

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

8TH Sitting

Wednesday, 11TH April, 2012

Assembly convened at 1.15 p.m.

PRAYERS

[Mdm. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

[Oral Replies]

RENTAL OF GOVERNMENT QUARTERS

Ms. Kissoon: I beg to ask the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development Question No. 1 on the Order Paper standing in my name:

Could the Hon. Minister inform this National Assembly:

- (a) Whether teachers and other government officers are required to pay 10% of their salary as rent?

Minister of Local Government and Regional Development [Mr. G. Persaud]: I have noted that the question asked is requesting information which is not in the purview of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. However, I will seek to volunteer a response to the Hon. Member. The question asked is whether teachers and other government officers are required to pay ten per cent of their salary as rent. The response, or the answer, is yes, and that is providing that the officer's conditions of service do not stipulate the provision of a quarter.

Ms. Kissoon: Could the Hon. Minister inform this National Assembly:

(b) Whether this procedure is practised in all 10 Regions and if not, whether this is being practised in Region 10 only?

Mr. G. Persaud: The response is yes. It is being practised in all of the Regions and not only in Region 10.

Ms. Kissoon: Based on my information, this is not so. The third part of the question is:

(c) Whether moneys collected are paid into the Consolidated Fund and if not, into which fund are these moneys paid?

Mr. G. Persaud: The response is yes. The moneys are paid into the Consolidated Fund.

HOUSE LOTS IN REGION 10

Ms. Kissoon: I beg to ask the Minister of Housing and Water Question No. 2 on the Order Paper standing in my name: Could the Hon. Minister inform this National Assembly:

(a) What criteria were used to determine the cost of a house lot in Region 10?

Minister of Housing and Water [Mr. Ali]: The criteria used in Region 10 are the criteria used across all of the Regions of Guyana. A house lot is sold to eligible applicants based on the type of scheme – low or middle income – and based on the eligibility criteria which are laid out in the Operations Manual of the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA).

Ms. Kissoon: Could the Hon. Minister say, in Amelias Ward, the scheme that he is talking about whether it is low income, why then, for that scheme, persons are required to pay different costs - \$300,000, \$500,000, \$150,000 and \$103,000?

(b) What is the standard size of a house lot?

Mr. Ali: I just explained that in one scheme there may be different types of development. There are low income, moderate income, high income or middle income developments, all embodied in one scheme. According to law, the size of a house lot should be 3,053 sq. ft. However, in Linden the size of a low income house lot is 4,000 - 5,000 sq. ft. which is above what is stipulated by law. Also, the scheme which the Hon. Member is referring to would have had varying development types, that is, low income, middle income and moderate income. The price paid is

based on the household income and eligibility criteria set out. For this specific scheme, it is set out in Operation Regulations, number 33 of page 1, which states: “The subsidy shall be granted only to low income households. Those households with family monthly income of up to US\$300 shall be considered low income.”

Ms. Kissoon: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I have a follow-up question because I need some clarifications. Based on my knowledge, Hon. Minister, are you saying that in the same housing scheme - you explained about the low income and middle income developments - the sizes of the house lots are the same for the price of \$500,000, \$300,000 and \$100,000. You are saying that there is a standard size, why should persons have to pay different costs for the same size of land?

Mr. Ali: As I explained, the basic criterion is based on household income also. For example, there may be a single parent whose household income is \$50,000. In another household there may be both parties working and the total household income might be \$200,000 and so those persons would not qualify for a low income house lot. That is based on the information which the applicants provide at the time of applying for the house lot and during the interview.

Ms. Kissoon: I would just like to say that there were persons...A young man paid \$500,000 for a house lot and he is a low income earner. There was no explanation for why he had to pay \$500,000 for his house lot. I am asking: Why should someone who is a low income earner have to pay \$500,000 for a house lot?

Mr. Ali: I am not aware of this case. If the Hon. Member is aware of this case and she has the form and the information that that applicant would have provided on that form then she should bring it, because the allocation is based on information provided by the applicant, not information manufactured by the Ministry.

Ms. Kissoon: I spoke to the Housing Officer in Region 10 and when I asked the question she told me said that some persons would have applied using some overseas address. When I spoke to the young man, it was not so. I am just bringing this to the Minister so that he can investigate the matter.

Ms. Teixeira: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, if I could crave your indulgence...

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Ms. Teixeira, I think I can anticipate what you are about to say. I would suggest, Hon. Member, that you take up the issue with the Minister. The Minister has indicated that he is willing to look into the matter. I am sure that the Minister, being an honourable man, would stick to his word. I think that is the way to go on that issue.

There is still another part to the question.

Ms. Kissoon: The Minister stated the standard size of a house lot and explained why persons would have to pay the money. He answered the question.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: I am saying that there is another part to the question.

Ms. Kissoon: The Minister answered that part of the question already, Mdm. Deputy Speaker.

[Written Reply]

EXPENDITURE ON CULTURE, YOUTH AND SPORT IN REGION 10

Ms. Kissoon: Could the Hon. Minister inform this National Assembly whether moneys are provided to the RDC of Region 10 for expenditure on culture, youth and sport?

Minister of Finance [Dr. Singh]: Moneys are provided to Region No. 10 for expenditure on culture, youth and sport, including under the budgetary allocations to line item 6291, National and Other Events, and to various line items within programme 803 – Education Delivery. Some expenditure in this area is also met from central sources such as through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport.

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.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now resume on the budget debate for the year 2012. I am advised that there is a princely list of fifteen Members who would be speaking today and I now invite the first speaker for today, Mrs. Volda Lawrence.

Mrs. Lawrence: Thank you Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I must say to you that it is always a pleasure when I see a woman sitting in that chair.

I rise to record my views on this Budget 2012 debate. Given the laying of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), 2011-2015 in this National Assembly, in August 2011, one would have thought that Government’s agenda would have clearly embraced this document. Page (iii) of this document states that:

“Steadfast commitment to policy measures elaborated in this PRSP is likely to set free the country’s vast potential in human and natural resources.”

Further, page 1 outlines the seven-pillared strategy around which these goals would be realised. Yet, the non-reference to this document in this Budget 2012 presentation is rather surprising. The

reality is that the Minister of Finance's budget has little or no sound provision to fulfil those objectives. No mention has been made to three of the four pillars. I refer to pillar number two – “good governance”, pillar number three – “improved social services, including better provision of safety nets” and pillar number seven – “special intervention strategies for vulnerable populations.”

I would first like to address the issue of poverty with reference to the PRSP, 2011-2015. The Minister of Finance's performance during the reading of page 7, section B, titled “Sectoral Performance” was hilarious. He broke out into a melodious crescendo and his body began to bounce in a dance-like fashion as he sung of the twenty-one sectors, outlined on pages 7 through 9, where only three of those sectors experienced negative growth in 2011, while the remaining eighteen sectors had growth ranging from two to nineteen per cent. No doubt, the men and women who worked to make that possible must be congratulated for their sterling performance and A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) so congratulates them.

This Budget 2012 can be likened unto an inflated balloon for the eighteen per cent of Guyanese who fall within the extreme poverty bracket and the thirty-six per cent who fall within the moderate poverty bracket. Further, the Hon. Minister of Finance indicated in paragraph 3.2, page 7 that, and I quote:

“Indeed, in 2011, the domestic economy achieved real growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 5.4 percent, within which non-sugar GDP grew even more rapidly by 5.6 percent. Significantly, this represented the sixth consecutive year of positive growth in Guyana.”

Yet, the Hon. Minister did not indicate how this growth would impact on the realisation of the seven-pillared strategy. One would have expected the Government to address, in a comprehensive manner, the seven pillars set out for the economic and social transformation of Guyana to at least remove the very real perception amongst Guyanese that the Government would have penalised those who did not vote for it or those who just did not vote.

I now turn to the issue of poverty. Amongst our poor - working poor, single parents, elderly, powerless and disabled - there was hope that with the increased growth, which the Minister gleefully spoke about, there would have been some new measures to address the way additional

income was distributed. That the Government would have sought to reduce the high degree of inequality in the distribution of income, thereby setting Guyana on the way to attaining rapid reduction in the number of those persons living in poverty, but this expectation was short-lived. The Minister did not at any time, during his sixty-nine-page presentation, mention the amount allocated in his estimates to address tangibly the inequalities which exist between the haves and have-nots. Rather, a glance at page 15, table 7 of volume 1 of the *Estimates of the Public Sector Current and Capital Expenditure* subscribes to the view that this budget is anti-poor, anti-ordinary citizen and anti-vulnerable group. More than ever, it is one which only takes care of the boys.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, at page 39, paragraph 4.67, the Minister spoke of his Government's commitment to invest in the social sector, but as the old adage states: "The taste of the pudding is in the eating." The Minister should tell this nation, given all that he said, why the allocation for the Ministry of Labour Human Services and Social Security was reduced by \$214 million and, more particularly, why the allocation to social services, under "Other Charges", decreased by \$210.4 million as against the allocation for 2011. Is this the strategy to reduce or lessen the burden on those in the poverty bracket? Perhaps, the Minister will tell us in his response.

Now I will address the case of the elderly and pensioners. Family members, individuals and public institutions must meet the challenge for survival of our elderly each day. The long-term care that is necessary for these individuals more than ever in Guyana is regarded as a responsibility of the family, even as life expectancy continues to rise and greater demands are made. Having spoken of the six consecutive years of growth, the Minister, in addressing our most vulnerable groups, made three profound statements for which he deserves three awards. Those are: \$600 per month or rather \$20 per day increase for the elderly; \$400 per month or rather \$13 per day increase for the vulnerable; \$10,000 on the tax threshold for persons working for \$50,000 a month and below. The Minister has proceeded without paying any heed to the shifts in age distribution in Guyana, given that our population aged sixty-five and over have exceeded ten per cent of it.

The World Bank 2009 Report reveals that the number of persons sixty-five years or older have been steadily increasing during the past decade. Is the Minister unaware? When is he going to address this issue? Not many elderly persons in Guyana fall into the category of those who use

their wealth and financial capability to head households. The majority of those who are found in this category would be spending their remaining days somewhere in North America. This, therefore, leaves a large percentage of our elderly dependent on family members for support. Those who depend on pensions to survive must face the high cost for food, medical attention and transportation, amongst others, and most often live below minimum standards. This budget offers no hope for them to be relieved from their impoverished conditions.

The figures for those who apply for old-age pension tell a sad story. There has been a steady increase from some two thousand five hundred plus every year from 2006 to the first half of 2008. There was a substantial increase of two thousand nine hundred from the last half of 2008. In 2009, there were three thousand and nine applicants. In 2010, there were three thousand five hundred applicants, and for the first quarter of 2011, some 800 new applications were made. These figures highlight the plight of the elderly in our midst, more so, of our elderly seeking old-age pension and those who continue to work. This is surely a dire situation for our people. Where have the rewards of increased growth been placed, Mr. Minister? The APNU proposes that this budget be amended to offer a minimum of \$10,000 per month to old-age pensioners. That is to \$420 million, Mr. Minister. Today, we are spending \$315 million, and as of May, 2012, it will be increased to \$340 million. All that has been added is \$25 million which works out to a miniscule percentage of the trillion dollars which was allocated to the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) and to Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL). Would this huge allocation to GPL mean a reduction in GPL bills to consumers every month? Would it increase its efficiency and reduce losses to the company which are indiscriminately passed on to the consumers? This is indeed questionable, given its performance over the years. Its track record reveals that this large subsidy will have no impact in relation to the burden placed on consumers.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, this Government, despite a collection of \$47.2 billion by the Internal Revenue Department, refuses to give our pensioners \$420 million. I guess the Minister is proposing to make a reality of the saying, *“who ain’t dead, badly wounded”*. Does the Government find no discomfort in doling out \$3 million to one person, as pension and benefits, every month, or \$100,000 per day? The people who must face the high cost of survival in Guyana with their shrinking income must look to this Government for assistance. Many of them are children and persons with disabilities.

On page 7, paragraph 3.1, the Minister spoke of the Government's decision "...to make the Guyanese economy more robust and resilient,... to withstand external shocks, and be less vulnerable to the vicissitudes of domestic single industry upheavals." While the Government speaks of robustness and resilience, it seems it is not aware of the increase in applications for public assistance from persons who have to grapple to withstand the shocks of survival in Guyana.

The continuous increase in the number of applications for public assistance is reaching alarming levels. Is our Minister oblivious to the number of our people who are suffering? One needs only to look at the figures coming out of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. The number of applicants for public assistance has increased tremendously over the last three years. In 2009, there were one thousand three hundred and ninety-nine applications and there were nine thousand one hundred and eighty-six recipients. In 2010, the applications were five thousand three hundred and the recipients were seventeen thousand eight hundred. In 2011, some six thousand four hundred and seventy-two persons made applications for public assistance while some sixteen thousand four hundred received public assistance. Yet, the Minister of Finance, in sharing the national pie, has boldly flaunted in the faces of Guyanese, particularly those in need of assistance, the meagre increase of \$13 per day or a monthly increase of \$400 for them. In reality, it is the cost of one sweet per day for our vulnerable group.

Age of Retirement: The number of persons seeking pension and public assistance is alarming and the facts representing longevity cannot be ignored. The World Bank 2009 Report highlights that the aging index was nearly eight elderly persons to every one hundred children in 1970. By 2002, it had risen to twelve elderly persons, accounting for an annual growth rate of 0.82 per cent, in contrast to a decrease of 16.3 per cent in the number of children aged less than fifteen years in 2006. The number of people aged sixty-five years and over increased by 23.6%.

1.45 p.m.

Guyana, like other countries, must therefore review its age of retirement, and look at the emerging picture of the elderly group. With the increase in the number of elderly people, our pension schemes would be unable to support the large number of pensioners who make demands on them. This discourse on the review of the age of retirement in Guyana has been going on for too long. The typical retirement age is fifty-five years in the public sector and sixty to sixty-five

years in the private sector, yet this does not entitle one upon retirement to receive pension from the two main state institutions. Persons must acquire the age of sixty years to receive pension from the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) and sixty-five years for old-age pension. What happens in the interim? Given the increase in the number of persons living above sixty-five years, the strain on our pension schemes and the inability of families to cope with the cost of taking care of their elderly relatives, it is imperative that the situation be brought to an end and a firm decision is made to increase the retirement age in the public service to sixty-five years. Alternatively, there may be the need to reduce the age of eligibility for NIS pension to coincide with the age of retirement.

It is lamentable that nothing has been forthcoming from the Government regarding the report from the Committee, which was put together by the Government, for the review and reform of the National Insurance Scheme. There is urgent need for restructuring this pension scheme. In November 2007, the Committee produced its final report which entailed several recommendations. At that time, the People's National Congress Reform (PNCR) had some reservations over some of the recommendations made, particularly one which suggested raising further the age of eligibility.

On 3rd March, 2008, the Hon. Member, Ms Manickchand, told this honourable House, and I quote: "It is presently engaging the attention of Cabinet where these recommendations that were examined and considered and are going to be looked at with the view to making the scheme, as the terms of reference said, more financially viable and efficacious".

The retirement age of fifty-five years, indeed, places a greater strain on the ability of the National Insurance Scheme to meet its obligations to the large number of persons who are forced into retirement. Apart from support from family members at home or remittances from those abroad, the elderly depends, to a large extent, on the NIS for financial support. The NIS, as we have been told for some time now, cannot withstand the pressure to provide benefits for the large number of pensioners in our midst. Despite the *Stabroek News* newspaper article by Professor Clive Thomas, last April, under the caption, "Downside Risk and Upside Potentials Facing the Economy", the Minister 69- page presentation made absolutely no mention of the Government's intentions for this institution. According to Professor Thomas, "The NIS is at a risk of turning to the state for bail outs with which to fund its outstanding liabilities".

In fact, this institution which helps to bridge the gap between the ability of pensioners to meet their survival needs and living in poverty did not find favour in the distribution of any of the revenues which the Government raked in last year. Instead, the NIS management is left to face the many complex problems including, but not limited to, resources tied up with the Colonial Life Insurance Company (CLICO)/Sanford debacles, an aging workforce, humongous and burdensome financial arrears, over-abundance of bureaucratic and administrative problems and high administrative cost estimated at about one-sixth of its income.

Despite the comments by Hon. Member Ms. Manickchand, the Government's reluctance to act on the recommendations put forward for this institution is another blatant disregard for the many pensioners and workers who, by compulsion, must continue to have their earnings paid into this scheme. Is this not another deprivation of the rights of the workers who, on retirement, expect to receive a pension for their hard years of service only to be faced with another CLICO fiasco, if nothing is done in the near future to secure their benefits? The Government must recognise that many of the past and present contributors to the National Insurance Scheme gave a mandate to the A Partnership for National Unity and Alliance For Change (AFC) on the 28th of November, 2011 to represent them and address their concerns in this House. This is therefore one of those issues which we will have to undoubtedly address as we review this Budget 2012.

Women: There is a paucity of female representatives in this honourable House. The need to have more women in our Parliament is greater today, given the number of issues pertaining to our womenfolk. In this Tenth Parliament, women are outnumbered by a ratio of two to one. Political accountability for women begins with an increase in the number of women in decisions making positions. It is a fact that wherever women voices are heard policies will better reflect their concerns. The many concerns which affect their lives, such as equal pay for equal work, reproductive rights, gender equality, gender base violence and rape, are more likely to be better heard, expressed and dealt with by women working with men to formulate policies, parliamentary process and law. Studies have shown that there is a direct correlation between women's empowerment and the growth of the national GDP. How can we not afford to give women a non-equal participation in the building of stable and peaceful societies?

Today, there are twenty-one women representatives in this honourable House. However, there are more than two hundred women outside this honourable House who do not subscribe to any

form of abuse by any person in our society. This view permeates every class, colour and age group and does not vindicate those who would use their status, office or wealth to abuse our women. One case in point is a call for the removal of the Commissioner of Police Henry Greene, forthwith from office. The constant abuse of one's office must stop. Our women, boys and girls must be free from those who have hidden predatory instincts for sex and sexual favours. I must congratulate the Guyana Women Lawyers Association (GWLA) which held an informative and interesting session two Saturdays ago on the topic of abuse. I wish to make it clear that the APNU is committed to reviewing the Sexual Offences Act to ensure that there is no miscarriage of justice through any loopholes this Act may now contain.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, today, women have broken the gender barriers which once existed within the labour market. We have shown that we can hold positions at every stratum, be it at an executive level, in the laboratory or in the factory. Notwithstanding our achievements, there is a growing concern that work is equal, but pay is not. This behaviour is more prevalent in the private sector and we must guard against it and stamp it out whenever and wherever it is found. This, undoubtedly, calls for more women to get involved in the trade union movement. Women must not see themselves merely as bench warmers, but must seek to run for higher office within those organisations. With women in leadership positions in our trade unions, equal work will equal pay, and the resurgent of sexual harassment in the workplace will be more adequately addressed.

The time has come for a more radical step to be taken on domestic abuse and all other forms of abuse. No more stamp it out and no more black and blue. I call on this Government to take firm actions against those in our midst who believe that they can abuse other persons, go to jail and spend time on taxpayers' money. This action continues unabated. I am quite sure that Suresh Parabunauth, the attacker of Simone Ritchie, knew of the attempt to stop domestic violence. Also the attacker of Eureka Garraway, hammer beating - "Woman hammered in her head." In the case of Kelvin Depleger, I am quite certain he also knew about the Act against domestic violence when he slapped Ms. Marcia Gordon, because of a mosquito coil zapper; also the perpetrator of Leroy Edwards, stabbed to death and Herman George who chopped to death Michelle Williams. Guyanese, irrespective of where they reside, must have heard of the campaign to stop all forms of domestic violence in our society.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Mrs. Lawrence, your time is up.

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

Question put, and agreed to.

Mrs. Lawrence: Thank you Mdm. Deputy Speaker. Guyanese, irrespective of where they reside, would have heard of the campaign to stop all forms of violence in our society, especially domestic violence. Every organisation, religious, social and educational, has spoken out against violence. Yet, this reckless behaviour continues unabated in our society. The time has come, now, for us to address this issue in a comprehensive manner, taking into account modern, social work intervention techniques, including counselling by trained professionals. It is believed that energies must now be focused on repairing the young minds in our society through social programmes in the education system. That data must be gathered and analysed to prepare a realistic approach for addressing this scourge; that greater emphasis must be placed on the owners of the many, or too many, bars who sell alcohol to anyone, irrespective of that person's level of intoxication; more persons must be trained in counselling; that we should seek to establish counselling centres in those areas where there are high incidences of abuse and that continuously we should seek to provide information and education on abuse for our citizens.

Child labour: Sooner, rather than later, some organisation will report negatively on Guyana's continued breach of the International Labour Organization Convention 182 - the worse forms of child labour. The laws of Guyana state that no child under fifteen years old must be employed and that persons fifteen to eighteen years can work, however, this work must not be injurious to the health and safety of the worker. Yet, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, today as you traverse the streets of Georgetown and those areas where there is a high degree of economic activities you would observe that a great number of children who ought to be in school are working as shop attendants, porters, vendors, with entertainment bands, restaurants and on construction sites, to name a few. The depressing reality is that in most instances the parents or guardians are well aware of the child's working life and benefits from the rewards. Apart from breaching the Convention, many of these children become uncontrollable and find themselves in conflict with the law, bringing undue pressure to the already choked social system. While it is my belief that no representative of this honourable House would condone such an infringement on the rights of

the child, it does not in any way release him or her from taking action whenever he or she comes into contact with such situations. The Ministers responsible for both the Ministries of Human Services and Social Security and Education must act to remedy this situation.

Children and families: In 2009, there were almost nine hundred cases of child abuse reported. In 2010, there were three thousand four hundred cases. In 2011, it surpassed four thousand cases. Of those cases, more than fifty per cent have been committed in Regions 4, while Regions 3, 5, 6 and 10 ranged between six to sixteen per cent. This is a tragedy. What is more mind-boggling are incidences which have been reported and those that continue to take place and go unreported, given the geography of the other Regions. Our children have fallen victims to various types of abuse: physical, sexual, verbal, neglect and abandonment, to mention a few. The statistics reveals that the majority of our children who are abused are of primary school age followed by those of the secondary level, particularly those who are not attending school. Many of these children are taken out of their homes and sent to live with other family members since the perpetrators, to a large extent, are parents, relatives and step-parents. Even with the passing of specific legislation to address the plight of our children, the abuse continues unabated. This leaves us with a task of finding other mechanisms whereby we can successfully address this crime inflicted upon our future generation.

This brings me to the point of parents and parenting: There is, that old adage that “Every male can father, but not all males can be a father.” Similarly it is believed that every woman has the ability to bear a child, but not all women can be mothers. The values which we were made to embrace as a people have changed dramatically. We are obligated as leaders to ensure that those who are given the opportunity to be mothers and fathers are given the knowledge and understanding that they are responsible for the upkeep and upbringing of their offspring. While some will make mistakes, there are those amongst us who will seek to neglect their responsibilities and we must ensure that they are dealt with in accordance with the law.

No parent must send a four-year-old onto the street without someone accompanying him or her. Children must not be kept from attending school because they must babysit the younger ones, or should parents be allowed to spend the public assistance on clothes, beauty parlours or on their paramours. On the other hand, Government must be willing to give assistance where a legitimate need exists. Specific efforts must be made to ensure that equal opportunities exist for all section

of our society. Discrimination must never be encouraged. There must be equitable distribution of the national wealth to our people. Regrettably, the Budget 2012 falls woefully short in addressing this issue.

The yearly increase of persons using the night shelter tells a story. In 2010, there were five thousand five hundred persons and almost six thousand in 2011. This tells the dismal story of the inability of persons to cope on their own. Further, the almost three hundred residents at the Palms institution remind us that families are at their breaking point and cannot carry the burdens of taking care of their senior relatives. It further reminds us of the ever widening gap between the few who have and the many who have not.

In concluding, Madam, the Budget 2012 does not begin to address in any tangible way issues which I have just outlined.

As we sit in this honourable House in the Tenth Parliament I want to publicly declare that the issues which our people face each day must be addressed. A Partnership for National Unity believes that Budget 2012 must be the beginning of this process. Hon. Minister of Finance, we cannot accept nor can we consent to the past President receiving approximately \$3 million in pension and benefits, while our seniors are given a mere \$20 a day increase, or that our most vulnerable must be grateful for \$13 a day increase. This is an affront to Guyanese. We will not accept the reductions in the appropriations for the social services, while the Government boasts of six consecutive years of positive growth and revenue of 12.1 per cent over the previous year, yielding some \$120.9 billion. We, of the A Partnership for National Unity, cannot, and will not, allow the Minister to give the spoils of the sweat and hard work of our ordinary citizens to friends and families of this Government. We, therefore, will carefully attend to the appropriations as allocated in the estimates of this Budget 2012 and ensure that justice is served. We hope that the Government, which boasts of continuous concerns for the ordinary people, will be like-minded and make the necessary adjustments to ensure the smooth passage of this budget.

Thank you Mdm. Deputy Speaker. [*Applause*]

Prime Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs [Mr. Hinds]: Thank you very much Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I rise to add my support to Budget 2012 in which our Minister of Finance has so ably presented a review of our progress in 2011 against the background of events in our

region and the world at large, and our plans for 2012, with accompanying projections and estimates, all of which are directed towards us *Remaining on Course* while being *United in the Purpose* of realising *Prosperity for All*. Even as we look back from whence we came, from where Guyana has come, and look forward to where we would like to be, different persons may advocate differing courses to be followed.

Allow me to submit, with modesty, that, with the trend we have achieved positive growth, and development averaging 4.4 per cent over the past five years, in the presence of various adverse regional and international events, there is reasonableness in the call to remain on course. No doubt, there will be dangers and concerns as we travel along the path. We should be on the lookout, and on guard, and, indeed, the Government welcomes concerns and dangers being pointed out. Nonetheless, I would plead that we forego demands for changes which seem to be only for the sake of change.

On listening to the presentation yesterday I feel that it is necessary for us to remind ourselves that our present tax structure favours the low income earners and is a powerful instrument for redistribution of earned income. Let us look at our main tools.

Income Tax: No income tax is payable on income below the threshold, which is raised from time to time, and is now being raised to \$50,000 per month. Everyone pays nothing on the first \$50,000 earned. Persons earning more than the threshold pay a flat one-third on each dollar, a simple tax system. Value Added Tax (VAT) at sixteen per cent on all goods and services consumed, that is, outside of a list of basic zero-rated goods and services, in which the list can be extended from time to time. So someone earning \$50,000 per month or less in Guyana can live lawfully paying zero tax - no income tax, no VAT. Someone earning a lot, and consuming a lot more, can be paying, on a margin, thirty-three and one-third, plus sixteen - forty-nine and one-third per cent on money he spends. So there is, in our system, some progressivity already. But note that savings, not being expended, would not incur VAT. That is on the taxation side.

On the side of access to benefits, all citizens have equal access to all services provided by the Government, such as education, health, infrastructure, housing and water, irrespective of the quantity of taxes they are paying. So this is a powerful mechanism for income re-distribution. More so, in a number of instances, for example in housing, there are better arrangements for

low income earners and even more so when some of the higher earners choose and pay for private services in education, health or housing.

The proposed changes in our present tax structure, in which we heard Members on the other side calling for, will not bring any more favourable circumstances to our low income earners. As we speak of Government services and private services, allow me the following observations on the question of value for money and poor service from Government facilities of which we heard so much about yesterday.

2.15 p.m.

When I heard the presentation from Hon. Member Dr. George Norton about what is happening at the Guyana Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) I was very much taken aback. Dr. Norton works there, he should know and he would speak truly. We too have all heard some disturbing story, or another, such as the one Dr. Norton told us about the child waiting at the Accident & Emergency (A&E) from about 11.00 a.m. until about 5.00 p.m. for treatment. Such should not be. I agree with him. There should not be even one case like that, but how are we going to remedy that? Where must we look to remedy it? I was comforted, some, when Hon. Member Dr. Mahadeo spoke subsequently and he recognised shortcomings in health services delivery and areas for improvement, but he highlighted that... Whilst Dr. Norton spoke truly, he spoke selectively. Similarly, the presentation of Hon. Member Ms. Kissoon from Linden, all the things that she complained about should not be, but she should have spoken also about the fact that there was no maternal death last year at the Linden Hospital.

I would like to point to the example of our well known teachers Wilfred Success of West Ruimveldt and Maydha Persaud of Abrams Zuil with whom I received national awards last year. When we think of those two teachers who would have received no greater pay than others and would have had no exceptional facilities, nor students to work with, yet they have achieved great success in the performance of their students and where they could, many others could. We all could, whether it is teaching or in the health services, and in whatever we do.

Whenever there are options before this Government to choose between various arrangements that have little difference, it has never hesitated to be partial when a Guyanese option is on the table. We have always been biased for Guyanese workers, Guyanese contractors, Guyanese businesses

and, in turn, we demand that our workers, our contractors, our businesses owe it to us, to themselves and our country to do their best and we are let down, from time to time, but many more times our people deliver.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, thinking again of that child who waited from 11.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. for attention, there must have been any number of different levels of staff at the GPHC who could have acted. People could have acted; workers there could have acted. The question for whom do we work is a most important question which all of us should ask, for we are all workers. Yes, we work for our boss and our boss's boss, and maybe for our Minister, and we all have job descriptions and we all work for money; but in the case of that child we also work for her, to relieve her of her pain and set her off to be well again as best as we could, and as quickly as we could. Like the esteemed teachers, Wilfred Success and Maydha Persaud, we should not restrain ourselves from giving service many times the value of whatever we are paid and in whatever circumstances we are working.

There is something else that we should have noticed from the Hon. Member's presentation, that is the Hon. Member Dr. Norton, and that is relevant to concerns about employment, unemployment and job creation. The Hon. Member spoke to the shortage, perhaps a third, of nurses and other supporting staff. These are jobs begging to be filled. We see also advertisements in the newspapers, inviting applications to work. The problem then appears to me, not only a problem, that it is not a question solely of lack of jobs opportunities, but lack of people willing and able and prepared to work for their fellow Guyanese, for earnings which their fellow Guyanese are willing and able to pay, and under the conditions which their fellow Guyanese can provide. This is the position from the very beginning, under our late leader Dr. Jagan that we always took, that we look to the Guyanese to work for their fellow Guyanese for the pay that they could afford and with the means of the resources that they have. This is what distinguished us of the PPP/C from the other two parties on the other side.

This Government has been biased for Guyanese. We consciously modified many of the programmes we inherited in 1992 to give more Guyanese workers, contractors and business persons the chance. So when workers, contractors and businesses failed we are very disappointed, but we do not reverse our course; we do not throw our hands up in the air, but we keep the faith and seek to correct, and this is my challenge to the Hon. Member speaking on the

other side - do not give up; keep the faith in our people. Let us learn; let us correct; let us stay on course.

We found that there is much for thought in the opening presentation of the Hon. Member Mr. Carl Barrington Greenidge, but we quickly heard effective responses from Hon. Minister Irfaan Ali. The *Guyana Chronicle* today uses the term “crushing” but I would prefer using the word “anticipating”. Minister Irfaan Ali had anticipated many of the things that Hon. Member Mr. Carl Greenidge presented, and why was it that we could have anticipated was because we too pondered the same considerations as we arrived at our preferred position at any given time and circumstances. So we could anticipate and we could answer immediately.

Let me say that there are two things the Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge’s presentation that we are thinking about, and we should think more about. His presentation on the income redistribution, if I heard him correctly, the top twenty per cent of people in Guyana earn forty per cent of income or wealth; the bottom twenty per cent earn only seven per cent, implying that a middle sixty per cent earn fifty-three per cent of income and own fifty-three per cent of wealth. I am not sure what it referred to. But, Minister Irfaan Ali was right. If this income or wealth distribution is correct then it might be one of the flattest, and most even distribution there is among different countries and indicates the recreation of a large middle class in Guyana.

We took note of the Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge’s suggestion that in subsidising the consumers of the Guyana Power and Light Inc. we should think of structuring tariffs, or amending tariffs, so that an initial quantity of electricity is very heavily subsidised, even at no charge, so as to give a base to everybody. At the end of the debate the Hon. Minister of Finance said to me that that was a good suggestion. Let us see how we might restructure or amend the tariff structure accordingly. We already know some answers because when we were considering electrification in the Hinterland the then President said, “Let our subsidy be used to provide each household equally a certain quantity of electricity that the subsidy could pay for and everyone should pay full cost for every kWh more that they consume”. So we welcome the suggestion from Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge and when we would have passed this budget we look to a quick engagement on a relevant amendment to the tariff structure.

The Government is heartened by the progress Guyana has made during the nearly two decades of the PPP/C administration. The *per capita* GDP in nominal terms rising from about US\$300 in 1992 to US\$2,870, thereabout, at the end of 2011 is a more than nine-fold increase in the numbers, but we know that the US dollar too is depreciated. Even if we take account of that, we are still looking, maybe, at a three-fold increase in production of goods and services by the people of our country and the income that we, the people of the country, have. That is very significant because it reversed what was, maybe, a twenty-year trend in the opposite direction before that. Even though we have made progress, all of us know that we are still far from where other people have reached, through their course of history, working and learning and steadily improving. We are not yet producing half as much, maybe, a tenth of much, of what we need or what we would like to have.

No one would find all that one would desire in our budget. That could not be a test of our Budget 2012 – that we get all that we want or even need. The test, however, is how even-handed has the Minister of Finance been in meeting, in part, the needs of all of us. I think, more importantly, how even-handed our budget is in providing opportunities where all of us Guyanese might apply ourselves and work and grow, and make employment for ourselves, and perhaps others, and where we could find employment, maybe.

This is a particular point when one heard the presentation, just before me, of Hon. Member Mrs. Volda Lawrence. It spoke about all sorts of rights, but there are no rights - nothing - unless somebody is working for it. If we want a better life the focus to get people out of poverty is to make them productive – create conditions so that they could be productive. The Government urges each and every citizen to forsake anyone who would seek to dampen his or her spirit with claims, whether of discrimination or marginalisation on the one hand - as you know, we say on the one hand discrimination and marginalisation - and in another place we say “You have been taken for granted.” Either way such claims, dampening enthusiasm and participation, lead to self-fulfilling lack of individual success, while others get on and the feelings come on that we have been marginalised; we have been discriminated or we have been taken for granted because we have been dampened by people, by Hon. Members on the other side. People do not participate or they hold back.

The Government believes that everyone must make efforts: must strive, must contribute and find great satisfaction and, indeed, purpose in life and grow individually and all together, as a nation. We feel good and we progress even faster towards everyone prospering.

Taking account of our history it will be surprising if there was not much suspicion and mistrust in our society about these things. Suspicions, there would be, but as the good books states, as you know, woe unto those who fan and ferment suspicions without any basis. But we must adjust even as our fears are dispelled. It is in this light that we should see reference by the Minister of Finance in paragraph 4.144, under “Other Institutional Reforms - Governance”, that in the same period of the last Ninth Parliament over three hundred questions were put to Ministers and all were answered. Even as we begin this Tenth Parliament there has been a huge cry about corruption in a number of large projects which Guyana needs and on which the Government had embarked. Many were loud and let their imagination run wild, being sure of corruption in their questioning on the Amaila Falls Project, the road, the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) upgrade and the Marriott Hotel, but quite quickly those questions were answered and there has been the deafening silence since. Some persons should have at least been saying we were mistaken in thinking and in assuming that there was corruption in those agreements, and at this Easter time - someone referred to the Easter time - we can only think about Thomas, as you know, saying let me put my hands into the side of, into the holes, and so on. Well, we were asked the question and the answers were given.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, Hon. Members, allow me to address a different angle on our motivation in the pursuit of a Marriott brand hotel. Permit me to refer to the article published in Easter Sunday, April 8th, edition of the *Kaieteur News*. “Robert Badal spends US\$8M to upgrade Pegasus - Sees Marriott as a ‘sour grapes’ project.” “Sour grapes” in that Pegasus is being taking to a higher level. If tourism is to be developed, as we are all hoping, and as laid out in paragraph 4.37 to paragraphs 4.40 of the Minister’s speech, it would mean not one but two or three, or four, additional internationally known brandname hotels. We just need to check out the number of international brand name hotels in neighbouring Paramaribo. In order for us to attract the international business investors and tourists who stay, or who look to the presence of internationally renowned hotel chains as an indicator, whether they should go or not, we must proceed along this course. We must build if we will have them come and at the same time our

local hotels are getting exposure, such as Pegasus itself, Grand Coastal and Sleep Inn. They are all encouraged to rise to the challenge of higher levels.

The growth and development which we have been experiencing, and the more that we need, bring changes and problems, contradictions, and so on. The challenge is to resolve them in constructive ways. We in Guyana have had a tradition, as you know, that heaven is achieved when something or somebody is the only one. We have to put that aside. Guyana, with prosperity for all, will have many, not just one. As I said, in my contribution at the ceremony to commission the new, and I would say it, really exquisite aromas restaurant at the Pegasus and to announce the upgrade, and rightly second tower, differences in view between the Government and Pegasus had been quite apparent. Nevertheless, without any reservation, I could only do this: I recommended and congratulated Mr. Badal and the steps he has taken.

For I recall a similarly sharp confrontation between the Trans Guyana Airways (TGA) and the late President Cheddi Jagan at the commissioning ceremony of TGA's new hanger, back in 1993. Trans Guyana Airways waded in to President Jagan, bemoaning the Government's neglect and seeming indifference to the local aircraft industry. Dr. Cheddi Jagan, full of experience and wisdom, challenged TGA, and others, to look beyond charter service for the more privileged and better financed and to see good business in meeting the needs of the ordinary people in the Hinterland by instituting schedules services. Few would disagree that it was this confrontation, that challenge between TGA and the late President, that has led to the much developed and expanded local airline sector and the Ogle International Airport Inc. which we have today. Ogle International Airport Inc. and the local airline industry are on the verge of going regional.

Our challenge is to keep before us our common purpose and find resolutions and reconciliations which bring benefits all around and stay united in purpose and realise prosperity for all.

With initial suspicions over our many large projects now put to rest, let us all pull together in bringing about the rapid, efficient, effective execution of the Amaila Falls Project, the new CJIA and the Marriott Hotel. This is not a call to put aside critical assessments or to put aside being on guard against any possible corruption – any corruption that may raise its head. But rather it is a call to recognise that there is no basis to start off with this assumption that there is corruption and discrimination, and marginalisation. All it does, it saps the energy and the enthusiasm from the

same people who people say that they are concerned about. We could think again, thinking in the biblical strain, of that parable of the talents, the ones who got five and two and one. The one who got one talent can feel very bad and put out. Now, we all know the story; he did not do anything with his one and it got taken away from him. So when we dampen people's enthusiasm and participation in the working and growing of our country we do them great harm.

The Opposition naysayers need to be mature enough to be vocal about their findings. After reviewing the documents presented upon their request, they must be furnished with the answer that maybe we should put aside, maybe we should be starting for this Tenth Parliament, all those assumptions. Keep on the watch; keep to the look out; but put aside the starting assumption of discrimination and corruption.

Electricity: The provision of electricity to all our households is one area in which the Government has sought to unite and unify our people, providing some access, if not equal access. This has been the aim from since the early 1970s. It was since that time that the Government of the day espoused unification of the electricity systems in Georgetown and Linden with sixty-cycle, the prevailing frequency in America, as the standard. The construction of large hydropower stations was also advocated and the extension of electrification along the coast with the absorption into Guyana Electricity Corporation (GEC) of the day, of the until then separate independent electricity company in New Amsterdam.

As it happened, those plans and aspirations stalled. They became unstuck by the mid 1970s and even what was achieved deteriorated under our economic reversals and difficulties in the latter half of the 1970s on to the end of the 1980s. We, this Government, began picking up the pieces of a universal electrification programme soon after we came into Government, instituting, first, new generators in 1994, regaining lost ground and advancing as quickly as we could. The provisions in our budget since, and also in this Budget 2012, bring us within five, or so years, of achieving those aspirations of the Guyanese Government of the 1970s. We are, maybe, within five years of achieving those aspirations. I will get to the aspirations just now.

As the Minister of Finance affirmed in paragraph 4.61, under the heading "Physical Infrastructure for Transportation, Energy, Power Generation and Supply".... In this regard

Guyana flagship project is the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. The Minister went on to describe Amaila Falls Hydropower Project in paragraph 4.63.

We are working towards financial closure and groundbreaking... before the end of this year with commercial operation and delivery of electricity at Sophia during the second half of 2016. The Government, always thinking of our people, has been bargaining hard to keep the sustainable prices for electrical energy low, pursuing soft loans from China and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and investing itself in the equity of this project. As currently envisaged, even with the seemingly high totally financed price of US\$840 million, the cost of energy at Sophia ought not to exceed US twelve cents per kWh, inclusive of the full amortisation of all during the twenty years Build Own Operate Transfer (BOOT) period, leading to a much reduced cost thereafter, just to meet operations, rehabilitations and maintenance.

The cost of electricity from Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, though greater than our first hope of say nine cents or less, seven cents, even, I recall, is a great improvement on the current cost at prevailing fuel prices, utilising the kind of generators, five to ten megawatt, which are appropriate to our system.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, before you continue, your time is up. You need an extension.

Ms. Teixeira: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, can I ask for a fifteen minutes extension for the Prime Minister?

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Hinds: For diesel engines, fuelled by diesel, it is thirty US cents generation, and that is pretty standard around the world, and when Heavy Fuel Oil (HFO) is used it is about twenty cents per kWh at current prices, but Amaila Falls Hydropower Project does even more for us. It provides us protection against further rise in the price for petroleum, in particular. It is likely, that some day fossil fuels would be required to carry the cost of removing the carbon dioxide (CO₂) and any other greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. We are aware of some articles in the newspapers which pointed out that with this one large hydropower station we will have to be thinking of arrangements for prudent backup against emergencies or planned outages and rainfall

risk. Yes, that to some extent attenuates the benefits of Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, but it is still an exceedingly good project to do.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, we are taking account of Amaila Falls Hydropower Project in all that we do. We need to keep on adding to generation to meet the growing demand for electricity. We have seen that significant sums of money spent in adding recently two generators, electrical units, 2 x 7.8 megawatt HFO fuel, generator sets and we are in the midst of a programme to upgrade the transmission system. Upgrading the transmission system was envisaged since the late 1980s when three substations were being contemplated. Today, the system has grown and we are putting in seven substations. We note, too, that we have been gradually, progressively, converting the grid from sixty-cycle to fifty-cycle and that includes changing over a station of twenty-two, (4 x 5.5) megawatt units, there are costs involved, in all of this, capital requirement.

For many years now, through a variety of measures, the Government has been doing all that it could, and perhaps more than it should, to keep electricity charges low. In paragraph 6.4 of his budget presentation, the Hon. Minister has outlined the situation wherein there has been no increase effected in electricity tariffs since December 2007, even though fuel price has increased by forty to sixty per cent. For GPL to partly meet the increase in its fuel bills in 2012, some G\$6 billion is being provided from the budget. This would work out to a subsidy of G\$8.78 for every kilowatt hour that consumers consumed. This is money given back to all those who received electricity from GPL and, to be specific, for small domestic consumers whose average is about forty-two kilowatts per month, it is about \$370 per month, \$3,240 per year. For the larger domestic consumers averaging one hundred and fifty-four kWh per month, it is giving back of about \$1,350 per month, and it is much more for the large commercial and industrial consumers.

It is a commonplace to be critical of GPL and to blame it for electricity tariffs which are high. I think I want to comment here, because I was asked to and I said I would, about that headline in *Kaieteur News* about buying versus renting emergency Caterpillar sets. I have a full considered answer here which GPL will publish that deals with it. Let me give you the short answer. The short answer is that delivery of purchased sets could have been four, six months or later.

2.45 p.m.

When one rents sets, it would be sets that people would have been keeping in stock, standing there in their yards, maybe for years. And naturally, when one pays for rented sets he or she takes right away, one pays for the years, too, that it has been standing there just waiting for one to call for it. So that is a big thing. The second issue is that the rental includes a certain amount of oversight and maintenance, some consumables and spares. And thirdly, it has a guarantee of performance. If the performance falls below a certain amount, the rental is discounted. However, there is a full answer. I think that Kaieteur News and the people who write Kaieteur News – and they were at the Public Utilities Commission hearing – knew better and they indulged in a bit of wickedness. The trouble is that these bits of wickedness are the kinds of things that make people feel that they have a right to steal electricity and that is a big blot on our country. And that is the problem with GPL.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, we did bring, reluctantly, to the last Parliament, legislation to deal more quickly, more assuredly and more severely with things like theft of electricity and conniving between past and present employees of GPL with the public out there to steal things, big things even, like transformers and so on.

Let me now address the reform which we are implementing in the supply and pricing of electricity in Linden, effective from 1st July, 2012. To place this reform in context, I need to speak about Linden, where it has come from, where it is today and why there should be no more delay in implementing reform. Linden is, today, very proudly – at least we are proud of Linden – Guyana's second town. Much is riding on Linden; much is expected of Linden in the further growth and development of our country.

Linden, as we know, started life nearly a hundred years ago as Mackenzie, a total company town, a foreign enclave, in many ways, disconnected from the rest of Guyana. Things began to change from about 1965 as Alcan-Demba began passing workers homes and responsibility for same to the workers themselves. Imagine then when one gets the company to repair his or her house, change the roof and all of that and now, one has to take responsibility for that. Linden people did it, they survived and they are better off today.

Linden became more important in our country as the road connecting Georgetown and Mackenzie was opened and there is one more reform left to completely transform Linden into a

regular Guyanese town, and that is the merger of electricity provision in Linden into the country's grid.

As the Minister has asserted for Guyana as a whole, Linden too is at the most important juncture in its economic history. Linden too is poised for rapid takeoff. We know that the Engineering Procurement and Construction (EPC) contractor for Amaila falls, *China Railway Engineering Corporation*, having visited and seen Linden, has already determined that all materials to and from the construction site, including the transmission line, will arrive in and depart from Guyana at Linden by boat or barge. And *China Railway Engineering Corporation* and its major sub-contractors have already taken options to lease available space in the old bauxite main office at Linden. Linden and the citizens of Linden stand in the first place; they stand on the first step for local employment, local contracting and other opportunities.

In paragraphs 4.16 to 4.18, under the heading, *Transforming the Economy, Modernising the Traditional Sector*, in the Budget 2012 Speech, the Minister acknowledged that, "the bauxite industry has served as an important traditional contributor to overall national economic performance". The Minister outlined, sufficiently for this debate, Bosai's plan in 2012 to "start construction of a third kiln aimed at expanding RASC production by 150,000 tonnes...and also to produce mullite". And this will see the creation of five hundred direct jobs during construction.

In Upper Berbice, the Bauxite Company of Guyana Inc. (BCGI) has begun to work to steadily raise bauxite production to three million tonnes and five million tonnes per year, already. A week or two ago I was there when it launched scores of mining equipment valued about US\$23 million, and I saw the beginning of the roads into the new mines, Kurubuka, Kokerit and Block 38. Additionally, four hundred and fifty jobs will be created in the Upper Berbice area. And also, Linden overtook Bartica and has become the transit town and the gateway to the Hinterland of Guyana and to Brazil. In this regard, already a number of timber companies passed their products through Linden and a number of them have established facilities in Linden. After careful nurturing over a number of years by Bai Shanlin, it is set to replace a start-up wood processing operation at the old Green camp site with a large modern processing plant conception in Region 10, just south of the Moblissa River where it enters the Demerara River. That would make available many construction and permanent jobs for citizens of Linden.

Linden is included in the new and emerging sectors. One of the ten call centres in Guyana is in Linden. The optical cable from Lethem passes through Linden and there is what is called a drop off point provided in Linden. Also, we are persisting in holding before us and people in Brazil that Guyana would be a good port for Northern Brazil as Northern Brazil develops. We continue to work to improve the Linden/Lethem Road. Linden has a great legacy of being an export and receiving port because in the best days of bauxite, up to about 3 million tonnes a year of bauxite were shipped out of Linden, and lots of fuel and other things shipped in. So, Linden stands to be the major port, initially, at least for the first ten years, I could see Linden being the major port for Brazil and trade to Brazil. [Member: Northern Brazil.] Yes, Northern Brazil. It is for people in Linden to have the new attitudes to be able to take part. Importantly it is in this new situation in our country and in Linden that we pursued the Linden Economic Advancement Programme (LEAP) which was a programme to change minds and attitudes of people, to turn them into entrepreneurs, so that they will be able to see things not only from the side of workers and not to think of themselves only as workers, but to think of themselves as entrepreneurs also.

The merger of Linden into the national grid was proclaimed since the mid 1970s. In 1976, then Prime Minister, L. F. S. Burnham, addressing a rally at Cuffy Square in Linden stated, and here I have GUYBAU News of Friday, 23rd July, 1976 - I cannot read as well now as I could have then - *Guyana Electricity Corporation to take over Electricity Supply at Linden*. Let me read what he said:

“I am not satisfied either that those who are supposed to pay do pay.”

He continued:

“Let us understand a few things straight. Socialism is not freeness. What we hope to do when we are integrated into the general scheme is to bring you straight under the umbrella of the Guyana Electricity Corporation. I do not know how much it will cost, but you will certainly have to pay no more than the people in the rest of Guyana pay. I do not promise you that you will necessarily get it cheaper than other people because, as Prime Minister, I cannot have favourites. I am Prime Minister of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, not of the Republic of Linden. Get that straight once and for all.”

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, before you continue to entertain the House, you need to be repowered, Sir.

Ms. Teixeira: I move to repower the Prime Minister with another fifteen minutes to conclude.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Hinds: Now is a good time for the last effort to be engaged in completing this merger and bringing an end to the unsustainable subsidy of electricity cost in Linden. The provision of electricity to workers' homes in a company town, as Mackenzie was, at no charge or very highly subsidised charges, was understandable. However, Linden today is no longer a company town. Today, less than 10% of households in the Linden area contain at least one person who is employed by today's bauxite company and it is a new company, BOSAI, as compared with more than 90% of households in the last days of Demba, first days of the nationalised bauxite company. And we note too that when in the 1980s the bauxite company could not carry those costs, they were transferred to and taken up by the Government. And those costs have been growing. So last year, the treasury from taxes and revenues of all the peoples of Guyana gave Guyana \$2.576 billion to subsidise electricity in Linden. That was a subsidy of GUY \$60.81 per kilowatt hour billed to the community: subsidies of GUY \$17,000 per month or \$200,000 per year for the average domestic consumer and subsidies of GUY \$50,000 per month, \$600,000 per year for the average business customer in Linden. I submit that that is no longer tenable. I submit, even more importantly, that Linden cannot proceed to grow or develop on that basis. We have to merge the provision of electricity in Linden into the national grid.

The Government intends to have the following in place by 1st July, 2012, that is for the second half of this year: merge the supply areas of LUCSL into Linden Electricity Company Inc. (LECI); align the classification of customers in Linden with that of GPL and adopt the tariff schedule of GPL with the possible amendment I spoke about of trying to give the first band of electricity at almost nothing; calculate the monthly electricity bill in accordance with the GPL tariff; for the rest of this year customers in Linden pay only half of the bill as calculated, only half of the bill as people elsewhere in Guyana would have paid; and, as an old bauxite man, but not enjoying the benefits as old bauxite employees, bauxite pensioners will receive the first 100 kilowatt hours each month at no charge and they will pay, according to the fourth proposal, for anything above

consumption of 100 kilowatt hours per month. Let us note that even with the above, this year, we are putting from the Consolidated Fund GUY\$1.865 billion to subsidise electricity in Linden. There is no doubt that this change is disruptive and traumatic, but I was there in the 1980s when following long time after, maybe Mr. Burnham's call, prices were raised at the time from \$0.02 a kilowatt hour to \$0.40 a kilowatt hour. And it was disruptive but we survived. And this would be disruptive, but we will survive and we will prepare ourselves to partake in the growth and development of our country and of the area. Linden could grow. If we do not do this, we will have a set of figures and then we will have to constrain Linden to those figures. Linden would not grow. So we have to take this step and we have a good authority. We could not have had a better authority on which to proceed.

In a few minutes, let me say about our Hinterland Electricity Programme. You know of 11,000 photovoltaic (PV) systems which are going into every household in the Hinterland and, as we lay it out here now, we are finding that, as all around Guyana, in the two years or so since the lists were made up in these villages that there is some increase in household buildings from 5% to 10% in all the villages as we go, on an average. That poses us a problem but it is a good problem. It tells us that things are also developing in the Hinterland as we have set out to make them develop.

Also, this solar photovoltaic project will be the base to provide electricity to the One Lap Top Per Family project. We are working and pursuing the development of a mini hydro at Kato and that is important because with the roads around Kato, Paramakatoi, Itabac, Chieung Mouth and those places, we can see a cluster of villages and we could see, maybe, Kato and Paramakatoi being centre of that cluster.

Finally, the Guyana Energy Agency (GEA) which has the charges of monitoring the use of energy in Guyana, promoting energy efficiency, use of renewable energy including waste, responsible for the hydroelectric act, and also it has been working on the Fuel Marking Programme to contain and constrain the propensity to smuggle fuel. There are lots of margins - they tell me - particularly if you start out with Venezuelan fuel at 10% of the world price, to sell as domestic fuel, but it could cause a lot of foreign affairs problems too. We hear of those incidents on the Cuyuni River sometimes.

I want to call on our people to pay attention to the programmes of the GEA which the GEA has been carrying out and will continue to carry out to train our people, to change attitudes, so that we live more efficient lives as we use all energy and, in particular, electricity. I can mention programmes for solar cooking. I used to think it was funny to put a pot in a big mirror, but it was demonstrated and also popularising improved wood stoves for the Hinterland. We had the announcement from the Minister that Government will remove applicable taxes on equipment used for generation of electricity from non-traditional or renewable sources for both household and commercial purposes and certain other appliances more efficient for utilising renewable energy sources. That gives further credibility to the Government's Programme to promote a Low Carbon Development suitable to our circumstances.

So Mdm. Deputy Speaker and Hon. Members, let me close in reaffirming that this is indeed a people's budget, that we have gotten on to a good track and we have been performing reasonably well. I too long for the days when we can get up to 7%, 8% or 10% growth rate and we can, if instead of preaching to people everyday about discrimination, marginalisation and corruption, we join in making people understand that the better life we will have, we will have to create it ourselves, in service to each other, providing goods and services to each other and if we all do that, we will soon have the kind of Guyana that our ancestors have been dreaming about for a long time. Maybe, as we complete the reform in Linden and make it truly no more a company town, as per the call in 1976 of one Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, and as I do it, may I hold myself free to, maybe, make a challenge to head the party that that gentleman once led and headed.

I thank you very much. [Applause]

Mr. Bulkan: If it pleases you, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I rise in relation to the Budget presented by the Hon. Member, the Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni K. Singh, on 30th March, 2012 under the theme: *Remaining on Course, United in Purpose, Prosperity for All*. On the cover of the Speech itself carries a likeness of a cross – Hon. Member Moses Nagamootoo brought this to our attention yesterday - and so indeed it is for the Guyanese people who will have to bear the burden of high taxation, high rate of unemployment, declining standards of delivery of public services in areas such as health, education, water supply, electricity, public security, administration of justice, to name a few.

The Hon. Minister has presented the Government's plan for management of the economy and national affairs, and in so doing has revealed its priorities and preferences. My first observation is that the poise, the self-assuredness, which I have seen the Hon. Minister display in earlier Sittings of this Parliament, and also being told of that very quality being characteristic of his previous budget presentations – and I believe there were five - was noticeably missing. This is instructive and it tells a story, I believe. It suggests to me that the Hon. Minister, at heart, does not believe the optimism he sought to project in his presentation. There are, of course, many valid and underlying reasons that would be responsible for his lack of belief in many of the rosy statements proffered, but I would venture to suggest that in a real sense it was the illegitimacy of the process itself that caused the Minister to lose the conviction which is usually present in his contributions in this House. The illegitimacy to which I refer has to do with the Government's rejection of the will of the people as expressed in the Elections of 28th November, 2011 which called for a consensus Government.

While it is true that we, the combined Opposition, now have the opportunity and the power to agree to or to recommend modifications or to reject outright individual measures, how much better it would have been if consensus was sought before bringing these proposals to this House. After all, a majority of voters at the last Elections voted for us on this side of the House. Prudence, as well the democratic principle, which the Hon. Minister correctly urges as necessary to be the bedrock of our actions ought to have compelled him and the Government to have had meaningful consultation on deciding and determining national priorities. That the Government chose not to do so is ill advised.

Yesterday, as well as a short while ago with the Presentation by the Hon. Prime Minister, we were treated to a number of presentations from the Government side, from Hon. Members Min. Irfaan Ali, Mr. Manzoor Nadir, Min. Ali Baksh, Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo, and Rev. Dr. Kwame Gilbert. We continue to be regaled with much data, all suggesting that our country is on the right path, that much progress has been achieved in recent years, on nutrition, child health, job creation, diversification of the economy, etcetera. Without exception, all of those speakers congratulated the Minister of Finance and sought to lecture us, on this side of the House, to similarly be smitten by Dr. Singh's handiwork. Hon. Member Rev. Dr. Gilbert was more pointed. According to him, we must put aside political posturing and pontificating, incidentally

“PPP” – I do not think he suggested that we put aside the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) and pass the Budget. He urges passage in its entirety. This is not what we, Members of the Opposition, are here for. This is not what the majority of citizens who voted at the last General Elections want. We were not sent here to be appendages to rubber stamp any and everything presented by the Government. No Mdm. Deputy Speaker, that status quo no longer holds. The people decided on the 28th November, 2011 that it must change and they have sent us here to help them out of their plight, their distress. The era, the long years when this House was treated as a rubber stamp is over. So regarding the Budget, as Hon. Member Moses Nagamootoo said yesterday, it will have to be reworked; we will have to bring out the scissors to excise inappropriate spending, cut out waste.

There was no mention, from the Government speakers, of the growing income inequality in our country, that which the Hon. Member, former Minister of Finance, Carl Greenidge, spoke about, the widening gap between “the haves” and “the have nots”, where presently the top 20% of the population earn between 47% – not 40% as I heard the Hon. Member, Minister Irfaan Ali, say yesterday and the Hon. Prime Minister say a short while ago... My understanding is that 47% to 60% and the bottom 20% just 7%. We are concerned about this sad state of affairs and we will work to correct it, as I am sure Hon. Members on the other side, particularly those men of the cloth who will be well aware of the biblical injunction that urges that we look out for the least among us. I am not a student of the Bible, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, so I stand to be corrected. I believe it is Matthew 25.

There was little or no suggestion, from the other side, of any middle ground. We are urged to adopt the proposals, accept the hypotheses, and pass the Budget in its entirety. They may have, however, overlooked the fact that the configuration of this House differs from all previous ones since 1992.

I will now look at the plans in the Budget for regional development, for allocations to the Regions. In this regard, in Volume 1 of the Estimates, a program objective is given and it is important for me to repeat what it says and this is in Regards to the allocations to Regions. It says, as the Programme Objective:

“To undertake the necessary consultation with the subject Ministries, RDCs, NDCs and AVCs regarding the implementation of any policy or development plan that may be determined by those agencies; and to give maximum support to programs, promote efficient and optimal use of resources and at the same time ensuring that all relevant guidelines are observed so as to achieve an acceptable level of accountability.”

3.15 p.m.

These are but words, and for many of the RDCs and NDCs the practice and actions are not consistent with those words. I will later provide specific examples.

In volume two and under the section for Regional Development there is a mission statement which says, and this is for the Regions:

“To provide for the coordination and utilization of human and material resources within the Region, to promote quality services and sustainable physical and institutional infrastructures, and to enhance orderly development in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the people in pursuit of improved living conditions for the residents of the Region.”

The respective Regions address its mission through a number of program areas, these being regional administration and finance, agriculture, public works, education delivery and health services.

In volume three of the documents which we have been given, under the Public Sector Investment Program, under the heading of “Capital Project Profiles” it says:

“The executing agency for the respective capital projects to the various Regions is given to be the RDCs and not the subject Ministry. The profiles for these capital projects for the regions are listed as reference numbers 257 – 386, some 129 interventions, and for every one of them it says that the executing agency is the RDC. It is important for this to borne in mind as the practice in many instances is for the ministry to play the lead role via the Regional Administration and the REO who it appoints”

The three volumes of estimates submitted totaling almost thirteen hundred pages in so far as it relates to the coordination, management and development of the ten administrative Regions informs and declares that the lead role for this is the responsibility of the duly elected councils. This is how it should be and in fact is what the Constitution stipulates.

Article 74 (1) states:

“It shall be the primary duty of local democratic organs to ensure in accordance with laws the efficient management and development of their areas and to provide leadership by example.”

Article 75 says:

“Parliament shall provide that local democratic organs shall be autonomous and take decisions which are binding upon their agencies and institutions and upon the communities and citizens of their area.”

Importantly, Article 77 which mandates and states:

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

Our Constitution which makes it possible for an individual to ascend to the powerful position of President of this Nation and with it the right to form a Government on his own, in the absence of the support of majority of Members of this Assembly imposes certain obligations on him or her. These obligations extend to the Government as well. It is deplorable therefore to recognise that in relation to the engagement with and management of the Administrative Regions that the Constitutional requirements are not being honoured.

The phenomenon to which I refer Mdm. Deputy Speaker, is the continuing and current control being exercised by central Government through the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and via the REOs that they appoint. Others speakers have touched on the lack of qualifications that are identified for the holders of these positions. These REOs operate like tin-gods and the further away they are from Georgetown, the more out of control they behave. My

colleague the Hon. Member Desmond Trotman referred to this yesterday. Also, yesterday during the recess I was informed by the Regional Chairman of Region 8, Mark Crawford, that the REO of Region 8 has been going about the Region informing persons that they have to be thought a lesson and presumably this is because the majority of citizens in that Region did not vote for the PPP. They are encouraged to act with impunity by the minister who appoints them and in many as well as the majority of cases do not see it as their duty to be an officer of the RDC or the clerk of the council. In other words, they see themselves as masters and not as servants of the RDC. These elected bodies and councils are somehow seen as hindrances or nuisances, they are tolerated not accepted. It reminds me of a refrain from my childhood, the one that goes "*children must be seen, not heard*".

If the RDCs are allowed to act in a truly democratic manner and if they are meaningfully engaged by the Central Government, and if genuine and sincere collaboration exists then a lot of the unhealthy things that are taking place, things which do not serve the public's interest, some of which we heard yesterday, for example the deficiencies at the \$2.2 billion Linden Hospital, and the \$1 billion Georgetown in-patient facility which was mentioned by Hon. Members Vanessa Kissoon and Dr. Norton, like the fiasco of the Supenaam or Good Hope Stelling which was built some three years before the arrival of the ferries that were to use it, and for which \$416 million is being sought for modification of this and the Parika Stellings before these vessels can be used. Yet, Hon. Member Minister Ali Baksh boasted yesterday about these two ferries, citing them as a sign of progress but without a word about the lack of planning, the Stelling fiasco. There were just self congratulations and no respect for the concept of value for money, a lamentable wanton disregard for efficiency or the efficient use of scarce resources.

The delinquency, however, extends way beyond this operational aspect and aberration and goes to the top, to the honouring in the breach of Article 77, which as I have just articulated, mandates that the development program of each Region must be integrated into the national development plans. It imposes on the Government a duty to allocate funds to each Region to enable its execution. It needs to be stressed that the lead role for the creation of the respective development plans is the responsibility of the duly elected RDCs, and not the Central Government's Ministry, and this is why our National Elections are both general and regional. If you recall, the ballot is divided in two and voters are asked to mark two "X"s. So, the Constitution tempers the near

imperial powers inherent in the presidency by way of these ten RDCs each having a Regional Chairperson. Proper observance of the Constitution would see these ten Regional Chairpersons collectively having a status superior to the Cabinet.

The Constitution does not say that Guyana is a unitary State; rather it says in Article 1 that, “Guyana is an indivisible, secular, democratic sovereign State”. In Article 9 it says that, “sovereignty belongs to the people who exercise it through their representatives and the democratic organs established by or under the Constitution”. It further says in Article 12, “local Government by freely elected representatives of the people is an integral part of the democratic organization of the state”. The Constitution could not be clearer as to the role, authority and scope of Local Government and Local Democratic Organs. I might add that the campaign of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Elections which seems to be in full swing whereby elected NDCs are being dismantled and dissolved and replaced by unelected bodies called IMCs is unprincipled and undemocratic, obnoxious and offensive and the Government should desist from further eroding the rights of citizens and their will expressed in democratic elections to choose their own councilors to manage Local Government Affairs.

Let us now examine the Estimates in relation to allocations in the Regions. The total allocations for the ten Administrative Regions amount to \$20.37 billion. It represents about 10% of the National Budget. It is made of \$17.9 billion for current expenditure and the sum of \$2.4 billion for capital expenditure. The \$2.4 billion for capital expenditure represents just 1% of the total budget.

The question is whether this is the Government’s understanding of the Constitutional requirement for the Regions to be given the resources to foster their development? The answer has to be “no”. We say this must be the last year that any Government violates the dictates of the Constitution. The total capital subvention for municipalities and local community councils, all of the NDCs, is a mere \$282 million. The Local Government Reform Task Force identified fiscal transfers according to their needs as necessary for the proper functioning of these bodies. When we compare this to \$1.1 billion that was awarded as a security contract from Central Government to a few private security firms for security services to premises in the regions we can see a disconnect. This has to stop. We have to treat the issue of widespread and pervasive poverty and high unemployment present with the seriousness that it deserves. If we do not then our people

will continue doing what they have been doing for decades and decades, which is to migrate, seek their fortunes elsewhere, anywhere. This is why Guyanese can be found everywhere in the world, not only in the big countries but tiny ones as well, in Dominica and perhaps even the Dominican Republic, Anguilla, Montserrat, and the tiny, Nevis. If we do not create the conditions that allows for people to lead a better quality of life and to enjoy a higher standard of living, then our best human resources will continue to flee.

The invidious practice of undermining the authority of RDCs takes many forms. One of it is the funding of projects through various ministries e.g. The Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Housing and Water. Take the case of Basic Needs Trust Fund which comes under the Ministry of Finance. The allocation proposed for this Fund in this budget is \$910 million which is almost 40% of the total capital budget to all 10 administrative Regions. This provision is for implementation of programs in areas such as health, community roads, water supply, etc. It represents partial funding for capital projects targeted to cost \$5,505,903,000 and includes, among others the following:

1. Completion, construction, rehabilitation and extension of:
 - a) Education facilities including Kako and Paramakatoi Primary Schools, BV, Diamond, Ithaca, Number 77, Tuschen Nursery Schools and Annai Secondary School.
 - b) Roads infrastructure in areas such as Paradise, BV, South Amelia's Ward, Leguan, Mon Repos and Stewartville.
 - c) Water supply in areas such as Wakenaam, Goed Fortuin, Mashabo, Wikki, Canefield, Annai, Kimbia and Wiruni.
 - d) Health facilities in areas such as Haiowa, Experiment, Number 53 Village, Kamarang, Yawong and Potarinau.
2. Construction of a daycare centre at Hururu.

It is important to recite this as it highlights activities that are undertaken by Central Government which ought to be the responsibility of Local Democratic Organs.

If the Government is to operate in accordance with the requirements of the Constitution then these projects and interventions must originate from the Regions themselves which must be

responsible for its execution, implementation, monitoring, et cetera. This program and these projects in particular coming under the authority of Central Government in the absence of some overriding reason is really but one means of subterfuge employed to miniaturise and marginalise the authority of local democratic organs, as dictated by the Constitution. This practice must come to an end. The responsibility for administering affairs in the Regions must go to the local democratic organs, in this case the RDCs, NDCs, etc. Excluding these bodies increases the potential for inefficiency, waste, corruption et cetera, previous speakers have referred to this. This phenomenon applies to other Ministries as I have said. The Estimates seek approval for the sum of \$720 million for a “Poverty Program” and provision for poverty alleviation and community development projects with the executing agency being the Ministry of Finance. Budgeted allocation for these two programs, the Basic Needs Trust Fund (BNTF) and the Poverty Program, which totals \$1.63 billion represents 68% of the total allocations for capital projects in all ten administrative Regions. We are sounding a warning to the Government that this practice of breaching provisions of the Constitution must cease. The creating of these slush funds allied to the bypassing and undermining of local democratic organs will have to end. The people must be engaged and be involved to protect their interests, as the Constitution demands, and projects in the Regions must not be the sole responsibility of a handful of unelected Ministry officials.

Let me use an illustration. The total budgetary allocation for Region 8, Potaro-Siparuni, is \$823,688,000 with current expenditure being \$681,425,000 and capital expenditure at \$142,263,000. Let us ignore for the time being the fact that the paltry sum of \$142 million is allocated for total capital expenditure in this entire Region, a sum that is less than 1/3 of what has been spent so far on a building a few corners due south of where we are, a building that threatens to be decrepit and derelict before it has ever been used and we get a sense of the misplaced and cruel priorities of this Government. I see that the sum of \$310 million, capital project number 31, is being sought for modification of a building, purchase of furniture and equipment and provision for institutional strengthening for the GRA. The total project cost is given at \$652.273 million. According to the documents apart from the modification of a building which location has not been given, the project provides for a diagnostic study of the trade transaction environment in Guyana in order to implement the single window automated processing system.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Mr. Bulkan your time is up?

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

Question put, and Carried.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Proceed Hon. Member.

Mr. Bulkan: Thank you Mdm. Deputy Speaker.

Over \$654 million is allocated for some amorphous building or diagnostic study, which is almost 80% of the total allocations to Region 8. Another \$300 million is set for the Skeldon Sugar Factory and this is apart from the \$4 billion injection, \$60 million for upgrading of playgrounds, Capital project 33, with the executing agency being the Ministry of Finance and not local democratic organs, another \$100 million for capital project 34, for which all we are told is that it is for strengthening public financial management and financial sector reform.

I was saying that the \$142 million total capital expenditure for Region 8 is less than half of what has recently been announced to be spent to repair roads in Mocha. I hope that the repairs are not like the repairs to roads in Lusignan that were done on the eve of last November's elections. Recently, I was in Lusignan and these very roads are back to being full of craters and potholes. [Mr. Neendkumar: Which one of the roads?] In Lusignan, Hon. Member, the main road leading in to the prisons at the back. Waste, incompetence, corruption!

The point I wish to make is that \$823 million is the total allocation for Region 8. Of this amount the sum of \$172 million is for health services, comprised of \$137.6 million for current expenditure and \$34.5 million for capital expenditure. Let us examine what the Government's idea of providing health services to residents of the Hinterland is. Of this sum of \$137.6 million budgeted for healthcare in Region 8, the grand sum of \$1.8 million or 1.3% is for drugs and medical supplies; it is a travesty and obscenity. This is a Region that is being ravaged by malaria and other diseases arising from the gold rush and uncontrolled and unregulated mining activities. The Hon. Speaker was in that Region recently, and upon flying into Mahdia he would have seen the spoilt landscape. Imagine therefore what is happening to the people there?

Only \$1.8 million dollars is allocated for drugs and medical supplies for this entire Region. No wonder that when the Vice Chairman of Region 8 Cornel Edwards, himself a qualified Medex, recently visited villages he was screaming for basic drugs: aspirins, multivitamin tablets, malaria drugs, treatment for diarrhea. Yet billions upon billions are being spent but the people are neglected. This aberration is by no means confined to Region 8. On January 25 this year there was a letter in Stabroek News written by Winston Peter, an Amerindian of Region 9 complaining about what he referred as the, “shabby health services being provided by the Lethem Public Hospital”, where according to him, drugs were not available and apparently so for the longest while. Yet Mr. Peter says that Government officials boast of the Lethem Hospital being a state-of-the-art hospital but his grandparents who sought medical assistance there could get none. “Where is the care and concern for our people” he pointedly asked in that letter. This case illustrates the lack of understanding for human needs and concern for human development. But yet we have heard much lofty rhetoric about progress on millennium development goals and how much has been achieved. These are but words. Stabroek News did forward a copy of that letter to the Hon. Minister for any comment he might have wished to make. What was his response? I can tell you that up to April 5th, which was a week ago, there was none. Mr. Peter said that what transpires at that hospital is a “do not give a damn attitude” towards patients. It would appear that that attitude is not confined only at the hospital. Incidentally, yesterday in the Kaieteur News – the Hon. Prime Minister did accuse the Kaieteur News of practicing wickedness a short moment ago – there was an article about the very Lethem Hospital not functioning to the expectation of residents. There is photographic evidence here of what obtains in that state of the art hospital. The article is quite detailed; it was yesterday’s edition of the Kaieteur News.

The lesson to be learnt from this is that Guyana is a large country and cannot be effectively run where all decisions are made in Georgetown. [Mr. Neendkumar: Have you ever been to Lethem? You normally go to Florida] If you go there Sir, you will learn something. We have to decentralise. The Regions have to be granted autonomy. The constitutional provisions which mandate this were not arrived at in a vacuum; rather it was out of recognition of the realities, out of years of experience, and perhaps oftentimes bitter ones. When people are empowered and are allowed to elect their own leaders to manage community needs then the best talent will emerge, the cream will rise to the top. There will be no square pegs in round holes. This is how we will develop; stop the exodus and hemorrhaging of our best human capital.

The Hon. Minister and these documents tells us that 1,729 solar panel systems were distributed last year under the Hinterland Electrification Program – the Prime Minister spoke about this as well – and that a further 8,000 will be distributed this year. The RDCs are not engaged in this activity. Our position is clear and it is that the RDCs have to spearhead and be involved if transparency is to be ensured so as to avoid what happened after the last elections where residents in Chenapau and Kopinang were threatened with repossession of these solar panel systems because apparently they did not vote for the PPP.

There is a lot of tomfoolery in this budget. \$235 million is budgeted for something called the Competitiveness Program. Total project cost is given at \$1.8 billion of which \$891 million has previously been spent. This project we are told is designed to improve the competitiveness of businesses and to enhance exports. Yet we see all the major sectors of the economy in distress. The forestry sector is in shambles, having regressed to primary production. With very little value added production, log exports now dominate the sector. In manufacturing it is no different. It is the same in the sugar industry. Fishing is down 5.3%. The economy is structurally unbalanced; it remains driven by primary production.

3.45 p.m.

Yet, amazingly this is what the Hon. Minister Dr. Ashni Singh says in his budget speech:

“Much effort is being devoted by the Government to make the Guyana economy more robust and resilient, better able to withstand external shocks and less vulnerable to the viscidities of domestic single industry upheavals.

We have done this by aggressively promoting the development of a more diversified production base and by advancing an agenda for improving national competitiveness.”

Where is the evidence, however? What we see is that total exports for rice, sugar bauxite and timber amounts to US\$469 million compared to gold exports which earned US\$517.1 million. Gold alone has earned 10% more than sugar, rice, bauxite and timber combined; a single extractive industry with no value added component benefitting fortuitously from high world market prices. This is what one would call a disaster waiting to happen. We have to get real, get serious; stop taxing and spending with reckless abandon. Only national consensus can save us.

As a country Guyana consistently produced more sugar in the 1950s than we have in the past four years, and this in spite of massive investment in that industry. The highest production in the last four years was last year – 236,506 tonnes. In 1952 the production was higher – 60 years ago. In 1960 the industry produced over 300,000 tonnes. The time for excuses is long over. We have to remove our heads from the sand.

This budget is indeed large. It seeks to spend \$192 billion, almost US\$1 billion. This is a lot of money; money which comes from taxing the nation, from the pockets of everyone. Much can be achieved with this kind of expenditure, but it calls for a relevant and appropriate vision, one that is sadly missing. It requires an understanding of our resources, both human and natural, and a genuine desire to invest in our human capital. Finding oil is not the answer nor is the state investing to build a hotel the way to go. We have to invest in our people. This is what this budget lacks – a sense of human development.

Hinterland residents are plagued with peculiar problems. These include very high cost of living, poor infrastructure, lack of jobs, poor water supply, and no market for their produce. The economy of indigenous communities is largely unbalanced; and care and sensitivity are required to address the many problems of residents in the hinterland. They cannot be left to their own devices. We cannot allow others to go into these areas and communities, take out the wealth and not factor in that in many instances the traditional way of life of those persons is literally under threat. We have to focus on human development; that is what we on this side of the House will do.

The theme of this budget begins with the words “Remaining on Course”. The Leader of the Opposition the Hon. Brigadier (Ret’d) David Granger’s initial response immediately following the presentation was that it represents continuity at its worst. This observation is spot on. But having looked at the massive amounts to be spent and where it is going I would say a more appropriate title would be ‘cash for cronies and contractors’.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I end by restating that this budget would have benefitted from meaningful consultation and consensus. Finally I urge that we move away from rhetoric and embrace reality. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Member Bulkhan.

Members it is now 3.50 p.m. I think it will be doing the Hon. Minister Webster an injustice to ask her to begin now and then we break. So we will take the break now and to save some time we will have a 50-minute lunch break rather than a one-hour lunch break and come back at 4.40 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 3.50 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 4.43p.m.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: The session is resumed, please be seated. Hon. Minister Webster.

Minister of Human Services and Social Security [Ms. Webster]: Thank you Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I rise today in this Hon. House to give my support to Budget 2012 under the theme *Remaining on Course, United in Purpose, Prosperity for all.*

Let me extend congratulations to my colleague the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, Minister of Finance, for articulating such a vision in this year's budget presentation which will ensure that our country remains on the path to prosperity.

I believe that we, as representatives of the people, must all work together for the benefit of all Guyanese, especially at this time in our country when just recently the people of Guyana, through a process, re-affirmed our country's strength as a maturing democracy. We must be steadfast in our endeavours, and continue the process which would enable our people to realise their dreams and aspirations; one where all citizens can live and work in unity and harmony for a better Guyana.

This PPP/C Government has, over the past 20 years, demonstrated by our policies and programmes a pro-poor approach to growth in our economy, aimed at improving the quality of life of our people, and has placed emphasis on the provision of quality social services to our people. In fact, this year's budget is a budget for all Guyanese, and is structured to provide greater relief to our people.

His Excellency President Ramotar in his inaugural address to this National Assembly, identified a number of areas for priority focus in several sectors which are aimed to further improve the quality of life of all Guyanese. The vision of our President cautioned us to work towards

representing all our people, and is one which would secure the path for an enhanced, representative legislative agenda in this Tenth Parliament.

His Excellency highlighted our Government's intention to intensify work for the empowerment of our women and youth. I quote from his speech:

“We will intensify work for the empowerment of our women and youth. They must be accorded a greater say in national development. Their problems must become our concerns and must be addressed in a systematic way.”

The mandate of the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security in many ways reflects the central thrust of our Government, through its provision, promotion and indeed protection, of the rights of all citizens, with special emphasis being placed and given to our most vulnerable groups – our women, children, the elderly and disadvantaged.

The delivery of services by the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security is one of the clearest reflections of the fact that we, as a Government, are here for the people of Guyana, and will ensure that no one is discriminated against.

The provision of human services focuses on meeting human needs through the prevention, as well as remediation of problems, whilst maintaining our commitment to improving the quality of life for target populations.

This Government has recognised the importance of investing in the most valuable resource vital to Guyana's continued development – our people.

On a daily basis a number of issues are addressed which include the provision of public assistance, payment of pensions, eye care assistance, provision of legal aid services, support for the homeless, the disadvantaged and the elderly, which are all aimed to address the issues affecting those vulnerable groups in our society. In addition, there are a number of issues pertaining to sexual and domestic violence, and the protection of our children, which continue to engage our attention on an ongoing basis.

The Child Care Protection Agency which was commissioned in 2011 has played a leading role in the investigation of a number of reported child abuse cases. This has resulted in an increase of

the number of cases investigated, from 3,377 in 2010 to 3,653 cases in 2011. Of this number 489 children have been removed from abusive situations and placed in safe homes.

Additionally, the National Foster Care Programme has a total number of 103 children in foster homes. These foster parents currently receive monthly cash transfers to the tune of \$18,000 per month, per child, in an effort to ensure the continued wellbeing of all our children being placed in foster care.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, a new facility, the Sophia Care Centre, which was commissioned in 2011, brought the total number of facilities which are owned and managed by the Government to three. This facility currently houses 180 children between the ages of five to eighteen years. And will provide holistic care to our young children, including specialised counseling services, and will undertake programmes aimed to improve the development of our children in fields such as music, dancing, art and craft and information technology.

In 2012 our Government will continue to implement policies and programmes to secure a safer environment for our children, and transform the lives of those vulnerable persons in our society. The care centres and homes will continue to provide protective and parental care. Very shortly, through an initiative with a private sector company in partnership with the Ministry of Labour Human Services and Social Security, the Mahaica Children's Home will be upgraded to provide better care exclusively for our young teenage girls who have been victims of sexual abuse.

We will also continue to provide support and training opportunities so that our young people are afforded an opportunity to acquire life skills. Plans are ongoing to establish a "half way house" to accommodate those youths who have attained the age of 17 years and are expected to leave the formal care system.

Additionally, the quality of our child care services will be regulated through the implementation of the new Child Care Development and Services Act (2011), which mandates the licensing and monitoring of child care facilities, including day care centres and playgroups countrywide. In addition, the agency currently monitors the operations of 19 private homes throughout the length and breadth of our country. In May, 2012 the Ministry will install visiting committees for which the primary role will be to ensure that all these private homes operate within the minimum

standards required, whilst ensuring that the well-being of the children placed in these institutions is secure, and that our children benefit from a better quality of life.

We have made significant strides in providing homes for children in need of refuge, counseling, support services for families in crisis, foster care and adoption services, where these are deemed the best possible options for some of our children. We will continue to provide a supportive and caring home environment so that all of those children will be equipped to take advantage of all the opportunities being offered in Guyana, so that they too can become productive members of our society.

In 2012 the Child Care and Protection Agency will also concentrate its efforts on early childhood development, through a number of initiatives and programmes, which would benefit children up to the age of eight years.

As stated in the PPP/C's 2011 Manifesto, the National Foster Care Programme will be expanded this year towards ensuring the long term goal of every child in need being placed in a family. This is indicative of the wider Government position of promoting family-based care and ensuring that ultimately all children are cared for in a home versus an institutional environment.

Guyana's first family court has been completed and this court will allow adults and children to seek redress in family related matters, adoption, guardianship and custody. The rules of court, comprising rules and regulations to create and govern a child friendly environment for the judicial address of family matters, are currently being finalised. The family court is expected to commence its sittings shortly.

In addition to decentralising child protection services throughout Guyana, officers will be housed permanently in all ten administrative regions to create a stronger and more interactive link with the public. More community outreaches will be conducted to educate both parents and children about the harmful effects of abuse and its impact on our society.

In 2012, our primary focus will be to place greater emphasis on the role of the family in our society. To this end the National Commission on the Family will be appointed shortly. This Commission will be tasked to address issues affecting families in our society with emphasis being placed on parenting skills, health and family life education, to mention a few.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I am sure you will agree that strengthening the bond of the family inevitably strengthens our bonds as a nation.

The Government has demonstrated its commitment to the provision of human services through the bolstering of the legal framework, and the passage of several key pieces of legislation in this National Assembly in the areas of child protection, sexual and domestic violence. The supporting institutional framework has been strengthened to enable the efficient provision of services in these areas.

However, I must respond to some concerns raised by the Hon. Member Mrs. Volda Lawrence. At a recent forum held by the Guyana Women Lawyers Association, which I attended, and which was intended to review and assess our approach in particular as it related to violence committed against women, all the stakeholders present at that forum, including NGOs representing women's rights, were united in our resolve to work together towards the further strengthening of the relevant laws including the Sexual Offences Act.

I have noted the sentiments expressed by the Hon. Member as it related to amendments being made to the relevant laws to protect our women. Despite all the consultations held when we looked at the Sexual Offences Bill during the Select Committee in this Hon. House, when training under this Act commenced, it was noted that there were two sections which needed to be changed. This is no different than in any other country.

In fact, I understand that whilst we were drafting this Bill, Canada's courts had ruled that one of the sections which we wanted to include in ours was unconstitutional. So Canada has had to amend their Act. Other countries have gone through scores of amendments. The Hansard will show that during the passage of this particular piece of legislation the then Minister of Human Services and Social Security, Hon. Mrs. Priya Manickchand, pointed out there was need to make further amendments. However, operations under the Act have begun and our first paper committal conducted in this country under the said Sexual Offences Act was done by the Chief Magistrate Mrs. Priya Beharry.

Let me assure the Members of this Hon. House that our Ministry continues through its work to reach out to everyone in need of assistance throughout the length and breadth of our country. We

will continue to exert our efforts to ensure that the quality of life of those vulnerable persons in our society is transformed in a significant way.

Very shortly the Centre for the Rehabilitation and Re-integration of the Homeless, which is situated at Onverwagt, will be completed. This will signify once again our Government's continued commitment and concern for the welfare of all Guyanese, especially as it relates to those who are faced with difficult circumstances, and those destitute persons who, for various reasons, are forced to make the streets their home, being afforded the opportunity to access available support services. Persons living on our streets are vulnerable to illness and other social ills in our society. That is why this Government has seen the need for a comprehensive approach to address the needs of those deemed vulnerable, because we care about the welfare of all our people. As part of our programme it is our intention to support the rehabilitation and re-integration of these individuals in our society.

It is often said that women are the backbone of our country. Our women are our nation's wealth. Indeed our women contribute to our national development in a significant way. The fact that Guyana was ranked 38th in the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index in 2010, was ranked 27th for the Political Empowerment of Women, and 33rd for Educational Attainment out of 134 countries, indicates that women are poised to play a greater role in decision making at the highest levels.

Our women provide the foundation for life. We are care givers of the highest degree, and are productive and valued members of our society. It is a criminal and abhorrent act when any woman is abused, emotionally, mentally or physically; and no woman should be a victim of sexual or domestic violence.

It is my view, and the view of many, that no act of domestic violence should be tolerated or condoned in our society. Domestic violence must be seen as a national pandemic that cuts across all borders - ethnicity, race, socio-economic status and religion. Domestic violence affects women's health and well-being; it hurts our children and families, and poses considerable cost to societies economically and socially. What is needed in Guyana immediately is to further address this issue in a truly coordinated national response. I am proposing that a national conversation on this issue be held involving all stakeholders, who will include parliamentarians, civil society,

private sector, and the judiciary; and which will also see maximum participation at the community level aimed to address the root cause of this issue, to identify preventative measures, and ultimately develop a national action plan.

We must take our society back. We have become a society where many do not have moral values. This reckless behavior must be stopped. I have already initiated the collection of data which would be used to analyse the current social trends which presently exist in our society with the view to utilising that data to inform policy making. It is Government's intention to establish counseling centres throughout this country to provide support to victims of domestic violence and abuse. We must commit ourselves to do whatever it takes to reduce the number of incidents which we see occurring so often in our society today.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, we as Members of this National Assembly have been elected by the people of Guyana to make a difference in their lives. I would advocate in this honourable House that we all join forces and unite together on this issue.

5.08 p.m.

I would like every woman in Guyana to know that our Government will ensure that the systems in place in our country will provide her with a safe refuge, when she needs it.

This Government, through the work of our Ministry, has sought to break the silence on these atrocities and is committed to the sustained rejection of abuse in any form and strict and strong actions being taken against the perpetrators.

We continue, through a number of policies and programmes, to empower our women, especially those who are single parents, to provide training opportunities in a number of fields and also through the availability of micro credit schemes, so that they would be afforded an opportunity to improve their quality of life, whilst, at the same time being able to generate income to support themselves and their families and similarly contribute in a meaningful way to our nation's development.

In considering the family unit, Government has paid special attention to the single parent household with a number of initiatives geared towards this specific target group, including the Women of Worth Programme (WOW) and skills training initiatives for single parents. Micro

credit has evolved as a multi faceted programme, aimed to benefit this vulnerable group of women, “Our single parents”, who are in need of support, so that many of them will be able to achieve economic independence. Government intends to expand the range of benefits available to them. In 2011, 864 single women accessed loans under the Women of Worth Programme from the Guyana Bank for Trade and Industry to support small business development, in areas such as leather craft, catering, the provision of day care facilities, to mention a few. It is also noteworthy to mention that in one instance, one of the success stories or one of the beneficiaries was able to access a loan to expand her veterinary clinic at Golden Grove, on the East Coast Demerara. Is this not a fine example of empowering our women to enable them to contribute in a meaningful way to our country’s development? In 2012, approximately 500 single parents will benefit from this initiative. We plan to launch this programme soon in Regions 1 and 7.

This Government’s concern for the pensioners and the elderly has been evident from the beginning of its term in office in 1992. Our first priority was to abolish the means test in July 1993 to allow every Guyanese, 65 years and over, to be able to receive an old age pension.

In 1992, our pensioners were in receipt of a mere \$211.00. In those days at an exchange rate of G\$125.00 to US\$1.00, that sum was a mere US\$1.69. In this House a lot has been said about the quantum of pension payable to our pensioners. If one were to look at the budget presentation presented by the then Finance Minister in 1992, no mention was made of any increases in pensions in the measures posited. We must not forget what has happened in Guyana and where we have come from and not stifle our conscience that nothing is being done to improve the quality of life of our senior citizens. It is this Government who ensured that every year pensions were increased. In fact, from 1992 up to 2006 the amount payable had increased almost 17-fold to \$3,500.00. From budget 2006 to budget 2012, pensions have increased significantly. In fact, to date the pension increase amounts to 131%. We must look at the reality and it is that the amount represents, once more, a sustained increase, which could only have been possible as a result of prudent fiscal management of Guyana’s growing economy.

We must not behave as though nothing is being done for the elderly, there is much more.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, before you continue, your time is up.

Ms. Teixeira: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, may I ask for fifteen minutes extension, please.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Proceed Hon. Minister.

Ms. Webster: The Hon. Member, Mrs. Lawrence, referred to the size of the increase of old age pensions versus the size of the support for the consumers of electricity. These two amounts are not opposite sides of the coin, but one and the same. This Government will ensure that our people, including our pensioners and our elderly, are able to have a reliable supply of electricity at an affordable cost. We would not deny them that.

This Government has worked tirelessly in the health sector to ensure that health systems, food security and other issues, which contribute to the calculation of life expectancy, were improved. Based on the latest published data from the Ministry of Health, calculations for life expectancy at birth indicated that in 1990 life expectancy was 60 years. I am pleased that today life expectancy is calculated to be 70 years, thus, identifying that an additional 10 years of life can be expected of every Guyanese who is born under this Administration.

Our commitment to the elderly aims to address a package of support services ranging from health care, nutrition, institutional care, direct financial subsidy for water, travel passes, assistance with medical bills and the provision of the spectacles through the Eye Care Guyana initiative.

Free health care is available to all, including our elderly. The ability to provide public health facilities in the communities shows that Government is demonstrating its commitment to taking these services to the people.

In 2012, 42000 pensioners will benefit from the monthly pension payable.

The Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security provides a number of other support services to our pensioners in addition to the monthly pension payable. Our commitment to the elderly aims to address a package of support services ranging from health care, nutritional institutional care and annual direct financial subsidy with respect to water charges incurred at the official residence of the individual pensioner, provided that no business is conducted at their place of abode. This subsidy amounts to \$11,880.00 per annum in respect of those pensioners who reside in Georgetown, whilst pensioners who reside out of Georgetown benefit from an annual subsidy of \$8,976.00, which is payable to the Guyana Water Incorporated.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, 21,980 pensioners were beneficiaries of this subsidy in 2011. For the record, I would like to give this Hon. House the details of the allocation of those 21 980 pensioners,

Division 1 - Essequibo Coast/Berbice -	2200
2 – WCD. WBD, East Bank Essequibo -	3159
3 – Georgetown -	4529
3 – Linden -	1232
3 – East Coast Demerara -	3544
3 – East Bank Demerara -	1432
4 – Upper Demerara/West Coast Berbice	2207
5 – East Berbice -	3677

Eye care assistance - In addition, our pensioners access assistance for the acquisition of spectacles through the Eye Care Assistance Programme. Through this programme, our pensioners receive a grant in the sum of ten thousand (\$10,000.00). In fact, the sum of \$5.349 million was expended in this regard in 2011.

In 2011 also, 2271 pensioners who travelled on our ferries were issued with free travel passes by the Transport and Harbours Department. Our Government remains committed to continuing a process to provide more benefits for the senior citizens of this country.

In the not too distant future, the National Commission on the Elderly will recommence its work and will be tasked to review matters relating to the care, housing, nutrition, health, psychological, medical and recreational needs of the elderly. As Minister, I have also initiated discussions with my colleague Minister of Health to partner and derive solutions, which will address special health care needs of the elderly, which include dementia, Alzheimer and Parkinson disease. Every hospital that is built in this country provides services which cater for the elderly.

In 2012, the Ministry will undertake a review of the administrative mechanism currently in place as it relates to the processing of pension application and the payment of old age pensions, with a view to ensuring that the system is more efficient and one which the integrity of the database is secure.

In 2012, the Ministry will focus its attention on improved quality care provided to the residents at the Palms Geriatric Institution. Very shortly, an administrator will be appointed to manage that institution. In addition, emphasis will be placed on institutional care and new internal control mechanisms will be put in place to monitor all donations received for use at that facility. In addition, the Ministry intends to ensure that the staffs of that institution are properly trained to provide the nursing care required by residents.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, there are many other vulnerable groups in our society, including the differently abled and more recently the Autism and the Deaf Association. The Ministry intends to collaborate and work closely with these groups, to provide support services to these organisations.

The Guyana's Women Leadership Institute empowered over 230 women through several capacity building training programmes offered at the institute, including life skills and for the first time Information Technology. In 2012, greater emphasis will be placed to provide training opportunities for approximately 2 000 women in areas such as small business management, basic accounting, project management and life skills development.

This Government recognises the importance of legal aid services being provided throughout the length and breadth of our country and is supportive of the provision of legal aid services being provided in Region 10. From 1993 to 2008, the sole legal aid provider in this country was the Georgetown Legal Aid Clinic, which provided resident services in Georgetown and the immediate environs and non-resident service in Region 10. These were the only two regions benefiting from legal aid services offered by the Guyana Legal Aid Clinic. The PPP/C, in our 2006 manifesto, promised to expand legal aid services, that promise was honoured by my colleague, the then Minister of Human Services and Social Security, the Hon. Ms. Priya Manickchand, who launched legal aid services in Essequibo in June, 2008 and in Region 5, in October, 2008.

We have always been supportive of Legal Aid Services and you will see in the 2012 budget the sum of \$32.338 million being provided.

Additionally, Government has been supportive of the efforts made by another NGO, the Linden Legal Aid Centre (LLAC). The attorneys who provided these services in Region 10 must be recognised for their contributions. It was this Government who advocated at the level of UNICEF and recommended that funding be provided, from country funds, to support the operations of the Linden Legal Aid Centre. Funding was provided from August 2008 to August 2009 to the tune of \$6.7 million and from December 2009 to December 2010 to the tune of \$6 million. During the period of April 2011 to December 2011, the sum of \$9.060 million was provided to meet operating costs. Those facts are indisputable, had the Government not advocated for and approved the expenditure on behalf of LLAC by UNICEF, funds would never have been disburse to the LLAC. A lot has been said about the adequacy of funding to meet the operations there, but I will say that there is no discrimination here. In the joint Government of Guyana/UNICEF Work Plan, resources have been identified in 2012 for the continued operations of LLAC so that the children in Region 10, who require Legal Aid Services, will not be denied access to that service. This I have advocated for.

It is unfair to say that taxpayers' money is not good for Region 10. No one in Region 10 or any other region, who cannot afford legal services, will ever be denied access to those services. These are the facts. Many have said that resources provided for legal aid services in Linden, is inadequate and it is true, that the finances provided for legal aid services in every Region is inadequate. That is true. Even the great United States of America, with an economy larger than ours, has never been able to provide adequate financial resources for legal aid services. However, we will continue to try to do our best to ensure that no one is denied access to justice and we will continue to pursue that objective until it is realised.

As I conclude my presentation today, let me say that our work will never be done until every woman, man, child, senior citizens and those vulnerable persons in need, have access to the best possible social services that we, as a Government, are able to provide. I conclude by saying that His Excellency, President Ramotar, in his address to this National Assembly, articulated a vision for the continued progress and development of our country, a vision that is reflected and has been cemented into the concrete polices, plans and programmes that this Government has

presented to this House in the 2012 Budget. I, therefore, add my endorsement to Budget 2012 and charges all to remain on course, united in purpose and achieving prosperity for all.

I thank you. [Applause]

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Minister Webster. I now invite the Hon. Member, Mr. John Adams to make his presentation. This is Mr. Adams's first presentation to the National Assembly.

Mr. Adams: Thank you Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I rise to present to this Hon. House, the views of a large segment of the population of Region 3 pertaining to the national 2012 budget, which was presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance on March 30, 2012.

I hasten to observe that apart from its eloquence, it was a marathon presentation of a scorecard and plans that offered little hope for the ordinary man, the downtrodden worker, artisan and the peasant who forms the majority of residents residing in the Essequibo Islands/West Demerara area.

Many of these folks possess a clear understanding of the issues that matters and can unequivocally determine the measures required to move them and their families out of the doldrums of hopelessness, to a path of improved standard of living, in other words, a good life, which APNU campaigned to deliver.

The constituent that I have the honour to serve has sent me to this Parliament to say that the Government's case, as presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance, which seeks to offer ideas for remaining on course, becoming united in purpose and achieving prosperity for all Guyanese, was fundamentally flawed.

Of course, the budget reflects a propensity on the part of the Administration to remain on the course of economic suppression, with the privileged united in deception, to achieve a continuation of the Orwellian status quo, "All men are equal, but some are more equal than others".

My colleagues, on this side of the House, have dealt with many of the disappointing features in the 2012 budget. Features that demonstrate the governing party's intention to dishonour

campaign promises such as reduction of the Value Added Tax burden- President Ramotar said so-, equitable distribution of wealth and reduction of lawlessness at the national level. So permit me to highlight some of the uncaring situations that this Administration seems bent on keeping, “On course”.

For a Government that prides itself on being internationally recognised for its advocacy for climate change issues, Region 3, and most of the Coast and riverine areas, experience flooding almost once per quarter. This occurrence whether from overtopping of the Atlantic, our rivers or rainfall, leaves residents with much damage and loss to property, not to mention the irretrievable nature of important and sentimental documents that becomes water soaked. I urge that Government pay close attention to expanding the programme objective for public works in Region 3, to include, “the continued enhancement and sustainability of the physical infrastructure with emphasis on combating floods and its effects”.

My second observation has to deal with Education delivery, for which \$1.5 billion was allocated. The programme objective, “To ensure equal access for all children and young people in the region” this is laudable. However, the programme must go beyond words to be meaningful and I submit with the implementation envisaged, it is bound to be restrained because of some deep-seated condition that the Government continues to turn a blind eye on in this budget and has seemingly ignored. For example, the Vreed en Hoop Secondary School is a public health disaster waiting to happen. It is flooded frequently and such flooding always spills over to the adjoining cemetery which is still open for burial. This school should be re-sited or the relevant engineering skills and resources be brought to bear to alleviate this problem.

The problem is not only public health in nature, for both students and teachers suffer from loss of tuition because the in service teacher training college in Region 3 is housed in this very building. Contrary to what is bandied, in some quarters, about those who occupy this side of this Hon. House, as being a minority dictatorship, I wish to point out that we are not in the business of criticising for criticising sake. So permit me to suggest how a part of this problem could be resolved in the short term by referring to the estimates presented. In Programme 734 - Education, reference 295 of the 2012 Capital Projects Profiles, reference 2 at “Description of Project states, “Extension of Essequibo Island Secondary and Windsor Forest Primary School”.

I recall this school was housed in separate buildings for a number of years. Recently, the senior building was extended to accommodate pupils from the junior building, which is now vacant. My humble suggestion therefore, is that the vacant junior building be refurbished to house the Cyril Potter College of Education in-service teachers' training centre in Region 3. This, I think, is an example of how we can maximise on scarce resources to meet the challenges and needs of our communities.

Before moving away from Education, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I wish to draw to your attention the fact that the department of Education building, in Region 3, was destroyed by fire in September, 2009 and is housed in cramped surroundings in the Region 3 Resource Centre. I am not aware that any provision has been made in the 2012 budget for this deficiency to be addressed.

5.38 p.m.

I would now like to focus on Health delivery in the Region. There is a shortage of technical specialists and nurses at the West Demerara Regional Hospital. The staff has been working overtime hours consistently to meet demands, and while some may welcome the opportunity to make ends meet in this overtaxed economy, we are painfully aware of the implications of this situation, for the proper health delivery.

Added to this is a shortage, and in some cases absence of an ambulance driver and dispensary services which do not work on a 24-hour basis... I would suggest that these services be made available on a 24-hour basis to serve the patients visiting that hospital. In some instances drugs obtained expire within weeks – a waste of taxpayers' money.

I note that the 2012 Budget makes provisions for allocations to the Madewini Youth Camp but nothing is proposed for the Den Amstel Youth Camp, which also belongs to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. One would have thought that in this modern age of integrated planning, with a modern outdoor synthetic athletic track and a technical institute in the works it would naturally follow that the youth facilities at Den Amstel would have been rehabilitated and upgraded.

Unto a few years ago, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, we in Region 3 were proud of the relative absence of criminal activities. Today crime is on the increase. Residents are fearful of being attacked by bandits when they go to bed. We have Police Stations without functioning generators to meet the constant power outage experience. Can you imagine that ranks on duty at night have to resort to the lighting of candles and kerosene lamps?

It has been brought to my attention that the Supernumerary Constables – properly known as the SCs – have to be working long hours, some for as much as 36 hours, receiving little pay and having to wait several months to get there overtime payment. Is this how we intend to improve security and grapple the upsurge in criminal activity in the communities?

In closing I must refer to the topic of agriculture. The steady agitation of cane farmers for improved working conditions is not political in nature; it is a real industrial challenge resulting from poor management of the industry that leaves much to be desired. The rice farmers are currently benefiting from the lucrative Venezuelan market, but I wish to caution for us not to abandon the traditional markets in CARICOM and Europe and put all of our eggs in the Venezuelan markets for with one swoop the farmers and the industry could collapse if something goes wrong in that direction.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I close as I started by requesting the Hon. Minister of Finance to consider the suggestions posited from this side of the House to improve on the 2012 Budget. This will help us truly in uniting the nation in purpose and assist in facilitating prosperity for all Guyanese and to ensure a better life for all.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much, Mr. John Adams. I now invite Dr. Vindhya Persaud to make her presentation. Also her first presentation. Members are behaving very well. I am very pleased.

Dr. Persaud: Thank you, Mdm. Deputy Speaker.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: I do not think that it is permissible to heckle the Speaker.

Dr. Persaud: Thank you, Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I am making my first speech in this August Assembly and I do so disappointed in the Opposition speakers who preceded me as their speeches were bereft of the content one would expect at the juncture of this country's history of development under the PPP/Civic. They sought to malign a budget which illustrates vividly the progressive transformation of the landscape of this country visible to every eye, if you wants to see, and exemplifies the PPP/C Government's commitment to the welfare of every Guyanese. This budget is not a document of empty words but constitutes a rational review of the development of this country and where we are going.

The Former Minister of Finance and the Hon. Member, Mr. Carl Greenidge, has a dismal record touching on the premise of unaccountability. I feel tall when I declare in this House, in this Parliament, that the PPP/Civic Government changed that trend. This Government ensured that the country's finances were subjected to auditing and presented within the statutory limits of the Constitution.

The crafting of this budget amidst international and domestic vicissitudes to reflect a decrease in international debt and growth in key sectors – among them education, health and social services – is a reflection of judicious management of the finances of this country by this Government.

We feel very proud of the PPP/Civic Government. Let me quote what the former Minister, Mr. Greenidge, the Hon. Member, said in his 1988 Budget, and if he wants I can even loan him my Hansard copy as he is so fond of speaking of and feeling proud of his tenure in that time:

“One of the most glaring consequences of our prolonged fiscal crisis has been our inability to maintain social and economic infrastructure...”

Under the regime of the PNC, of which Mr. Greenidge, the Hon. Member, was a Minister of Finance, this country, Guyana, was dubbed the poorest country in the hemisphere. Today the PPP/Civic Government has reversed this trend. May I, at this point, congratulate the PPP/Civic Government for moving our beautiful country, Guyana, forward.

I have no intention on harping on the past, but rather to move you forward progressively and take you to the current level of development. Young people are now given every opportunity to give expression to their talent and skill in any field of human endeavour. The world is travelling at a

fast pace in the evolution of technology; youths are definitely being encouraged to move with the times. Young people in this country require the wherewithal not only to contribute to the country but to be integrally involved in every aspect of development of the critical sectors in Guyana.

The Government's visionary Information Communication Technology (ICT) sector was not derived in isolation; there was a plan, there was a purpose and one can see the link between the sectors, the provision of resources, training and, it goes one step further towards the provision of jobs. Our ICT sector easily outstrips that of the Caribbean and I can say this as fact. What they have taken years to develop we have jumped ahead to achieve right now.

Government understands that young people need to be equipped with the necessary tools in technology to stand on par with their counterparts in the developed world.

There is projection in the budget contrary to what has been said by speakers in this House. There is projection that at least 16,000 jobs will be available to young people in the information communication sector with the increase in call centres – yes, in Linden too.

I am also going to say, further, there is interlinking, there is infrastructure for networking. Not only has the information communication sector been developed but the One Laptop per Family provides young people – yes you can say “Oh, as you like” but it is true... 10,000 families have benefitted already, 90,000 more families will benefit, youths will benefit. I also want to let you know, to make this all work fiberoptic cables will link every part of this country, even to the most remote areas because there are drop off sites at Lethem, Annai, Kurupukari, Mabura, Linden, Moleson Creek, all the way to Anna Regina. This ensures that large volumes of young people in this country, urban, rural and hinterland young people have equal opportunities and equal access to use advanced technology to research, study and communicate on par with the developed world.

I want to let you know that as I have listened to the Hon. Members on both sides of the House, more so to the Hon. Member on that side of the House, I do not like the way in which young people are being charged to always expect a handout. We have to develop in them a sense of self worth, a sense that we have to work, we have to earn and we have to develop ourselves and Government is providing this opportunity in every single one of their sectors and this is only the information technology sector that I am speaking about.

No doubt the allocation by the Minister of Finance in this year's budget of \$3.1 billion to continue this dynamic interlocking provision of the most advanced forms of internet technology to equip our youth to face the fast paced global changes in the world cannot and should not be dismissed.

The Government of today is cognizant of the value of education for youths as they prepare to enter the working world to maintain a family and, more importantly, to carve out their independence financially.

The multipronged approach and thrust to nurturing young minds in and out of school, improving their academic credentials and providing them with the tools to access education at every level is now available to every Guyanese be it from the rural, urban or hinterland communities.

The PPP/Civic has not reneged on its promises in the manifesto as relates to universal education access and facilities for youth. More schools populate Guyana. There is obvious rehabilitation going on in schools. There is development of facilities conducive to learning. There is improvement in technology, in scientific equipment necessary for academic prowess. We do not say that we can be compared in any way to the big developed countries but we are moving, we are trying and this is what this budget is all about – building on a strong foundation.

In the hinterland, I can say, there are a number of schools. The number of schools has not only increased but the numbers of students have increased. Let me tell you: the Paramakatoi Secondary School now boasts 700 students compared to 35, Santa Rosa now has 300 students and a new secondary school will be built in Kato, one is currently being built in Sand Creek.

I have to come back once in a while to the past. No longer do our hinterland children have to come in droves – and that too only 1% of them – to acquire education at that level, it is provided right there in their communities through 13 high schools; 5,768 students attend these schools and they are in North West, Santa Rosa, Port Kaituma, Wakapau, Saint Cuthberts Mission, Waramadong, Bartica, Paramakatoi, Mahdia, Annai, Aishalton and I can go on but I think that the message is clear.

Under the PPP/Civic Government the hinterland children have been given back their fundamental right to education at that level which they were deprived of under the PNC Government.

It does not stop at just education; there are innovative programmes, such as the National Feeding Programme which filters down into the Hinterland, the School Uniform Programme; we cannot say that these are things that are not being done. Students who need boarding or need to attend schools out of their communities Government pays for – their boarding, accommodation, food, their uniforms, everything. [Dr. Ramsarran: Transportation is in there too.] Yes, thank you Minister, transportation as well. 63 are currently boarding at Student dormitory at Liliendaal and there are other Guyanese students who are boarding around the country. How can any Opposition with the interest of Guyanese children at heart, more so the hinterland Guyanese children deny the obvious provision that has been made to remove them from the obscurity under which they languished in years gone by.

As I said, provision for education is not only made in school but out of school. The Guyana Learning Channel which broadcasts programmes complements the education curriculum for all students countrywide.

Young people in their pursuit of academia, more than any other time in history, are more diligent. Young women easily surpass their male counterparts. The number of graduates from the University of Guyana has increased. I am a product of the University of Guyana, and a proud one. Had I not had this Government in power I would have had to do National Service and perhaps I would not have been where I am today. Many young women, like me, serve this country at all levels and they serve at the University of Guyana, as I did or in various sectors across the country.

Not only the University of Guyana has been earmarked in this budget for development in research, infrastructure, student loans, science and technology, education, curriculum reform, but also tertiary level education has been earmarked for continuous improvement to cater for all students who enroll in the diverse programmes.

Young people in Guyana, like anywhere else in the world, have diverse interests and diverse interests lead to differences in career ambitions. With the decentralisation of services and

facilities and the injection of finances in an extensive, but not exhaustive, list of institutions and training facilities, the construction of vocational centres, Government has catered for youths in all stages of the education or vocational climb and with an expected expansion in our human resource pool in every single region. All youths have been targeted: school drop-outs, victims of neglect and abuse, orphans, those with special needs, those who are vulnerable, those have been denied education in the past, those who need to improve in core subjects to progress further in the working world. I can name all of these institutions and I can tell you that they are functioning and that people are graduating and coming out of these institutions every year: the Cyril Potter College of Education, construction vocational training institutes in Regions 3 and 5, a new \$427.5 million technical institute at Leonora, facilitation of skills training under the Board of Industrial Training (BIT) in Region 2, National Training Programme for Youth Empowerment (NTPYE) which allow not only youths but single parents to be trained in mechanics, electrical repairs, welding, masonry, catering, patient care assistants, record keeping, cosmetology, garment construction and information technology. There is infrastructural works at the Smythfield Drop-In Centre, the Sophia Training Centre, the facility at Madewini Youth Camp, the Community Action Component (CAC) of the Citizens Security Programme which targets out of school youths in communities such as: Sophia, Annandale/Lusignan, Port Mourant, Kilcoy/Chesney/Fyrish, Overwinning/Edinburgh, and Agricola/McDoom. By the end of 2011 over 1400 youths would have benefitted from that programme alone. Additionally, hundreds of youths completed training under the Youth Entrepreneurial Skills Training at the KuruKuru Training Centre and Sophia. Through its vocational and skills programme, Government would have trained in 2011 over 2900 out-of-school youths and other vulnerable young people under these programmes.

Apart from our local programmes, scholarships are offered to students. We can speak about the various types of scholarships offered. Scholarships are offered to our hinterland students through the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, GFC and the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture. There are many other scholarships available. The recent one made known would be the scholarships to Cuba where a number of our students were trained in medicine, engineering, architecture and a number of other fields and today we are seeing the benefits when those students come back to Guyana and can fill voids and spaces which would have existed if we had not undertaken that initiative. These are young people – not young people from Georgetown – from every corner of

the country. That is what the Government is all about: universal access, universal opportunity and catering for the welfare of every single Guyanese.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, the generous allocation of \$26.5 billion for the education sector in 2012, is not only an investment in our youth of Guyana but is a legacy that will not be forgotten.

We can talk about employment; much has been said. We look at the traditional modes of employ and every year at least 6,000 or more young people emerge from schools and they fill voids in areas such as teaching, nursing, security, technicians; but yet, look at the vistas that are opening. Employment vistas are opening with the expansion of the housing programme, construction jobs are available. When one talks about drilling and exploring for oil those job opportunities will open up for young people. When one talks about other areas that are under discussion and development by this Government of Guyana how can we say that young people do not have opportunity for employ? Before we say that, we should also insist that our young people access the opportunities that are available to them for education and training to prepare them for employment, and that is available too.

As a young person I am not going to stand here and say that everything has been done and that every Member who sits here is complacent and confident that all that has been done; I would not be true to myself, but if you were true to yourself you would admit that things have been done. Things continue to happen and things will continue to happen if we can work together for the future of Guyana and our people.

All Guyanese youths are urged to explore their creative dimensions and through the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports young people would have received training in drama, filmography, dance, fashion and various arts. They are given various fora at which to exhibit and express these talents. The recent acquisition of a music school opens yet another avenue and all of these avenues encourage our young people to chart bold directs and to become pioneers and entrepreneurs in the creative arts.

More young people today own business; more young people today are doing things out of the box. Youthful energies can now manifest themselves in manifold directions through the sports infrastructure which caters for all Guyanese. Let us list them, if you have not already heard them, or read of them in the present budget. I will list them for you:

the National Aquatic Centre at Liliendaal

the country's first public squash courts at the Racquet Centre in Georgetown

the completion of the Bartica Community Centre

the upgrading of the National Gymnasium

the Cliff Anderson Sports Hall

the National Stadium...

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, before you continue with your listing, you are out of time.

Mr. Hinds: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I propose that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude her eloquent presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Dr. Persaud: There is a multitude of programmes that exists and I would like to go on all night telling you about it, however I want to say this, I feel pain and am disturbed and I say it with a heavy heart when I hear Members of the Opposition, like the Hon. Dr. Norton, present to this country half truths and distortions and I want to let him know as a female and as a doctor I totally disagree with his standpoint on the HPV (human papilloma virus) vaccine. I would hate to tell my daughter and countless of young women that in the future, when they reach their thirties that they are having cervical cancer because this has been stopped. If one looks at authoritative medical websites and literature one would see the CDC (Council for Disease Centre), PAHO (Pan American Health Organization), WHO (World Health Organization) and Medscape – these are authoritative organisations – listing the benefits of the HPV vaccine and the one that we are using, Gardasil which covers for four strains of the HPV. Cervical cancer is the second most common cause of death for women in the world and in Guyana it is one of the leading causes of death, so I hope that Dr. Norton, the Hon. Member...

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Attorney General, please, you are on her side.

Dr. Persaud: Thank you Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I would hope that when you speak in the future that you are fully equipped with information to present to the people of this country with responsible dissemination of that information. I would also like to advise the Hon. Member Ms. Kissoon on that side of the House that when she speaks about Linden not to, as we say in Guyanese terms, “dis” those people who work at the hospital, they are proud. Do you know what they said to me this morning? “We provide as many services in that hospital as the Georgetown Hospital.” – all of the services.

Because I am out of time, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I will give those messages and that information to the Hon. Member but I would like to close by quoting from the Hon. Member Mr. Moses Nagamootoo who spoke in 1995 in this House, on this side of the House; he said:

“I get the distinct impression that because we are so obsessed by our own importance and our own role in the past we become blind to the innovations which are taking place in the present.”

Hon. Members I beg of you, let your words not be empty, let your heart be filled with compassion for the people of Guyana and work together to make this debate not one of empty rejoinders and repartees, but meaningful debates that will work for the welfare of the people and keep us united for the prosperity of the people of Guyana.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I now invite Hon. Member... Members! Mr. Nagamootoo! Thank you.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Just congratulating the Hon. “woman” speaker, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, the last speaker.

6.08 p.m.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Mr. Nagamootoo, sometimes it is better if you remain silent.
Dr. Singh, Hon. Member Mrs. Lawrence...

Mrs. Lawrence: Sorry.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: This sounds so nice. Perhaps, we should have a minute of silence, but I will call on the Hon. Member Ms. Annette Ferguson to also make her maiden presentation.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you Mdm. Deputy Speaker. Before I make my presentation, I want to respond to the previous speaker. The Guyana National Service which provided opportunities for thousands of young people, Critchlow Labour College which the Government presently stifles, the Youth Corp, Guyana People's Militia... It may serve you, Hon. Member, good stead to research before you speak.

It is with gratitude and pleasure that I take this opportunity to give God thanks and praise, my family, the people and my colleagues for the confidence they have placed in me to serve in this Tenth Parliament, which I believe is a defining moment in the legislative branch of Government.

I rise to make my presentation to this House on Budget 2012 which was presented by the Minister of Finance, Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh. My presentation, which focuses on the health sector, will address the following issues: HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, hypertension and cholesterol which are referred to as communicable and non-communicable diseases. Persons are infected with AIDS and tuberculosis through direct contact while persons are infected with malaria through vectors, which is highly determined by the level of sanitation, while hypertension and cholesterol are commonly known as lifestyle diseases.

The Hon. Minister in his presentation stated, in paragraph 4.83, that for 2012 the Government has allocated over \$ 16.9 billion to continue the modernisation of the sector and consolidate on the gains made over the past decade, as compared to the amount allocated for 2011 which was \$14 billion, as stated in paragraph 4.74. In his address to this honourable House, the Minister failed to give a detailed breakdown on how moneys will be expended in the health sector, more particularly the expenditures for those critical areas to which I have already referred.

According to the *National Health Sector Strategy 2008-2012*, the following targets are set for the improvement of health services by 2012. Amongst those targets are reducing HIV prevalence to one per cent, tuberculosis prevalence to seventy per one hundred thousand

and malaria cases to five thousand per year. My question to you, Hon. Minister of Health, is how far have we gone in achieving these targets?

The plan further stated that priority health services will be driven by the sector strategy. This will be done primarily to achieve the desired health outcomes and achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Thus, the *National Health Sector Strategy 2008-2012* will implement the 2nd Edition of the Package Of Publicly Guaranteed Health Services which priorities will be given in the following regards:

“Chronic non-communicable diseases

There will be an intensified programme to promote prevention and self care through knowledge, attitude and behaviour change, supported by health professionals, aimed at reducing hypertension leading to stroke and kidney failure and diabetes... The chronic disease programme will address the common risk factors of poor diet, physical inactivity... and seek to promote activities in other sectors that impact on these risk factors and on accidents. Health services will provide earlier detection, diagnosis, treatment and management, employing evidence based care and involving patients in their own care.”

“Communicable diseases: HIV,STIs,tuberculosis and malaria

In collaboration with Civil Society, prevention efforts will be intensified to reduce HIV, tuberculosis and malaria that remain leading causes of death and ill health in our younger populations. Treatment, care and support services will be further integrated into the health and social services offered by government and non-government providers.”

These extracts were more or less taken from the *National Health Sector Strategy 2008-2012*.

What the budget has failed to reflect is how the areas, as per head, will be measured. That is, how the money will be spent in keeping with programmes to be approved by this honourable House. We have heard the shadow Minister of Finance, Hon. Member Mr. Carl Greenidge, referred to the amounts proposing for spending by this Government as “slush funds” since there is no detailing in the respective areas. Specific reference can be made to Volume 3 of the

Estimates of the Public Sector Current and Capital Revenue and Expenditure where there are descriptions of huge projects to be undertaken, without specificity. It should be noted with concern, that during the national population census conducted in 2002, 51.3 per cent of this country's population, between the age grouping of fifteen and forty-nine, is mostly affected by HIV/AIDS.

The *National Health Sector Strategy 2008-2012* reveals an estimated number of twelve thousand persons are living with HIV/AIDS; thirty thousand persons are infected with malaria and there is a recorded figure of six thousand persons infected with tuberculosis. On the other hand, for the non-communicable diseases - hypertension and diabetes - there is an estimated figure of sixty-five thousand and forty thousand persons, respectively. Government predicts that these figures are likely to increase or remain stable in some cases. The Hon. Minister of Health should inform this Assembly of the programmes or preventative measures which are in place to treat with these communicable and non-communicable diseases since his Government would have crafted the health sector's strategy plan.

I must confess that efforts were made to attain current data to aid in my presentation. However, I was advised that the information is classified and cannot be obtained unless the heads of the health care institutions of the various Regions approve such release.

In Region 3, where the population size is approximately one hundred thousand persons, the PPP/C received at least fifty per cent of the votes after the 2011 General and Regional Elections. Research conducted on the status of communicable and non-communicable diseases in this Region revealed that a number of persons between the ages five and six were tested. However, it was difficult to ascertain the percentage of persons tested positive and negative.

The Hon. Minister reported in his budget speech, at paragraph 4.83, lines three to five that:

“Government will continue to place emphasis on decentralising services, strengthening public-private collaboration in a continued effort to reduce chronic non-communicable diseases, improve the quality of care and access to health services, and strengthen the health system.”

This is well said but, in my view, the Hon. Member has failed to address how Government intends to deal with the communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria since these diseases are likely to increase or have already increased. I would like to know how the Government proposes to decentralise these services and how soon this will be done, since, in my view, there are areas that are being neglected and, hence, persons are forced to travel to central Georgetown to access treatment.

The Government is currently receiving aid from global health funds. In 2009, the fund accounted for around twenty per cent of international public funding for HIV/AIDS, sixty-five per cent for tuberculosis and sixty-five per cent for malaria. The Hon. Minister of Health should report whether there has been changes in the percentage figure from 2009 to current. In the current estimates before us there are no provisions for the accountability of global funds. Therefore, I would like the Hon. Minister to inform this National Assembly on how the funds are being disbursed.

Surmise to say, a physical visit was made to a number of public health institutions and the information gathered from the ground was appalling. It has been reported that systems are in place to treat with persons who are infected with these infectious diseases. However, there is need for improvement. Using these communicable diseases as classical examples, and to be specific, it has been reported that currently there are twenty-one cases of TB-infected persons who are residing at the night shelter in East La Penitence. From that figure there are five persons who are co-infected - that is, being HIV positive as well, while ten persons are coughing up sputum - that is, since having the highest stage, 4+, of tuberculosis. These persons have been tested recently. As a result of this, there is need for a surveillance system to be set up at the various port authorities. I know that in the national tuberculosis manual, mention of surveillance for TB is catered for. Therefore, how effective is this since there is gradually an increase in the cases of tuberculosis. Persons accessing health centres for medical aid reported the difficulty they are experiencing in acquiring medication for hypertension and cholesterol. Whenever supplies are exhausted and their prescriptions are referred to public hospitals they are told that they cannot get the medication there. As a consequence, they are forced to purchase the medication from a private pharmacy at a cost of \$16,000 when they are only receiving a meagre pension of \$7,500.

Members of staff complained bitterly of the conditions they are faced to work under. At the David Rose Health Centre in West Ruimveldt, there is a stench emanating from a septic tank situated in the school's compound. It was reported that several reports were filed to the Ministry and to date no action has been taken. As a result of this, patients and staff constantly get unwell.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, permit me to remind this honourable House of that fire which gutted the Lethem Hospital late last year and, hence, there is limited supply of drugs and poor services in that area. As a result of this, persons are forced to procure panadol and other painkillers from shops in Lethem. Viewing the capital expenditures for 2012, there is no provision for citizens in that area. Suffice to say, while the Hon. Member outlined in the *Estimates of the Public Sector Current and Capital Revenue and Expenditure Volume 1*, and I quote, page 173, under Programme 472, "Disease Control and its Objectives":

"To ensure the effective and efficient surveillance, prevention, management and control of communicable, non-communicable and chronic diseases through intersectoral and international collaboration."

Since there is no mention as to how this will be done, then I would like to suggest the following:

Communicable diseases: There should be continuous public education and preventative measures, rather than the Government using the period when these diseases are celebrated annually to educate its masses.

- Non-communicable diseases: There should be ongoing public education, including diets to be used.
- I trust that emphasis and priority will be placed on those persons who are currently housed at the night facility, since the housing population for displaced individuals is high and the health centre is in close proximity, hence, other persons are put at high risk.

At paragraph 4.76, page 38, the Hon. Minister, in his budget speech of 2011, mentioned that:

“Government plans to ensure testing accessibility continues to reach every citizen in an effort to achieve universal coverage for HIV prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care before 2015.”

The Hon. Member mentioned that Directly Observed Treatment Short-Course (DOTS) will be decentralised to Regions for malaria diagnosis and treatment. It is evident that in the Budget 2012 there is no mention of this initiative. A total sum of \$387 million has been budgeted for training and improvement of public personnel to meet the growing demands for specialised services. As per paragraph 4.86 in the Hon. Minister's presentation, in the year 2011, a sum of \$345 million was budgeted for to provide similar services as per its intended purpose for the year 2012. Information revealed that much is not being done to train the right quality of personnel. In comparing the figure from previous year, as against this year, one would question why so much was catered for 2011 and now, in 2012, a further \$42 million has to be expended for training.

The information that has been provided to me is that there is poor succession planning in the nursing administration and, currently, there is shortage of trained staff to administer care and supervise students on clinical nursing. The result of this is due to the working conditions staff is made to work under which is tantamount to the remuneration they receive. The editorial of *Stabroek News*, Tuesday, April 3, 2012, page 6, reads, “Dr. Bheri Ramsaran and the Guyana School of Nursing”. In a synopsis, what that editorial is addressing was all of the moneys expended in training of nurses and yet the final results were astonishing, where there was an 80.5 per cent failure rate within the current batch of students.

The budgeted amount for the year 2010 showed that the sum of \$300 million was supposed to be spent on human resource development in the health sector, as per paragraph 4.80, page 36. Taxpayers will become wary and want to know why in every fiscal year moneys are being allocated to train medical personnel and still there are no major improvements in the delivery of health services.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up.

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

Question put, and agreed to.

Ms. Ferguson: During the elections campaign, 2011, the APNU's policies, under health services, in its manifesto are as the following:

- Significant improvement of benefits to health sector workers to enhance retention.
- Strengthen the technical capabilities of health workers at all levels through training and re-training with major emphasis on strengthening supervisory skills.
- Strengthen the procurement practices utilising objective scientific tools and increase oversight of the sufficiency and quality of the consumables.
- Strengthen health surveillance units and laboratory services in general, but more particularly in Regions where malaria is endemic, especially since the Hinterland is becoming a geographic engine of our economic growth.

Therefore I would like to suggest to the Hon. Minister of Health that he can seek to use some of the policies that the APNU has in its manifesto. The above are just a few. Since the APNU's campaign theme was *A Good Life For All Guyanese*, our focus was on investing in our people to ensure quality in service is accessible in the health system, so that the ordinary citizens enjoy the benefits from the services, in contrast to what the PPP/C has proposed in its Budget 2012. It clearly shows that its centred-focus is on modernising and increasing infrastructural work in the health sector, rather than ensuring that Guyanese enjoy a good life. My question to the Hon. Member: Does that address the immediate health need of our people?

In conclusion, the figure being sought for health services where there is a huge amount being allocated for infrastructural works and purchase of equipment, I will deem unreasonable. Emphasis should be placed in other critical areas, as mentioned in the presentation, since citizens are suffering as a result of the inadequate services which are rendered to them.

I would like to implore the Government to re-look the areas for which provisions are being made and invest more in the clinical areas in the health sector. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Dr. Ramayya: Thank you Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I rise in the name of the thirty-five thousand three hundred and thirty-three persons who voted for the AFC to make my contribution to this

debate. I want to first of all make a few acknowledgements. I want to acknowledge, from the bottom of my heart, those twelve thousand and eight voters from Berbice who made my presence in this House possible.

They had to make the hardest decision, of all voters, to break from the tribal voting by voting for change. I will do all that I can, as their representative, to bring greater human development in Berbice.

There are two things that I know for sure: The Guyanese people have been misled by this budget, that I am convinced of. I am also convinced that cleaning up the Government is not going to be driven by the PPP/C; it has to be driven by the majority in this House, since the PPP/C has become accustomed to manipulate this House there is a slim chance for it to change course to good governance. This is why we can get a budget labelled *Remaining on Course, United in Purpose...* What is the course and what is the purpose?

I will debate on the topic of agriculture and I want to start with the good things in this budget for it. We believe that the efforts at diversifying our agriculture base away from the traditional crops will reduce the risk of agriculture failing. Thus we, in the AFC, support the Agricultural Diversification Project, funded by the IDB, which is aimed at helping us to export more cash crops and fruits, and contract farming; increase meat exports with the construction of a state-of-the-art abattoir in Berbice; increase aquaculture farming and export to use lands that are not very productive, such as swamps; facilitate the increase in private investments in the prioritising of products such as pineapple, plantains, pumpkins... and in-land fishing; a commitment to increase the technical expertise of the local farmers to the international standards and soil sanitary standards so that our cash crops and fruits can be accepted in any market around the world. This budget is not all bad; there is the element in it that we, the AFC, want to support.

However, what concerns us deeply in the AFC is how the PPP/C Government is managing the sugar industry and the flood control mechanism which affects all crops. In 2008, the Minister of Finance said in his budget speech that we shall see coming into operation the much anticipated Skeldon Sugar Factory. What was he really expecting in 2008? Cane stock and cane skin since that factory failed to meet its manufacturing capacity of producing Berbice gold. The truth is that the old sugar factory at Skeldon was producing more and if it were in existence, it would have

been more efficient and productive than the white elephant at Skeldon. Some G\$40 billion has been spent with the publication of the Sugar Turnaround Plan. We are worse off today than we were in 2007 when the old factory was working.

In 2007, Guyana produced some two hundred and sixty-six thousand tons of sugar. Today, we are producing some thirty thousand less tonnage after spending over \$40 billion. Where did all of this money go - into whose pocket? Mr. Robert Persaud, were you hiding? You need to answer these questions. It all happened under your watch, and Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo.

Ms. Texeira: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 41 (6) state, “No Member shall impute an improper motive to any Member of the House.”

Dr. Ramayya: My apology, Mdm. Deputy Speaker.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Dr. Ramayya, please be careful in your speech. You ought not to impute improper motives to any Member, so just be careful as you proceed.

6.38 p.m.

Dr. Ramayya: Yet, today, the same company, which financially disempowered the people of Guyana, was given another contract by this PPP/C Government for \$10 billion to upgrade the GPL transmission lines from Berbice to Demerara. Does this make sense? The PPP/C really likes the Turnaround Plan, since it got it once from this company at GuySuCo and now it is taking it again to GPL. When next will it turn around and ask you, the Guyanese people, to clean up the financial mess? That is, the \$50 billion which Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo’s team poured into the China National Technical Import and Export Cooperation and then it had the nerves to tell us that it was a Chinese loan which required a Chinese company to carry out the work. China has millions of other companies, many of which can do better jobs, but this \$50 billion relationship has a lot to do with the bank accounts of politicians. Show me the value for our money from the \$50 billion relationship.

The Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, is seeking from this honourable House \$4 billion to bail out GuySuCo. The industry has failed because of mismanagement and it is not the workers. As I recalled during the 2011 Elections, and recently, GuySuCo utilised its equipment and labour force for cleaning roads and dams, making stages for rallies and for keeping memorial services,

and for politicising the PPP/C during the 2011 campaign. It is a cost to GuySuCo and not for the country, and for the PPP/C party which should shoulder its responsibility for campaigns. This is a fact that can be proved at all times.

In every wise struggle for human betterment one of the main objectives, and often the only objective, has been to achieve, in large measures, equality of opportunity. In the struggle, as for this great end, we, in the AFC, will continue to press forward to expose those acts of financial abuse and spread the word to make the people more enlightened of the real corrupt doings of this Government. One of the chief factors in progress is the destruction of special privileges by the few at the expense of the many. That is what we are fighting for here, today, to cut the special privileges and share more of the national economic pie with more of the people of Guyana. As a current Member of Parliament, the people are talking to me all the time; and technicians at the estate have alerted me to the real case of this factory at Skeldon. The factory at Skeldon is currently consuming twenty tons of cane to produce one ton of sugar. Is this what Mr. Jagdeo call development on modern factory in the Caribbean? I did not see...

This was quoted from GuySuCo website. In Fiji, to produce one ton of sugar it is about ten to eleven tons of cane. At the old factory of Skeldon, it is more like twelve to thirteen tons of cane to one ton of sugar. At Albion, it is between eleven and twelve tons of cane to one ton of sugar. At Rose Hall, it is between eleven and thirteen tons of cane to one ton of sugar. Blairmont, it is eleven and twelve tons of cane to one ton of sugar. At Enmore, it is fourteen and fifteen tons of cane to one ton of sugar. At Wales, it is between thirteen and fourteen tons of cane to one ton of sugar, and at Uitvlugt, it is between fourteen and fifteen tons of cane to one ton of sugar. All those factories, more than thirty-year- old of producing, in some cases, are ninety per cent more efficient than the state- of-the-art factory with the most advantage of sugar technology, built by a company that never built a proper sugar factory in its life.

The cost of all this inefficiency is being blamed on God, the weather and the workers' industrial working conditions, but no blame is taken for the habitual *squandermania*, at the highest level in GuySuCo. In the real world, when a management team and a Board of Directors approve \$40 billion in expenditure it is to cut cost and improve production, but in reality the opposite happens, which is unusual the consequence for such incompetency.

Under the guidance of GuySuCo's Board, and the senior management team, production at Skeldon deteriorated by ninety per cent and the cost increased so much that the taxpayers of today are being asked for another \$4 billion in this budget. In the real world, before the marching orders come from the President, that Board and top management team should have done the decent thing which would have been to resign for gross incompetence and for perpetrating the greatest of betrayal against the people of Guyana. What happened under this PPP/C Government? The Chairman got promoted to the Minister of the Government. This is a joke, because we are the people who have to pay the bill for all the *squandermania*, mismanagement and incompetence.

Let us expose the truth. GuySuCo is not asking for \$4 billion to benefit the eighteen thousand workers in the industry. This \$4 billion is being asked for to fund the master plan to cover up the poor decision made by the past presidency and Mr. Robert Persaud's ministerial stint. This \$4 billion is being asked for to cover up for the incompetence of the GuySuCo's Board and for the co-leadership under Mr. Paul Bhim, and this is just the beginning. All the trends are pointing that next year, again, it will ask for more and give workers less, to remain on course, united in purpose to generate prosperity for the PPP/C's *kabal*. That is why there is no money to pay salary increases. The AFC remains committed to paying all state workers, including sugar workers at the bottom of the economic ladder, a twenty per cent salary increase, and we know this is very possible. Because of Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo's state-of-the-art sugar factory at Skeldon, the workers' Annual Production Incentives (API) has been delayed and is under clearer and present danger of being significantly reduced to the point of worthlessness. Well, I am in a difficult position to support this budget unless the workers of Guyana get a reasonable salary increase, since there is more than enough money in the budget to fund it. All that has to be done is to cut back on the \$75 billion the Government plans to spend on capital works. It will cost this Government some \$5 billion to fund a ten per cent salary increase to all the state workers, including GuySuCo workers at the parastatal agencies. From a business point of view, if the Hon. Minister reduces the capital works from \$75 billion to \$70 billion, it will be no big deal, no big difference. From the perspective of thirty workers, \$5,000 more in disposable income means more milk for the children, more bread for the children and more food on the table. It is a world of a difference.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, the Ministers play musical chairs while the sugar workers and the industry remain in trouble. I am being told that GuySuCo has bought a number of tractors which have no warranties. Is this competency? What kind of *cake shop* procurement there is at GuySuCo? A senior procurement manager told us, in the AFC, that all they do is to follow instructions of the Board to do procurement, and many of those procurement contracts are wrong for GuySuCo, since deals have been made with people who do not understand the real needs of the company. Everyone in the company stands to lose greatly from the current extremes of mismanagement, even the managers themselves. As one manager told us, GuySuCo is bleeding profusely from wounds inflicted by a corrupt Board and top management.

I want to turn to the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Hon. Minister told us that security of every resident of our country is of paramount important to this Government. Yet, to date, there is no justice for Simone Mangar; there is no justice for sixteen-year-old Kevin Fraser, who died at the hands of the police bullet; there is no justice for the young Keiron Thomas, who allegedly had his private part severely burnt by two policemen; but, to date, there is no respect for his rights from the state. I can add to that list many times more.

The Minister said that in 2011 the Government spent \$15 billion dollars in the security sector. One of the things he claimed, which was done in 2011, was the operationalising of the integrated crime information centre, but in 2008 budget, the same Minister, again, claimed that \$660 million was to set up the integrated crime information system and a state-of- the-art forensic laboratory. Again, in 2008, one wrote in the *Kaieteur News* newspaper boasting of how our Government would have spent \$13. 6 billion dollars to do projects, including implementing the integrated crime information system and the forensic laboratory. Again, in Budget 2010, the Minister proudly boasted that spend some \$473 million would have been spent on a state-of- the-art forensic laboratory. In March 2010, the Home Affairs Minister officially launched the integrated crime information system in front of all Guyana, including diplomats. In Budget 2011 the Hon. Minister of Finance provided some \$1.1 billion for the construction of, again, the forensic laboratory. The Hon. Minister of Finance claimed this, again, in the Budget 2012 that the Government is progressing with the construction of a modern lab of \$16.2 billion.

How many times we are paying for the same thing in the Ministry of Home Affairs? Is this plain incompetence and disrespect for the taxpayers? Or is it just plain doltishness? The Government

cannot spend \$1.1 billion dollars on the security sector in four years and it comes to this House to ask for \$75 billion to be spent, in 2012, on capital works. So we shall change the name of the story from *Alice in Wonderland* to the “Ministry of Finance in Wonderland”.

The Minister in his budget, our Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh speech, alluded to the training of over six thousand persons in anger management. I hope the first person on this list would be the man who is famous for running up in front of the microphone, at rallies, cussing anyone who exposes wrongdoings. And might we add to that anger management class those who parade as human beings, as the cussed out professional officers, as well, at the law and to accuse them of indiscipline when they do not...

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Dr Ramayya, your time is up. You need an extension.

Mr. Ramjattan: I move that the Hon. Member be given an additional five minutes to conclude his speech.

Question put, and agreed to.

Dr. Ramayya: The saga must stop. We can look at Mr. David Ramnarine who exposed the \$90 million with the budget. We can recommend, again, Mr. Merai, Mr. Paul Slowe, all those people, who got the courage to come and tell us what is happening in our professional system. I ask now: When will the forensic laboratory be fully functional and in service to the people of Guyana? I do not want to hear any *Alice in Wonderland* story. This honourable House wants a fixed date and deliverance of those facilities in the service and protection of all our people. Only then we can be lectured that the Government is placing security for every resident in this country, and that it is the top priority on the list.

I now come to the question of salary increases for members of the Guyana Police Force, Guyana Fire Service and Guyana Prison Service. Every day many of these officers put their lives on the line in service for the nation and now to have another budget that offers them no salary increase is shameful. We, in the AFC, stand ready to support a twenty per cent increase in salaries to be recognise, in the Budget 2012, for all members of the joint services, and, I might add, to members of the Guyana Defence Force.

I stand here today as one of the two Members of Parliament from Region 6 to say, without exception, there are some elements in this budget that we, the AFC, can support, but there are some elements, such as the \$75 billion in capital works, we cannot support. I stand here today to say that there must be a better deal for the workers of Guyana, including salary increase for the sugar workers, the police officers, the nurses, pensioners, the teachers and all the other workers of the state. This nation, more equitably, is to cut out the *squandermania*; then the people would be hurt badly if we do not. I humbly ask all in this House to have a conscience and do what is best for the working class who is the most dependent on what we do, in this House, over the next five years. Here, in this House, the PPP/C is talking about transparency, and the transparency can be viewed in this paper here about Dr. Jagan's legacy from Nadira Jagan in what she said about it. This is very important for us to see what is going in this Government. This generation faces a great test in respect of all the *squandermania* and financial wastage. Shall we allow it or shall we confront it?

Unlike the Ninth Parliament, or the People's National Congress (PNC) days, the people do not have to surrender themselves to that. What are we going to do... The Government then controlled the National Assembly and the budget. This is the first time that a Government of Guyana has truly listened to the people of changing the PPP/C into an Opposition in this House, and the Opposition is the majority today. With this new dispensation, and with this new political culture, a new history has been created in this National Assembly where the people outnumber the dictatorship Government. This is our duty as a political party to ensure that the majority of the people of this nation get a fairer share of the economic pie.

In Region 6, 2009, a sum of \$156.743 million was expended on the purchase of fuel lubricants and no log books were presented for the entire year to be audited, yet in, 2012, \$193.326 million for lubricants is again allocated for drainage and irrigation, and, by the same token, trenches, schoolyards, playgrounds and cross streets are poorly maintained and there is quantity of substandard work being done. Black Bush Polder is a good example which is in a deplorable condition, that even the schoolyards are filled with garbage. Because of the lack of transparency and accountability, I, again and again, vent my frustrations when diesel is being utilised for personal enhancement and the planting of rice for people of Region 6, and when regional machinery is used for the personal cultivation. Today, it is a blatant shame that...

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Dr. Ramayya, I give you half of a minute to conclude. Just conclude Sir, so that you just do not have to stop abruptly. You are out of time

Dr Ramayya: Thank you Mdm. Deputy Speaker. Yes, can we do it? But this budget is not a favourable one to such process and I call for a thorough review of the measure and promises in this budget. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Members, we are about to take the suspension. I want to remind you all that we have just finished our eighth speaker. We have seven more to go. We are committed to going to the end today so that we can start fresh tomorrow. Let us cut the half an hour to twenty-five minutes and then when we return we will have the maiden speech by Dr. Ramsammy.

Sitting suspended at 6.57 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 7.28 p.m.

Minister of Agriculture [Dr. Ramsammy]: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I am not quite sure about a maiden speech, but probably it is a maiden speech as the Minister of Agriculture.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker and colleagues all, I do want to take the opportunity in starting to congratulate all the new Members of Parliament since it is the first time I am standing to speak in this Tenth Parliament, and particularly, all the young people who are in this Tenth Parliament. It is good to see so many young people in our National Assembly. It is good to see some of the veterans also. It is a good mix.

As it is expected, so far, and I expect it will get even fiercer as we go, there is always fierce debate on the merits of any budget, and the Budget 2012 is no difference. But budget time is also the time when we fiercely debate the performance of the Government and the Budget 2012 presentation, and debate, is an opportunity for us to give our judgement on the performance of the PPP/C Government. We always use the occasion of these budget presentations to debate the directions the country is heading, not surprisingly we, on the Government side, will passionately defend our records, and we will argue that we are on the right trajectory of development. The Opposition Members will seek further with equal passion to chide us and to debunk our claims. It is the nature of budget debates. We do so sometimes poignantly. I heard last night, Dr., the Reverend, Kwame Gilbert. I heard my old friend the Hon. Member Mr. Keith Scott's poignant

presentation, but often times we do so with fire and brimstone. I saw the Hon. Member Mr. Moses Nagamootoo, the Hon. Member, youth, Mr. Irfaan Ali and most of the time... [An Hon. Member: Youth!] He is pretty young actually... and most of the time our debate is characterised by a great deal of hyperbole.

This is not unique to Guyana. It happens everywhere, in country, particularly at budget time we see the hyperbole in our presentations and our claims. I believe that all of us in this House want the same thing for Guyana – a future in which we attain our destiny of being the breadbasket of the Caribbean; a country which lives up to its potential as the El Dorado of the Caribbean, of providing a decent standard of living for everyone. It would be an understatement to say that we disagree with each other on the development trajectory of our country. We know we disagree; we do not really have to be disagreeable. This is our country; we want the best for Guyana, no matter how the House is made up.

Some of us would argue that we could, and that we should, have been better off than we are today. It is an argument that we have debated vigorously before. It is an argument we are now vigorously debating and I am sure that throughout this Tenth Parliament we will be debating that robustly. But the truth is that we will be narrow-minded if we cannot acknowledge that Guyana today is better off than it was in 1992, and that is not saying somebody did that. We are better off today. We may not be as better off as all of us want, but we are better off. I know some of us might find it difficult to concede that our people and our country are better off today than it was in 1990, and I am proud to have been a part of this Guyanese story.

No matter how we try to take sides, the fact is that more people today have jobs; more people earn better salary; more people own their own homes; more people have access to better health care; more people have access to water; more people have access to improved sanitation; more have access to electricity; more people have education - there are more professionals in our country today - more people own their own cars; more people have television and more people have telephones; more people have a higher standard of living, and more of us live in that corner called the middle class. [Mr. Greenidge: It is aboard.] That might be so Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge, but the fact is that we cannot deny that. My comrade and my colleague, my Madras brother, the Hon. Member Dr. Ramayya, knows that where he lives, there was a time - remember, Dr. Ramayya - when one person had a television set and everybody used to come,

at the bottom there, and now your neighbours are going for their second and third television sets in their home. That is the truth. And as you know, comrades, that we go at the market corner... My mother is quarrelling with me on why she cannot get a second cell phone to text her son. An eighty-two-year-old woman is doing this to me, so that she can find out where I am. [Ms. Ally: You have bought it for her.] I did. But the fact is that people are better off in our country and none of us can deny that. We can argue that it should have been even better but we are better off today, and we should be able to acknowledge that - the fight about going further along. We must not be intolerant at the same time. We must not be intolerant of our sisters and of our brothers who still believe that, in spite of the progress, we can do even better.

I hear this from many people. We, on this side of the House, would want people to acknowledge that we have challenges and therefore we must be patient, but I want to also believe that each one of us in this House and our sisters and brothers outside are all impatient and that we all want better now, not tomorrow. That is true. As we make our case, though we must be truthful, we can spin - we all do that - but we must not mislead. Take for instance our Hon. Member Mr. Moses Nagamootoo, who in spinning, tried to create an impression that we are more indebted today than ever. He ignored the fact that our debt today stands at less than \$1 billion and that in 1992 it was \$2.2 billion. He ignored the fact that in 1992 our foreign debt was almost seven hundred per cent out of our GDP and that to date it is below forty-seven per cent, one of the best in the Caribbean, by the way, and that is the truth. We have now surpassed all of the Caribbean countries in terms of our debt management.

7.38 p.m.

We in fact... [An Hon. Member: Our standard of living has not improved.] Your standard of living has improved, brother. It has improved. Believe me, it has improved. I came back to this country and we were standing up at the roadside waiting... but all of you now drive, and we must concede that. So our standard of living is better. It may not be as we want, but it is better.

Take for example, the Hon. Member Mr. Ronald Bulkan stood up and talked, in terms of fishing it has reduced and that is true; there has been a slight decrease, but the fact that in all other sectors within agriculture have increased, and that is the truth also. So we must present a

balanced picture. In fishing, it was a deliberate choice, because, in fact, what we are addressing... Our export of marine fish has to be managed because we have to look at the stock and we have to control that. So Suriname, for example, reduced its marine fleet from seventy to thirty. I know that Minister Robert Persaud had been working with the owners of trawlers, and so on, to reduce their number of boats, and we have chosen to do so voluntarily. Let us take this. see I am willing to say that Mr. Bulkan and I think... There was some other Member who spoke this afternoon. I cannot remember if it was the young Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson or Mr. Adams. I am willing to say that what the Hon. Member had stated was not out of mischievousness and to be provocative, but it was that the Member really did not know, because, for example, when the Hon. Member said that Region No. 8 got only \$1.8 million for drugs, what was not known is that for a long time now... [Mrs. Lawrence: He forgot that part.] I am just telling you that that is an emergency fund because drugs come from the central supply. I do not know, Minister Ramsaran will talk about 2011, but in 2010, for example, Region 8 received \$29 million of medicine. That is the truth. So, sometimes we spin it and we spin it in a particular way. I know all of my colleagues want me to address the issues brought up by my brother Dr. Ramayya and I will at some point. I think that we get the point; we will make our case, but today I am supposed to talk about agriculture and its role in the development of Guyana.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, a long time ago, an English and poet and philosopher, Samuel Johnson, wrote that: "Agriculture not only gives riches to a nation, but it is the only riches she can call her own." As a country, Guyana identifies with this statement. The agriculture budget of 2012 underlines this truth.

I stand in support of the Budget 2012; and today, more specifically, I stand proudly, privileged and honoured to speak on behalf of agriculture and its development in Guyana. Agriculture has always been important in our development. Budget 2012 continues the tradition of investment in agriculture in such a manner that it must retain its place as indispensable in our development trajectory. This year we have allocated more than \$15.6 billion to agriculture. In 2011, we expended more than \$10 billion and in 2010, we expended \$ 9 billion for agriculture.

Our investment in 2012 translates to more than \$100 *per capita* for agriculture. It was less than \$5 *per capita* in 1991. Indeed, that low investment... [Mr. Greenidge: What about 1964?]

It was more than \$5. [Mr. Greenidge: It was not.] Yes. It was. In fact, because of the

low level of investment... If I read just two sentences from Mr. Camacho, in a June 1994 report about what had happened between 1980 and 1990, “Agriculture output fell fifteen per cent between 1980 and 1990. Sugar output, twenty-one per cent to some one hundred and thirty-two thousand tons, the lowest output in 1976, while rice output decline by thirty-four per cent, the lowest level in fourteen years.” One of the reasons given was the reduction and the inefficient allocation of public investment resources which resulted in the deterioration of the infrastructure and support services for water management. There are other reasons, but I thought that I have to mention that. The truth is that agriculture has always been a mainstay in our development story.

Since independence, and to this day, the agriculture sector has been a catalyst. It has been a pillar in our development trajectory. Today, agriculture contributes almost twenty-five per cent to our economy. It accounts for more than thirty-three per cent of direct employment in our country, and almost fifty per cent of Guyana’s export earnings come from agriculture. The significant contribution of agriculture as a major component of our economy is likely persist even though we envisage accelerated growth of mining, emergence of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) as a major player in our economy, the significant growth in service industry and the fledgeling manufacturing industry. Even if oil becomes part of our development growth pole in Guyana, agriculture is likely to remain very significant in our development.

In 2012, we will intensify our efforts to diversify and modernise the sector, overcoming barriers that presently exist. We will continue to enhance genetic stock with improved varieties of crops and breeds of livestock, seek to improve access to more affordable and better fertilisers, more effective financing arrangements, improve availability and access to land, further enhance drainage and irrigation and access road and farm-to-market roads, and ensure stronger and wider markets, and enhance weather-related disaster management. This is the context that, within this context, we must view the agriculture budget of 2012.

Clearly, one of the major priorities of the continued expansion of agriculture is water management. Water security is not a new priority for agriculture. It has been so since creation. We must acknowledge that along the way Guyana has made mistakes in how it managed water. In fact, as the Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge is trying to pull me, most of those mistakes were made before 1992. I will remind the Member of the irrigation system. Dawa pumps, the Manaribishi pumps and the Mibikuri pumps were all down and dysfunctional. That is the God’s

truth. In fact, in Number Fifty-two Village and Number Seventy-four Village, out of the twenty-two thousand acres of land available... I am talking about things that the Hon. Member Mr. Prakash Ramjattan would know. In the Number Fifty-two Village and Seventy-four Village area, in 1992, out of the twenty-two thousand acres of land only one thousand could have been cultivated because of lack of cultivation water. The Manaribishi pump was not working, and that is the truth.

It was not only that. Major sluices had become dysfunctional - non-functional. Some of the functional sluices, such as Coizer in Pomeroun, Pepper in Canje, Friendship on the East Bank Demerara, Canal No. 2, Cunia, Golden Grove, Victoria, Alness, Buxton, were all down. The pumps, all around the coast, became dysfunctional - abandoned. That is the work we have been doing - putting back all the pumps, getting all the sluices to work. Over the last decade we have put back all the sluices and all the pumps are now in operational - all of them.

Over the years, we have not only embarked on major overhaul of the drainage and irrigation (D&I) system as we had it. We have been reengineering it, adding new structures. Places where there were never any pumps they now have pumps. New sluices are added and a new relief channel to improve drainage in our country. For example, everyone knows about the construction of the Northern Relief Channel at Hope which has been advanced in 2011. This relief channel will ensure discharge directly into the Atlantic Ocean, reducing the dependency on discharge through the Lama and Maduni sluices. This will reduce risk of flooding in the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary (MMA) area. Contracts which total \$2.95 billion have been awarded for the construction of the head regulator, relief high level sluice outfall structure, a public road bridge, conservancy supervision services, and the procurement of geotextile and steel sheets pile materials. The National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA) procured fourteen excavators and earthen work has been, almost thirty per cent completed on the channel. A cumulative sum of \$1.8 billion was disbursed at the end of 2011 and in 2012 \$1.3 billion will be disbursed to continue the construction of the Northern Relief Channel. In the meantime, short-term contingency work has been executing to improve the drainage in the Mahaica/Mahaicony and Abary areas as was successfully done for the Biabu area in 2011.

Eight fixed drainage pumps would be installed at Windsor Forest, Pine Ground - Mahaicony, Cane Grove, Paradise, Black Bush Polder, Skeldon, Albion and Rose Hall, along with six mobile

drainage pumps. Six pumps should be arriving in the country in June and the fixed site pumps should be arriving in the country between November and January. This would drain an additional sixty thousand acres of farm lands. With the operation of an increase number of pumps, and the construction and rehabilitation of key drainage and irrigation structures and access roads, there will be improvements in the discharge capacity and flood performance in vulnerable areas.

At this time, a relief channel at Cottage is being completed. A sluice has already been constructed. In the 1950s when Black Bush Polder and Canal Polder were designed, even then, as part of the construction, there were two additional canals which were supposed to be dug. We are familiar with the A-line at Canal Polder, but on the other side of Canal No. 2, the YR area, there is no relief channel. That was never built from the original design to now. With the increase amount of water to be managed, the construction of that canal is absolutely necessary. That relief channel has now begun to be designed with a pump and sluice system to release water into the Demerara River.

At Black Bush Polder the same thing happens and the water from Johanna has to be diverted into the relief channel, Yakusari main channel. In 2012, finally the relief channel from Johanna out to the Atlantic Ocean will be built, and there are many of the others sluices. I do not want to go into all of the details. Guyana will pursue aggressively a place in the growing biofuel industry.

I believe that the efforts of the Government, for more than a decade, in pursuing a biofuel industry have begun to take shape. Agriculture must not be seen as a producer of food for local consumption or for export. Agriculture in Guyana must be developed beyond food. For example, Guyana has the opportunity to create biomass for the production of biofuel, satisfy needs other than feeding our people and needs that would ensure a sustainable and affordable fuel source. Guyana is already using agricultural products, such as bagasse, to produce energy on a small scale, but now it must embark on a deliberate path to push and to develop biomass to support large-scale bio-energy industry. In 2012, Guyana's bio- energy policy will be finalised.

A prototype ethanol producing plant, as a pilot, is presently being developed, as we speak, at the Albion Sugar Estate. A Brazilian firm is collaborating with us to develop this plant as part of an IDB technical grant support programme.

Guyana has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Ansa McCal to carry out feasibility studies for a large-scale production enterprise in Guyana. Several other investors have approached Guyana with an expression of interest. We will pursue these opportunities.

Clearly, sugar and rice continue to be major players in the agricultural sector. Sugar is still a critical factor in our success story and it continues to be the single largest contributor to the national GDP. I am in a position to be optimistic when I speak on sugar today. I am in a position to say that sugar is successfully confronting the many challenges it is facing at the global, and at the national level. Much has been said about GuySuCo already, and the budgetary allocation of \$4 billion for GuySuCo has generated heated and emotional responses. I am on record as stating that it is the right thing to do. I am on record as being unapologetic for the infusion of much needed financial support for GuySuCo. This is the industry which supported Guyana in bad times.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, before you continue with your record, you need an extension.

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

Question put, and agreed to.

Dr. Ramsammy: The sugar levy was utilised generously to support the Government current expenditure in Guyana for decades. This industry continues to spend about \$1.8 billion annually for community drainage, and this industry provide medical services at the cost of \$270 million a year for its workers.

The troubles in GuySuCo have been placed by many solely under mismanagement of GuySuCo by its managers and its Board of Directors. We heard that today. No one has sought to analyse the impact of the thirty-six per cent European price cut on the industry and the approximately \$8 billion lost per annum impact that this cut caused. No one has acknowledged that the industry also had to cushion the impact of the value of the Euros versus the US dollars. It would be equally dishonest of me if I were to attribute the challenges and the troubles of GuySuCo merely on the European price cut.

I must, at this time, make myself unequivocally clear that if it was not for the workers, both field and factory workers of GuySuCo, this industry would have failed a long time ago. In spite of their concerns and difficulties, the sugar workers have responded because they know that this industry is important to them, to their community and to this country. It is for that reason I stood firm, that no matter what it takes, that the sugar workers must be guaranteed their API payment when they were not being paid by GuySuCo. Sooner, rather than later... I am glad that GuySuCo was able to do so, on its own, on March the 16th. [An Hon. Member: You threatened them.]

I also have been working... I was never threatened and I worked with them in the field ...with GuySuCo so that field and factory workers can benefit similarly from the agreement of those workers represented by Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU), as the National Association of Agricultural Commercial and Industrial Employees (NAACIE) workers, through the just completed job evaluation. It would be remiss of me if I were not to mention the struggle of management. This industry is presently under the management of young Guyanese professionals. They have worked hard and they have the interest of the industry at heart, no less than anyone of us. They have been subjective to great criticism. Some in this House have been merciless in their condemnation of the young Guyanese managers, but in the face of great challenges they have been able to manage the industry in a manner that places GuySuCo in a good position to overcome the enormous challenges it faced.

In 2011, revenue increased by \$6.4 billion and there is a projected increase of \$1.2 billion in 2012. This is due to better price negotiations, strategies in our export market and an increase in the value added product to ensure a profitable and competitive industry in the long run.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, GuySuCo continues to respond to challenging times. In 2010, the production was two hundred and twenty thousand tons and that increase to two hundred and thirty-seven thousand tons in 2011, and we hope to attain a target of two hundred and fifty thousand tons in 2012, a far cry from the hundred and twenty-nine thousand tons in 1990. It is true that Skeldon factory is still a major concern and there are remedial works to be done, and those will be done this year. Work has begun in the modification of the design of the bagasse feed conveyors, the ploughs and feed chutes for increasing the punt dumper lift weights to three hundred tons canes per hour to increase cane delivery for the replacement of a five-megawatt

Wartsilla alternator and the commissioning of a new well at site. We expect that most, if not all the defects, will be remedied by the end of 2012.

The Enmore packaging plant is now working fully and as long as we could supply the sugar it can reach its capacity of forty thousand tons per year.

I heard the Hon. Member Dr. Ramayya and I heard also the Hon. Member Mr. Moses Nagamootoo talked... [Mrs. Lawrence: You have forgotten that you have said that they are your brothers.] They are my brothers and friends... and in fact I heard all the TCTS has been mentioned by the Hon. Member Ramayya and yesterday I heard the Hon. Member Mr. Keith Scott talked about the NIS problems across the country. GuySuCo workers have been subjected to a lot of NIS concerns and those we are now addressing.

In terms of the TCTS, Dr. Ramayya mentioned some numbers, all of those are not accurate. In fact, Skeldon has been going between twelve and twenty. Yes, it reaches twenty sometimes because of wet cane, because of cane left on the field, because of rain, and so on. At Albion, it has gone between 8.7 and 12.1, depending on the weather, and at the other sugar estates. Uitvlugt goes to thirteen, but all the others have been between nine and a half and ten and a half in good weather and up to twelve when there is a bad weather.

We cannot hide in the sand about the equipment that we procured. The Lambidini tractors were procured through normal procurement process. We would have been damned if we do and damned if we do not because the procurement cost was one-third in the bidding process of the others. Had we gone for the others we would have been accused of having put money into our pockets. We went for the lowest bidder and, in fact, those equipment have created problems, but the company has agreed to come at its cost and do the remedial action on those tractors. It is presently doing that. So a lot have been happening with sugar.

Rice, my colleague Mr. Seeraj will speak on it, but a lot...

I know the time is running out and the agriculture diversification programme is going on. I just want to mention, for cattle,... We are self-sufficient for poultry - we produce enough meat; we produce enough table eggs. In the future, we will try to increase our capacity for hatching eggs,

but we have a great opportunity, in terms of beef, pork and mutton, because for these, if we attain self-sufficiency, we could also be a major exporter, but there are certain things we have to do.

8.08 p.m.

The veterinary lab is being constructed right now as part of our Agriculture Diversification Programme. The artificial insemination lab will be commissioned shortly and a modern, state-of-the-art abattoir is being built through a public-private partnership. All of these projects will occur this year.

We, in terms of our diversification, have introduced micro financing and this year farmers will be able to access \$250 million through a special programme with the Institute of Private Enterprise development (IPED). We have contracted IPED to handle that programme and, as part of that programme, we will be establishing community based packaging and processing plants. And whilst the money will be put up by us, we are going to create a company where the farmers could procure shares through selling their products and obtaining shares so that within three to five years, the farmers will own one hundred per cent of the shares. These are some of the things that we are doing.

In terms of our import of food, we are trying to address this by looking at growing spice. We hope this year that through our programme with pepper, nutmeg, black pepper, ginger and turmeric, we will be able to produce 2,500 tonnes, reducing our importation of these products by 20%. [Mrs Lawrence: Is that Mr. R. Persaud's PPP - pepper, plantain and pumpkin?] The four P's (*plantain, pumpkin, pepper* and pineapple) are still part of the programme.

There are a number of other projects that we are pursuing. Included in this are projects that promote the production of potato and onion, providing our small farmers with opportunities and enabling Guyana to diversify our food products so that we could reduce importation and also increase export.

Last year, we exported more than 11,000 tonnes of fresh vegetables and fruits, and this year we are hoping to exceed exportation through linking our farmers. And in that process, a new Guyana Marketing Corporation will open up its Guyana shop in Georgetown in a month's time, enabling the farmers to have a market to sell their products. We have established packing plants; we have

procured refrigerator trucks; and we are increasing the refrigeration capacity at the Cheddi Jagan International Airport, all in such a way to help our farmers not only to produce food for local consumption but to produce food and products for export.

We have a vision for agriculture in this country, and agriculture we see as a strong vehicle for sustained, economic and social prosperity, moving Guyana to a high, middle-income, developing country by 2020. Agriculture will be a stronger vehicle for wealth generation, for providing entrepreneurs with investment opportunities, for providing employment, for building Guyana's export portfolio and ensuring a brand "Guyana" that people everywhere recognise and want. Guyana wants to produce and export safe and wholesome food and non-food agricultural products such as biofuel at competitive prices, utilising land, water, marine and other resources and will support commercial agriculture through provision of requisite client-friendly state and technical services.

Guyana's vision for agriculture 2020 seeks to attain our rich tradition of being a major producer of sugar and rice, reaching and sustaining production of greater than 450,000 tonnes annually for both products, moving towards packaged and processed sugar and ethanol, and packaged and processed rice products rather than export of bulk products. We intend to ensure that we take full advantage of the resources that we have in both our marine and inland fishing. We will establish aquaculture and make honey production an economic opportunity for people in communities across Guyana. And we will expand opportunities for non-food agricultural products. In this regard, we will promote horticulture and biomass development for production of biofuel and specialised crops...

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, your time is up.

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

Question put, and agreed to.

Dr. Ramsammy: ... such as bamboo to support furniture and craft industries. Guyana's vision for agriculture, 2020, creates opportunities for Guyana's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to grow, to provide boundless opportunities for our people, our youth, our women, indigenous

peoples and for local and international entrepreneurs, and will provide a vehicle for sustained, economic and social prosperity. The Government of Guyana is strongly committed to playing a facilitating and a catalyst role in the development of a sound agricultural programme. However, the full realisation of an agro-industrial enterprise for Guyana will depend much on the involvement of an aggressive private sector. This is our vision. This is how we can transform agriculture to continue to play a leading role in our development. This is how we can ensure that brand “Guyana” is secure and wanted. This is how we guarantee that agriculture is a vehicle for sustained economic and social prosperity. We ask that we all provide solidarity for this programme and that we do not speak with both sides of our mouth: one day saying that we need to support the private sector and another day attacking us for working with the private sector. That is not building trust and... [Member: Do not be fooled.] Be careful. Not fooled. Mdm. Deputy Speaker, that is not right. [Mr. B. Williams: She will never call you a fool.] I know. The truth is that we have to, in fact, work together. We need the private sector to come with us. We need to engage the private sector and that is why I promise the Hon. Member that if he wants the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). You will get it. There is no MoU to give anything. There is a MoU for a feasibility study to be done. Mr. Greenidge: Why is there secrecy?] There is no secrecy. And, in fact, it is there for you to see.

There is much that we can talk about agriculture. The fact is that Guyana has moved forward. The fact is that agriculture has grown in Guyana in spite of the difficulty. And the fact is long after all of us are gone, sugar will continue to be a success story in this country. We have faith in sugar. We have put our faith in sugar and we will continue to support GuySuCo with all the energy and commitment that we have for the workers, for GuySuCo’s interest and for the interest of the people of this.

Thank you, Mdm. Deputy Speaker. [Applause]

Mrs. Baveghems: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, thank you. I rise to speak after my honourable and dignified colleague, Mrs. Volda Lawrence, and to say that it is an honour to be part of this year’s Budget debate. I rise to speak in representation of the so called “grassroots” persons in society, in particular our senior citizens, nurses and teachers. In this regard, this year’s Budget is the worse that I have ever seen.

The Hon. Minister of Finance boasts about the rise in the income tax threshold. [Mr. Ali: Mr. B. Williams, did you write that speech?] Yes. What you want to hear you will hear.

That sounds good, but how many workers receive a salary of \$50,000 per month? Nurses who have brought us all in the world, who are there to provide nursing care for us during our lifetime, have not received any mention in this Budget, in terms of a salary increase or incentives. No money has been allocated to them, hardworking as they are. These workers who cannot refuse to treat any patient are left open to contract diseases and are exposed to harm, for example, those nurses who work in the psychiatric ward and those who work with patients who have easily transmitted diseases. Nurses need and deserve special salaries. If not, we will continue to lose nurses each year and the health care system in Guyana will remain in a deplorable state. Perhaps some of the Members on the Government side in this House should go to the emergency section of the Georgetown Public Hospital, in disguise, and they will experience, at first hand, what Guyanese experience daily. Citizens spend hours without receiving proper attention. And when some do get attention, they cannot get the drugs ordered for them. And when they do get the drugs - sometimes they have to get two or three drugs – they get one free and have to buy the rest. That is how Georgetown public Hospital Corporation operates.

The staff- both doctors and nurses are short. Perhaps if there were greater incentives in pay, we may be able to retain more health workers in Guyana. So serious is the situation that some private hospitals have resorted to recruiting nurses from overseas. One hospital has imported some from India and they cannot speak proper English. The patients are at the mercy of these nurses who cannot communicate properly with them. So the Minister can boast about how many millions he has allocated for the health sector, but if we have a shortage of nurses, how will that improve health care for the grassroots of this country?

Like nurses, teachers also need special salaries to teach our children who range in ages from three years, nine months to an average of 17 years. They enable their students to obtain careers but most times these efforts go unnoticed and unrewarded. There are numerous teachers who work very hard with their students for them to obtain passes at internal and external examinations. But they still did not get any reward. The Government takes all the credit, boasting about how much money it spent on education. It is the teachers who go beyond the call of duty, sometimes teaching through their lunch periods and after normal school hours. They do this for

their students. The teachers have to ask and sometimes they have to take care of their biological children. Do they get any incentives? None! Not a single extra dollar! What a shame! Teachers are exposed to the threat of and sometimes actual assault from both students and parents who visit the schools with pieces of wood, knives and even guns. The teachers are left to defend themselves as the majority of schools have limited or no security. Mdm. Deputy Speaker, could you believe that teachers from a few schools were asked to give remedial classes last July to August and to date some of them have not received their full payments for this?

Teachers prepare our children for the world of work and these same children end up in jobs which pay fabulous salaries and have numerous incentives. But the teachers who prepared them for these jobs are earning a pittance in comparison. How will this Budget help to improve education? The truth is that the ordinary citizens cannot afford to pay for extra lessons and so they have to endure with the existing system where many teachers are dissatisfied with their salaries and have to look for alternative means of earning a living.

I want to talk about social assistance which was granted a “princely” sum of \$400 as an increase. Social assistance is given mostly to single parents who have to take care of their children. Presently, there are lots of children who perform odd jobs, either before or after school, just to help out with the family expenses. This increase is inadequate and should be reviewed.

This brings me to the issue of the School Uniform Programme. One uniform is not enough. I am humbly requesting that this allocation be increased from one uniform per child to, at least, two uniforms per child. There is a saying that children are our country’s wealth. If this is so, then we should allocate more funds to their future. GPL and GuySuCo have gotten billions so we should be able to allocate more funds so that our youths can secure their future. Or is it that we prefer our youths to become dropouts and turn to a life of crime?

There are lots of vulnerable children who have hardly anything to eat and where some of them decide to do anything in order to get a better life. Some of them turn to stealing, selling drugs for the “big ones” who get the drugs in easily and give them to sell or other nefarious activities since they believe in the motto, *Get Rich or Die Trying*. Not having a good schooling or not being able to attend social activities is a terrifying experience.

There is a single parent who I met recently. And she revealed to me that some days, in order to feed her children – four in number she has – she looks at the television programme, death announcement, and goes to the wake nearest to where she lives. She then is able to get food from the wake for herself and children for the next couple of days. Sometimes this is a nightly activity for her.

The drastic increase in electricity rates at Linden may turn out to be disastrous. Persons will not be able to afford such a high increase in their tariffs and many may turn to activities that will be detrimental to themselves and others, similar to what is happening in other parts of the country where people use all manner of methods to obtain electricity without paying for it.

Old age pension is supposed to be increased by \$600 per month. Pensioners are persons who would have worked very hard in their younger days doing whatever jobs they could. And are we saying that \$600 more is sufficient for them? This increase represents a one-way taxi fare since most mini bus drivers refuse to transport the elderly in their vehicles.

Sometimes when pensioners turn up at the post offices to collect their measly pensions, they are told that there is no money to pay them. Pensioners are human beings too. They have needs and wants like every other person. Could the Hon. Minister give each pensioner a basic hamper every month? It should not come from Food for the Poor at all. This hamper should include such items as rice, flour, sugar, milk, margarine, oil, Quaker Oats, bath soap, washing soap and toilet soap. One pensioner told me that she is very upset with the proposed increase since she was looking forward to the back pay to pay off her debts to GPL and her landlady. Becoming a pensioner is a frightening experience except if you are a former President and will be guaranteed millions in pension and benefits despite your age. Most times, it is only when a pensioners reach 100 years old that a lot of attention is paid to them. They are showered with gifts, hampers and attention. And this may be the reason why they die shortly after. They are not accustomed to all the fuss and attention. Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I would love to see more attention being placed in the Budget on the less fortunate, nurses and teachers. After all, the Minister boasted of how much increased revenue the Government collected last year. Well, if that is true, where are the benefits for the grassroots in this Budget? The truth is that there is nothing significant which is the reason that I began my presentation by saying it is the worse budget that I have ever seen.

I thank you, Mdm. Deputy Speaker. [*Applause*]

Minister of Labour [Dr. Gopaul]: Thank you Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I rise to support this very progressive Budget of 2012 which, I believe, will see continued progress in this country, and I am happy to be associated with it and defend it because I am aware of a time, in the history of this country, when children used to go to school with sugar cake and sugar water and they had to walk miles without transportation. They had to walk with their shoes in their hands because streets were impossible and they had to go through severe hardships. Today the situation is much improved when compared to what it was then.

I would have liked to see, and I was going to take a different line had I see some degree of reasonableness being displayed by some of my colleagues on the other side in dealing with this Budget. We cannot have discourse on a budget without analysing it and make statements about corruption. Which figure in this Budget is giving the avenue for someone to be corrupt? Why have the figures not been analysed, and a scientific input made, proper and concrete analysis made so that we can understand...

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Just one second. Members please remember this is the Hon. Minister's maiden speech. If it is one convention, Hon. Manickchand, that we observe, because people from your own side could also disturb you. So let us listen or do something else if you do not want to listen when Dr. Gopaul is speaking. Please proceed and I will give you back that minute.

Dr. Gopaul: Thank you Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I am making the point that I would have thought that this Tenth Parliament, given its current composition, would have provided an opportunity for serious discourse, sober deliberations and appeal and a working arrangement from all sides so that we will be able to find common ground with a view to seeing this country develop. I want to state clearly, and I believe that when I would have highlighted some of the problems that faced this country in the past, we will see that although it was caused by some Members on the Opposition side and a party which was the People's National Congress, Members have moved into different political directions, working perhaps and was able to campaign and won significant portion of votes judging from where they were in 1992. That being said, I would have thought that we would have been able to show that maturity and discuss issues so that we will be able to work together.

The President has opened an avenue where Members of the political parties in the Opposition could meet with Members of the ruling party for us to find common grounds. While those discussions are taking place – and I do not know how serious our colleagues in the Opposition are – actions are being taken to give us the impression that, “Look, we won the majority, we are in the majority and therefore you better toe the line or else we would do certain things”. And, in fact, they have set out, without any form of discussions, to amend certain areas when it comes to the composition of the House. We believe that that was wrong and that it was not the way to go. It should have been done with consultation and it should not be done because we believe that on one side we have one vote more than the other. If we continue along that way, the situation could very well be different. And so I believe that this Tenth Parliament can present an opportunity for us to work in the interest of this country.

We should examine where we are now and where we were before, and no one can deny that development has taken place under the PPP/C Government, over the last four elections, in an unprecedented manner. When one hears what happened in the 1980s and the 1990s, and I am going to quote Professor Clive Thomas in *The Poor and the Powerless*. Professor Clive Thomas, prior to writing this book, in January 1982, in the Caribbean contact stated that Guyana’s economy had collapsed. When he wrote that article he drew massive anger from the ruling party then. A month later, the ruling party went out and decided that it was going to tell it like it is. The people were in the dark. The analysis was made.

8.38 p.m.

My comrade, Hon. Irfaan Ali, had indicated what some prominent Caribbean personalities had been saying about today’s development. I would want to move on with what Professor Thomas said and then give you what Dr. Courtney Blackman from the Barbados Central Bank had to say about the Guyana economy in the 80s and 90s. I am quoting, Professor Thomas from page 285 and page 256 from *The Poor and the Powerless*, he said:

“Guyana has been in a state of continuous crisis since 1975. The numerous manifestations of this included a negative rate of growth of Real Product since 1975, with the result that per capita real income at the end of 1986 was less than that of 1970 and more than 1/3 below that of 1975. Dramatic increases in malnutrition and deaths from

deficient nutrition related illness, particularly in public institutions (hospitals, prisons and homes for aged and disabled), widespread and endemic shortage of food as well as other basic items of consumption. Shortages of raw material was so severe that for the past decade industry has been utilising only thirty to forty percent of rated capacity. In addition, electricity cuts are common, with scheduled cuts in March 1986 averaging 36 hours per week for all districts in the country. Unscheduled interruptions also occurred. With double figured inflation rates between 1975 and 1985 the Consumer Price Index had more than quadrupled. Over half of the labour force was unemployed, following large-scale public sector retrenchments. The virtual collapse of all public utilities to the point of contributing a major obstacle to production, the dramatic deterioration of social services, drastic increases in crime, corruption, clientelism, graft and nepotism in public and private life, a massive external debt in excess of \$700 million or three and half times the value of the GDP, and a rapid deteriorating Balance of Payment deficit.”

I am not going to read more, but this covered the picture of what Clive Thomas was seeing happening in the country between 1975 and 1985. Dr. Courtney Blackman, writing in the EC News of the 18th March 1989 had this to say:

“Since the 1981 devaluation Real GDP in Guyana has declined at a rate of negative 6% per annum. Between 1981 and 1987 the economy declined at an average rate of 6%, unemployment is high, and Guyana cannot pay its foreign debt.”

Today we can pay our foreign debts and we can honour our obligations. We can also see development at ever corner of every street in this country. When we develop every corner of the society some members in this House go and tell the people that the PPP is neglecting their supporters and looking after other areas. When they go to the other areas they carry a different message Mdm. Deputy Speaker. The PPP/C Government believes in developing this country. We believe in serving all the people of this country.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Please have a seat Dr. Gopaul. Hon. Attorney General I think I should read this, “...and the interruptions from either side of the House” People seem to believe that you cannot interrupt your own speaker. I would like to read the clause on maiden speeches, “The first speech made in the House by a new Member...” that is the definition of maiden speech, “...by

tradition, the Speaker recognises a Member rising to make such a speech in preference to others...”, this is the important part “...traditionally it is considered discourteous to heckle this new Member’s first delivery in the House.” If you, Hon. Attorney General, feel that you should be permitted then I will allow everyone to proceed as they wish during Dr. Nanda Gopaul’s maiden presentation.

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: I do not feel so at all.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Please proceed Dr. Gopaul, and I trust that your Members would have more respect for your presentation.

Dr. Gopaul: Thank you Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I was saying that the PPP/C Government believes in even-handed development of this country. That is the reason why when you move around this country you see development and progress everywhere. When you go to Linden you will see a new hospital with all amenities and facilities. When you go to Region 1 you will see the same thing. If you look at schools and hospitals all over you will see the development of schools, new secondary schools being constructed, our colleagues mentioned some just a while ago, and technical schools. Technical education has improved tremendously throughout the length and breadth of this country and not only resides in Georgetown and New Amsterdam; it is all over, in Skeldon and every other part of this country, Essequibo and elsewhere, Linden included.

We see these developments, but these developments came against the backdrop of massive debt burden inherited by the PPP/C administration. It came against the backdrop of many infrastructural areas that were lacking, where development had not taken place in excess of a decade. Roads were in disrepair. In those days, when some of us were driving around in some of the areas and as you dodge the holes they call you ‘Pot Hole Dodgers’, they said that you just acquired a PhD by dodging the big craters that you have on the road. Those were what we inherited.

If you were to travel from Skeldon to Parika you will find a smooth traffic. The hours we had to wait to cross the ferry at the Berbice end to go from Rosignol or to New Amsterdam, those long hours no longer prevail. We have a bridge which can take us over to New Amsterdam within minutes. If that is not development, then I do not know what it is.

I would want to believe that in looking at the issue of this Budget we will all discuss and say, “We want to see the following happen”. I have heard some colleagues talk about increasing pension rates, but we have to take into consideration what happened before, where we were and where we have gone since this Government has taken over. Some would have said we want to see increase in salaries by twenty percent, but you could have salary increases by twenty percent and you could have consequences which will negate those increases. You have to analyse and you have to discuss where this money will come from. You have to take into consideration that when we make these demands, we must try to find out where the money will come from to meet all the areas for national development in an even-handed way.

In 1998, if I may look at minimum wages in the country, we will find that it was \$11,445 per month. By the end of 2011 it is \$34,055 per month, an increase of about 197% over that period. Equally, when you look at the rate of inflation during that period you find that the overall rate aggregate of 1998 to 2011 was 83.3% or at an average of 5.9% per annum. The average wage increase during that period will amount to 14.07%. So, you can see that this was actually protecting the real wages of the workers unlike what Professor Thomas said occurred in the 1975 to 1985 period.

When you look at the employment situation, the country has created employment in almost every sector of the economy. When the crisis hit the world, Guyana was unscathed. This is testimony to prudent management, dedicated management and management who had the interest of Guyana at heart and who could have seen ahead of time.

I have heard some very nasty criticisms being made of President Jagdeo, but I want to state here that I am proud to have been associated with President Jagdeo as a leader and a visionary. Had it not been for his stewardship, this country would not have been where it is today.

The Minister of Finance indicated, and I am going to skip the issues of what caused this country to go where it was, the type of repression we experienced in 1985, in the 80s right up to 1989 when the budget was described by no other but Mr. Eusi Kwayana right in this Parliament as a “vampire budget” and when it was described by some of my colleagues at the back as the “Empty Rice Pot (ERP)”, with “every race punishing”. I am going to skip some of the reasons, and I am not going to detail the oppression which took place in Linden when my colleagues were

tear-gassed in their prison cell. I am going to skip those. It is documented in *Resistance and Change* and I have quotations. But I want to say that fundamentally what has happened with wages, and why we are talking about increases now. Some of my colleagues on the other side, right in this House in 1984 moved to upturn an Act of Parliament that restored increments in the Teemal case against Guyana Sugar Corporation by passing a Labour Amendment Act. We had to challenge that decision. We had to take the issue right up to the Court of Appeal, and the Court of Appeal found that the legislation was against natural justice and was colourable and they struck down parts of that law. So increments were restored and some people benefitted.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, we should never ever get back to the point where our people will feel oppressed or where they will have to go to the streets to demand and to get their rights. These should be given to them by our leaders who are legislators and who are in the decision making process. When nearly 6,000 public servants in the 80s were sent home under the guise of retrenchment they were given a single day notice and some of them were paid nearly a month's pay in lieu of notice and in some cases some were given one weeks pay. Thousands did not benefit from any Severance Pay whatsoever. The PPP/C ensuring that justice was done to workers enacted the Termination of the Employment and Severance Pay Act to bring benefits to the workers of this country, and to ensure that people with years of service are given payment to a maximum of fifty two weeks in cases of those with long services.

We enacted other legislation in occupation health and safety, anti decimation legislation; we also enacted the Trade Union Recognition Act, an issue which surfaced in this country since the 1950s and went to Parliament several times but was unable to see the light of day. The PPP/C ensured that, so that workers can have a Union of their choice through a democratic process. Having done that and taken these steps I believe that the Guyanese workers are very comfortable. We do not believe here in the PPP/C that the wages up to this day are at the right level, but is has to be dispensed based on the ability of the country to meet all other needs. The fact of the matter is that when you take into consideration the concession made by the Hon. Minister in his budget speech about increasing the tax threshold to \$600,000 per year, in effect what is happening is that you are giving the workers at the bottom one additional months pay right off the bat which is equivalent to an eight percent salary increase. That is being given to the workers immediately. The budget also caters for an additional increase in 2012, so workers will get something more.

The issues of employment opportunities continue to prevail and we have heard discussions on bauxite. The budget indicated that 450 new jobs will be created by additional investments by Bauxite Company of Guyana Inc. (BCGI). There is another company called First Bauxite Inc., they will invest according to the Minister of Finance, another \$120 million in Bonasika. This investment will see additional employment opportunities. There was a time when bauxite was absolutely dead in this country; it is being resuscitated.

In terms of Manganese, the Minister outlined that US\$300 million will see 1000 jobs created at the development phase and 500 permanent jobs at the mature operations. Already, the Minister of Finance reported that 250 jobs have been created with US\$50 million invested thus far. This is also a new area being explored, an area that was condemned for several years.

The Minister then dealt with uranium and rare earth elements. He drew attention to three companies that are in advanced stages of drilling in the Kurupung area. This is yet another job creation venture which will see hundreds of job creation opportunities. We are not only going into mining and these sorts of things, Mdm. Deputy Speaker.

The Government has been criticised, and I could not understand anyone with any sense of decency and commitment to our children of this country, especially those who are unfortunate, to criticise the Government's One Laptop Per Family Programme (OLPF). This programme will see 90,000 computers distributed to poor families. It is bringing new ideas to some homes and children who never saw a computer in their life, who never even played with a calculator. They will have that opportunity. Due to that we will see these people becoming equipped and computer literate and more and more jobs being created in this country. Three thousand jobs in the ITC sector is already here with ten call centres in this country.

Dr. Persaud spoke about the fibre optic cable giving access to people in the most remote parts of this country. In some areas people have been fleeced by the service providers in this country charging \$10,000 and \$9,000 per month for them to access the internet. This investment is done with people's development in mind. My colleagues are saying that this budget does not have human development in focus. Well if this is not human development then I do not know what it is. It is anticipated that 15,000 jobs will be created in the ITC sector during the next few years.

The Budget also gave us a review of what happened in the agricultural sector last year. It says that for last year 8000 farmers have been trained in their areas; in crop and animal husbandry and farm management. This is a new input. We may believe that because we are farmers we just go and plant a crop and that is it. There are new techniques being devised in agriculture and we want to be abreast with time. Therefore, eight thousand farmers benefited last year. Much more will benefit this year. We hope to cover the length and breadth of this country to ensure that our farmers understand new techniques and new management in agriculture so that they can optimise their production and productivity.

Last year also, when the Barama Workers faced difficulties and they were laid off the Government had a subsidised programme where many of them benefited from computer training, some who never went to school and some who never handled a computer. And the vast majority of those workers are now literate in the use of computers.

We then moved to GuySuCo and during the out-of-crop period on the West Coast of Demerara and in the Berbice Area, the Government placed computers in those communities like they did in Linden and the persons not working during the out-of-crop period were all trained. Even housewives were encouraged to go and make use of those facilities.

We hope that during this period the Ministry of Labour will, with these legislation passed, and with the influx of new businesses in this country.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member your time is up.

Mr. Hinds: Mdm. Deputy Speaker I propose that the Hon. Minister be given fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Proceed Hon. Minister.

Question put, and agreed to.

Dr. Gopaul: I will try to wrap up even earlier than that Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I am saying that during this period, with the influx of new businesses in this country especially those in mining, we will move to have our inspectorate division visiting these locations. We are targeting to visit all the factories and to certify them and ensure that they are in keeping with the occupation

health and safety laws and all the other relevant labour legislations. In fact, what we will do also and are doing at the same time is to visit as many workplaces to ensure that the labour laws are observed and that there is no child labour in any business entity. The Ministry of Labour is coordinating with the National Insurance Scheme (NIS). As we visit some entities we are looking to ensure that the people are registered and that they pay the NIS. When NIS inspectors visit other locations, there is an exchange of views and reporting so that we need not go to some of the places, but there might be a necessity where both the NIS and the Ministry of Labour will have to go to some of the entities.

We are actively investigating any form of accident, whether fatal or not, that is reported. Under the Act it is compulsory for employers to report an accident. If they fail to do so they can be prosecuted, and we are moving to prosecute those who fail to report accidents at workplace. As such, the Ministry of Labour is very active in that regard. We are also seeking to revamp many cooperatives which are either riddled with mismanagement or in some cases not being able to deliver; we are monitoring those. In cases of some that badly need management, we are putting interim management committees in consultation with the members and we are hoping that we will be able to revamp them, because the cooperative movement in this country has significant assets and can create employment. In fact when you examine what has happened, there is an asset base of nearly \$15 billion; as large as many commercial banks. We are working to ensure that the Co-operatives function in an efficient manner to benefit their members. There are some very large ones in the trade union movement and the Police and the Guyana Defense Force (GDF) Co-operatives also have quite a lot of assets which could benefit their members. We are monitoring those.

The Board of Industrial Training has been able to train nearly 3,000 persons last year. Minister Nadir, when he was Minister of Labour, was able to introduce a new programme of Heavy Duty Equipment Operator, because we have a short supply of that. I want to say that the moment those persons graduated jobs were available for them. Ninety per cent of those persons trained were school-leavers and they have all been engaged in employment actively, some even in higher paying jobs than public servants do get from the private sector. They go and they get very skilled jobs in that area.

We have also been able to train patient care assistance workers for the Palms and some for the Linden Hospital at institutions like the Georgetown Hospital, and we are going to continue to do so this year. The apprenticeship programme is also important, where we train our young people at places like Port Maurant Training School and some of the technical institutes, but those are more qualified and skilled programmes and the Board of Industrial Training certifies those programmes. We are putting emphasis on that.

9.08 p.m.

I am sure the Minister of Public Service will tell us about the other scholarship programmes we have in the country – those that will produce doctors unprecedented in the history of this country. Nearly 300 doctors will soon graduate and return home.

There was a time when public servants could not even buy a motor vehicle. Cars were not available. Some who were in this House long enough – not me – could not get duty-free even at this level. Today, nearly 2,000 public servants benefitted from duty free concession. When that is checked it amounts to a minimum of \$40,000 per month in each concession.

Therefore, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I want to end by saying this country belongs to all of us. The PPP/C does not believe it has the wherewithal all the time, that it knows everything, and does not depend on anyone, although we can run this country as ably as we have done. We believe that a vibrant opposition can play a role in the development of this country, and we believe we would not be asking them too much to play that role so that the people would see an effective democracy at work. Let us put it to work; let us ensure that we put people first. Our country at the same time must see development so that our children can enjoy a better way of life.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. The next speaker I now invite is the Hon. Member Mr. Sydney Allicock who is also making his maiden speech.

Mr. Allicock: Thank you very much Mdm. Deputy Speaker.

I rise to make my contribution to the 2012 annual national budget under the theme “Remaining on Course, United in Purpose, Prosperity for All”. I also wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the Hon. Minister for presenting such a budget.

While the theme seems very appropriate my observation is that the budget does not reflect the reality of the expectation of the masses. The people of the hinterland and Guyana as a whole spoke at the last general and regional elections. The instructions given to us, the legislative and the executive arm, by the people of Guyana is that the pendulum must swing for democracy, justice, and good governance.

In the indigenous tradition the culture of working together is interwoven in the fabric of community life. This noble tradition was copied by the rest of Guyana as we sought to forge and realise our national motto, “One People, One Nation, One Destiny”. However, to the dismay of the majority of Guyanese, the dream of inclusivity seems a marriage to be realistically held in our hands. Whom should we blame for this? Everyone will point to the other side and say they are to be blamed, but we represent the lives of the people of Guyana. With this mentality we have to then ask what can we do to improve the lives of the people? In the indigenous culture we at times shed the bad blood and allow new blood to take its place. This tells us that to get we have to give. We have to listen to the other side. I feel strongly that in a democracy the nation must be adequately consulted so as to enable the presentation of a budget that allows the people to feel included. Article 13 of Guyana’s Constitution requires that there be consultation, with particular emphasis on those areas of decision making that directly affect their wellbeing.

As I listen to the prayer that is recited before every sitting, and also listen to the debate in this honourable House, I am of the impression that things have gone wrong for so long that to do the right seems wrong. The past situation in the last parliament is one that has become entrenched. It is one that allowed the majority to make all the decisions affecting the lives of all Guyanese for better or for worse. It is a form of governance that can be described as being a bad marriage in which one partner does not listen to the other. This is a recipe for unhappiness, poverty, marking times in the past, and failure. The analogy of a family, in which the father works his family and uses the benefits gained to satisfy his vices and to fatten himself mainly, can be used for the 2012 budget. No reduction of Value Added Tax (VAT); less than one kilo of beef pension increase; “salary without calories” for our workers; and little job creation for the nation among one... The

executive seemed to have deliberately carved this anti-people budget whilst scuffing at the Guyanese people. How long will we allow ourselves to remain in this bondage of modern day slavery?

Having said the above, as a representative of the hinterland people I request that this budget be historical. Let it be the first budget in modern day Guyana that sees the indigenous people of Guyana as the beneficiaries for large projects. I do not believe that the framers of our Constitution wanted us to have a white washed budget without any amendments being made. Let us have a new beginning. Let our bright minds sit together and make the amendments without regard for the midnight oil. Give and take for Guyana. Can we do it? I say we can.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, we the indigenous people hold our lands as we hold our mother. It is from our territories that we get our food, our homes, health and wealth. Throughout our history we have safeguarded the patrimony of utilising the resources in a sustainable manner. We only seek to have ownership of what is rightly ours, and that is enough land to sustain our people for generations to come. Although our peoples have tried to gain their territories to date this has not materialised. In instances the divide and rule policy was used by the PPP/C to avoid being fair with the indigenous people. The village of St. Ignatius is an example of not getting the lands that were traditionally occupied. Instead others are getting lease lands on what the people are claiming. I recommend that no land must be leased to any private person which is located in lands claimed by the Amerindian Village Councils. Also we are still waiting for the granting of our rights to our subsurface lands and our waterways. It must be noted that we are the fastest growing ethnic group in Guyana. I wish to call for a revision of the Amerindian Act to rectify all these issues that continue to stifle our right to our lands.

Realisation dawned on Guyana and the world at large that the indigenous way of sustainable utilisation of our lands is the best way forward. For Guyana this realisation came with a focus on getting dollars for safeguarding our forest. If any name should be given to the initiative it should be called "The Indigenous People's Initiative". The time has come to relook at the way the funds from Norway and the others to come will be managed. At no time should we allow the fox to manage the chickens in the pen. You know what the result will be. An oversight body for funds, in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, for the indigenous communities must be managed

by a Toshias Council Secretariat. The details of this can be worked out but the hallmark of inclusivity must be visible.

The issuing of lands by the Ministry of Housing in Region 9 continues to be a “bugbear”. The situation has reached a level where the local people are being sidelined for some people from the coast. This is not being biased but it is the reality. Many of those affected are afraid to speak out because they fear victimisation. What kind of government do we have when the people are afraid to vent their issues in public? I recommend that an inclusive land affairs committee be commissioned in Region 9. The committee must include the representatives of the other political parties and the Neighbourhood Democratic Council. 14:17

Also, prior to the elections there were lots of vote-catching projects that suddenly became non-urgent after the elections. One of those was the Culvert City New Housing Scheme. The roads were done and water mains installed. However, to date no water is flowing. Also there is no sign of the installation of electricity, ten years after the scheme was commissioned. How long must this scheme wait for electricity?

The Tabatinga Housing Scheme has left a sour taste in the minds of the local people. After the initial plan was used to commence issuing of lots the Ministry of Housing took over and remade the plan. The residents found that their septic tanks were in other people’s yards, fences were in the wrong position, house lots were divided by roads, just to name few of the confusing things that happened. To date the Ministry is yet to offer the people of Tabatinga any compensation or apology.

Large contracts are granted in Region 9 by the Central Tender Board. It has become the norm for the Region 9 administration and the Regional Democratic Council to be totally ignored by Central Government. Our staff is not even invited to participate in the monitoring of the work done. We are the beneficiaries and will be tasked to do corrective works in most instances, plus we have to align with whatever shoddy work is done. In one road construction the contractor used a large amount of clay from the side of the road to do road repairs instead of fetching gravel from a few miles away. The rainy season is coming and results of the shoddy work will be borne by us, the local people, while others’ bank accounts will be well greased.

A few years ago the Guyana Action Party (GAP) brought in a sound proposal for the construction of a highway from Lethem to Linden. This proposal was not given the green light by the Government. The time has come for this highway to be constructed. Some years ago the indigenous peoples were asked if we wanted to road. Our answer was that we did not want it but need it. Currently the roads and bridges are in need of dire repairs. The strategy of just paying for minor repairs for this road was shown to be very unwise for the past few years. The road surface has reached the surface subsoil so intermittent and big craters develop during the rainy season causing undue hardship for the commuters and shortages of basic foods and fuel for consumers in the region. The wooden bridges are unable to take the weight of the heavy trucks. It is time to have concrete bridges done.

Our hinterland people are being discriminated against by the Government. Just imagine that Government workers, who give service to the people of the hinterland, are not being paid when working overtime. Any Guyanese will know the conditions and the terrain under which these workers have to serve are not easy. Cutting out their overtime is a blatant act of discrimination and being overly malicious towards the people of the hinterland.

In the education sector, one dream that I have is to see our teachers receive a living wage. This is the problem we face in Guyana. In Guyana one has to look at the core problem. The core problem is not the bad Mathematics or English results that we get at CXC; it is the fact that we are not paying our teachers adequate salaries for them to have food on their tables for themselves when they walk the extra mile with our children. Will someone help to correct the situation? If not we will continue to lag behind and give our most vulnerable resources, our children, the least chance of living educated and productive lives.

I wish to propose, after listening to a lot of the speakers from the Government side stating that we have hundreds of thousands of laptops, that we give to the hinterland scholarships students, the University of Guyana (UG) students, the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) students, Cuba students and students attending Georgetown Technical Institute (GTI) laptops to be helped in their quest for higher education.

At present, the St. Ignatius dormitory has run out of space. The children have to sit on the floor in the hallway and the kitchen to study in the evenings. An extension to the dormitory should be

included in the budget as a priority. Also the majority of students walk several miles to get to school. I recommend that a school bus be made available to transport the Lethem students to school. This is also applicable to the students attending Annai Secondary School, and at this school up to now the cooks have not been paid their salaries for work done during last year.

In the health sector, at the moment we have five nursing students at Linden and they are not supported either by the Region or central government. They need support. These are the people who are supposed to be helping us to have a healthy nation, but we continue to neglect them while we boast that everything seems to be in order and well done.

The Lethem Hospital has another long list of worries, but I just want to say that the Hospital needs urgent attention to have proper administration in place so that we have the best result out of that newly built hospital. Lethem is a growing community. At one time the Brazilians used to come for help to Lethem, now we have to be going to Boa Vista, and many times under some very, very distressing and embarrassing situations. We need to be a country that has independence. We also have a mortuary that has caused problems for many years. This needs to be rectified urgently. In addition to that it has been brought to my attention that the overtime for those nurses that go out into the field has been cut. This is a terrible spoke in the wheel.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member your time is up.

Ms. Ally: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I would like to move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Question put and carried.

Mr. Allicock: Thank you very much.

Under tourism, on page 28 paragraph 4.3.7, the Hon. Minister mentioned:

“...tourism remains one of the sectors in which Guyana has a significant comparative advantage given our vast and unique endowment of nature.”

This is very encouraging. I am not sure why this industry was not treated with the respect it deserves. Tourism is about the No. 2 industry in the world. Our vast and unique endowment nature speaks for itself; ecotourism is on the rise in the Rupununi and elsewhere. We have all the

things in ecotourism, the giants of Eldorado, and one could name them. I do not have the time to explain more. This is the business of hospitality not hostility. Therefore, we need the Government's support in the following: destination marketing; regulation of the tourism sector; international trade show attendance; the selection of these to be private sector driven; reform or rebuild the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA) with senior individuals to have a meaningful board helping the sector; GTA and board to be an independent body - it is currently under the Minister of Tourism; official port of entry status for Lethem for aircraft – currently that is not the case and we need that to be rectified; the GDP recognition must be in place. The Government of Guyana to fund this exercise should bring in an international body to carry out this exercise.

The budget's \$220 million this year is fine for a start and we need this to be doubled next year. I wish that common sense will prevail so that all Guyanese benefit from this budget. Hopefully we could be able to have something to talk about for this year 2012. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. I now invite Mr. Dharamkumar Seerj to deliver not his maiden speech.

Mr. Seeraj: I lost that quite some time ago Mdm. Deputy Speaker. Thank you Mdm. Deputy Speaker. It is a lot quieter at this end of the room with you sitting up there. I am very happy that you are sitting there.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: We may have to move to make that permanent Hon. Member.

Mr. Seeraj: I am sure we can enter into some bilateral discussions.

First of all, allow me to welcome and congratulate the new Members to the House on both sides. I am certain that they will enjoy their stay here. Whilst it may be challenging, especially as the buzz words in these days are “the new dispensation”, we do not have any experience to draw down on as to how the House will operate. So in this regard we are almost as new as they are in trying out this new formula as to how we operate.

Secondly, I would like to add my congratulations, to that of my colleagues on both sides of the House, to the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh who has done it once again in presenting a very good budget, and by extension the people behind the Hon. Minister who would have spent long days, way into the evenings, in preparing this budget. Sometimes when I listen to some Members of

this House, especially on the other side, I am almost inclined to suggest to the Hon. Minister to give them a chance to prepare and present a budget to this House, and let us see how they will fare. Because it is taken for granted that in presenting a budget of the likes that we have seen since 1993 that that this is an easy job. We do not understand and appreciate the complexity behind presenting a budget that can deliver to the people of this country.

I was looking forward to a profound and in depth presentation by the Hon. Member Mr. Carl Greendige a former Minister of Finance. I must say I was disappointed. I do recall the fiery presentations by the late Winston Murray. The Hon. Member and colleague Volda Lawrence does a good job in leading off the debate. Mr. B. Williams tried one year, but he did not make it. I must say that given my understanding of the background of Mr. Carl Greenidge, his presentation left a lot to be desired.

(Mrs. Indranie Chandarpal in the Chair at 9.36 p.m.)

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I am very fortunate this evening. This is the second lady I am talking to.

The Minister in his presentation made a number of profound statements that has to do with positioning Guyana's economy in the first instance, the economy of the Caribbean, and in the second instance, in the global arena. When we look at what is happening in Guyana, we must not see this in isolation of what is happening in the rest of the world.

9.38 p.m.

What were some of these statements that the Minister made? Real growth, I read, in gross domestic products averaging 4.4% over the past five years, last year it was 5.4% and this year it is projected at 4.1%. External balances, the highest ever; external reserves increasing 3-fold since 2006 to US\$798 million; external debt reduced from 658% of GDP at the end of 1991 to 47% by the end of 2011. This figure taken into isolation does not give you the real impact of Guyana's performance when compared with the rest of the world.

If we look at the Caribbean for example, close to home here, how did the Caribbean fare? In 2010 the growth in the Caribbean region was 0.2%. In 2011, it was 0.7% and this year, whilst we are projecting a 4.1% growth, the Caribbean is looking at a growth rate of 1.7%. We have to position Guyana in this context.

If we look further afield, how is the rest of the world managing? It is in the Minister's presentation, but let me highlight that, global output expanded by 3.8%, which was down by 5.2% in 2010. The advanced economies or developed countries, those economies grew by a mere 1.6% and this year they are projected to grow by 1.2%. So I beg of my colleagues to view this budget in this context. Perfection does not exist anywhere or if it does, I have not been there. Of course, we will have to continue maintaining the roads, hospitals, and schools. We have to continue earmark new projects, our sea defences, drainage and irrigation networks, providing extension services and so on, to all farmers. That is an ongoing business of the Government and we expect Members to raise those concerns, but we do not expect them to get on as if there has not been progress, as if this Government has not been delivering on its mandate, as if we have not been fulfilling our promises.

We are hearing a lot of talk about the pension, public assistance and VAT. Hon. Member, Mr. Allicock, I must tell you that I saw somewhere in the budget that there has been a lot of millions allocated for the tourism sector. By the way, beef is VAT free, just to let you know, it is zero rated. So, when you talk about VAT we also have to examine VAT as to what items are *vatable*, because sometimes we get away with this impression that everything that is needed for the ordinary household is carrying a VAT of 16%. These are troubling issues, these are issues that we have to talk about and we have to view them in the context in which this Government is trying to bring about economic development and well-being for our people, we have been doing that.

If we look at the issues of pensions for example and we take the life expectancy that this country was experiencing in 1991, we could have easily raise pensions, if we had maintained that life expectancy; if we had not done the necessary investments in the health of our people, in proper food security, education, in providing an enabling environment that caused our life expectancy to move from 59 years to 70 years and we had allowed it to remain at 59 years, we could have easily said the pension is \$1 million per month, because persons would not have been alive to get that pension. What we have been doing is that we have been consistently investing in our people, in their education and for this purpose, in particular, in their health, that is why we are seeing the results of insuring that our people's life expectancy has moved from 59 years to 70 years. We do not wait until you are 65 years to give you a pension. What was that pension in 1991? It was

G\$211 in 1991. We are investing in the welfare of our people from birth. As a matter of fact our investments are in our people, even before they are born, in the maternal care that we are providing for our expectant mothers. We do not wait until you are 65 years to give you a pension.

Our colleagues have mentioned how the pension have moved from G\$211 in 1991 and we have to look at it in that context, look at what it is now and what it is projected to go at. Of course, it is not enough, but at the same time the point is that we have been continuously investing in our people and our budget shows that. A consistent budget, as way back as from 1993 to now. Even if we look from 2006, \$105 billion, \$109 billion, \$167 billion and then last year \$154 billion, \$192 billion, it demonstrates continuous growth in keeping with the growth of our economy and it demonstrates solid macro-economic management by the Government in terms of ensuring that Guyana stays on course and the country has been responding.

If you talk to members of the Private Sector Commission, they will tell you clearly that there is more confidence in Guyana now in terms of investment. If you look at the agriculture sector, if you look at tourism, in every single sector we have grown confidence in the performance of Guyana's economy and I just mentioned how the rest of the world is doing. [Mr. Greenidge: Inaudible] Mr. Greenidge you should be the last man to talk, you have not really done anything. We have to examine your performance in the period that was classified as "The lost decade". That is where we had to pick up from. A country that was bankrupt.

Look at how the agriculture sector, in particular rice, had responded to the enabling environment that was provided by this Government. Continuously, we have been breaking records in terms of production. We made record production in 2009, it last a mere 12 months, we broke it in 2010, 2010 records was broken in 2011 and this year 2012, we will also break the 2011 record. This is not happening in isolation with what is taking place in the rest of the world, in the rest of the country. We have been investing not only in the physical infrastructure, Hon Minister, Dr. Gopaul mentioned it, we have been training our people and the rice farmers have been part of this process. We have brought them up to date with technology, not in an air-conditioned environment or in a classroom environment, we took that technology to the farmers in their fields, in what is called Farmer Field School Activities and we provided that environment for them to engage with our scientist and vice versa, because it is a learning process, it is a two-way

street. That is how we do business on this side of the House. We have been continuously seeing the results of that kind of investment.

One would have expected that the Hon. Dr. Singh, recognising the new situation here, to come with a budget that would probably address, in more details, concerns of persons and geared towards a more election environment. That is not the case, the Minister continued to ensure that his budget follows a trend and a path that has been designed from the inception to provide a solid economic platform for this country to grow and to sustain that growth and our people have responded; it is not by the wave of a magic wand. Every single sector has improved, our education and health for the people in this House who are approaching 65 years and beyond - I see some gentlemen across there - be comforted in the fact that the average life expectancy is 70 years and with the good care of this PPP/C Administration, you will go beyond that. That is the kind of budget we present to this National Assembly, to ensure continuous growth on a sustainable basis and we will not pander to sometimes desirous, nearsighted or otherwise just because we have observed a change in dispensation. We will stay on that course to ensure economic development on a sustainable basis. We are going to stay on the course of investing in our people; we will stay on course to provide safe and drinkable water, housing, education and health.

Guyana is one of the few countries, developing and otherwise, that continues to provide extremely good health care, free of cost to our people, in every single village, all over. If some doctors worked their full eight hours at the Georgetown Public Hospital, as they are paid to, we will have better care, especially better eye care for our people. They are paid to go there for eight hours and they short change the treasury by turning up and then *rolling out* back and go to their private clinics. Then they refer patients from the public institution to their private clinic. If we are leaders we have to lead from the front and demonstrate in a concrete way our nationalistic views. We have to do it that way and make representation.

The programme that we have earmarked on in this budget, which is so aptly titled, "Remaining on course, united in purpose, prosperity for all". This theme that is in this budget can adequately provide for every single Guyanese, wherever they are, for them to enjoy prosperity and take part in national development, for them to enjoy a better way of life and for their children. I have experience that, the way I grew up is not the way my children are growing up and I am certain

under the continued governance of the PPP/C Administration, my children's children will grow up even better than they are growing up.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker I thank you very much. [Applause]

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER

Mr. Hinds: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I rise to propose, with your consent, that Standing Order No. 11, be suspended in order that we can continue to have all the listed Members speak this evening. I think there are two more presenters and we should finish in another 40-45 minutes. Thank you very much.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. I sense that there is consensus so I will now invite Mrs. Marcello, who is also making her maiden presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Standing Order Suspended

Mrs. Marcello: Thank you Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I rise to lend my support to the AFC (Alliance for Change) members, who have spoken before for the very first time in this Hon. House. It is indeed an honour for me to stand in this National Assembly of the People and I am cognisant that with that honour, comes awesome responsibilities.

The AFC members who spoke before and those who will come after me have made and will make critical analytical presentations, but allow me to address some matters close to my home and my people which I am sure are common all across Guyana.

The Hon. Member, Dr. Singh, painted an entrancing picture of Guyana present and in the future. However, it was like *déjà vu* as I listened to the Hon. Member present the 2012 budget. I was transported back in time as I am sure that I have heard many of those statements sometimes in the past. Millions for regional development, billions in health care, billions for education, millions for Amerindian development, it all sounds so familiar. But, I must ask, where did the money go? Not in Region 8, I tell you. All those millions and billions, I do not know, maybe it was spent on the coastland, because in Region 8 the people are still suffering.

Take for example the roads in Region 8 and I use the word “road” quite loosely, more relevantly, trails since they are not properly established. The so called roads in Region 8 are not in a good condition, as Paul Keens Douglas would say, “Is papa potholes, mama potholes and all them pickney potholes. It is a whole family of potholes.” There can be no comfortable safe travelling along these roads.

The road from Mango Landing to Mahdia itself is in a terrible condition. Moreover, buses using Mango Landing must not pay toll, because I strongly believe the companies are exploiting people who are looking for a living, for example, Demerara Timbers Limited, they are extracting the resources, yet still exploiting the people. It is like making rich people richer and poor people poorer.

The water situation in Region 8 continues to be a major problem. To some extent pipelines have been fixed at Mahdia, but there are more repairs to be done. In Campbeltown, almost 70% of the people are still without water. This presently applies to Amerindians at Campbeltown and not Mahdia.

The water situation at Paramakatoi is also in disaster. Persons at Paramakatoi use small creeks for bathing and washing purposes. This water is stagnant due to dry the weather and this has lead to the spread of scabies among the population. There is a typical example of this, a week ago, a team of Regional Officials visited the area and spent a couple of days there. On their return they had to seek medial attention at the Mahdia District Hospital to treat scabies. Maybe word has gotten around so we do not see Government Officials visiting Paramakatoi. We need potable water at Paramakatoi at Mahdia to better serve the people.

Additional wells for Paramakatoi - since the Paramakatoi population is increasing rapidly and Paramakatoi serves not only the people or the residents at Paramakatoi, but persons children from 21 different locations come in to attend Paramakatoi Secondary School.

The region is looking at the infrastructural development of health centres, health posts and the upgrading of hospitals in Region 8. We welcome this. Anyway the moneys allocated in the area of health for the region, is very limited and we are asking for the figure to be increased to cater for the works to be done. For example, if we have to build a new health centre at Princeville,

with living quarters, we will be left with no finance to work with on the expansion of Kuru Kaburu Health Centre, which needs urgent attention.

Nurses and other workers at the Mahdia District Hospital - I can give you a typical example of myself. I am a non-resident of Mahdia, but residing at Mahdia right now providing services at the Mahdia District Hospital. It has been my bad experience working overtime, whereas the Ministry says that the working hours should be from 8 o'clock to 4.30 in the afternoon, I go beyond that and I have written a letter to the Hon. Minister, Dr. Ramsarran, I believe is that is the correct name and no response has been given up to now. I was asking him if ... not for plenty money, but if at least \$10,000.00 can be given to pharmacy assistants who will be working overtime and who will be called upon at any hour in the night to come out and to treat Malaria patients upon diagnoses. Up to now, no positive response has been given.

The Mahdia District Hospital needs 24 hours guard services with attractive salaries. If you look at the salaries being paid to security guard at the Mahdia District Hospital or in Mahdia generally, it is \$20,000 per month and this is being payable within two months. There is only one security guard and I strongly believe that if one nurse has to be on a shift, it is insecure. For me as a person providing services at the Mahdia District Hospital, to come out to the hospital at wee hours, like 9.15 p.m. to treat Malaria patients, is not safe; and for a woman too. Most of the times I am being left alone because of the little salary that I normally work for cannot be afforded by my husband who has to venture into mining areas looking for extra dollars. I am a woman of four children. Most of the times when I open the door, I leave it opened and venture to look after the health of persons at Mahdia. Nurses' salaries as well should be increased, because there are some nurses who can work day after day because of the shortage of staff. Most of the nurses providing services at the Mahdia District Hospital are not the residents of Mahdia, there are some persons from Region 9, Region 3 and from all over.

I therefore, strongly suggest that the security be tighten at the Mahdia District Hospital since there has been an influx of criminals getting away from the Coast to those mining areas and hiding. It is not safe for these workers to be working late hours without security.

Another important thing that has to be addressed at the Mahdia District Hospital is communication methods; I should say telephones. The Mahdia District Hospital does not have,

not even, one telephone. Persons, like me, use personal telephones to make contact with the Minister of Health and different persons for information or whatsoever. It is very dangerous and I am unhappy about these things happening. I am willing and happy to serve the people at Mahdia that is in Region 8, but under these situations I do not want to do it. Taking me from my comfortable home to work there insecurely is not good. So I want the present Government to tighten security at the Mahdia District Hospital.

Education in Region 8 is fast going downhill, especially since the introduction of volunteer teachers, rather than qualified teachers. There have been complains by parents that these teachers do not use curriculum guides and syllabuses provided by the Ministry of Education for education delivery. Instead, they focus more on textbooks when planning lessons and since most of the textbooks are outdated it is placing the students at a disadvantage. I was also made to understand that these teachers do not have adequate educational skills to deliver education. Some of them have poor grades and do not have the potential to deliver quality education to students, which will enable them to cope with the educational challenges of the outside world. Thus, performances are declining instead of increasing.

Raise in salaries of teachers – teachers, some of them work overtime, voluntarily. As one of my colleagues I believe on the other side was saying, they have been performing, but we have not been compensating the teachers who are making emphasis on the performances of the people...

[Interruption]. **[Ms. Manickchand:** Yes, but they do not perform good.] Yes Minister.

Scholarship for Region 8 – students who have excel at CXC - there are two students who I know of who excelled at CXC at Paramakatoi Secondary School, but have not been given any scholarship to further their studies. One was forced to do teaching, which is not of his personal interest. Therefore, I strongly suggest that the Government look very strongly to the interest of young people, when it comes to human resource development.

Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh, mentioned in his budget presentation that companies are coming into Guyana and jobs will be created. I would like to ask the Minister if Guyanese are equipped with the knowledge and skills to acquire those jobs. Let me say, in relation to Region 8 when it comes to operating heavy duty machinery our young people are not equipped to capture these jobs. There is a need to train young people in trade, since for example, if we entertain outsiders

to get the contracts in the region, or employment in the region, we will remain unemployed and moreover the infrastructural work they do is not of good quality as they are always in a hurry to get the work done, even if it means the quality has to be sacrificed. If we employ the citizens of the region to carry out infrastructural works, I strongly believe that they would do a better job.

10.08 p.m.

Therefore, the Government should provide scholarships to young people in Region 8 and let them enter institutions such as GITC (Guyana Industrial Training Centre), GTI (Government Technical Institute), GSA (Guyana School of Agriculture), Teachers' Training College, UG (University of Guyana) and other institutions to enhance skills in trade.

We need to produce tradesmen on the ground so that when buildings become dilapidated, pipes are being broken, we do not have to depend on "coast landers" to fly all the way from Georgetown to fix them. We will be able to do it ourselves. Therefore, I am kindly asking the Government to make human resource development a priority number one in this country, and as such development must be based on the needs and the opportunities in the community.

For too long Amerindians have been viewed as basket weavers; we are more than that. Stop the platitudes and hollow sentiments about Amerindian development. It is time to show real respect for Guyana's first people.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, the level of unemployment is high among the residents of Region 8, young people and adults all alike. Most of the economic activities that they are involved in are farming and mining. I can clearly remember when Minister Robert Persaud was the Minister of Agriculture he had to encourage the Grow More Campaign. People in Region 8 are farmers. If I can plant, she can plant, he can plant who is going to buy? Transportation has been a problem in this area, so even though we were encouraged to plant there was no transportation and there was no market; therefore, young people, upon leaving school, will go straight to mining areas to do mining or other things which I will address in a moment. **[Dr. Westford: Mining is a job.]**

There are no jobs and that is why they are looking for jobs in the mining sector, which is good but very risky. How many of you in this House would want your children to go to do mining and would want to find out that within a couple of weeks the person is dead or contracted malaria?

Since we have a high level of crime in mining areas we do not see it safe for our young people, in large numbers, to be involved in mining.

What about the young men who do not want to go into mining? What are they supposed to do, steal, to earn a living, get involved in crime? Definitely they will think of abusing drugs or planting illegal stuff to sell to whomever and that is illegal and prohibited by the laws of Guyana.

Why should Amerindians not have the opportunity to become agronomists, environmentalists, accountants, lawyers, and certified electricians just like any other Guyanese.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up.

Mr. Ramjattan: May I ask for five minutes for her to conclude.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Thank you. You have five minutes, Hon. Member, to conclude.

Mrs. Marcello: Thank you, Mdm. Deputy Speaker. Are these professions exclusively for “coastlanders”?

Prostitution has become a problem. Prostitution has been and still is a major issue among people in Region 8 and is left neglected. Human trafficking will reach a pandemic stage because of unemployment. Young people who left school recently have indicated to me that they feel hopeless since their performance in mathematics and English are poor and these are the requirements for higher education – they remain hopeless. I can give a typical example: I was approached by three beautiful women who are very young. One of the persons said that she had to sell her body for 3 pennyweights of gold and the other two for 1 pennyweight of gold. How much money is that? That is very little money. Therefore, they go to prostitution to earn a living since their parents cannot afford to keep them anymore because they are unemployed. This is really sad because these young people also end up as victims of HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) and AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) since they are not very knowledgeable about the activities they are involved in.

Sometimes I wonder what value the Hon. Minister of Education places on Amerindian youths. During campaigns for the 2011 Elections we were promised by President Donald Ramotar that

the Government is concerned about the affairs of Amerindians. Now he is President Donald Ramotar and we need for him to manifest himself as one who keeps his promises.

I looked at the 2012 Budget specifically for two things: job creation and women empowerment in Region 8. Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I am still looking; I have even looked between the lines. We have some paltry allocations for health, education, administration, but nothing concrete for job creation and nothing for women's development.

I know that the Government will stand and recite litany of Low Carbon Development and GFIF (Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund) but we rue the days that Amerindian development must rest on the whims and the fancy of foreign countries and governments. Amerindians are Guyana's first people; a significant percent of foreign exchange earned by the country comes from gold, diamond and forestry; this is the wealth of Amerindian lands and our heritage, yet we are being told that our development must come from handouts from foreign governments. It angers me! As a proud Amerindian woman I say that Amerindians must not support this Budget unless and until the allocations for Amerindian development are guaranteed from revenue earned through economic activities on Amerindian lands. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member.

Mrs. Chandarpal: Thank you, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I wish to congratulate the Minister of Finance, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, for presenting yet another people's budget of the PPP/C Government. I also would like to join with the other colleagues who have spoken in congratulating as well the new Members of Parliament.

Today for me, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, has been a momentous day and it has been momentous in the fact that when I listened to those dynamic presentations of the female Members of Parliament, very young ones, who have spoken today, I feel that those of us who have been in the Parliament for about 20 years will be leaving this institution in very capable hands and we are very proud of the women and what they have been doing today.

Budget time since the PPP/Civic was elected to office has always been one of great expectations. These expectations are fuelled by the people's knowledge and recognition of our stewardship in steering growth and development in all sectors of Guyana's development.

The theme of the 2012 Budget, “Remaining on Course, United in Purpose, and Prosperity for All” is in sync with the PPP/C’s developmental agenda.

All Budgets of the PPP/Civic Government have had some major commonalities especially in the areas of macro-economic stability, sustained growth in all of the various sectors, new and innovative programmes and care for the poor and vulnerable.

Our budgets were always about maintaining and sustaining growth in all sectors. This is evidenced by the domestic economy achieving real growth averaging 4.4 % over the past six years with 2011 recording a 5.4% growth rate.

The Hon. Minister of Finance in his presentation spoke to the key achievements over the last five years and referred to a number of achievements. He cited the performance of seven major sectors in which there was growth as much as 68 percent in the bauxite industry followed by gold which recorded a 17.7%.

This growth augurs well for the country since there are still sections of our population who are living below the poverty line and they are in need of assistance in one way or another from Government.

We still have a lot more to do in different areas of development and the initiatives outlined by the Minister of Finance will certainly provide the necessary fillip to these.

The Government would have wanted to provide more assistance in terms of percentage and quantum. Unfortunately, one cannot give more than what one has. We are mindful that the amount allocated to old age pension is attracting attention and we would like to give them much more. However, this is not a once for all action; this has to be sustained and it has to be given in stages as the economy allows.

Those who accuse us of being heartless must remember that it was the PPP/C that removed the means test and now provides for all persons 65 years and older to get a pension and provided public assistance to thousands of people who are faced with difficult situations.

When we refer to social assistance we need to take the collective benefits accrued; whether it is water rate assistance, eye care for seniors, assistance to children – through the school uniform

programme – the single parents initiative through the Women of Worth Programme, legal aid; as well as those other initiatives that are available in the other social sectors, such as health education, labour, housing and Ministry of Amerindian Affairs. Some provide direct assistance while others provide the training for upward mobility.

The three Constitutional Commissions have been tasked with the responsibility of undertaking a number of actions on behalf of women, children and indigenous people. This collective approach will definitely help ameliorate hardships and accelerate development in these areas.

The sustained development of the country and its people includes a variety of measures including policies, programmes, measures to protect citizens, access to various types of opportunities, collaboration with civil society, subvention to support those organisations that are providing services to those that are in need, among others.

Those who accuse this PPP/C Government of being heartless must recall that we created the home for destitute people and provided them with food and clothing and we are constructing another shelter at Onverwagt for more such persons. It is our desire to assist them so that they can be fully re-integrated into our society.

The Child Protection Agency is providing a safe haven for children – some whose parents have just brought them into the world and have left them to the mercy of the elements. In this regard, I wish to use this occasion to call on the parents who are abandoning their children to the institutions and who do not even make time to visit their offspring; this is irresponsible behaviour and no amount of finger pointing can negate the fact that some parents are responsible for their children's downfall.

The PPP/C Government has increased spending in all areas in each year. The overall increases in the last two decades are very substantial, making a significant impact on the lives of large numbers of people with greater needs.

Overall, almost all the people of Guyana are living in improved conditions. Some are still struggling to catch up, but over time they will also be in a better position.

The housing development and the successes of that sector is one we should all be proud of. Not only have we transformed the landscape of hundreds of communities but we have transformed

the lives of thousands of people. We have given them a feeling of achievement, of pride and of self worth. The children of today have something to look forward because their parents are in a better place.

When one speak to people and remind them about where we were and where we are today, many will say “You know what? We have been behaving as if we have had all these things for all the time.” Unfortunately, some people take the developments in all the sectors and regions for granted and fail to recognise the improvements.

I wish to use street lights as an example to illustrate the effects it has on communities that have access to it. A lot of you would have experienced Saturday or Sunday nights in almost all of these communities; the same is true for Georgetown and its environs. Tell me, has it not changed the way people interact with each other? Has it not created opportunities for small businesses who ply their trades on the seawall every week? However, there is a cost to this and the state has to take responsibility for the expenses related to this benefit.

Another issue is the theft of electricity, in some areas. There are persons who have not been paying for their electricity and are using it indiscriminately because they are taking it free. So when we come to Parliament and ask for more money for the electricity sector in whose interest is that? Is it not for the nation?

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, Guyana’s economic and social growth is a work in progress. Everywhere and in every sector there are developments. In the process there are difficulties as well and there are things which could be done differently in relation to the quality of work, the value for money spent and the timeliness of needed interventions.

As we note the improvements around the country we must also be mindful of the negative trends affecting the social behaviour of large sections of our population. While we have drastically reduced the numbers there are still too many cases of school dropouts, family violence, incest, alcoholism, substance abuse and other related problems. These are realities, and there is need for more citizens to become involved and take responsibility for their actions and those of their offspring. These are all real issues that continue to confront our society and it calls for collective responsibility and action by all of us.

Our people must understand that Government alone cannot solve all the problems of the people. People everywhere need to take ownership for their development by being more pro-active in the development of their communities and families. While the Government is taking initiatives at the national level to expand our economic base, the people can support these initiatives by being more responsible and involved.

Take the NDCs (Neighbourhood Democratic Councils), for example: some people would prefer not to pay their rates and taxes but yet they want the NDCs to pick up their garbage, weed their parapets, clean their drains and repair roads. When you ask them how much they pay they would say “Oh, well, we pay \$2,500 or we pay \$3.000 per year”, yet they would not go out and take responsibility for their own immediate environment, cleanliness and well being. Another example of lawlessness is the attitude of some people who are living by the main roadways. They see it as their legitimate right to wantonly dump whatever they want on these roads.

I wish to call on all of us to do whatever is necessary to encourage our respective supporters to be more supportive in their communities in ways that are possible.

This budget and those before under the leadership of the PPP/C is so different from the gloom and doom which characterised PNC’s budgets that the now Shadow Minister of Finance presented when he was Minister of Finance.

Today under the PPP-Civic, there is optimism, growth and prosperity for all. We today have the largest amount of local and foreign companies ever. The Hon. Minister of Finance has pointed to the many prospects emerging for our country especially in the utilization of our country’s abundant natural resources. As seen in the progress in oil exploration, investors are showing great confidence in our country. We today have the largest amount of local and foreign companies ever. We are indeed reaching new levels of realization of the many expectations raised in our National Development Strategy.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper Report 2005 also dealt extensively with some of the steps that would have been taken to facilitate the growth in sectors such as bauxite and gold. The good news is that in 2012 we will see a bigger expansion of these two sectors with even more massive investment. For the PPP/C Government, growth in the economy will provide new springboards for delivery of the social goods to larger sections of our population.

As one of the geographical representative of Region 4 I wish to look at the major projects that will be undertaken by Central Government for this Region in 2012. The Minister of Finance in his presentation spoke to the physical infrastructure for transformation in which he cited some important areas, and these are: the modernization and expansion of the four-lane access road to the Cheddi Jagan International Airport, starting in the extension of the four-lane highway from Providence to Diamond; the widening of the highway from Better Hope to Golden Grove on the East Coast of Demerara and the sums allocated is within the vicinity of \$2.2B; the upgrade, expansion and modernisation of CJIA to the tune of \$4.5 Billion

Region 4 will also benefit from sums allocated for drainage and irrigation work for the advancement of work on the Northern Relief Channel at Hope/Dochfour as well as \$391 million have been budgeted for the continued modernization of the Hydro meteorological network.

\$1.8 billion will be invested for the installation of a submarine cable linking Kingston and Vreed-en-Hoop, constructions and upgrading several sub-stations.

\$672 Million is budgeted for the construction of a 100 bed state of the art specialist hospital at Turkeyen.

\$678 Million is budgeted to continue the construction of Haags Bosch Sanitary Landfill.

In 2011 there was a greater emphasis on the improvements of the infrastructure especially in the areas of road rehabilitation, drainage and irrigation work and building of sluices to protect farming communities and those that are prone to floods.

Some specific activities undertaken in this Region are as follows:

- 35 roads were rehabilitated and 5 new ones were built.
- 10 new sluices were constructed and 6 new ones were built.
- Water tanks were distributed to 6 communities.
- New water lines and distribution mains in Yarowkabra, Kurukuru and Eccles.
- Land was acquired for new housing development in Herstelling/Diamond.
- A new power site was constructed at the back of Diamond New Housing Development.
- A nursery and primary school for Diamond.

- 2 borehole facilities in Hope and Area B, Lusignan.

There are a number of rollover projects from 2010 of which 5 are ongoing and 6 have now been completed.

In 2011 there were 18 projects which are still ongoing.

Region 4 will benefit from the \$2.755 billion for 2012. This sum will be expended on agriculture, public works, education and delivery of health services.

Region 4 is a hub of activity and everywhere there are developments taking place. Within the last two weeks I have had the opportunity to visit from Cane Grove to Timehri and it is amazing when one drives through all these places to see the type of development that is taking place. We are indeed proud as a nation that we are seeing these types of development taking place in our time.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, Guyana is on the move and while there are still difficulties we must not close our eyes to the development that has taken place all over the country. As the country advances economically we will be able to provide more goods and services to all the people of Guyana as we move our country from poverty to prosperity. I call on all sides of the House to join me in supporting this budget as presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance. I thank you.

[Applause]

ADJOURNMENT

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much, Mrs. Chandarpal. I want to thank all 15 Members who made their contributions to the budget.

Mr. Hinds: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I now propose that the House be adjourned to 1.00 p.m. tomorrow.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Thank you. The House is adjourned until 1.00 p.m. tomorrow.

Adjourned accordingly at 10.35 p.m.