital Complex where the nauseating stench emanating from overflowing sewage had both patients and outpatients running out of the hospital to escape the noxious fumes. This new facility had many episodes of overflowing sinks, toilets and washrooms on the upper floor of this spanking new building. That is not to say that the plumbing problem at the Linden Hospital Complex has been solved, for only recently the X-ray room was non-operational for three days owing to this sewage backup.

At this new inpatient facility, the ceiling is swollen with moisture and can fall and injure someone as what has happened, in December 24th of last year, at the Linden Hospital Complex. This, somehow, seems to be the work acceptable by this Government. For it was the Attorney General himself who said, and I quote: "Inefficiency is not an offence." Or probably this was the demonstration of what the Hon. Dr. Bheri Ramsaran described as efficient and effective use of real estate and taxpayers' money. Whatever it might be, this new institution can never be value for poor Guyanese taxpayers' money. Some of the patients' wards in the facility have no ventilation, except for the single door of both entrance and exit. There are no windows. While some of the wards have ceiling fans, those windowless wards have none. The wards on the western wing, with windows, have no blind and one can only imagine what happens to patients during the afternoon's sun. Of course, there are wards maids to clean, but they have to share their

mops and, besides that, they were told that they have to wait on this budget so that they could get enough cleansing solution - inadequate proportion to do their cleaning.

The promise of new and modern equipment by the Chief Executive Officer on the commissioning of this facility remains still a promise. Just to cite an example, the bio-microscope that is so necessary in ophthalmology is old and not working. In last year's budget, \$60 million was allocated to this institution for the purchase of medical equipment and this year another \$50 million is allocated. We hope that this time around we would be able to get a new one.

When this facility was declared open the public was informed that there are elevators to take patients to and from the different wards on trolleys and wheelchairs. The elevators are still working, but there is a dire shortage of wheelchairs, stretchers, trolleys and attendants for patients who need them to move around.

I work at this Georgetown Public Hospital, and I have been there for almost a quarter of a century, and it is a fact that I am aware that the Hon. Minister was enquiring about my contract. I say this, because the things that I am saying are factual. I do not say this because of any political expediency. I do not say these things which have nothing to do with me getting votes or me wanting to be the Minister of Health. This is about getting value for hard earned dollars, as the President has repeated with such frequency. Besides, that is what I am here for. I am here to point to the Government, to advise it, remind it, to criticise it when it is not doing what it is supposed to do. I must tell it of its shortcomings when I see its failures, its poor implementation and its less than effective policies.

7.02 p.m.

No stone must be left unturned to prevent the ever so often screaming headlines in the daily press, critical of the health system, as has happened only recently: *GPHC denies that 3-hour delay caused baby's death*. What does it say? "A mother claimed that her baby died in child birth because she had to wait for more than three hours for a caesarean section, even as the baby's hand dangled from her vagina." This is the kind of headlines that we are getting about the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC).

The Accident and Emergency Department is described as a place of accidents but no emergency on the part of the staff. There was a mother who waited for six hours with her five-year old little girl, dressed in school uniform, who had her finger squeezed by the door at school. She got to the hospital at 11 in the morning and at five 0'clock, we still found her there still waiting to be tended to. This is the centre that the Minister of Health refers to as the "centre of excellence".

Medical services may be free at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, but they do not have to be substandard. There is so much need to correct these inefficiencies and the Administration should take into consideration the various recommendations made and the shortcomings pointed out and make changes necessary to optimise patient care.

Take, for instance, the situation of the Gynaecology and Obstetrics Department of the GPHC. This is a very important Department because it deals directly with maternal and child mortality. Besides, the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation is the main referral centre of the country.

At the opening of the inpatient facility, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) loudly declared that the problem of bed-sharing has been eliminated. Not at all, for this still remains the trend of the day in the Gynaecology and Obstetrics Department, that is, mothers with their new born babies sharing one bed.

There is need for an operating theatre for emergencies and minor cases in this Department. This will certainly reduce the level of both morbidity and mortality, with the necessary anaesthesia support along with the reduction of waiting time for treatment and bed occupancy time.

It is recommended that the hospital should reintroduce, in this Department, the use of forceps and vacuum, along with acquisition of the necessary equipment such as cardiotocogram, cardiac monitors, defibrillators, amino hooks, pregnancy wheels, and dopplers.

Once again, we will be looking forward to seeing how that \$50 million allocated to the purchasing of medical equipment for this hospital will be spent. We are holding the Government accountable for finding the money that is necessary for the above and we refuse to accept the excuse that there is no money, as was pointed out by Guyanese rights activist, Joy Marcus, who said, "There is money. It is a question of what you make a priority for spending." This situation, as was mentioned before, exists not only at the Linden Hospital Complex with respect to the

ultrasound machine which never functioned, but also up to very recently at the Suddie Hospital. I think it took the intervention of the Minister himself to correct that situation, only recently.

A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) and other Guyanese are worried when news continues as in only last weekend when we heard of a 17-year-old mother who died in labour while being transported from the Linden Hospital Complex. We call on the Government to do all that is necessary to prevent maternal mortality and for that rate never to go back to what it was in 2010. These tragic and preventable deaths are the culmination of human rights violation against women and girls. Let us not forget that failure to provide available, accessible, acceptable and quality health care, especially emergency obstetric care for women during pregnancy and childbirth is a violation of women's right to life, health, equality and non-discrimination. It is heart breaking when the hopes and dreams of expectant patients are dashed to pieces, when the mother – and possibly the child - dies during delivery when it could have been prevented. Any preventable death is one too many.

It is of some concern to note that the much publicised waste disposal system of the GPHC is not functioning properly, if at all. High airfares during the last Christmas season was blamed for the delay of this US\$1.2 million plus World Bank Funded Hydroclave waste disposal system. According to the CEO, the facility was ready for operation, but GPHC made a decision to postpone the consultant's inspection to avoid purchasing tickets during the holiday season, owing to the high cost during that period. One reads in the newspapers of the modern disposal system to be completed since April 2010. Later, it was expected to commence on 1st November, 2011 of the following year, but it was postponed to mid-January of the following year and then again by the end of February this year. The Attorney General said, "Inefficiency is not an offence – cannot sanction." We wait for the denial or some form of explanation for what was said in the print media last Sunday. The article states that there is a price difference of US\$400,000 between the cost for the two pieces of equipment (Hydroclave and truck) and a quotation from the Canadian supplier which included charges for training. So far, we heard no response. This begs the question of if these inefficiencies that were pointed out will disappear, automatically, from the health system when the much talked about multi-million dollar specialist hospital is built. We are talking about \$672.5 million. There are so many other questions about this hospital.

In the 2011 Budget, an initial sum of \$150 million was provided for works that included a design of the hospital, land preparation, bridges, et cetera. Then an additional \$29.1 million was sought as provision for mobilisation payment on infrastructural works. This is tax payers' money and so we need to know and must be satisfied with how it is spent or is being spent. There is the opinion that the money allocated for preparation works for this hospital has been improperly and imprudently spent. In other words, to use the words of the past President, "We want value for our money." For this reason, on 16th February, 2012, when Parliament was asked to approve that expenditure and no reasonable explanation was given of how this sum was spent, we, APNU, voted against it and will do so again if needs be. This is not to say that APNU will not support plans and projects that are in the national interest. APNU will support any plan and projects that will benefit all Guyanese, irrespective of their race, religion or creed or irrespective of the country which is funding such plans and projects. APNU's action of voting against that expenditure is due to the lack of accountability and transparency on the part of the Government.

This whole Specialty Hospital, to some extent, like so many other projects that we are hearing about these days, is shrouded in clouds. Could not the details of this project be brought to the open public in the local newspaper rather than leaving it online? Not making the details public gives rise to a series of questions in the print media. Were it not for these open questions in the media, it might not have been now clearly revealed by the Minister, himself, that Guyanese medical personnel and other support staff will be working at this facility and that they will benefit from on-the-job training and formal training. Of course, one would have expected the same from the National Ophthalmology Hospital in Port Mourant that is run by the Cubans. There should have been, by now, Guyanese general practitioners working along with the Cuban ophthalmologists to receive on-the-job training as is being done at present at the Georgetown Public Hospital Ophthalmology Department. I seize this opportunity to remind the Hon. Minister of his Budget Speech last year when he promised three post graduate scholarships in Ophthalmology. The Government Medical Officers (GMOs) in that department are anxiously awaiting that scholarship.

It was interesting to note what was brought to light by the Minister, himself, in an effort to justify the accusation of someone being racist because the person asked questions about the hospital. He said that Cuban doctors were brought by this Government and, to quote the Minister, "cannot

speak one word of English” and no one protested. I can assure you that the Hon. Minister was wrong on that note. Yes, people are complaining when the physicians who have to impart medical treatment to them cannot speak English. This is being done right now at the Linden Hospital Complex.

We are grateful for foreign doctors to come to Guyana to work and help the Guyanese people, but one of the conditions for them to work in Guyana, which is according to The Medical Practitioners Act 6 (1) (b), the Medical Practitioner must be able to communicate satisfactorily in English. In other words, this law was being observed in the breach. The Hon. Minister has a moral obligation to bring such cases to the attention of the Medical Council for appropriate action rather than publicising it in the press. Some, in the Guyanese society, including the doctors from the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, of the highest level, have expressed the view that probably the upgrading of the existing public hospitals to provide specialist service could be the better way out, at least for now.

It is a known fact that private health care is a lucrative business and already the private sector has its tentacles tightly around Guyana’s pharmaceutical industry which is a multi-million dollar market. The Guyanese public needs to know if this Speciality Hospital is going to provide free specialist services to local Guyanese, such as the pensioners with their \$600 increase, who cannot even pay the so called “affordable costs”. At present, the Government only assists with 25% of the costs of a Computerized Axial Tomography (CAT) Scan and poor Guyanese patients have to pay, at times, as much as \$50 000 to get a scan, and in case of radiotherapy, 50% of the cost. Would this hospital be operating under similar conditions? What seems to be the likely scenario is that this hospital, which will be built by the Guyanese Government with Guyanese money, is going to provide a market for private health care providers with a heavy subsidy from the Guyana Government.

We are indeed happy to hear of the plans to expand and enhance the ambulatory services of the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation and when we saw photographs of three ambulances in the daily press, only recently, one could not help thinking that the GPHC had just acquired three new ones, which it so badly needed - since in 2009, in my budget presentation, I asked for that. Last year there was \$6.7 million allocated, specifically, for the purchasing of an ambulance for the GPHC. The CEO was right here saying, through the Minister, that this ambulance will be

furnished. Not so at all. It is the same, old three ambulances that were there at the hospital all the time, furnished only with one stretcher. One of the ambulances is not working at the moment. The other is for internal hospital use. In reality, the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation has only one ambulance. And if two patients need to be transported, then one of them has to lie on the floor of the ambulance. This particular ambulance crashed three times already. We are now waiting to see if the \$11 million allocated this year to the GPHC for the purchasing of vehicles will be used to purchase the much needed ambulance. APNU, like all other concerned Guyanese, wants to see an end to situations like, “Ailing man dies at Parika while waiting for ambulance for two hours”. There were three other patients with him, coming from Bartica. Even if this were not an accurate account of what took place, it is only a matter of time for something like that to happen. This incident only took place a week ago.

At the moment, all that is done is an ambulance is sent to pick up some injured body or sick person from wherever. As much as there is the need to train personnel in Emergency Medical Care who can accompany the ambulances, there is a dire need for more new and equipped ambulances.

In 2010, \$280 million was expended on training and, in 2011, it was \$345 million. Yet we are below that ratio of health caregivers to patients which is required, even by Third World standards. We hope that the now the over \$450 million that is earmarked in this Budget for Health Sciences Education and training is sufficient to take the human recourse capacity to where it is supposed to be, especially in the services provided by the nurses.

Let me point out that from 2007 to now, that is over the last five years, the largest number of nurses per 10,000 population was in 2007 – five years ago. The figures for all the years later were less. Only a few nights ago in the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation in the Female Surgical Ward, there were two nurse assistants working with 56 patients. This institution is the country’s main referral centre and has a vacancy for 50 midwives in the maternity section alone. In the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), of a nursing staff of 35, there are only 28. Of these, 25 staff-nurses are needed, but there are only 16. In the High Dependency Unit (HDU), of the total 18 nurses required, there are only 10. We now hear from the Hon. Minister that the health sector is preparing for its greatest influx of nurses, with just under a 1,000 nurses in training, with the talk again of getting value for every dollar spent. Sorry to say that the Nurses Association of Guyana

has a different and sad story to tell. The Minister boasted that the 1,000 nurses in training are of the highest quality, but what is the Nurses Association saying? “We are creating weapons of destructions. No need to go to Iraq. We have them here in our health centres in Guyana.” As such, the Guyana Nurses Association is calling for a temporary halt to the nursing programme until the necessary issues are properly addressed. But they are being totally ignored by the Authorities. The Hon. Minister intends to start a new batch of nurses soon, in spite of being informed by the Association of the adverse conditions that exist at the moment.

In 2009, for instance, a total of 255 professional student nurses were taken in, plus nursing assistants. For all these students, there are a total of 11 tutors, 4 of them retired for many years now, and, as such, are very advanced in age. According to the President of the Association, there are classes with as much as over 250 nurses. The student ratio, at its highest, should be one tutor to 25 students in the class room, one tutor to 12 students in the clinical setting and one tutor to eight students in the critical area. Many times there are no instructors for the students while they are on the wards and the clinical training is such an integral part of the nurses’ formation that it is mandatory. Most of the time there are more students than patients. Quite unlike the Hon. Minister, the Association is of the opinion that it is not producing nurses of the necessary quality since the facilities and environment are not appropriate and conducive to the production of properly formed nurses. It is convinced that the quality of nurses in Guyana was at a higher level in years gone by and it would really like to bring it back to where it once was, before it is too late. The Association added that one of the contributing factors to this state of affairs is the fact that many non-nursing persons in authority are making decisions for nurses without an iota of knowledge of what nursing is all about. It was pointed out that the Nurses Association has no part to play in the selection process of students, which is done entirely at the level of the Ministry of Health. The tutors do not know who are coming and how many are coming. The Association suggests that a selection board should be established for this purpose where an interview can be conducted with the applicants before the selection is made. It has reported situations where persons sent to the school cannot even write a proper sentence; some display signs and symptoms of drug addictions and drug abuses, even leaving traces of drugs in the class room; students displaying outburst of abusive and, at times, psychiatric behaviour; lack of interest in the course; indiscipline is at its highest; unwillingness to adhere to the school rules; punctuality; dress code; students sporting tattoos from the neck to the ankles; absenteeism; pregnancy and

hence maternity leave; and abuse of sick leave. This is what the Association has to undergo all the time.

What is of much concern is that the Georgetown School of Nursing no longer has any authority to discipline any student; rather, this is done at the level of the Ministry of Health. So it is not at all surprising that there is an 80.5% failure rate at the Georgetown School of Nursing. We hope that the \$25 million air marked for the rehabilitation of the School of Nursing will bring some relief to the overcrowding and poor ventilation at that institution. The few toilets are inadequate to meet the needs of the school population. This is compounded by a faulty and outdated sewage system and whenever it rains the sewage backflows which results in an unpleasant situation created by the accompanying stench. It is hoped that the staffing problem can also be addressed, as well as that the money owed to the trainers of the Patient Care Assistants for last year could be made available to them.

The Nurses Association is convinced that the Ministry seems to be only interested in the quantity of nurses being trained rather than the quality, hence the slow pace being exhibited to have continuing medical education for nurses to become mandatory. In Guyana, unlike other countries, nurses, assistant nurses and midwives are not mandated to present credits for their re-registration; they only have to pay a few dollars every two years.

The Nurses and Midwives Ordinance legislation is dated sometime in the 1950s. It is time that the Hon. Minister of Health stops talking the talk and brings a draft Bill to the National Assembly to correct this situation. Of course, passing legislation is not all, for we see daily what happens in this beloved country of ours with respect to abortions. Women are still losing their lives even though the Government has legalised abortions more than a decade ago. When this happens, persons look for all the different, wrong reasons to deceive, to shift blame and to hide the true causes, including the use of lack of education on the part of the victim, as was attempted only recently. That was to explain why an 18-year old teenage mother of two died in December last, after she had an abortion performed on her, illegally, by an uncertified physician in an unlicensed clinic. The fact is that none of the public hospitals here in Guyana offers pregnancy termination services. None of the public health facilities does abortions. This PPP/C Government is failing the Guyanese women folks once again. The Guyanese mother who needs an abortion must have \$10,000 to \$30,000 so that she can seek private medical assistance to end her

pregnancy. Those who do not have that amount buy non-prescription drugs and prescription pills, at times, drink various concoctions: the famous “bush tea”, throw themselves down: we know of the “slip and fell”, and use more drastic measures such as pushing knitting needles or umbrella bone wire inside themselves. Some succeed and survive, sometimes with serious injuries; others do not, and pay with their lives. These women do not die because they do not know that abortions are legal in Guyana now; they die because affordable abortion services are not offered at any public medical facilities. Just a few doctors are authorised to do abortions in Guyana, none from Georgetown Public Hospital. The CEO says if such a service is provided by that hospital, it will open a flood gate that he is not prepared to cope with. Today, mothers in Guyana with unwanted pregnancies are not much better off than they were decades ago. Terminating an unwanted pregnancy is every woman’s right in Guyana and the Government needs to move immediately to provide the necessary service. It is not enough to put the law on the books. If a woman who needs an abortion cannot afford or cannot access proper medical care in the public domain and is forced to go to unlicensed, incompetent, bottom house clinic, this problem will remain.

In his budget speech of 2010, the Hon. Dr. Ramsarran claimed – and I remember this carefully – that this Administration has put, over the past few years, eye care on the front burner, quietly. I made no comment then. However, the exact words were repeated in his budget presentation in 2011, with his loud praises for the National Ophthalmology Hospital at Port Mourant. I am expecting that he might make such a similar comment again in his presentation this year. For that reason, I want to offer a comment. I am indeed happy for all the patients who presented themselves and benefited from the services provided by the Ophthalmology Hospital at Port Mourant. I am sorry for those who got there but could not benefit from it because of lack of consumables and broken equipment. And I am happy for those who were there and were sent back to the Georgetown Public Hospital and had their problems solved.

Mr. Speaker: Your time is up, Hon. Member.

Ms. Ally: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Dr. Norton: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker.

The Hon. Dr. Ramsammy, on 21st November, 2011, said that in the 1960s Guyana was recognised in the Caribbean as having the best healthcare facilities available. He said so; I do not know. When I came back to this country to work at the Georgetown Public Hospital as an Ophthalmologist, what I found there in that department would support what the Hon. Minister did say. The Ophthalmology Department was a complete unit with clinic, wards, operating theatre and pharmacy. There were two wards, male and female, separated from each other, complete with nurse's station, treatment room, stock room and rest room with bed for the nurses. There were 40 male beds and 20 female beds. There was also a large lecture room. Both wards had a designated Eye-Trained Ward Sister in charge with eye-trained staff nurse always on duty.

The Eye Theatre had two operating suites, anaesthetic machines and change rooms for doctors. Similarly the Eye Clinic had a triage room, waiting area, two doctors consulting rooms, a pharmacy outlet and a room for minor operations. What is there now at the Georgetown Public Hospital for the eye department since it was placed on the front burner? There is only one operating suite with old, rusted and badly damaged instruments. In spite of the constant appeal for replacement, we are unsuccessful. [Mr. Neendkumar: Is that what you are using?] We are using it. Sixty million dollars last year and \$50 million this year were allocated to the GPHC for purchasing medical equipment. We are hoping that, at least, we can get some.

The wet-field cautery machine is broken for more than a year. The Hon. Dr. Ramsammy stood in this honourable House and said, "We are doing phacoemulsification cataract extraction in the Georgetown Public Hospital." That is something of the past. That machine was broken and cannot be repaired. Consumables like balance salt solution; the intraocular solution Miochol necessary for cataract operation cannot find favour with the authorities to get them to purchase it. Adequate types and amounts of sutures are not available, even suitable needles for retrobulbar injections are not available, and the anaesthetic solution that is there is not of the correct strength. Is this bringing eye care on the front burner quietly? Probably this is the reason why patients are gathered from downtown Georgetown and taken to Port Mourant to have their cataracts operated by an outreach programme by the Hon. Minister.

Let us further analyse the situation of the eye wards, if there is any. There is a room for two beds with no windows and one door that is supposed to be the Female Ward in the new inpatient facility of the Georgetown Hospital. Likewise, there are four male beds which, at times, will have to be shared with females. There is no nurses' station for the eye nurses, no dressing area and no storage area. The eye trained nurses are moved to other areas while nurses who have no eye training are made to tend to eye patients. Is this bringing eye care on the front burner? Maybe this is why the Minister is saying he is doing it quietly. Probably this is why some of us will never go to the Guyana Public Hospital for any form of treatment regardless of how minor it might be. We see you in private hospitals. Probably it is because we fear that something might happen to us quietly.

Of the \$14 billion allocated to the Health Sector, \$400 million went to immunisation in 2011. In 2009, the PCV 9 and PCV 13 vaccines were introduced and in 2010 the rotavirus vaccine was introduced. The Hon. Dr. Ramsammy did say, "We will introduce the Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine with the aim of arresting potential impact on women contracting cervical cancer and other STDs, first to girls and then to boys. This vaccine was launched on 11th January at the East La Penitence Health Centre.

There are serious issues with regards to this vaccine and the vaccination campaign. Some are of the opinion that this vaccine, which is very expensive, is unnecessary and can be dangerous to life and are openly opposed to the use of it in Guyana. They say that the Ministry of Health is better advised to promote preventative measures that take into account nutrition, social and economic conditions and lifestyle. There has been picketing exercises and petitions to the Ministry of Health to halt the campaign. As a matter of fact, it was no other than Dr. Barnett of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) who said that most Human papillomaviruses are benign and will go away without treatment. According to the *Journal of American Medical Association*, in the USA where the prevalence of HPV infection is significantly higher than in Guyana, only 3.4% of all these viruses result in cancer. Since this campaign is by far the most ambitious and costly campaign the Ministry of Health has ever embarked on, according to the Hon. Minister, one begs the question: if the so many other pressing public health issues such as mental illness, alcohol and drug abuse, child abuse, maternal mortality, diabetes and domestic violence, abuse of women, would these not make better choices for investment and action?

Others are concerned that there is no proof of a causal relationship between the HPV and cervical cancer. The campaign continues despite the protest. And what is the Hon. Minister calling the group of concerned women, sisters and wives? “Naysayers, political fringe groups masquerading as NGOs” And he is challenging them to come to him with their facts and qualifications. Dr. Janice Woolford from the Ministry of Health said that the programme is voluntary and started since 2001. There was information sharing and discussions with parents and guardians of the targeted schools. But the question is asked, and we can ask ourselves, what kind of information has been provided? Has prior and informed consent been sought?

7.32 p.m.

When and where were public discussions held? This Women Group is asking the Hon. Minister to meet with them on national television so that pertinent questions can be answered about the adverse effect of this vaccine that may not manifest itself until years later. Many are of the opinion after diligent research that the dangers of this vaccine by far outweigh the pros. They are saying that concerns are not limited to the actual introduction of the vaccine, but rather the manner in which the Ministry is handling it. Parents must be allowed to make an individual informed consent, a choice to accept or reject the vaccine rather than being subjected to an imposed decision. Answer the question.

I personally ask around the Georgetown Public Hospital who of the doctors and nurses knows of the HPV vaccine? Hardly any did know. Where was this information disseminated? Lack of proper medical education about this vaccine could cause persons to believe that this vaccine protects them from other STDs and they will not protect themselves or take the necessary safeguards.

The entire world and Guyana in particular has become very sensitive to many issues that no longer will be taken for granted. Gone are the days when persons would quietly and obediently line up for a vaccine without questioning those in authority about the pros and cons of these vaccines granted that not all medical information published online have been completely validated.

We read of large numbers of persons falling ill. Only last month in New York 12 girls fell ill after the vaccination, suffering from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

This vaccine was introduced to eleven-year olds girls at the school in La Penitence, a community that was described by the Hon. Minister in his budget speech two years ago as being the poorer level of the economic scale, he said, “living in home overcrowded with children”. Was that why the Hon. Minister invited all the little girls who took the shot to an appreciation lunch for the show of bravery? When this is added to the fact that we here this vaccine is approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration (US FDA) and is supported by the Pan American health Organisation/World Health Organisation (PAHO/WHO) and of the Medicine Healthcare Regulatory Agency and about all the adverse effects we cannot but help remembering that Tuskegee Syphilis Study. For those who do not know what it was, it was an infamous clinical study in Tuskegee by the US Public Health Service on the natural progression of untreated syphilis in poor black men who were made to believe they were receiving free medical help. It was as sensitive as that. It has become so sensitive. You have to be careful!

We insist, and I am saying this to you, that sufficient information must be made available to the Guyanese public by the Ministry so that we can weigh the risks and benefits associated with the vaccine. That is what we are saying.

It is sufficient that this information must be made available to the Guyanese public by the Ministry. This must be done, even if it means taking up the offer made by Dr. Chowdhury, the Dean of the Green Heart Medical Facility here in Georgetown who has offered to help the Ministry in educating the nation about this vaccine.

Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members I think this is an appropriate time to take the suspension. Could I, before we take the suspension, ask Mr. Neendkumar to please refrain from making comments like that against a professional. Thank you very much.

Sitting suspended at 7.36 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 8.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members the Sitting is resumed. Please be seated.

Dr. Mahadeo: Thank you Mr. Speaker. First of all please permit me to extend my congratulations to you as Speaker of the House officially and to Ms. Backer as Deputy Speaker. Permit me to congratulate all the new Members of Parliament (MPs) in the House and in particular the two MPs from Region 6, my colleague, Hon. Member Jafarally and Hon. Dr. Ramayya. Congratulations and welcome to this House which could be entertaining at times. You could learn from it at times and a lot of times you will shake your head and say “what...”

[**Mr. B. Williams:** ...am I doing here]

Mr. Speaker: No so-and-so's.

Dr. Mahadeo: I want to wish each one of you well in your sojourn in this Hon. House. As I stand here to make my contribution to the debate on the National Budget for the year 2012, I wonder what the next few days will bring and the numerous twists that these figures presented in the Budget will be given. However, I must first congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance for a well crafted Budget and an excellent presentation, a presentation like I said the last time was simple and full of information. It is a balanced Budget. I am sure the Hon. Minister and the Government would have liked to have a lot more in this Budget, but I want to remind us all that we have come a far way.

Year 2011 was one of successes in Region 6. I will elaborate on this together with, I am sure, my colleague Hon. Member Mr. Jafarally. Like in my last speech, I want to clearly say that we have not paved all the roads, nor have we built all the bridges. I will also say that we have had some shoddy work done by contractors; these we have noted and are working on. We have not done all that we would have wanted, but we did the best we could with the funds and resources that we had available.

I would like to state clearly that in Region 6 there have been consultations across the Region for the preparation of this Budget. Consultations were done at the level of the Regional Democratic Council (RDC), the National Democratic Council (NDC), the different departments, Health, Education, Agriculture, Drainage and Irrigation (DNI), et cetera. The residents of Region 6 were involved in the management of government institutions. They were given the opportunity to hold Government officials responsible and accountable.

The Regional Administration had for the year 2011 many community meetings. This does not include the community feedback meetings that we had in health and in education. I also want to say that after the Budget was presented we had meetings across the Region with members of the community and we got feedback, some of which I will relate later.

To get into some details, there was development work across the Regions. In every village work was done, not taking into account the makeup of the village. With Central Government's help, works on 23 kilometres of road in Canje, West Bank Canje and Black Bush Polder have either been completed, and works are ongoing. Street lights were put up in 2010 and they are continuing to be put up in other areas in 2011 and even up to now. New lands for farming and rice cultivation have been opened up; this together with the new varieties of rice has helped Region 6 to produce more rice than ever in its history.

The Women of Worth (WOW) and One Laptop Per Family (OLPF) projects have made an impact on the lives of Berbicians. Four new health centres were constructed at Skeldon, Ma Retraite, Whim and at Angoy's Avenue. All health buildings were in some way renovated or repaired. An ambulance, a tractor and a slasher were bought.

I must mention here that there is new administration in Region 6. Mr. Armagon, Regional Chairman and team have promised to have the community more involved and to be held more accountable by the people. A more transparent administration is promised. He has like his predecessors, PPP Chairmen, opened his doors to all persons independent of political persuasions. The practice of involving the community to monitor the works being done by contractors will be expanded to include all contracts. The community will be encouraged to take ownership of these projects in their community and they will be encouraged to be the eyes and ears of the administration.

The next five years promises to be interesting. I must again mention like I did last budget that inspection of all works will be done by the works committee that is made up PPP and Opposition Members. Again, like last year, I would like to call on the Opposition Members that they need to make their objections and suggestions in the committees so that only good works can be passed for payment. This is what they were elected to do at the regional levels also. They must make the final assessment after the community would have made their contribution.

Another fight that needs to be mentioned is that there are a number of different contractors to whom works were awarded last year. So it is clear that works are given not to choice persons or companies, but it is the best contractor that gets the job.

I extend an invitation to the Hon. Members of the Opposition to visit with us when we go in the fields. For example, the Regional Chairman has statutory days when he visits Black Bush Polder areas, which is ever other Wednesday. I invite them to be part of the team and be there when the community makes its input, raise your issues in front of the people and join with us as we visit areas that you might consider to be your support areas, because works are done there also.

In the area of health care for 2010 we were all saddened by three maternal deaths in Berbice. For 2011, there was one such. We are still not satisfied. I want to state however that the cases investigated analyse, and in fact Mr. Speaker, like a member mentioned before me, any avoidable death is a death that we should worry about, not only for the maternity unit but for all cases, as such all deaths are investigated thoroughly and recommendations made and systems put in place.

Having said that I must say that the Berbice Regional Health Authority, which is the authority for health in Region 6, have a number of achievements which they can boast about. Once again I must acknowledge the full and unconditional support we received from the Ministry of Health. The fourth services agreement was in effect and we reported to the Ministry of Health again same. We were under continued guidance of the National Health Sector Strategy and the (Berbice Regional Health Authority) BRHA second three years business plan for all quarters in the year 2011, the BRHA topped the country with the scores of the services agreement when they were tabulated. Kudos to the hardworking staff of the BRHA!

In training, we completed the first ever psychiatric patient care assistant programme in Guyana and in the Caribbean. These 21 specially trained persons are now assisting in management of patients in the wards and chalets of the National Psychiatric Hospital. The once neglected National Psychiatric Hospital under the PNC has under the PPP/C been getting the kind of attention, starting with the then Hon. Minister Gail Teixeira in 1992 through to the present Minister Hon. Dr. Bheri Ramsara, that will once again make it a premier institution.

Of course we are not where we want to be as yet, but step by step we are getting there. The Psychiatric nurse practitioner programme was completed. It was the first of its kind in Guyana and was done in collaboration with Dalhousie University. What is more unique about this training is that it was done mainly online. The E-classroom was set up in the boardroom of the boardroom of the BRHA and this was used to conduct the classes. At the same time whilst this training was being done, with the help of Central Ministry, a new Acute Care building was started in 2011. This structure will be completed by the middle of this year and with help, our staff will provide a much better level of care to the acute cases with the better facilities that will be available.

The more modern medications that were available yearlong has helped to reduce the burden of diseases in the national psychiatric hospital and for psychiatric patients. The Pharmacy Assistant Programme in Berbice produced eight Pharmacy Assistants that have boosted the staff in the BRHA.

Mr. Speaker: Dr. Mahadeo, one second, could you assist me? There is a gentleman who is residing at the fence. Stand please. We have a resident of the National Assembly who needs to be at that hospital that you are speaking so glowingly about. You can assist me in getting him there.

Dr. Mahadeo: Yes Mr. Speaker, we can speak about it after.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much.

Dr. Mahadeo: There is a procedure that we go through. May I continue Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Yes

Dr. Mahadeo: Voluntary Counselling and Testing sites (VCTs) from both the Government institutions and the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) were given refresher training and they have been certified.

In terms of HIV a target of 12,000 tests were set for the BRHA for the month of testing. In fact we did 14,614 tests in 2011 and we effectively managed to test 12% of our population that contributed to 33% of persons tested for that period. I must point out that we managed to do tests for our population in all areas, Riverine, Hinterland, villages and towns on the Coast during

the period of testing. For a true representative picture of HIV infection rate we have again done a real sample.

For blood collection, a target of 1,000 was set for the BRHA in our services agreement. We actually collected and sent to the National Blood Transfusion Service (NBTS) 1,067 units. We partnered with Churches, Mandirs, Masjids, health centres and NGOs and due to their efforts and those of the BRHA staff, 86.6% of the blood that was sent to the NBTS was from voluntary donors.

We had our second telethon for blood donation last year, again sponsored by the Little Rock Television Station. Speaking about using television for health, the BRHA has a half an hour (Local Education Authority) LEA informative programme every week on CCTV channel 19. The cost is born by the television station itself. This programme is, "Your Health in Your Hands", and we have had very positive responses from viewers.

Extended Home Based Care Programme has been a real continuing success story. This is the programme that started out to bridge the gap between the hospitals and bedridden patients and taking care of those persons in need. We have extended the programme to include persons over the age of 75 who want to be on the register. It also now includes visits to some of the mothers and newborns. It also includes some of the psychiatric outpatients. This programme that offers monthly and quarterly medical services to the various communities has patients and clients in communities across the Region. The visiting team will include a doctor, a dentist, a community health worker and staff from the health centre. Last year we had 866 persons on our register, some of them were visited six times for the year. For this year so far over 500 persons have already been visited at their homes. The staff continued to deliver care with pride in their work and I publicly commend them.

In addition to the home-based care there are outreaches by medical teams to Hinterland and Riverine communities, regular outreaches to Orealla, Siparuta, Barakara, fortnightly outreaches to Yakusari done by the doctor and team from the Mibikuri Hospital. Monthly outreaches that we used to have at Mara Schepmoed Brothers on the East Bank Berbice were increased to fortnightly visits. There were also outreaches to Toko and Angoy's Avenue. These do not include the special outreaches during floods and at the request of Regional Administration.

I must make mention here of the new engine which was given to the Orealla community. So now the community has its own boat and engine that is dedicated to health. There, the community has taken ownership of the facility. The management committee of the Orealla Health Centre that was set up has oversight and helps to manage this boat and engine.

Barakara was also given a boat and engine and they now have a Medex who lives there to service the community, along with a renovated health centre.

The dental department made significant progress. There has been a very active school programme. This was boosted by the introduction of the dental bus in a mobile unit to do works at the schools and also to service communities, the school children being priority. For this year so far 656 school children and 78 adults benefited. The adults are being seen during the school holidays. The procedures done by the dental team includes prophylaxis, floral application, fillings and minor surgeries. The team that operates the bus includes a dental surgeon, a Dentex and a dental technician. Congratulations to Dr. Chalwan's team for a good job.

In our endeavour to be more accountable to the people we serve we had faced the community meetings at our health centres. At these meetings held at the different health institutions from health posts and health centres and hospitals, the staff reported on the work they did for the previous year to the community. They also informed the community on their plan for the next year and specified targets that they could be held against. In addition we also had general patients satisfaction surveys using questionnaires and interviews that were carried out at the different hospitals and health centres. The results of these surveys were analysed and presented to the board, recommendations were made and implemented. Our Complaints Department received 518 complaints, all of which were investigated and action taken.

For this year so far we have faced the community meetings at Baracara, Whim and Brothers Health Centre and we have started the new Patient Satisfaction survey. We continue to maintain our website and I again invite anyone who is interested to check it at www.rha6.gov.gy where you will see some of the works that the BRHA has been doing, our plans, our programmes and our reports.

2011 was a year in which we had some setbacks that we acknowledge. Some of these had been mentioned previously and they have been given great deal of publicity, including in Region 6 the

issue with the Skeldon sugar factory. These we cannot and do not ignore, instead we have analysed and are dealing effectively with the issues. This is why I would like to thank the Ministry of Finance for putting the billions of dollars to help put the sugar industry strongly back on its feet, especially for the residents of Region 6 since we have three large sugar estates in Berbice.

I would also like to make mention of the \$6 million that will be going to cushion the increase cost of electricity since it will go a far way in helping the poor to meet their bills. The increase in income tax threshold is another plus for the wage earners.

I now move on to the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Department. Our vaccination coverage is in the nineties after complete tallying is done. An example of coverage is BCG – 97%, MMR 1 year – 99%, OPV – 93%. The Region received the award for best performance in the introduction of a new vaccine and I would want to publicly thank here Dr. Wolford for spearheading the vaccination programme. Because of this, Guyana received an award in Barbados for its vaccination coverage.

Again in Region 6, unlike the impression we would have had from the last speaker, the HPV vaccine was not only introduced in Georgetown, it was also introduced in Region 6. Sixty percent of our children have already received their first dose, that is, 665 of the targeted 1,164. One hundred and forty seven children have already received the second dose. This is in spite of the targeted campaign – I wrote this speech before I heard the last speaker – by some against the introduction of this vaccine. Mothers are coming forward to thank the Ministry of Health and the BRHA for the introduction of the vaccine after checking pre-reviewed sites and information coming from PAHO and WHO.

I know that Dr. Barnet who is the Head of PAHO in Guyana made several speeches about this vaccine. The vaccine that we are using covers all four of the viruses; two of them are very malignant. Cervical cancer in Guyana is one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality for our young women.

When people speak against this vaccine, twenty five years from now when a child who is ten years old that should have gotten the vaccine but did not take the vaccine because of negative propaganda, is in her 35 – 50 develops cancer, these people who are speaking and discouraging

them right now will not be there to help them. If you want to read about – the Hon. Minister Frank Anthony just showed me on his phone – check www.medscape.com or the PAHO website, you will find pre-reviewed information.

I listened to the Hon. Member making his remarks and I want to say that Minister Ramsaran never claimed that the Cubans do not speak English. I do not know where that information was gotten. This is misleading.

Mr. Speaker: Your time is up Hon. Member. Is anyone going to ask for an extension for the Hon. Member?

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I propose that the Hon. Member be given another fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members we are ending at 10.00 p.m. and we have five speakers to go. Continue Hon. Member.

Dr. Mahadeo: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I would like to respond to a few things raised by the Hon. Member who spoke before me, one is about the percentage drop that we had in spending in health. We have had absolute increases in the budget. From year to year we have had absolute increase in health and that cannot be denied. The actual figures are increasing; therefore a lesser percent from a bigger budget becomes a larger absolute dollar value.

Listening to the last speaker, I was remembering the Jekyll and Hide Story, but in this case it was only the Hyde which came over, everything bad and everything negative. I did not hear him say anything about the new hospitals that were constructed at Diamond, Leonora, Suddie or Port Mourant. We need to consolidate so that what the Hon. Member said before me, that we need better bang for the dollar. We do not need to build new facilities, but to build on what we have.

The Hon. Member mentioned about emergency at Georgetown Public Hospital Cooperation (GPHC). Right now at GPHC, and I am sure if the Hon. Member is worker there he would know, but did not mention that there are postgraduate training programmes in emergency medicine, in surgery, in paediatrics and soon to start in obstetric and genecology. There is post graduate

medicine right in Guyana with help from overseas universities. I am not sure that the Hon. Member is unaware of this.

A new theatre is right now being rehabilitated in GPHC. The Maternity unity will be having their own theatre that will be functional for maternity and obstetric cases. Although the Hon. Member mentioned issues at Linden he did not mention that for the year 2011 there were no maternal deaths. The supply of blood to the Linden Hospital Complex was improved and this allowed us to prevent maternal deaths. The Hon. Member made mentioned about training for ophthalmologists. I think he should be aware that we have one ophthalmologist that has returned and is presently working at GPHC, Dr. Sugrim. There are four more in training right now.

I would like to remind the Hon. Member that GPHC is not the whole health sector and not only doctors from GPHC should get post graduate training, but doctors across Guyana.

8.30 p.m.

I do not know if Minister Ramsaran or Minister Ramsammy could tell me what was the number of cataract cases done before Operation Miracle at the GPHC. How many were done per year?

[Dr. Ramsaran: Sixteen operations a year before Operation Miracle.] There was a backlog that was so long the Government had to put in place a special programme to get rid of the backlog. Now we do not have any backlog. What is so wrong if the Government takes persons from the different regions, pays all the cost, takes them to Port Mourant, gets the surgeries done, and takes them back home? What is wrong with that? Nothing is wrong with that.

I also want to remind this Hon. House that in the days before Operation Miracle a cataract surgery used to cost \$200,000. It seemed as if there was a deliberate delay in getting these surgeries done so that people would have to seek it from the private institutions. Now, even at private institutions, the cost of the cataract surgery has come down to \$25,000 and \$30,000 because there is no backlog; it has all cleared up. We did not hear that! We did not hear that!

We heard about the Guyana Nurses Association making remarks about the training programme that is ongoing, and the number of persons coming in to be trained. I want to remind this House that it is the Guyana Nursing Council that certifies these things and that the Guyana Nurses Association has a representative on the Guyana Nursing Council. I also want to say that for the

last midwifery examinations - we did not see this in the newspapers either – the New Amsterdam School of Nursing had 100% passes. I did not hear that from the Hon. Member. The Georgetown School of Nursing had a large percentage of passes.

In 1993 the then Hon. Minister of Health brought pictures to this Hon. House - I am sure that records could be found - and showed the state of the theatre at the GPHC, the only functioning theatre they had. The walls had fungus; it was black with mold. That is what accounted for the large number of post operation infections which occurred in 1993. Now check the theatre; it is very different. It is comparing chalk to cheese.

I would want to close by talking about the visits we made. In the post budget meetings we had some people demanded of me that I say some things in the National Assembly. They said they heard last year some Hon. Members sitting in the House saying that the Government needs to invest more in GuySuCo, needs to lend a hand to the industry, would not fail it since it is too big to fail, since it affects the livelihood of so many. They do not want to see criticised the moneys that would now be plugged into the industry. The people are watching; they are listening.

I was asked to remind this Hon. House at a meeting in Port Mourant that the minimal wage in 1990 and I know about 1990, because I started working as a doctor in this country in 1990. When I started working as a doctor in Guyana it was \$1,027 at an exchange rate of US\$1 to G\$90. If we calculate that it comes up to US\$11.41 as the minimum wage, not a pension. This would translate to \$2,282 dollars today. I started working as a doctor with a salary of approximately G\$3,000 per month in 1990, at an exchange rate of US\$1 to G\$90, this amount came up to under US\$40 per month. Times have changed. I know that the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government wants to give us more but with the limitations that we have - we have worked within our limitations - the budget is the output.

Congratulations Dr. Ashni Singh. I want to commend this budget, and to say that I fully support it. Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Dr. Mahadeo. I now invite Mr. Desmond Trotman to make his maiden speech in the Assembly.

Mr. Trotman: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I want to begin to state my reaction to the Hon. Minister of Finance's 2012 Budget by adding my voice to those persons who have been lamenting the fact that the National Assembly in 2012, in the new dispensation ushered in by the results of the November 2011 election, with the continued presence of the barricades which are erected around its perimeters every day there is a meeting of the Assembly, has become virtually inaccessible to the public. This situation did not obtain during what we, in the then opposition, often referred to as the worst days of the People's National Congress (PNC) regime. In that period Mr. Speaker, meetings of the National Assembly were accompanied by the staging of opposition dissent outside of this building on the streets surrounding the Assembly. I was there and took part in a number of those expressions of dissent, unrestrained by the presence of security forces on duty.

[**Ms. Teixeira:** You were lucky.] Because you were not there. I was also privileged to follow the debates in the National Assembly through public address (PA) systems that were strategically placed around the Assembly building. However, since 1992 and throughout the life of the PPP/C Government, which takes tremendous pride in styling itself as the most popular and democratic in the history of this country, the opposite exists. The National Assembly, under the PPP/C regime, has taken on the features of an institution under siege with little or no relationship to the people whose fate it oversees.

I would have thought that after those unique election results, citizens of Guyana would have been enjoying greater freedom to express to Members of the National Assembly and to the world at large, their concerns about issues. The people should not only have to wait to visit an MP's office in order to speak with that person. They should be allowed, as is done in other countries, to address their representatives as they make their way in and out of Parliament. However, instead of there being greater freedom, what we have, in effect, are greater restraints. The barricades around the Assembly have been extended and very soon may reach as far as Camp Street to the east. Is it that the erection and retention of the barricades is the PPP/C's response to what it perceives as the revulsion, disdain and contempt which the populace has for it? Is it that they feel a greater sense of security when they see persons whom they believe are opposed to them confined behind those steel barriers?

I recall the days when you had cause to condemn this state of affairs as unacceptable and disruptive. I do not believe the change in your status will force you to conclude otherwise today.

I wish, therefore, to call on you and all Members of this Hon. House - who believe in freedom and subscribe to the tenets that the right to protest and the right to freedom of expression are inextricably linked with the democratic aspirations of the people - to do all within our collective powers to ensure the speedy removal of the barricades which impinge on the fundamental rights of citizens to express themselves on those issues which they believe impact negatively on their lives.

Additionally, I wish to call on you to facilitate the desire of citizens, who congregate on the streets outside to follow the debates, by ordering that PA systems be once again placed at strategic points around the Assembly building for their convenience. One of the legacies of this Tenth Parliament is its recognition that freedom is a cornerstone of democracy. Those of us who subscribe to that should work to make it a reality.

I now wish to turn to the Budget, and I want to begin by saying that I believe the extent to which a government demonstrates its concerns for its most valuable resource – the people of the country – can be gauged by the investments in the social programmes that government makes to uplift their standard of life. The impact of these investments must be seen in most, if not every, aspect of the lives of the people. Where there are shortfalls and serious omissions, the impact of these must be properly assessed to understand the effect they will have on those who are most affected by them.

It is my contention that the Hon. Minister of Finance in his budget presentation to this House on Friday, 30th March, 2012, in spite of the claims he makes, and the numbers he was at pains to present as being indicative of the forward movement in people's fortunes, in fact, de-recognised the value and importance of people in Guyana, particularly the most vulnerable. The Hon. Minister of Finance attempts to convince the public that everything is "hunky-dory", that the future is rosy, that workers with the increase in the threshold are now poised to enjoy the best times of their lives, failed miserably. The measures which he proposed to impose, particularly those which negatively impact on the lives of the most vulnerable in the society namely, working people, women and children, stand in stark contradiction to this position. Already, with the removal of the electricity subsidy from Region 10 consumers, Government has immediately taken away some of the alleged benefits from the recipients of public assistance and old age pensions, and also the poorly paid workers of that community, with the resultant hardships to

follow. Let those of us who reside in other Regions not be deluded into believing it will not happen to us. It will; our turn will also come. Let us be clear on one thing, the Government will find ways and means of ensuring that a very significant part of the so-called benefits from the increases find itself back in the hands of the government coffers.

It is my contention that the Hon. Minister of Finance has failed to justify the retention of the value added tax at current levels and the minuscule and contemptuous nature of the increases he announced for public assistance and old age pension benefits. Just as importantly, he has failed to give a rationale for the absence of any consideration, in his budget proposal, for wages and salaries increases for public sector workers. When taken together, these acts of the Government make a mockery of their claim that the budget is “people-oriented”.

When one takes into consideration the fact that this Government has committed to paying huge pension benefits - the likes of which have not been seen before in this country - to former President Jagdeo, benefits which would allow him to live out of office in a style that is comparable or even better than when he was in office, the measly increases which the Hon. Minister of Finance has earmarked for our elderly is best described as outrageous and disgusting. The situation gets worse when one does the math. You will see that a pensioner, at the existing figure of \$7,500 will be able to accumulate the equivalent of one month of Jagdeo’s pension, at current levels, only after 33 1/3 years. In others words, unless a pensioner lives to the ripe old age of 98 and one third years he or she will never draw that one month of Jagdeo’s pension. It is in that context that I shouted shame when the Hon. Minister made his announcement last Friday. If this is not brutal treatment directed at one of our most vulnerable categories, what is?

And I want to add that the Members over on the other side of the House who proposed the increase are so embarrassed by the amounts, for both public assistance and old age pension beneficiaries, that they attempt to hide their embarrassment and argue justification by referring to it in their propaganda campaign in percentage terms rather than in dollar terms. I heard the junior Minister of Finance on one of the Government’s propaganda blitz attempting to rationalise the old age pension benefits as a form of assistance rather than an income. Of course, if he was a man of God he would be close to the flock and hence he would, I believe, have a better understanding of the situation. It is clear that is not the case. His nonsensical position indicates the extent to which he is out of touch with what is going on here in Guyana.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member your choice of words such as nonsensical... you are referring to a Member of the House. I once referred to a former President as being myopic and it nearly led to a fight.

Mr. Trotman: Could I say idiotic, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: No, that is worse. No. Mr. Trotman. Find a better word than nonsensical and let us go on.

Mr. Trotman: His position only indicates the extent to which he is out of touch with what is going on here in Guyana.

While it may be true that old age pensions were not intended as an income to recipients, it is very true that for a large number of persons the only monetary source they have is what is derived as old age benefits. I want, therefore, to challenge the Hon. Minister of Finance to immediately review the figures and to propose realistic increases in keeping with the rise in the cost of living in Guyana, and the persistent weaknesses in the country's social safety net. In fact, the target for old age pension should, I believe, be at least half of the minimum wage, which is a reasonable benchmark. Right now all the Minister of Finance seems to be doing is simply plucking figures like rabbits out of a hat.

I believe that the Hon. Minister of Finance should also review the Value Added Tax (VAT) with the intention of reducing it, thereby relieving the burden of citizens. If the Hon. Minister undertakes to do this he will not be losing face but rather he will demonstrate to Guyanese that he is capable of correcting mistakes. I believe that if the Government fails to respond to the entreaties of the Opposition on those measures we must reject the budget proposals as unacceptable in their present form.

The shortcomings of the budget do not only indicate that the Government lacks a social conscience; they also indicate that the Government acts with a certain degree of malevolence. Traditional public sector workers are not considered a favoured constituency, and so are not deserving of meaningful salary increases. Bauxite workers and their families did not deliver the votes at the last election and, therefore, are punished with the removal of their electricity subsidy,

but the subsidy to the sugar industry was increased. Old age pensioners and public assistance recipients are not clearly identified supporters and so benefits are grudgingly disbursed.

That is why I believe the proposals in this 2012 Budget indicate that the Opposition must join together and offer to defend all workers, and other vulnerable categories, against the onslaughts by Government, until such time as they can defend themselves. I also believe that the Opposition owes it to those who voted for us to use our collective energies in this regard. We cannot and must not fail them at this grave hour.

I also believe that as Government boasts about the growth in GDP, and the fact that Guyana is now better off financially than it has ever been, we must encourage workers to challenge for their piece of the pie. As Government continues to dole out the country's resources to its lackeys and cronies, we must not be reluctant to encourage workers to exercise their genuine right to collective bargaining and by extension their right to proper wages and salaries, and conditions of work. For my part, I pledge my full and unconditional support to workers engaged in legitimate activity to emancipate themselves, to stand and march with them when necessary, and to assist other vulnerable categories to improve on their conditions of life. I say this unhesitatingly and unreservedly.

I now wish to turn to the situation in the Regions. While I do not propose to speak extensively on this part of the budget, other APNU speakers will deal with this in a more comprehensive fashion. I, however, want to say that I note the continuation of the trend to allocate funds to regions purely along political lines and not in keeping with the needs of the individual regions. Thus regions controlled by the PPP/C are earmarked for large allocations regardless of the size of the population, while those controlled by the opposition parties continue to be discriminated against and are allocated smaller amounts. While this is most disappointing it is not surprising to see this trend continuing even in the new dispensation which the 28th November, 2011 ushered in. This trend underscores the reason why some regions are limited in terms of delivery of service to the people on the ground while others are better funded to do so. You will note I said better funded but not more capable.

I am anticipating that when the Hon. Ministers; Norman Whittaker and Ganga Persaud rise to address this House they will present figures and numbers. Again I ask you to note, Mr. Speaker, I

said figures and numbers; figures representing monies given to the individual regions, and the numbers representing the percentage of works done for the last financial year. They will also attempt to regale this Assembly with the argument that the moneys given to the regional administration under the PPP/C tenure far outstrip anything given under the 28 years of the PNC rule. What neither of them will do when they make their contributions is to say if the percentage of completed works that are reported is accurate or if, in fact, it is a misrepresentation of the true picture. To support this position my friend from Region 1, Mr. Richard Alleyne, will present information to this Assembly which will show that in Region 1, in 2010, money which was expended for a road which was supposed to be completed to the tune of \$25 million cannot be found. That is an indication of what...

Mr. Speaker: The money or the road? [**Ms. Selman:** The money and the road.]

Mr. Trotman: What I want to do here is to challenge both Ministers to address with honesty and competence the work of the persons they appoint to control the individual regional administrations. The same Regional Executive Officers I just alluded to are all political appointees, and more often than not are PPP/C party members and supporters. If the Auditor General's reports are to be taken seriously they have very little or no proven track record of competence. Their individual performance reads like a litany of woes, but, yet they continue to be retained in service. They wield immense powers, and the further they are from the centre the more powerful they become. They enrich themselves at the expense of the people they are supposed to serve and complaints to the Ministers against their behavior fall on deaf ears.

Regions 1, 8 and 9 are real examples of tin gods appointed by the PPP/C raping the resources of the country with impunity. An examination of the situation in Region 8 underscores the gravity of the problem. The RDC meets irregularly, once per quarter. The Hon. Ministers will argue in their response that the cost of holding regular meetings is prohibitive, but I will submit here that the cost to the people, in dollar terms, for not holding regular meetings of the RDC far outstrips the cost of holding those meetings.

Mr. Speaker: Your time is up Hon. Member.

Ms. Ally: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members I am finishing at 10.00 p.m.

Question put and carried.

Mr. Trotman: One of the primary purposes of those meetings is to monitor the performance of the Regional Administration in respect to the instructions and decisions which the RDCs make. These monitoring exercises are intended to allow the peoples' representatives to know, among other things, what releases were given to the regional administrations by the Ministry of Finance for a specific period, how those amounts were disbursed, and if the moneys were disbursed in keeping with the approved programmes. They are also intended to provide information on the progress of works, health and education related matters et cetera. However, when these meetings are held quarterly, vital information is withheld from the people's representative, by the REO, who does his own thing. He is everything in the administration, wearing several hats at the same time. He feels he is accountable to no one and grave problems are unearthed only when the audit takes places. These problems keep occurring year after year, and the REO is neither surcharged nor penalised for the grave anomalies which have been exposed. These matters cannot continue unabated. The same situation also exists in the Ministries where Permanent Secretaries, who are also political hacks, are in place. The answer to this ridiculous state of affairs is to revamp the entire public service rules to allow for the appointment of career public servants to these positions. I doubt whether those on the other side of the House will want to accept this proposal. I say this because I do not believe they have any interest in wanting to see any improvement in the areas of transparency and accountability. But, if by some miracle they do accept the proposals, and while action is being contemplated, the Accountant General must be directed to act now to put a stop to what has become the norm. The officers must be surcharged or, better yet, put them before the courts for the barefaced theft, violations and breaches of the regulations under their watch.

I also believe that there is now an urgent need for this National Assembly to go beyond that position and to establish an office of budget management to monitor among other things, the allocations, voted in these annual budgets, are spent in keeping with the laws of the country. It will do other things but it is important that this National Assembly become more hands on in relation to the use of the resources of the state. [Mr. Nadir: *inaudible*] If it is you get a little closer to Clive Thomas you might be a little smarter.

In relation to tourism, while there has been some forward movement. I believe if this sector is to really take off and realise its full potential, a number of important things must happen immediately. This should include reorganizing the Guyana tourism Authority to be comprised of personnel with professional skill and expertise and who are prepared to be both accountable and responsive to the needs of the industry and less so to the dictates of the Minister. There should be also the implementation of a system of destination marketing; GDP recognition is critical to understanding the state of the industry. Fiscal incentives, I believe, to develop the sector are also very important and should be addressed with a degree of urgency.

I hold the view that some mechanism has to be put in place to determine who are Guyanese returning to Guyana for a vacation as distinct from the international tourist crowd. If this is not done the tourism authority may very well be misinforming itself on the actual state of the industry. But even if all of these things are in place until the question of the state of the environment is addressed, until the issue of unrestrained garbage dumping with its potential health disasters are brought under control, or properly eliminated, the expected growth in the industry will not be realised.

9.00 p.m.

Guyana's comparative advantage lies in the 'eco' aspect of the tourism product and not the sun, sand and sea variety. While the Diaspora numbers are not insignificant, Guyana needs to advertise itself as an eco-destination, in keeping with its diversification objectives. Guyana is well endowed in eco-tourism potential in the form of numerous, attractive waterfalls, exotic flora and fauna, birds of immense varieties and culturally exciting indigenous communities, *inter alia*.

However, in order to fulfil this eco-tourism potential Guyana would need to launch a vigorous infrastructure programme in the interior, including paving of the Lethem road, construction of feeder roads to various sites, provision of guest houses and other basic amenities and facilities at the sites, strengthening of air transport services, etc. Of course, all this would come to nought unless the crime situation is brought under control, which seems to be beyond the current PPP/C regime.

In conclusion, I want to say that there is no question in my mind, none whatsoever, that in respect to the issues which I have addressed in the 2012 Budget proposal, Guyana can go forward unless there are changes to the original proposals from the Minister to reflect what the true situation is in the country. It cannot. This budget has unleashed untold sufferings on the most vulnerable in the society and must be resisted in its present form. If the Hon. Minister of Finance and the other Members on the Government side of the House are really committed to the growth and development of all the people of this country and not only to a very small privileged group, they are now presented with the best opportunity to demonstrate this. I want, therefore, to urge them to take the bull by the horns, reassess the situation and come up with real proposals to address the needs of the most vulnerable, which the Hon. Minister has been so contemptuous about in his proposals.

I truly believe that Guyana can go forward in unity, but unlike the Members on the Government side, I am not prepared to pay lip service to this idea. Let us have a budget we can support knowing that the concerns of all the people will be met in it. This one does not do that. Thank you Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Rev. Dr. Gilbert: Thank you Sir. Mr. Speaker, Before I make my contribution to the budget debate of 2012, with your leave permit me to first of all extend a welcome and congratulations to the new Members of this House, those who are here for the first time. I am particularly pleased to note that many of them are young people, many of them are also women, a testimony to the progress that we have made as a nation, in terms of our democracy.

I wish also to commend Dr. Singh for the adroitness that he demonstrated, both in the preparation and presentation of this budget. Also, to say that it would be remise of me if I do not also take this opportunity to express - while I hold in very high regard the Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh and his unmatchable talents, in the management of Guyana's economy – I want to also take this opportunity to say that I believe we must give thanks to God as well for his blessings upon our nation. For the scriptures doth truly remind us that, except the Lord build the house, they that buildeth it labour in vain.

I noted the Hon. Member, Mr. Trotman's concerns regarding the current use of the barricades. I believe his concerns has to do with maybe an interpretation of the use of the barricade as either

the Government or the Parliament's attempt to restrict, restrain, prohibit or prevent, persons from... [Opposition Members: The PPP] ...the PPP, from entering into the Chamber or be a part of or the exercising of their democratic right. I rather believe that the issue – well this is my understanding - of the use of the barricade has to do more with an issue of security, which is a matter for the management and administration of the Parliament, as well as the Guyana Police Force and I believe that that is a matter, therefore, that should be discussed at that level.

I want to also make... [*Interruptions*] mention of the fact that there seems to be maybe some confusion, regarding what the budget really is about, because persons, particularly on the Opposition benches, speak of the use of numbers and figures in the pejorative sense, as if we should not be talking about numbers and figures. My understanding is that is what the budget is about. I believe also that over the next few days we are going to be spending a lot of time talking about numbers and figures.

One of the external elements of every budget is expectation. Every budget prior to and during its presentation and debates, is always accompanied by expectations. There are expectations by every citizen of what the budget will address, specific to their lives and their circumstances, their socio-political and socio-economical expectations as well, some of them realistic, some of them unrealistic. Unfortunately, the business of the governance of an economy, will not always unfold in a manner that meets the expectations of everyone. However, the job of this Government, as it is with any good Government, is to ensure that regardless or mindful of those expectations the budget is reflective of the most effective and fiscally sound management of the economy, which redounds to the social and economic well-being of its people.

We in this hallowed Chamber have also come to have our expectations of how these debates should go. It is expected that our friends on the Opposition will do their utmost [Ms. Lawrence: Inaudible] ...Thank you for reminding me of that...to find all that they can possibly find that is wrong with the budget. That is what an effective opposition must do. It is expected that we on this side, will do all we can to show what is right in this budget, that is what an effective government must do. But, it is also expected that when we have all had our say, that we will put aside our political posturing, and pontificating and pass the budget, which is what good Guyanese Parliamentarians must do. That is what our people expect us to do.

I wish to pick up from a few lines mentioned by the Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh's presentation , and I want to quote, he says, "Perhaps most importantly, it is absolutely critical that all of the people of Guyana are enlisted in this effort to make our country a better place, the investors whose financial capital and entrepreneurial acumen drive business activity and economic growth, the workers whose effort and productivity determine our competitiveness as a nation and the young people whose state of preparedness today will determine the fate and prospects of our country tomorrow." And he continues, "For all of this to be realized, the clearest signal of all must come from those of us in this Hon. House, whose legislative agenda will chart the course for our country, whose cohesiveness will set the tone for all else in our nation, and whose every decision must be consistent with and never deviate from keeping our country on the path to a brighter tomorrow for all". This path to a brighter tomorrow to which the Hon. Minister alludes to, is not a path that we are seeking to find today. That is why this budget cannot be examined in an isolated context, divorced from previous budgets. This budget must be viewed as another chapter in the developmental blue print of this Government, to move Guyana closer and closer to the realisation of her true potentials and moving all of our people unto this pathway of a brighter tomorrow for all.

This path to a brighter tomorrow began as far back as 1992, when political democracy was restored to Guyana. This path to a brighter tomorrow began and continued with every successive budget presented to this national assembly ever since then. It is a path and not a destination. We have not arrived at a destination. A path would suggest that we are moving in a steady, clearly defined articulated direction. I cannot say when we are going to get there, but what I can say is that, while we are not where we want to be, we are not where we used to be.

Whether it is the \$128.9 billion of 2009, or the \$142.8 billion of 2010, or the \$161.4 billion of 2011, or the \$192.8 billion of 2012, every budget represents Government's vision and commitment to the transforming of lives and the legacy of the Guyanese people in a sustainable fashion. The point to note is the import of the sustainability of Government programs and intervention. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: One second, is there a problem Mrs. Backer and...what is going on? We are coming to the end of the debates for the night and the Member is making, I believe, some very

salient points and we would all like to listen and to hear. Thank you. Continue please, Hon. Member, Rev. Gilbert. If there is a point of order to be made, could it be made so that we can move on, rather than have the entire House disrupted?

Mrs. Backer: Mr. Speaker, I did not want to make the point of order, but I did draw to the attention of the Hon. Minister, Ms. Manickchand, that drinking from a brown paper bag in the National Assembly is not the preferred thing to do. She, having ignored me because the suggestion came from this House, I was constrained to make it again.

Mr. Speaker: I will give her the benefit of the doubt and think it is her medicine she has to take and we move on. Could we...

Mrs. Backer: With the greatest respect, I am on my feet, she cannot tell me, to sit down and shut up.

Mr. Speaker: The point is noted, unless... I do not know. I see that the Clerk is busily going through his Standing Orders. In the meantime, could Rev. Gilbert proceed? I do not know that a bag per se is offensive, but Hon. Member thank you. Could we proceed please Rev. Gilbert?

Rev. Dr. Gilbert: Permit me Sir to record my personal displeasure with the disrespect and disregard. I personally do not show that disregard to persons in the House, I allow persons to benefit in the opportunity of being heard. I wish that persons would do the same when I speak.

What we can safely say and we have heard a number of suggestions being made and very good suggestions as well, I do not believe that the people who sit in the Opposition do not have the interest of this country at heart, I believe they are here because they want the best for this country. The suggestions that they have made are commendable. My question is many of the measures, suggestions and recommendations that they have made, are they sustainable? Are they sustainable in the context of Guyana's current economic circumstance? What I would want to say is, the measures outlined by Minister Singh, may not pass the test of popular and public expectations, but they will pass the test of sustainability.

Every successive budget, I believe is guiding, bringing greater focus, contributing to helping us get to the path of that brighter tomorrow that the Minister alluded to. Those efforts were

expanded to point significantly with the lead of 3433 house lots distributed in 2009, to 7000 in 2011. That is another step towards the path of the realisation of those dreams, making home ownership a dream fulfilled for more and more ordinary Guyanese. It was expanded through the Health sector, with the construction, staffing, and operationalising of hundreds of health care facilities across the country, from Lima to Linden, from Ithaca to Eteribang, as far as we have the reach or the capacity, Government has sought to address the social needs of our people in those areas, whether it is in housing, health or in education; or \$14.5 billion in 2011 towards the implementation of the National Health Sector Strategy; or \$998 million for the construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of health care facilities, including the new 285 bed facility at GPHC.

I want to pause briefly, because there are times when, we have a responsibility as a people to advocate for improvements in the delivery of Government services, I rather suspect that as a people too, we are quick to forget where we are coming from. Again, the existence of a new facility at the GPHC and the continued efforts by Government to provide health care services to our people, sometimes I think that while we are looking at the trees we are forgetting that there is a forest.

Over \$300 million expended on the training of medical and paramedical professionals. So, we will continue to see the expansion of these in this sector with the allocation of \$16.9 million in this 2012 budget.

Yes Sir, this path of a brighter tomorrow was expanded in the continued drive by the Ministry of Human Services to address the plight of single women in the Women of Worth (WOW) program. A program which saw over 1,100 beneficiaries in 9 out of our 10 Regions, which is expected to impact another 1700 single parents in the coming months. Or, to tackle domestic violence in the establishment of the many campaigns that we have had, seeking to address these issues, or the training of 633 religious leaders in 5 Regions across Guyana, all being supported by a battery of modern legislations. Or the establishment of a ‘National Men’s Affairs Bureau’, to augment the work of the women’s affairs bureau, to bring focus to the issues of gender justice, all aimed at making this improbable aspiration of a brighter tomorrow, more realisable today.

Time will fail me Sir, if I attempt to enumerate the extent of the expected transformation of the education sector, with the allocation of \$26.5 billion , or the in excess of \$4 billion for housing and water, or the many other significant allocations, which my colleagues have talked and will continue to talk about over the course of this week. Time will also not permit me to talk about the UNDP's Human Development Report of November 2011, which shows Guyana's Human Development Index increasing by 26% from 1980, to where we are today at a rate of about 0.8% per annum, particularly, our socio-economic performances, poverty reduction and environmental sustainability among others.

The minister also recognised the value and necessity of a collective approach as a sine-qua-non to the realisation of this corporate destiny. Here, we want to hail the continued engagement of the national stakeholder's forum by His Excellency, the President, as a testimony to Government's commitment to a multi-stakeholder, consultative approach to governance.

It is important for us as a people to examine where we are coming from, where we are and have an appreciation as to why and how we got to where we are. One of the things as I listen to the presentations over the course of this evening, it would seem to me that many of the issues and problems identified by the Members of the Opposition, sounds as though the Government is both the creator and, of course, the expectation is that they are to be the fixers of these problems. I want to suggest that there are problems in our country that are not necessarily problems that have to do with Government. There are problems in our country that has to do with the fact that we have seen continuous erosion in the failure of the other social institutions. Government just happens to be one of the social institutions in any society. Most sociological thoughts would teach us that there at least five social institutions. Many of the problems that we sometimes tend to lay at the feet of Government are issues that has come as a result of the failure of some of these other social institutions and so I wanted to interject that because I believe that it is important for us as a people to recognise that Government has a responsibility to fix and to address the problems that are within their constitutional mandate to fix.

There are issues within our nation; I believe that we need to take responsibility for. Some of our problems are fixed by the failure of family life, by the abandonment of moral and religious values in our society and those are the things I believe that if we are honest with ourselves. We

cannot blame Government for overflowing toilets, two minibuses crashes on Homestretch Avenue and the Government is responsible. The drains are overflowing in peoples' yards and the Government is responsible.

We consider as a nation and the Hon. Minister mentioned it as well, that we are less indebted as a nation and the Hon. Member, Mr. Nagamootoo expressed his interpretation of why he disagrees with that position. I believe that, like Mr. Nagamootoo, I myself am a layman to the issues of economics, but I will attempt nonetheless to express my own view as to what I believe regarding the reduction of our debt. I believe that the debt of a nation also...

Mr. Speaker: Your time is up Hon. Member.

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I propose that the Hon. Member be given ten minutes to conclude his presentation.

Rev. Dr. Gilbert: Sir, I am not quite sure that you took into consideration the interruption we had, nonetheless I will conclude in about two to three minutes.

We have to see debt reduction in the context of debt to GDP ratio. I believe the evidence that is presented in a number of reports would suggest that with respect to debt to GDP ratio we are doing better today than we were twenty years ago.

One of the outcomes of an emerging democracy is the freedom of its people to demand more and expect more from their governments. We on this side of the House, Sir, do not baulk at the challenge of meeting the demands of our people, which is why they elected us in the first place. And, because we believe we have a responsibility to them, both to those who voted for us and those who voted against us, we have brought this budget to this National Assembly, because it is our responsibility to serve all of the people of this nation. Therefore, in that respect we seek the support of our colleagues on the other side for the complete passage of this budget, that we may together keep our country on the path of a brighter tomorrow for all. Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Scott: Thank you Mr. Speaker, Comrades all. Congratulations first of all to the Hon. Finance Minister for once again presenting to us a budget. It is my hope that he takes on board the measures, advice and the opportunities that we have given to him from this side, that if

together we can adopt those measures, which he has the power to do, then ultimately this budget does have the possibility of being regarded as a people's budget.

My colleague, the Hon. Shadow Finance Minister, Mr. Carl Greenidge has splendidly illustrated some of the inefficiencies that are contained in this budget. In this respect, I fully support his observations and I hope that that too will be seen in a positive sense that we can then take all the measures and arrive at something much better for the nation as a whole.

In the not too distant past, budget presentations were anticipated with some excitement and hope by the poor and their trade unions, that the Government of the day will introduce some measures which would offer them some financial and economic relief. While at the same time offering incentives to industry and commerce which assisted in their further development. There were prior consultations with their representatives and with businesses. All above were therefore involved.

Today this practice no longer exists. There are no longer consultations and even when the combined Opposition offered to be involved in the crafting of the budget, the Government rejected this attempt at national consensus and proceeded to deliver from on high, what they thought was good enough for the citizenry.

The rejection, the anger and the disappointment of the masses reverberates around this land in response to a budget devoid of any measure designed to alleviate poverty and or of any vision that points the way toward a better life for all.

When the Finance Minister, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, admitted that after the 2011 National Elections, a new political configuration had emerged, we all expected to see a changed approach. He said, "This arrangement beckons our country into a new political epoch and heralds an opportunity for the nurturing of a new political culture." He was even inspired to wax further when he added, "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."

9.30 p.m.

Our leaders were nationalistic and positive as the Leader of the Opposition dubbed the year 2012 as ‘The Year of Hope’ in his New Year’s message to the nation. The Opposition even pledged to agree to an extension for the budget presentation in order to incorporate inputs from civil society and from other representatives of the people, but this offer was rejected.

Alas this budget, as part of its theme “Remain on Course” continues to fail the poor and the powerless. It brings no increase in wages, no positive increase in pensions or social assistance and it consigns the masses to spend more for less. As the Government boasts of increase in revenue of 6.2% projection, what constraints exist, if any, to prevent a caring Government from offering a meaningful wage and pension package using a portion of this increased revenue to alleviate the hardship they go through daily? Instead, this budget seeks to redress mismanagement and incompetence with its gifts of billions of dollars to GUYSUCO and GPL.

In this 2012 Budget, the Finance Minister announced that \$4 billion from Government will be transferred to GUYSUCO. At the stroke of a pen, taxpayers’ money is again given to a failing corporation. For what purpose, and when will it end? This money, he says, is to meet operating costs and investment requirements. This is an entity that constantly fails to achieve its targets. Land valued at \$39 billion at Diamond was sold to the Ministry of Housing for \$4 billion. Mr. Speaker, who benefitted from the \$35 billion gift to the Ministry of Housing? Now they expect to receive billions of dollars for operating cost and support for a turnaround plan that turn in a downward spiral of continuous losses. When will it end?

The Minister, himself, said that in 2011 the sector produced 236,506 tonnes of sugar, the largest since 2008, yet in each of those years production targets were not met. Can you tell us what the profit level is of this company, and when will such be declared to the nation? How distant and large does the 273,317 tonnes for the year 2000 and 292,297 tonnes for the year 2001, produced without mechanisation now seem to us?

Every year we are fed the same excuses for failure – poor weather, pest infestation, strikes and low turnout of workers ranging from 72% to 52% yet nothing is done to arrest these trends. This is a serious indictment of the Board of GUYSUCO.

They lament the loss of the European Union market and use it as a further excuse for the decline in profits but in effect they were unable to take advantage of rising prices on the world market at

that time. They could have gotten at least \$00.25 per pound on the world market as against the lower prices from the European Union. We had a windfall and we failed to capitalise on it. Other countries like Mauritius benefitted from this move while we dithered.

We also could not benefit because we could not produce enough to meet the market – a grievous mismanagement problem – which was compounded by the poor treatment of their workers. A few weeks ago frustrated and dissatisfied workers fed up with the poor labour relations went on strike at Blaumont Estate calling for the removal of senior management staff. This situation can be duplicated throughout the industry.

The workers have lost confidence in their Union which they perceive as politically controlled, no longer offering effective representation. The fearful noise after the Hon. Mr. Moses Nagamootoo descended on Berbice, bears out this point. The workers are concerned at the wastage, theft and corruption they witness. What has become of the Italian tractors bought for \$170 million and which worked for six months?

We call on the Parliamentary Committee on Natural Resources to visit Skeldon during the in-crop period and report on the situation on the ground. Tell us how much power GUYSUCO has sold to GPL under the Co-generation Power Purchase Agreement and what is the state of accounts?

When we arrest the endemic corruption, improve the labour relations between workers and management then, and only then, we can begin to appreciate the dream of the Finance Minister of achieving the target of 400,000 tonnes.

Mr. Speaker, our society is in a state of disbelief at the revelation that the directors of GPL can demonstrate such contempt for the masses in the irresponsible and non-accountable disposal of their money used to rent generators. Convinced that they can get away with any dubious investment once an explanation is proffered, they felt secure in the certainty that business as usual will continue. They brokered this strange rental agreement that cost the taxpayers – Kaieteur News revealed – US\$720,000 each year for each generator. When we consider the alternative as this article suggests, we can only conclude that the commission of this act borders on criminality.

Given that the caterpillar generator costs US\$900,000 to acquire, wisdom would show that it is better to buy the generator utilising loan capital by borrowing the US\$900,000 and creating, as a result, an asset for the corporation. How many such deals await parliamentary investigation? The Government wants to give \$6 billion to prop up this inefficient entity.

When GPL becomes efficient it would be profitable with affordable tariffs and there would be no need for taxpayers' bailout. We spoke to a woman from Vreed-en-Hoop, whose meter was taken away in December, 2011. She went into them, paid everything that was required; the installation of a new meter was promised to her before Christmas but sadly she is still waiting, in April, 2012, for that meter. If this non-service is replicated we will clearly see the incompetence and mismanagement that permeates this corporation. Loss of sales can be reduced as many customers want to pay for service that they receive but due to this inefficiency, GPL is not getting the returns available from sales. They must, therefore, focus on correcting these faults. They must expand to un-served areas rapidly; this will encourage citizens to build and sales will therefore increase. Concentrate, they must, on minimising line losses thus allowing people to pay for what they use and rectify billing to large businesses for their actual consumption.

They must reintegrate large private companies onto the national grid, assuring efficient supply of power.

They must relocate customer offices from above rum shops as now obtains in Sheriff Street and rent or buy customer friendly buildings that provide access for the differently-abled.

They must remove political appointees as Directors and management and, finally, hire professionals and set efficiency targets for them to attain.

When management can concentrate on these things effectively then, rather than look for bailouts, GPL in a year or two will become a profitable entity.

Mr. Speaker, the actuarial review at 31st December, 2006, for NIS makes for frightening reading and points to a possible collapse of the scheme as happened in other countries unless urgent remedial action is taken.

At its launching in 1969, NIS offered the best social security umbrella for the working people and led the way in the West Indies as the most progressive and secure means of giving a cushion

to the sick, the pregnant and the aged. In spite of being vilified by the PPP who referred to the scheme, not as NIS but as ‘SIN’ and who did not encourage their supports to participate, the workers came to realise the social benefits to be derived.

Many in the sugar belt came to see the scheme as a blessing during the out of crop season and even now the number of beneficiaries in the sugar sector is greater than those in the non-sugar sector. Their PPP/C supporters are now seeing that political interference has resulted in poor board investments that places in jeopardy their years of contributions and threatens the long-term viability of the scheme.

My Colleague, Shadow Finance Minister, the Hon. Mr. Carl Greenidge has warned of the grave financial peril faced by the scheme and posits another bailout from the Government to prop up the sinking ship... Has bailout become the new plaster for incompetence? Christopher Ram points to the \$6 billion that NIS invested in CLICO and questions whether CLICO will honour its debt. Government’s parliamentary resolution guaranteeing state support for recovering NIS investment in CLICO fails to mount an investigation into the questionable decision of the board in this worrying matter instead there is silence on these decisions.

What is now needed is a reconstituted board independent of political direction, a revamped inspectorate, the life blood of the scheme, a new programme to register more self-employed persons into the scheme, a modern management plan to reduce operational costs, greater implementation of recommendations of the Actuary and a new process to register citizens at birth rather than at 16 years of age into the scheme.

While we support the investment of the scheme’s funds, both locally and internationally, such investments must be prudent and transparent. The NIS must be perceived as a social security umbrella in which all citizens can have confidence in its management and continued viability.

In conclusion, this budget speaks of Government’s increased revenue by 12.1% over the previous year. Such agreements can be reached with the Opposition to review Old Age Pension, Public Assistance and raise the minimum salaries of all government workers by 10% across the board in the first instance as outlined in the APNU’s Peoples Bill of Rights.

Let us resolve to develop and implement systems that will promote efficiency in management which in turn will lead to better services to the population. With these modifications and with cooperation on both sides of the House we can take Guyana forward to a brighter future. I thank you. [Applause]

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I think that you will be pleased to know that that concludes our business for today. Before we rise let me just say something on the matter raised by the Member Mr. Trotman about the security at the barricades. It is a matter that is engaging the attention of the National Assembly and the Parliament Office. As recently as Thursday a little body of Members met to examine with the police the idea of the arrangements and why they are so stratified. As you know, as Speaker I have jurisdiction only up to the gate. I believe that the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs and the Police Force have the jurisdiction on the outside.

The Hon. Member Mr. Felix has some views which he may wish to share with you as to the current positions as to why they are so.

I have also written to the Commissioner of Police asking for the barricades to be relaxed and for traffic to flow and so forth, so we are actively pursuing it.

Thank you for your concerns and I would like to thank the Members for their cooperation today. Tomorrow, with a little better time management I believe that we can end on time.

Mr. Hinds: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I think we had a good day and I now move that the House be adjourned until 1.00 p.m. tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker: The Assembly is adjourned until tomorrow at 1.00 p.m. Thank you very much.

Adjourned accordingly at 9.47 p.m.