

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

12TH Sitting

Tuesday, 17TH April, 2012

The Assembly convened at 1.04 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Higher standard of decorum in the National Assembly

Mr. Speaker: There are just a few brief announcements. Those of you who were here until the end of the session, last evening, would recall that it ended with a bit of tension. I would just like to say that I believe everything has calmed down, and we look forward to a very good day of debating today, and that all is well. I met with both the Government and Opposition's Chief Whips and we had good, cordial and frank discussions. I am satisfied that some of the statements made last night were not directed at me, *per se*. But, as I indicated, we all expect that the conduct and the decorum in the House would be of a higher standard. I think it is what the people of Guyana would expect of us. I thank you for that.

Notification on the commencement of the consideration of the Estimates of Expenditure in the Committee of Supply

Mr. Speaker: The second announcement is that you would have received, I believe, on your desks, copies of the minutes of the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply setting

out the schedule. As of tomorrow, Wednesday 18th, April, 2012, consideration of the Estimates will be conducted in the Committee of Supply. That commences at 2.00 p.m. and it is not at 1.00 p.m. As of today, with the anticipated ending of the debate, the 1.00 p.m. arrangement expires and we will resume with our regular 2.00 p.m. scheduling as of tomorrow.

Response from the Head of GINA

Mr. Speaker: The third announcement pertains to one that I made yesterday regarding my writing to the Head of the Government Information Agency (GINA), Mr. Neaz Subhan. He has responded. I think that, in fairness to him, I should note that he has responded, as of yesterday afternoon. I would like to quickly read for Members his response, which arose out of my writing to him arising from a complaint received from the Leader of the Opposition regarding the asymmetry between reporting on the presentations of the Members of the Opposition as against those of the governing side. It states:

“Dear Mr. Trotman,

With reference to the above, as conveyed through your letter dated 16th April, 2012, I respectfully wish to inform you that the production of the Government Information Agency (GINA) addresses the needs and directives of the Central Government. This has always been the protocol which the agency has followed in keeping with its mandate as a unit within the Office of the President. As a result, please be advised that content of output from a ministerial unit can only be modified on an explicit instruction from the authorities.

Yours respectfully,

Mr. Neaz Subhan”

Copies of this letter have been shared with the Hon. Prime Minister, Brigadier (ret'd) Mr. Granger, Leader of the Opposition, and Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan.

ORAL QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

MEETING OF REPRESENTATIVES OF OPPOSITION POLITICAL PARTIES WITH MINISTER OF FINANCE ON CONCERNS REGARDING THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, earlier this morning, Hon. Member Mrs. Volda Lawrence telephoned me and said that she wished to submit an oral question without notice. She emailed that question to me. I considered it and I have granted permission for her to ask that question this afternoon, of the Hon. Minister of Finance.

Mrs. Lawrence: My question is posed to the Hon. Minister of Finance Dr. Ashni Singh and it is asking him whether he would give consideration to meet with representatives of A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) and the Alliance For Change (AFC) to address our concerns regarding the 2012 Estimates of Expenditure to provide for its smooth passage in this honourable House.

Minister of Finance [Dr. Singh]: We, in the People's Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C), alliance, are always willing to meet with and to receive from stakeholders views expressed on matters of interest and national importance. Indeed, when the Economic Sub-Committee, established under the Inter-Parliamentary Party Dialogue forum, last met, I indicated that Government would be willing to consider any written submissions received in relation to the budget. No such submissions were received subsequent to that invitation. That notwithstanding, and in particular, against the background of our willingness at all times to engage, I wish to indicate that we would be willing to meet with appointed representatives of the APNU and AFC, provided that the concerns alluded to by the Hon. Member, in her question, are documented in advance to aid productive discussions, and provided that the schedule agreed to unanimously by the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply - only yesterday, is still adhered to in its entirety.

Mr. Speaker: Before we proceed, by way of announcement, my apology, our guest today is Mr. Trevor Benn who is the Programme Analyst for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). He is a friend to many and familiar to most. The UNDP, in conjunction with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), has been providing technical support to the National Assembly with projects, and so we welcome Mr. Benn today. Hopefully, he will be inspired to

report to his superiors and principals that things are going well in the National Assembly and that it is worthy to draw down on much needed scarce financing.

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 that expenditure;

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

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2012, of a total sum of **one hundred and seventy nine billion, six hundred and ninety six million, five hundred and forty six thousand dollar (\$179,696,546,000), excluding thirteen billion, and eighty four million, seven hundred and thirty five thousand dollars (\$13,084,735,000)** which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in the undermentioned schedule, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to make further provision in respect of finance.” *[Minister of Finance]*

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Mr. Speaker: We welcome the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs who has been absent but, out from what I have read, was representing us ably. I trust, Hon. Minister, that in due course you

will brief the House fully on your presentations at the United Nations as it regards the Government and country's application for an extension of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Without ado, I invite the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs to address the National Assembly.

Minister of Foreign Affairs [Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett]: I rise, as my colleagues before me, on this side of the House, to commend the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh and members of his team for preparing a budget that is very consistent, as budgets before it, in the sense that it offers something for everyone - maybe not everything for everyone, but it is something for everyone. I think congratulations are in order, especially when one considers the erratic financial environment in which many of our countries in the world have found themselves, so much so that a new category of countries has been coined – the Heavily Indebted Rich Countries (HIRC). It is in this sense that we must not underemphasise the achievement by Guyana.

I also want to, at the outset, congratulate all of the new Members of Parliament who have joined us in this House, and also those who have returned. I also want to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, for being elected as Speaker of the National Assembly and the Hon. Member Mrs. Deborah Backer for being elected as the Deputy Speaker. I notice that she is also my shadow Minister in the National Assembly.

As is expected, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued to focus on the protection and the consolidation of our sovereignty and the preservation of our territorial integrity. Of course, added to that is the promotion of economic and social development. Let me say that where necessary, action was taken to ensure that the internationally recognised boundaries of Guyana were respected. Members of this honourable House would recall that in September last year, Guyana completed its submission for an extended continental shelf - to which you alluded - Mr. Speaker - under article 79 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). By making that submission, Guyana has taken the necessary action to safeguard its rights and interests beyond the outer limit of the two hundred nautical miles of the Exclusive Economic Zone. It will be recalled that the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in September 2011, and indeed more recently, declared its incongruous position on the action taken by Guyana. This Government will always ensure that Guyana remains a responsible actor in the international system. Guyana's actions pursuant to the submission, was in keeping with the provisions of international law and I therefore wish to assure every Guyanese that Guyana will

resolutely and vigorously defend both its submissions to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) and its rights under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Let there be no doubt about our resolve in these cases.

Mr. Speaker, as you rightly recognised, my absence from this Assembly was due in part to my leading a delegation to appear before the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf and to present our oral submission. I also met with the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon.

I have noted that the Hon. Member Mrs. Backer indicated the APNU's support for the position taken thus far by the Government, in relation to its submission to the CLCS. National interest must always transcend partisan party politics and I think this is a great example. I hope it will be contagious and would have the same effect on the budget as a whole.

I have noted, too, that the Hon. Member Mrs. Backer spoke about the need to consult on issues of national importance, especially as it relates to our foreign policy. I want to inform the House today – well, the PPP/C Government has always done so and will continue to do so - as of tomorrow, the leaders of the Opposition parties in the National Assembly and your good self, will receive an invitation from His Excellency so that they could meet with him and be fully updated (for obvious reasons in camera) on those developments at the United Nations.

Being a responsible actor in the international system does not only involve a commitment to dialogue, but it also involves a commitment to cooperation, both in a broad sense and in the sense of taking advantage of common interests, goals and positions. Cooperation allows for the exploitation of both synergies and asymmetries and, of course, can even result in reduced vulnerabilities, as it permits sensible economic partnerships. These have been the guiding principles in terms of our relations with both Suriname and Venezuela. The differences in views of Guyana and both states are well-known *vis-à-vis* Guyana's territory, and in relation to the latter Guyana's maritime entitlements. Those differences, as important as they are to Guyana and its foreign policy, must not be allowed to preclude cooperation for mutual benefit once such cooperation does not compromise Guyana's legal rights and entitlements. It is on this basis, and what I see as a concomitant reciprocal position, at least in some respects by those states, that

Guyana has worked hard to deepen cooperation with the Republic of Suriname and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

It is a fact that, of the fifteen Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Guyana and Suriname are the only two with contiguous borders. We share more overall commonalities and I submit that the movement of people across our borders could very well be more than that with other Member States of CARICOM. Then why not capitalise on what brings us together? The good news, in my view, is that both of our countries now recognise and embrace these realities and possibilities. A new relationship has germinated, I would say, in the last three years or so and cooperation is the pivot of the relations now between Guyana and Suriname. We are cooperating in the areas of combating crime and enhancing public security, agriculture, climate change, forestry and many other areas. Guyana and Suriname, as I mentioned last year, have decided that it is in their best interest to bridge the Corentyne River. I must inform this House that a partner of our two countries, one of our friends in the international community – I am speaking here about a country – has indicated its interest and very shortly we will be submitting a joint proposal to that country.

The completion of the Corentyne Bridge will no doubt leapfrog integration between our two countries and peoples. But I must also mention that the return of Suriname Airways to our sky is not by coincidence. It is part of a larger plan by our countries to improve transportation and also to bring our peoples closer together, as will be the case with the Corentyne Bridge. We are also working...My dear colleague, Hon. Member Minister Ramsammy is working with his colleague to have harmonised fishing regulations. That is regulations for fishermen. This would, in part, aid the fight against piracy and, in other areas as well.

I have noted too that the Hon. Member Mrs. Backer spoke about the alternative entry and exit points, albeit of an illegal nature, which continue to exist on both sides of our borders. Mr. Speaker, I want to inform this honourable House and in particular the Hon. Member Mrs. Backer that there have been discussions on this issue as recent as a few days ago, and a meeting is planned for the end of June, 2012, to further discuss the systems that must be put in place. This has to be done simultaneously on both sides of the border and Guyana and Suriname will be meeting to do this. I want to assure the citizens of Guyana that we will give adequate notice when those systems are completed and when we are ready to implement them.

In relation to Venezuela, we continue in the areas, as I mentioned earlier, of sensible partnerships. Our rice farmers continue to make significant contributions to Guyana's development and our nation's food security, but there is also recognition of the need for further growth. It is in this light that we have signed several agreements with Venezuela for the export of rice, the most recent agreement being one for US\$53.4 million in 2011. Under this contract we will export twenty thousand tons of rice and fifty thousand tons of paddy. This activity has helped to significantly add to our foreign exchange reserves but also to the reduction of debt which would have otherwise accrued because of an importation of petroleum and petroleum products from Venezuela. Indeed, this type of arrangement where we obtain petroleum and petroleum products and in return provide rice is precisely how PetroCaribe was intended to operate. I must say, and this would show if we go to the records, that Guyana has little company when it comes to fully living up to this commitment and I am very proud of that. We have also been pursuing the possibility of sourcing increased imports of urea from Venezuela to meet the needs in the sugar and rice industries. The Venezuelans have recently indicated an interest in buying building materials from Guyana. We have engaged the private sector in this regard and, where possible, we hope to meet the needs of the Venezuelan market, at least in part, and we will continue to work on that in this year.

Turning to Brazil, our largest neighbour, I wish to inform that our cooperation programmes continue apace in several areas – military cooperation, agriculture, to name a few areas. The joint Commission on Police Cooperation and Drugs has agreed to the sharing of information to combat organised crime and to improve joint border control mechanisms. I saw that a lot was said about that by the Hon. Member Mrs. Backer. Perhaps it is because we do not do a lot of drum rolls when those things happen, the people might not be aware of all that we are doing. When it comes to security, the Hon. Member Minister Rohee would tell that it is not always everything that is being done is advertised, but we are hoping that we can have the same successes that we have had with our cooperation with Suriname, with Brazil as well.

I know that while all of those cooperation activities with Brazil are laudable, the nation awaits with abated breath word on the paving of the Lethem to Linden road and the construction of the deep water port. Let me say that in recent months there were accelerated discussions on those two projects. I was invited by my colleague, the distinguished Minister of Foreign Affairs of

Brazil, to prepare for a visit of His Excellency President Donald Ramotar. That visit will take place shortly, within the next two months, and we are almost sure that the results of that would be something very positive for Guyana and Brazil.

We know that with the rapid pace of development in Brazil there can be an energy deficit in that country as early as the end of this decade. Brazil is working very hard for that not to happen. Guyana and Brazil have already signed an agreement for cooperation in hydroelectricity and work is progressing on a feasibility study. Let me say that Guyana will ensure that all of the necessary studies and consultations are conducted as required and, with this in mind, I am confident that there will be further movement in this regard. We need the road and port and Brazil needs energy. I think that we can have some arrangement in that regard.

In terms of our regional integration institutions, let me speak about CARICOM. Let me say, without a shadow of a doubt, that Guyana's commitment to CARICOM remains strong. This is evidenced in certain facts. This is not just empty commitment. Guyana was one of the first two countries to sign on to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ). It is one of the leading countries, in terms of ensuring that the legislative requirements are put in place in several areas. Guyana also built the CARICOM Secretariat which was promised under the People's National Congress (PNC) administration and it has continued to pay its core allocation to the budget of the Secretariat. This is our regional integration institution, second only to the European Union (EU) in longevity, and it has served us well. It has stood the test of time but it is ripe for a review right now. After all, it is thirty-nine years old. Many of us are over thirty-nine years of age and we know that at that time we need to do a review anyway. So, there are certain questions which must be asked. Is this institution ready for this twenty first century? Is it as efficient and effective as it should be? Are the goals that we have set ourselves been achieved or are achievable? How do our populations feel about CARICOM? Is smallness our weakness? How can we use our fourteen votes more effectively in the regional and multilateral arenas?

Those are some of the questions that motivated Guyana to lead the call in asking for a review of the CARICOM institutions. We even offered to host a retreat of the Heads of State in Guyana to critically examine the priorities of this vital institution. We have seen the review of the Secretariat which is very telling and we support the hiring of a change agent to assist the Secretary-General in bringing that institution to where it should be. The work conducted thus far

by the CCJ has made it imperative for us to take a second look at the revised Treaty of Chaguaramas. I am pleased to inform this honourable House that through the capable chairmanship of my colleague, the Attorney General Mr. Anil Nandlall, who is the Chairman of the Inter-Governmental Task Force (IGTF) on the revision of the revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, Guyana will ensure that it plays its active role there.

Let me end on CARICOM by saying that we believe that CARICOM's full potential will only be realised when there is full and complete commitment and political will from all of the Member States and when the people of the region can see its benefits. We are not there as yet. I agree with the Hon. Member Mrs. Backer that we need to involve all of the stakeholders so that even if the Government changes the commitment to CARICOM will not change. CARICOM must not only give, it has to receive, and we can only receive based on the inputs, and I believe that Guyana is doing well in that regard.

Even as we consolidate CARICOM, Guyana is well aware of the importance of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) which it had the opportunity to chair in 2011. We do not see CARICOM and UNASUR as competing integration movements but actually as complementary. We were happy that it was during Guyana's chairmanship that the UNASUR Treaty came into force and was able to have a Secretary-General appointed. We are happy to see, now, that some of the concrete proposals put forward by Guyana are being discussed and some of them are being implemented.

1.34 p.m.

Latin America remains the region with the most inequality and it is in this light that the Ministers of Finance of UNASUR have begun to address the possibility of an economic model - they call it a South American economic model – that allows plurality for both the private sector and the state to develop economic activities where the focus would be on generating wealth, more evenly across the nation and reducing the inequality that exists today. UNASUR also has agreed to have an electoral observation mission and Guyana benefited from that.

Mr. Speaker, you would also know about the new organisation CELAC which is the Latin America and Caribbean Community of Nations. There have been talks about CELAC being an alternative to the Organization of American States (OAS). We do not necessarily see it as that,

but we have to wait and see how this institution develops. Having just returned from the Summit of Americas where I accompanied His Excellency President Donald Ramotar, I wish to say that that Summit provided for some good discussions amongst leaders in areas such as crime, security, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and climate change, but it is my humble view that that process is in jeopardy. If thing continues the way it is I cannot see another Summit of the Americas. This is primarily because of the exclusion of Cuba. All but two countries present at the Summit agreed to have Cuba back in the fold. We were not able to have an agreement from two members of State. Lest we leave this House without being clear on what Guyana's position is, let me repeat what President Ramotar said at the summit, and I quote:

“The other issue that is testing our solidarity is the question of Cuba's attendance at this meeting of the Americas. I thought this issue was settled at the last summit in Trinidad and Tobago. Our position is that Cuba should be here. This island is a part of the Americas and has contributed tremendously to the development of the Americas. This issue continues to be a reminder of another period in our history that has passed; that of the cold war. It is time we move beyond this. It is time for the blockade to be lifted and for Cuba to take her rightful place in our meetings”.

That is Guyana's position.

Turning to the area of foreign trade, despite the serious economic challenges and pressures that persisted in the international trading system in 2011, Guyana has maintained an open and liberalised trade policy environment. It continues to press ahead with trade arrangements that allow its economy to expand imports and exports with both traditional and non-traditional sources. As a member of CARICOM, Guyana also remains engaged in the external trade negotiations with third parties. Trade with its regional partners in CARICOM has remained stable, accounting for approximately thirty-five per cent of its imports and over twenty per cent of its exports. At the Caribbean Forum of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (CARIFORUM) level, that is, CARICOM plus the Dominican Republic, we see an expansion of the trade performance with the Dominican Republic.

Since the implementation of the CARICOM - Dominican Republic free trade agreement in 2005, bilateral trade between Guyana and the Dominican Republic has increased almost sevenfold. Our

exports to that country have more than tripled from \$0.9 million in 2005 to over \$3 million in 2010. Interestingly, our growing exports include products such as rice and coconuts, which are excluded from any tariff preferences. So regardless of that, Guyana has been able to increase its trade. During that same period imports from the Dominican Republic grew from \$1.5 million to \$12.6 million. We expect that the trade with this CARIFORUM country will continue to strengthen but we certainly would like to see the trading balance shifted in our favour and we will be working towards this. We negotiate trade agreements because we want to have open greater access for our country's exports of goods and services and to improve the opportunities for growth and development of our business sector in trade and investment. It therefore seems that if the best deal or outcome is to be achieved the private sector's input and active participation would be critical. This would also be true in the implementation of the negotiated trade agreements.

This year Guyana will continue with its implementation of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union. In our first year of EPA's implementation that commenced in January 2011 let me make it very clear, that after all the song and dance of the EPA we have not seen any change in our trade with the European Union. The first comprehensive review is expected to be carried out next year and the CARIFORUM side will commence preparation for that review later this year.

In terms of Canada, Guyana remains committed to that negotiation. As you might know, Mr. Speaker, CARICOM is insisting that the agreement be a trade and development agreement and Canada is insisting that development must not be in that agreement. We have decided that we are going to have informal discussions on these issues, and, hopefully we would be able to have a negotiated solution. The United States of America is still our leading trading partner, accounting for over forty per cent of our combined imports and exports. We expect that CARICOM and the United States of America will soon conclude a trade and investment framework agreement which will provide a forum under the CARICOM-US Trade Investment Council for the two sides to pursue bilateral trade and investment issues.

I want to speak briefly about the diaspora because both His Excellency President Ramotar, in his address to the Assembly and the Minister of Finance spoke about the policy in that regard. Let me say that last year a Diasporas Unit was established at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and it

has embarked on several initiatives. In fact, it is working with the International Office for Migration on a project which would see a database being created of our skills overseas. The project was submitted in January 2012 and we are hoping that it will commence within another few months. As part of this project, we would also be looking at the resources needed internally for development so that these needs could be matched against the resources in the diaspora, and to use the social media to have people registered as well. That is only one aspect of the project. We know that we will have to ensure public sensitisation and we will be doing that so that persons can become registered. Hopefully, next year Guyana will host a diaspora conference. By then this project will almost be completed and we would know what we have out there and would be able to have a successful conference. I also want to say that the International Office of Migration has upgraded its office in Guyana to a regional office, a Caribbean office, so that is also very important. We are working very closely with it and we intend at the next Foreign Ministers' meeting of CARICOM to include our other partners as well in this initiative.

The Hon. Member Mrs. Backer spoke about the Foreign Service Institute and this remains critical to our Ministry's response to train our human resources. There have been several training sessions during last year and early this year, and the Ministry will continue to do that. It is hoping that it will be able to conclude certain agreements with diplomatic academies in different parts of the world. The Ministry has had interest indicated by several other countries and it will certainly be capitalising on those.

The Ministry is also gearing to be involved in the major transformative change in the way Government services are delivered. I am speaking here about ICT. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of course, is a part of this and it would be working to ensure that the services it offers are very well advertised and that people will be able to go online. It has started already and the remigration forms issues and visas are already online, but it wants to go a bit further and it would be working on that this year.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up. Has had been allotted, you have another twenty minutes more, so what I will do is to just indicate to you when you are five minutes away from the expiration of your time.

Prime Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs [Mr. Hinds]: I move that the Hon. Member be given another fifteen minutes to continue her presentation and then five minutes more.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett: I would like to use this time to respond to some of the issues which were raised during the debate. I have noticed in the newspapers that the Leader of the Opposition Mr. Granger, I think it was in an interaction with the media, spoke about disappointment when it comes to the budget and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I rather suspect that has to do with him feeling that the Ministry should have more money. On the other hand, I have read that the Hon. Member Mrs. Cathy Hughes, from the Alliance For Change (AFC), spoke of the need to reduce the travel budget. They are two different positions there. [Mrs. Backer: It is two different parties.] Well I know that it is two different parties, but I am saying that if we are to effectively have our foreign policy positions adumbrated in the international community we have to travel. Now there is an additional institution which this House unanimously approved – UNASUR - and that body has seven councils and several working groups, and those meetings also have to be attended. This is why there will be some increases in the travel budgets because the travelling for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is from that same budget. I think the Hon. Member Mr. Nagamootoo spoke about it, so Members may need to look back at that situation.

I also noticed that Hon. Member Mrs. Backer spoke about the establishing of a mission in South Africa. It is either she has inside information or we are thinking alike because this matter was discussed just in January and it has been agreed that Guyana should work to have a mission established in Africa and South Africa is where it has been identified. We will be working to have that come into operation at some point in time and hopefully it might be later next year. I should also mention that the Government of South Africa has offered CARICOM to provide some assistance in hosting a mission there for joint representation. That has been under discussion. Let me assure this House, one way or the other, that this is something that the Government has already discussed and is going to do at a later date.

The Hon. Member Ms. Backer referred to a study too that was done by the United Nations (UN) which spoke about the ambassadors being in place for too long and she spoke about “diplomatic

fatigue.” I was thinking whether we have parliamentary fatigue too. But let me inform Mrs. Backer that that study was done sometime in early 2000 and I want her to know that since then - she should know this - there have been changes in Venezuela, in Brazil, in Canada, in Suriname, in Cuba, at the Permanent Mission and also at the Consulate in Toronto. That accounted for more than half of all of the missions, and this is an ongoing process. So I think the diplomatic fatigue Ms. Backer was referring to there is not completely accurate.

In terms of rotation of staff, again, as I said, we do not do those things with a lot of fanfare, but let me tell Ms. Backer and the Hon. Members of this House that in the last six months officers were posted to Brazil, Washington and China, and next week officers will be leaving for London, Cuba, Venezuela and New York. Of course, there are officers coming back home so the rotation has already started and this is an ongoing process as well. So that recommendation too is a bit too late.

In terms of a reduction of staff in the Trade Department, let me make it clear that the Ministry of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have been merged and that is why there is a reduction in staff. In addition to that, with ICT now, there is no need to have forty persons. There is an office, Guyana Office for Investment (Go- Invest), and now the connection is just made with the relevant agency, let say, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, and the investors deal directly with those Ministries. I think there is adequate staff because that question was posed but if there is need to have more the Ministry will certainly do so.

I have to refer to a particular phrase that was used in Mrs. Backer’s presentation and this is what she said in the context of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation and the staff: “We do not have the best and brightest at our missions”. I do not know if Mrs. Backer feels that the monopoly on brain and brightness is over on that side. We have some loyal Guyanese out there, working hard to serve our interest and they are listening to us in this National Assembly.

Let me say, one of our officers, Mr. Troy Torrington, led the negotiations in the UN for the Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs) declaration. It is our officer here, Mr. Neville Totaram, who was a major player in the CARICOM-Canada trade negotiations. Those are our people. These are

only two examples. I know that in diplomatic speak a lot of things are said in very flowery ways, but people would speak to me about the officers and the work they do out there. I know the good work that they do. I know that time is limited... [*Interruption from the Opposition Members.*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I think that the Minister is making some very pertinent and informative statements. I certainly would like to hear them. I do not know if other Members would like to hear them too. I would ask that we give her that opportunity please. Go ahead. It is my apologies to you.

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I would not want to respond to the issues of ethnicity which were scattered all over the presentation. But let me say this: I head the Ministry of Foreign Affairs...

Mrs. Backer: I rise on a Point of Order. My honourable colleague, who I have the greatest respect for, is indicating that splattered throughout my presentation... [**Ms. Teixeira:** Scattered.] Scattered or splattered throughout my presentation were ethnic innuendoes. On one occasion I referred to and it was challenged and the challenge had to be withdrawn. I referred to Dr. Luncheon's sworn evidence in an ongoing case. That is the only reference that Mrs. Backer made that had any racial connotations and I condemned the Government for not forth calling on Dr. Luncheon to withdraw it. That is the only reference and I challenge the Minister to show where else was reference made.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. There will be no challenges issue, no jewels, no contest, but the Hon. Deputy Speaker is correct. There was an instance which generated some disquiet on the Governments side and I dealt with it. It had to with references to evidence already given and reported in the national newspapers, but there may have been... I do not know. I cannot recall any other reference, but please proceed, because I do not believe that is the real point that you had wanted to make.

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett: I would not go through the references but they are there and we can see them. But let me say...

Mrs. Backer: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order. I am specifically saying that there was none, and if there is, the Hon. Member either has to produce it. We do not need the video. She

can produce the words or withdraw it. I am requesting that. She can withdraw it until she can present it.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I will ask that you proceed, but in the interim I am asking the Clerk to provide now a transcript of Mrs. Backer's presentation, which I will review during the break, and I will report to the House.

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I am happy that it is recognised that this is not how we do our work in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is based on merit. I am very happy about that. This is how I approach my work and this is how the Government approaches its work. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Minister. It is unfortunate that we ended on that note, but I like to say that my public respect for you has not changed. I believe that you are one of the nuggets in this House. Thank you and welcome back. I now welcome Mr. Ramjattan leading the AFC delegation for the first time, go ahead Hon. Member.

Mr. Ramjattan: I think this will be, apart from some interventions I made, my first address, and so, in a sense, it is a maiden address for the Tenth Parliament. So I will be urging no heckling and I will be asking for your support. It is almost my nineteenth year here.

Let me just, immediately, before proceeding to the more useful parts of this address, indicate that the Alliance For Change appreciates the difficulties of the international world order as it is, appreciates the difficulties and challenges that Guyana has and for the Minister of Finance, in that context, to come up with a budget as is. We in the Alliance For Change will support any Budget, or any economic programme, that offers opportunities for all, and ensures an equitable distribution of our country's resources, and ensures the prevalence of the rule of law, our individual rights and our collective finances. We are going to support such a Budget. Understanding the international exogenous factors as some economists would put it, understanding our internal problems, I can appreciate the difficulty the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh had in coming up with a Budget. It is always going to be a difficult thing. On very many occasions standing up to speak on Budget debates, though I have been very passionate about certain things, which I will still be passionate about. I also would like to say that in the context of

things... yes... a Budget is always an exercise that has difficulties about it, and so I can appreciate.

This Budget of course... we see things, in the Alliance For Change, that we can support. But there are a lot of things which I suspected will be deemed unprincipled on the part of the Alliance For Change if we do not ask for a review, change or alterations. Before going there, however, I wish to make a couple of points, pre-ambular, in relation to what we have heard, especially across the floor, to our economy. We on this side of the House have been given a tongue-lashing, indeed, from that side of the House, in relation to how wonderful the economy is doing. That is not necessarily the point. The point, I think, was made by Reverend Gilbert, that “indeed we are where are and is better than where we were.” The point of it, however, should be: “Are we where we are supposed to be?” with the same set of moneys and finances that we have in this budget? That is the point.

We talk about diversification of the economy, which is sustaining this growth, and, indeed, there were growth - 5.4%, 5.1%. Probably the numbers can be nudged around, but it is over five per cent. Was it diversification that caused it? When we check the list here, sugar, rice, bauxite and gold – that has been happening for fifty years, a century and more, as the pillars of our economy and we have had growth there. But what was not there and where we did not see it was in the other sectors. Fishing went down from 8.4% to 5.35% as compared to 2010 to 2011; forestry was down from 11.8%, reduced to 9%, when 2010 was being used as the base year; and construction also went down from 10.78% to 2.8%; information and technology 7.5% to 1.5%. These are the set of sectors which did pretty badly when compared to what they used to be.

The other pre-ambular point I wish to make has to do... because I wish to clarify it so that we have a proper perspective, and do not want to give it all glitter... has been an inexcusable rise in our external and domestic debt. My addition is that it has grown almost to a position of US\$1.9 billion when the domestic debt is added on to the external debt. Whilst there has been a *per capita* Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rise - these are numbers of which I have to quote accurately (from US\$1, 984 dollars from 2007 to US\$2,867 and that is based on a rebasing) and I want the Members to say that that might be a qualified opinion - there is a *per capita* debt, however, that has risen from US\$1,400 to US\$2,500! It is important that these statistics be brought to the attention of this House and also the to the attention of the public, out there.

Thirdly, as a pre-ambular point I wish to make is that the plan here is to have a \$13 billion deficit and that deficit is also with a fifteen per cent in Grants. Now, if at this stage we are saying that we are going to get those grants, \$15 billion, and if by 2012, December, they do not come in we could be in a budget deficit that could be in the range of \$45 billion! This assumes..., and I want to say this, because though I would want to say it is challenging times, this can be regarded as something which can be reckless. There could very well be some alarming dis-proportionalities in relation to our finances come later down the year.

There is a fourth point I wish to make and it is more than merely pre-ambular. That is the uncontrolled and obviously partisan - I know, Mr. Speaker, when I use the word partisan, I mean it - contract employing within the Ministries and Government Departments and Regions! It is an important thing to understand that when, under the independence Constitution and during the course of the time since then, when the public service was created, we were trying, by virtue of that public service, to insulate the politicisation of our civil servants from the powers that be. What there is now is but a de-gutting of that public service through this mechanism called "contracted employees". All this category of salaries that there used to be is now riven asunder by virtue of contracted employees, some of whom are given hundreds of thousands of dollars as against others. Even those who might not be so partisan, when the fact is considered that they are only under contract, they do not have the Public Service Commission, or the Public Service Appellate Tribunal! So in the case of where it makes decisions and dissents against certain Ministers, that security mechanism for their tenure is now abandoned by virtue of them having to sign up contracts.

2.04 p.m.

It has created what is called the "bloated bureaucracy" which also has come by virtue of the expansion of Ministries over the years. This, we must say, is a *donkey cart* economy. It is getting faster - probably from a donkey we have got horses now - but it is not a Mercedes-Benz. What we are saying is that when you start having, from a time when the great Cheddi Jagan was there, thirteen Ministries to almost twenty-one now, the expenses that some...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, one second, please. I am hearing a continuous blackberry pinging. If someone in the Chamber has his or her phone on it is coming through

consistently. Please turn it off, or the volume off, or something. It is seemingly to be coming from the right or the middle by Hon. Minister Ganga Persaud, but go ahead Mr. Ramjattan.

Mr. Ramjattan: Added to the fact that there are these whole big numbers of contracted employees, and also a number of Ministries now on board, it is creating, for our finances, obviously a difficulty. Moneys can simply be given to workers, for social assistance, to pensioners, if those Ministries are cut back to fourteen, fifteen. It is an important point that we wish to make in the Alliance For Change..., because not only did we indicate during the course of the campaign, but it was also something we have to learn to live with, that is, within our means. What is happening is that lots of those Ministries are doing the work of what is called constitutional authorities and then there are other agencies which have been created to do the work. There is a brand new Ministry now and there are still the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission, the Guyana Forestry Commission, all of them coming under that Ministry, the Land Use Commission, and this and that, and all of those largely are supposed to be doing the work in effect a Ministry should be doing. So what is it? It is a duplication of expenses, and that kind of cut and scissoring is important for a country that is not a Mercedes-Benz economy!

Now, apart from all of that, I want to make mention, as I have made over the years, that it is important that we manage our finances, which are left after all these “bloated bureaucracy”, better. What we have seen over the years has largely been what I call excessive, what has been, bad management, for want of a word that is coming - it might be unparliamentary language. And we must indicate this to the opposing side that it is also inherent in our Auditor General’s Report how badly we are doing in that regard.

We in this country can only know, first of all, whether we are having all the moneys in the Budget, in the Consolidated Fund, if we are honestly having them placed there. We cannot, in a Budget debate, state whether indeed this is all the moneys. National Industrial Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL) has moneys; Guyana Geology and Mines Commission separate account; moneys are there in the Guyana Forestry Commission; the bank, Guyana National Cooperative Bank (GNCB), the Unit Collection or the Collection Unit, money is there. They are not brought to book into our Consolidated Fund from which we now, as parliamentarians, can have total scrutiny. That is why I fear that, yes, we have a good Budget, but when we feel that

the amount is only \$192 billion that we have to disburse, in accordance with what the Minister proposed in its Appropriation Bill, it may not very well reflect what actually the amounts are.

It is obvious that this Minister knew that we are going to get some moneys out of a certain deal by selling off the Guyana Telephone and Telegraph (GT&T) Company shares for US\$30 million - US\$25 million now, US\$5 million later on. Apart from what I feel, and this is my opinion, we are killing the goose that lays the golden egg. Five million US dollars every year will be got from GT&T shares. In six years it could have been US\$30 million! But it has been sold out! Is that good for the country? It is my opinion that it is not. The Government Members will say to us that we cannot kill the goose that lays the golden egg but they are killing it. That is important too, to understand that there is, what is called, this kind of management of our finances,...

What is happening is that I understand that this US\$5 million or US\$25 million of shares sold to this Chinese company called the Datang Telecom Technology & Industry is not reflected in any Consolidated Fund. It is going to be reflected somewhere in NICIL's fund. Land has been sold to Guyana Bank of Trade and Industry (GBTI) to build up that beautiful bank there. A lot of transactions have been done. We do not, however, know. So when the Minister of Finance comes here, to bring this Budget, he should indicate that these are our revenues. It would appear, more than appear - it is obvious - that there are more moneys in bank accounts other than where they are supposed to be.

It breaches another requirement of our Constitution, that when we now are going to expend moneys, as we are here for, as of tomorrow, in the Committee of Supply, we are not going to have, what is called, any power to disapprove or approve in relation to those large sums of moneys. In this budget presentation, the Hon. Minister Dr. Ashni Singh indicated that there will be a Marriott Hotel built, but there is nowhere in it do I see that we have to approve such a major project. So there will be, in accordance with our Constitution, a violation committed, because moneys will be spent to the magnitude of so much. I do not know. It is going to be over \$27 billion that the Government is going to put in to that Marriott Hotel project, one way or the other, equity or guarantee behind the scene. We will not be approving it because there is a stream of revenue that is totally outside here, the Budget. We have to put a halt to that in this National Assembly as of this new dispensation. All the streams of money must come into this Budget, so we then with eagle eyes can then take a position and seek the position for ourselves.

I want to state that there are a lot of other revenue streams, that we are suspecting there might be, and it is for that reason that a couple of days ago I did ask the Minister, through a letter, that we would like to know where statements of balances are in respect of a certain institution. We would appreciate receiving from you, Mr. Minister, a statement of balances as of December 31st. This letter was written on April the 12th. I know it is short a time for a Minister to probably get all the information, but I am certain that it is gettable, and it is in respect of what are the Government's moneys that are not in the Consolidated Fund, as the NICIL's money - not in the Bank of Guyana? Most specifically, what is in the NICIL's bank accounts, if there is more than one? What is in the Guyana Forestry Commission's bank account? What is in the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission's bank account? The Guyana Gold Board? The GNCB's Debt Collection Unit? The lotto fund? And other significant balances, including the amount held by Ministries which should have been repaid into the Consolidated Fund?

Then is when we are going to know if there is more money, or if there is not more money to pay pensioners. You cannot take half of the money, hide it up somewhere and come here with a Budget saying that the Consolidated Fund...revenue section...indicating X, Y and Z are the figures! That is wrong! That is absolutely wrong and it is a breach of the Constitution. The Attorney General must know this. If we are uncertain about it, we can ask the court for a declaration. Where are these moneys supposed to be? It is not on the opinion of a certain Mr. Charles Ramson, in relation to the lotto fund, based on some 1959 legislation, when we reformed this Constitution and when, in that same constitutional reform process, we said that all moneys must go into the Consolidated Fund! But he quoted, and I have his opinion here, the legal opinion of Mr. Charles Ramson. As indicated by the formidable Mr. Anand Goolsarran, it is totally flawed. I wish to tell this honourable House that that kind of holding of our revenues outside of the Consolidated Fund cannot give a proper picture of what moneys we have so that we can spend on our workers, our population, our old people and our young people, for the education, or on better education, at the University of Guyana. We do not. I hope that the Hon. Minister is going to find some time to ensure that these questions are answered.

We also would like... because there is an additional revenue stream which is very important. A lot of people who get contracts in this country they get a lot of duty-free exemptions on cars - all manner of duty-free exemptions. I would ask the Minister to provide the concession on duties,

particulars to all tax waivers, concessions and duties by sectors, over the period 2010/2011. We will have a fair idea of where it is going... if it is favouritism. Because we have in this National Assembly noted that certain people and company were given tax exemptions when it was illegal. We had to come back into this National Assembly to legalise an illegality. This is another stream in which we do not know has arisen and we are not in the capacity to know unless freedom of information, in a sense, is given. The exercise here has to do with transparency and accountability, concepts the President, His Excellency Mr. Donald Ramotar, came here and spouted a lot about. Let us get that kind of information, so we will know.

I just want to deal with the Auditor General's Report, a couple paragraphs emphasising the point that I am making. It has to do with the 2010 Auditor General's Report which was delivered to us after the elections of 2011, earlier this year, I think it was. He was talking about 2010. This is what he talked about the Office of the President..., because on a previous occasion, in the last Parliament, I was quoting from one of the better economist in the world, Paul Collier, about the mismanagement of funds and Hon. Member Mr. Irfaan Ali had a lot of criticisms about that quotation. But let us quote from our own Auditor General.

“The Office continued to inappropriately meet expenditure for the Presidential Guards and Castellani House from the subhead...”

Listen to this.

“...Subsides and Contributions to Local Organisations...”

And do you know what the amount is? It is \$236,243,000. It is put under “Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations,” or whatever organisations, and there it is where the Castellani House and the Presidential Guard are getting their money from. He told them that the inclusion of this sum, in that wrong place, materially misrepresents subsidies and contributions. I have been trying here... and it would appear that it is a recurring decimal.

Entities which have not filed their financial statements so that we do not know their status include the National Parks Commission, since 2006, Guyana Office for Investment, since 2008, Guyana Energy Agency, since 2006. There are lots more - from 2002, the Institute of Applied Science and Technology. When we do not manage our affairs by getting the financials of these

Government entities, which come under the Office of the President, we are then doing a pretty bad job. We are doing a horrible job. I want to indicate that we must do better.

The next page, as you turn, and it is not only at the Office of the President that there is that kind of thing happening, there is also the Ministry of Finance, page 25 of that report:

“Charges are not categorised...”

It is at paragraph 74.

“...and shown in the Appropriation Account in the traditional manner, and this distorts the true costs in these two areas.”

It is talking there about Customs Anti Narcotics Unit (CANU). It was coming again under “Contributions to Local Organisations,” CANU, a department. This is a department, as it is stated here:

“It should be noted that CANU is a department within the Ministry of Finance and is not a separate legal entity.”

It goes on to state, on the next page:

“Further, although CANU was established to protect Customs revenues, this Unit was not operating under the direction of the Commissioner of Customs and Trade Administration. It is therefore clear that this arrangement does not provide for proper financial and administrative control, and is not in conformity with the applicable Customs Laws and Regulations. Also it is not with the Financial Management and Accountability Act.”

The same Audit Office and Auditor General here talked about a number of accounts being all over the place, instead of the Consolidated Fund. I go back to page vii and it is the “Executive Summary.”

“Several transfers from other accounts to the Consolidated Fund were not effected and several accounts had overdrafts. Details of these are as follows:

(a) Transfers not effected

- (i) The amount of approximately \$4.416 billion representing balances held in eleven special accounts;”

This is what we were talking about, the static accounts all over the place. The Bank of Guyana has plenty. In other places there are accounts which ought to go into the Consolidated Fund account so that we can know what the state of our moneys is. There is a “General Account No.405”... it has \$23 million. The Auditor General is ordering that it be put in the Consolidated Fund. It is not being put.

“(iv) The balance of \$13.287 billion held in other Ministries/Departments Bank Accounts.”

There is a bank account called “Other Ministries and Departments Bank Account”. Imagine that - \$13.287 billion. It is not there; it has not gone in. That is as of 2010.

I understand that there may have been some transfers into the Consolidated Fund since 2010, but when this set of numbers, which are given in the volumes, is being checked I am not finding them, and I only quote some of the heads.

“Overpayments to Contractors, page viii:

“A significant amount of overpayments to contractors had occurred...”

That was in 2010.

“... on measured works or contracts undertaken by Ministries, Departments and Regions and Regions facing serious challenges in being able to recover amounts overpaid on various contracts...”

Overpayment of salaries to staff also occurs; Overstatement on Appropriations Accounts, and I am only going to highlight the heads because lots were said about them in each. Then there is “Procurement of Drugs – Ministry of Health”. I want to read that one.

“A sum of \$1.252 billion was paid,...”

It is another favourite which we are having.

“...to New Pharmaceutical Corporation Limited on the basis of sole sourcing approved by the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board and not by competitive bidding as required under the Procurement Act (2003). The transactions with the firm were for the procurement of drugs and medical supplies.”

Again, the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation also provided drugs and medical supplies at a cost of \$879.91 million based on awards of contracts by the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board without a system of competitive bidding.

That is not how the finances must run.

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

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

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have twenty minutes in all, so I will just give you a signal when you are down to your last five minutes.

Mr. Ramjattan: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. I want to say that what we do as a result of what we have means totally an overhaul of our financial system. We have to get those institutions in place, like the Public Procurement Commission. I notice that there is a motion on the floor by the Hon. Member on the Opposition side that we do something about that. We, in the Alliance For Change, will support that Public Procurement Commission which is going to ensure that, in relation to matters of procurement, we are going to have value for moneys. At least, if we do not have the value for money, we will know what will be wrong with those tenders, so that we will get to see them. It is important. We have to instil and reinforce an ethos of legal compliance and efficient financial practices. That is the accountability and the good governance we, in the Alliance For Change, would like to see happen all across this country - its regions, its Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs).

I want now to make an argument about how we can better spend... in view of the fact that there are, what is called, a number of projects. During the course of the campaign we had noted that,

from persons who had asked us where we are going to get moneys to give businesses and people who would be entrepreneurs,... because I must say that there is a scenario where ease in doing businesses in Guyana is always, over the years, a difficult thing. The World Bank's Doing Business in Guyana Report reflects us..., as against the 2000 Report that I had quoted extensively when we were at the bottom, or last space down the line. We have moved up a bit. But do you know where we moved up? Contract awarding, could you imagine...? It is rather strange that it had indicated a number of things - Doing Business, the 2012 Report the business environment, Guyana, in this South America, is in a pretty bad shape. The two countries which are lower than us - surprisingly, I did not realise that Suriname is doing so badly - are Suriname and Haiti, then there is Guyana. It states that Guyana is one hundred and fourteenth. Now, there are lots more countries than in 2007 when there were only one hundred and seventeen countries and Guyana was bringing a hundred and seventeenth space in a number of these indicators. But we have here, doing very well, dealing with construction permits.

Construction is a thing that seems to have smooth passage in Guyana. As I indicated, as Mr. Paul Collier from the University of Oxford, in that very famous book, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It*, has indicated, this is one of the epi-centres of corruption. We are doing very well in the construction arena. It is largely not because there are fantastic engineers, as Mr. Ceres might be confirming and vindicating. But because Mr. Paul Collier, and another very good book by Vinita Yadav, out of India, indicating what is sapped out of the will of people through corruption in these countries, notwithstanding that they are growing, like in India.

Guyana has been doing badly in relation to getting credit. It has been doing very badly in a number of areas and so we have to make mention of all of that. We have to also start asking the relevant question: Why is it that we are not seeing a tendering out for the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) deal? Over \$200 million US dollars has been spent on GuySuCo, at that Skeldon Factory, or there about. We are now being told that some company by the name of Bosch Engineering Company, which apparently did some work for Tate & Lyle, has been granted the contract to supply components to fix up that new factory. So there it is a company which is part and parcel of what we called a "bad factory" has been given an award. It is millions of US dollars. We are not hearing, however, how much it is. There, again, the argument was

made by one of the Members on the Government side that in the United States of America President Obama had to bail out companies. There were two conditions about President Obama's bail-out, that all the members of the Board of those companies had to "bail out", but in GuySuCo, there are still Mr. Raj Singh and Mr. Paul Bhim, and whoever else. We have to bail them out. They also have to pay back the money within a certain year. President Obama made it quite clear that within ten or fifteen years the money had to be paid back, which was used to bail out the companies. That is not made a conditionality here! But we continue to have what is regarded as non-transparent deal! And it is not only with GuySuCo, but with the Guyana Power and Light (GPL) which is getting \$6 billion.

We understand, only a couple of years, GPL bought certain Machinery Corporation (MACORP) machinery. But it rented... bad again, mismanaging our finances... for US\$720,000, a Wartsilla Plant. We now understand... I have gone on the internet, got it out from Florida, the MACORP there, rather than the MACORP that Mr. Brassington dealt with here, that is the one from Columbia... that it is offering the identical equipment for \$800,000 with maintenance cost over the period, routine maintenance cost free. So that which is given to us here we must not simple take as if it is, indeed, the gem that it is described to be. For that reason, we have to indicate that we must do lots of things differently.

For instance, instead, of having a Marriott Hotel project, knowing the occupancy rate is so low in this country, why not use the moneys from the Marriott Hotel project and GT&T, which are there, as we had indicated, in a State Development Bank, so that credit can be made easy for our young entrepreneurs, all the bright people, which is said, coming out of our education system now. It will be important. It would not be understood that there is a need for struggling entrepreneurs... It is not for the special favourites who are going to get exemptions when they are even illegal. We want the young people who want to enter that kind of arrangement to get involve with the gold industry, fishing, whatever industry. We are saying that we have to put some more of those moneys, rather into those reckless projects, into the University of Guyana. We need the University of Guyana to have more money into it, and especially in those faculties which are going to create the conditions for the production of the personnel to run the country's jobs which will be created in the future.

2.34 p.m.

We have to do better in the Science and Technology faculties. Put some more moneys there - Engineering and Mathematics. We have to do all of this so that the Forestry and Gold refining, and even if we have to create a new faculty like that, then do that. That is what we are saying to do rather than put moneys into fanciful projects, all of which are going to go down the drain and then the Government will have to privatise those projects. And do you know who the Government will give? It will give its friends.

We are saying that we can then have the moneys to reduce the Value Added Tax (VAT). That is a core issue in this Budget that the Alliance For Change is talking about. We have done and we will give the notice to the Speaker and the Clerk where we can cut this Budget to ensure that we get a reduction of VAT, where we can have increase for pensioners, and also social assistance for the poor and deprived. It is important that we do that rather than have all of these fanciful projects resting not on proper feasibilities. We were given the Marriott deal, but we did not get what is called the feasibility because we were told that the feasibility is a private thing. Commercial confidentiality requires that we must not get it. But please, this is money from a government.

The Hon. Prime Minister, in a discourse I had with him on the deal, indicated that that is the way. We, the public sector, will have to help and then give it over to the private sector for it to then take it on. **[Mr. Hinds: Set up.]** Yes. Well it is another set up that we are getting here!

I want to, finally, make the argument that Dr. Jagan had made some time ago. We have had the pontificating from over there that the Members over here do not understand Dr. Jagan and what he would have done and all of that, and the Government Members went back 28 years. I, myself, wanted to resist going back there, but when it came to pensioners and increased salaries, the same, almost identical, position had been taken then in 1979 when the Government was saying that it had to put moneys for all those fanciful projects. At that time, it was whether to pay the workers \$14 or to have the hydro scheme. Then the People's National Congress (PNC) was arguing the case - I think it was Mr. Frank Hope - "No, we cannot give you \$14 a day. We cannot increase the wages and salaries because we have to do special projects. We have to build the Cheddi Jagan International Airport." I am saying now that we have to cut the extravagance and all these bureaucracies and Ministries. We can find the money for the workers of this country. And that is what he was saying then. But we have the argument here, "No, we cannot do

it.” I want to quote the great man and his portrait stands... And I must commend Dr. Frank Anthony, through the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, for producing the publication – *National Assembly Speeches Volume 6*. We welcome it and I am going to use it. It is a useful tool now that we have an argument coming from over there. The Government Members over there talked about “lost decade”. Well we have seen, from what I have just argued, “a decade of losses” over the past ten years with what has happened in relation to our finances. [Neendkumar: How can you compare Mr. Greenidge with Dr. Ashni Singh?] I am not comparing Mr. Greenidge with Dr. Ashni Singh. I am comparing what Dr. Cheddi Jagan’s argument was then and what Mr. Ramjattan is saying now. That is what I am arguing. It is strange how the Government is now arguing only to say that they cannot afford it; they have projects to do.

But it is saying that increased wages will cause...by the way this is page 219 of Cheddi Jagan’s *National Assembly Speeches (1979)*. Now it is saying that we cannot afford it but it is saying that increased wages will cause hardships. That is what it is saying. Ms. Shadick was asking if we know what inflation rates will be if we increased workers’ salaries - public servants. [Ms. Shadick: I did not speak about inflation.] Well you talked about the fact that it was going to be a negative and that is why the Government cannot raise salaries. This is a statement which the Government has put out and it is more or less saying that the payment of wages will cause more hardships. The Members of the Government referred to the poor pensioners, for instance, and the unemployed who will suffer increasingly added pressure. If they were so sympathetic to the pensioners, they certainly would have increased it. At that time it was \$16 a month which was being given to them. Trinidad and Tobago used to have, as was said, \$70 per month during those years, but Trinidad and Tobago also had food stamps, free transportation and a number of other things which make life bearable.

“It is remarkable that these politicians...”

...he was talking about the Government then.

“...are now shedding tears about pensioners. The fact of the matter is that they are constantly making propaganda.”

That was Cheddi Jagan. To continue, he indicated:

“The GAWU, in its Memorandum to the TUC at a special conference, pointed out that the Government can afford to pay the \$14.”

I have noticed that quite missing from here is the GAWU President.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Komal Chand is not in the best of health and so he is excused from sittings. His absence is in no way indicative of any disrespect in the House.

Mr. Ramjattan: I was not going to disrespect him. I was only going to say that I would have been happy had he been here to hear what Cheddi Jagan was talking about GAWU at that time.

Mr. Speaker: I just wanted the House to know why he is not here.

Mr. Ramjattan:

“GAWU, in its Memorandum to the TUC at a special conference, pointed out that the Government can afford to pay the \$14 indeed to restore all the subsidies and to increase personal allowances and...” “If one examines the structure of the Budget,”

This is what he was talking about.

“If one examines the structure of the Budget, step by step, sector by sector, we can find the money for \$14. The bureaucracy grows, the privileges grow and their salaries grow. To add insult to injury, the Government, not too long ago, promoted the senior Ministers. Their salaries and allowances rose from \$2,000 to \$3,000. This is the extravagance I am talking about that we can cut so that we can pay workers.”

It is exactly the same thing here. I am saying that it is exactly the same thing here. You are making the argument that you do not want to because you have certain other hydro scheme projects and this and that and so you blank it out for the workers. Well I want to tell you – and I am coming to an end Mr. Speaker – that it is indeed important that we all do a re-evaluation as to how we manage our finances.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have approximately four minutes.

Mr. Ramjattan: That is right.

For us to move forward, not only must we have our economy right. I want to say that we largely have to have our politics right too. If we are going to be incensed by the fact that there is a new dispensation and we are going to do the cuss-down that the Opposition wants to be a dictator by one, it is not going to help the process. We have to now appreciate – and I am talking to Members across the floor – that indeed there is a new dispensation, and we are not going to be, in any way, trying to hog anything from the Executive Branch. We are not. We want to work with you. We want you to put your hands out so that we can have an embrace and we are trying that. We tried as of 31st December, 2011, but please we are not having the responses. Rather “Oh they want to dominate the Parliament. They want the one-man majority or one-woman majority to do...” [Ms. Teixeira: Is that not the truth?] That is not going to take us anywhere. It is important that you understand that the politics is necessary to also move forward.

Our systems are not necessarily going to be built along these lines of exclusively raising certain capital projects and doing that. We need to have education. We need to have tax reforms. We need to have a number of things done so that we can see the public goods - education, infrastructure and a number of other things that we are going to make mention of that has to do with the rule of law - being distributed to the public. Those moments will come in time but we are indicating that we, in the Alliance For Change, are here to ensure that we have an embrace with the Executive branch. The legislature of any country comprises that Executive branch and it is that branch I am stating that we can manage properly to the extent of having the necessary facilities for an onward motion of this Guyana vehicle.

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

Leader of the Opposition [Brigadier (Ret'd) Granger]: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Members of this Hon. House, first I would like to acknowledge the warm words of welcome not given to me as an individual but given to all the new Members of this Tenth Parliament. I am happy to be here, although it is quite an unfamiliar environment, listening to the debates.

I rise to respond to the presentation on the 30th March, 2012 by the Hon. Minister of Finance... the presentation of the national Budget for 2012. Friday, 30th March, 2012 marked the end of an era. It perhaps is the last time that we will witness, in this House, an attempt by a minority to craft a Budget on its own to impose it on a majority. I think this would be the last time that we

see an attempt to introduce a Budget that is not in consonance with the public will. It is the last time we will see an attempt at unilateralism. I welcome the question by my colleague, the Hon. Member, Volda Lawrence, and I welcome, too, the response by the Hon. Minister of Finance. Let us hope that this initiative will not be a 'flash in the pan' but it will lead, in coming years, to true bipartisanship between the two sides of the House in the crafting of this national Budget.

I would like to feel that in years to come, maybe as early as next year, there will be a Budget Office in the National Assembly. We would not have to wait to be invited. We would not have to wait for motions and questions because the annual cycle will be continuous in this National Assembly.

There is nothing more important than the activity in which we are engaged in presently. On the entire calendar of the National Assembly, the crafting of a national Budget, occupies most of our time. Everyone in this House will have an opportunity to speak. Every point of view will be aired. This management of public finances is our most important annual activity and it must not be left to one side or the other side. It must be a collective effort. The eyes of the nation are upon us. You go outside and the ears of the nation are open. People want to know what the Budget has for them.

What is a Budget? A Budget is a financial plan. It is not a review. It is not a retrospective. It is not a recapitulation of what happened in the 1960s, 1970s or the 1980s. It is not a game of one-upmanship; who is better at this or who is better at that. There seems to be a danger that some people can become obsessed with the past but they must realise that the Budget is a plan for the future. The people out there want to know what will happen tomorrow, next week, next year. The majority of Guyanese living today do not know who Burnham was and who Cheddi Jagan was. What they want to know is what sort of life they will have and this is the task of this Assembly. It is to craft, through the vehicle of the National Budget, the type of plan that could make sense to them. The young people want to know about tomorrow and this House must tell them about that.

The Budget is complex; it is not simple. And we appreciate the difficulty the Hon. Minister might have had when, last December, after the elections, we announced that there should be a tripartite Budget committee. Perhaps the process had gone too far and that is why I insist that

from next year there will be measures introduced into this House to have a Parliamentary Budget Committee.

The Budget operates at various levels. At the personal level, every pensioner, everywhere one turns, wants to know something this week or next week. “*Wha alyuh doin fo we?*” It operates at the local level. And, as the Americans say, “All politics is local.” The Hon. Member, Allicock, from Surama wants to know about the roads. The Hon. Member from Upper Mazaruni wants to know about the schools and the cost of living. Everybody has an interest and those interests are local, regional and national.

We understand that a Budget is highly complex. That is why we insist on collaboration. No one knows everything. We have to sit down prior. We have to speak to each other, not because we are forced to by circumstances but because that is the way forward. We have spoken about a consensual approach. We have spoken about a collaborative approach. We have spoken about a cooperative approach. Let us get it right next time.

It is not too late now and we have not closed our ears. We do not want a collision. We do not want a car crash and we will speak to anyone, anywhere, anytime, to get this Budget right. Collaboration is not an option anymore. It is an obligation. The minority in this House has to collaborate with the majority. The days of “we will go it alone” are over. The days of “we are in this together” have started. They cannot do it by themselves and we want to work with the other side of the House.

The Budget is not an opportunity for shouting at each other. It is a time for listening. It is not a campaign rally. It is not a stage for one-upmanship. It is not an opportunity for giving out little frecks and favours to selected communities. It is not an opportunity for one party to lord over another party. It is an opportunity for us to work together – all 65 plus one of us – to stand up in front of the Guyanese people and say, “We have listened to your voices. We feel your concerns and this is the best that we can do for the Guyanese people.” But, in crafting a Budget, we are not only concerned about facts and figures. We are not only concerned about numbers. We are concerned about policies. Dr. Lawrence Peter, the man whose name was given to the Peter Principle, said, “If you do not know where you are going, you will probably end up somewhere

else.” And when we listened to what the Hon. Minister of Finance had to say, we wondered where the Budget is taking us.

The Budget is based on certain precepts. It is based on certain preferences. It is based on certain priorities. It is based on certain policies. And we must ask: what were those precepts, priorities, principles and policies? It is the view of A Partnership for National Unity that people are concerned with five basic freedoms and we want to see those five basic freedoms enshrined and embodied in the Budget.

The first freedom is freedom from fear. Every fisherman, woman, child, miner and citizen wants to live in safety and be protected by the people who have been appointed to protect them – the state, the Government, the Guyana Police Force. We need to build a country where every citizen feels safe and freedom from fear is at the top of the list. When we look at the Budget, therefore, how is that Budget going to make us free from fear? How much will be advanced to the security forces, to the law enforcement agencies, to protect us? Will the Guyana Police Force be given its correct manpower? Will it be given aircraft to patrol the 2,500 kilometres bordering our coastland? Will it be given maritime craft to protect our fishermen? If these things are absent from the national Budget, how can we guarantee to our citizens that freedom from fear when the fishermen go out and are afraid of pirates, when the miners go out and they are afraid of bandits? So, for the Budget to make sense and if it is going to guarantee this freedom, then I look to see where the money will go and how the money is going to be spent.

The second freedom people want is freedom from want, freedom from poverty. They want enough to eat. They do not want to be working at some security company for \$100 an hour. They do not want to be jobless. We need to build a society in which people are free from want. And it is amazing how little attention was paid in this Budget to the alleviation of poverty. The very poor people will always end up at the bottom of the social ladder because their children cannot go to school because they have no meals, they have no footwear and they have no transport – we will come to that in a little while again.

The third freedom is freedom from ignorance. The Hon. Minister of Education was quite open and frank yesterday and I do not want to go over ground with which she is very familiar. But none of us would like our child to grow up in Region 8 when we look at the reports and the

performance at the Secondary School Entrance Examination, the National Grade Six Examination. None of us would like our children to be part of that dropout rate. Almost every hour in this country a boy or girl drops out of primary or secondary school. By three o'clock tomorrow afternoon, 22, 23 or 24 students would have dropped out of our schools. And the Minister knows that. It is not a secret. We cannot build an education nation if people are dropping out at these rates.

The fourth freedom is freedom from discrimination. And when we speak of discrimination, we are not speaking of religious discrimination or, necessarily, racial discrimination. We are speaking about the way we regard this country as a holistic unit, as a single entity. And unless we build roads, unless we develop the infrastructure to enable our people to move from place to place, there will always be pockets. There will always be communities which feel left out of this nation state. Anyone who has had to travel on that boat between Kingston and Kumaka, anyone who lives in Mabaruma or Mahdia, would know what it feels like to be left out of the development of this country. That is the type of discrimination I speak about because we are still coastland and hinterland. We are still town and bush. We do not have an equal chance.

The fifth freedom is the freedom to communicate and the freedom to receive ideas. Only last weekend, Mr. Speaker, you were the recipient of a letter from me. And you received, in return, a letter from the Government Information Agency. Our freedom to receive ideas is guaranteed by the Constitution. And if an agency comes into this Hon. House and deliberately decides not to report on what the majority says, it is depriving the public of the right to information, the right to receive ideas. If the people of Linden cannot turn on their televisions at two o'clock or three o'clock in the morning and see a programme of their choice, if the people who listen to radio are forced to listen to "Radio GaGa" day-in and day-out, we are depriving them of that freedom to communicate.

These are the five freedoms that I will like to see enshrined and embodied in this Budget. The Budget must speak to those freedoms. Those are the priorities, the preferences and the policies which must be embodied in this Budget if the Budget is to make sense to us. Therefore, we come upon this unhappy necessity to craft the Budget in a way that the people of this country want it crafted. As I said, we do not want a collision, but our position on this side of the House is based on principle and we want a Budget that is based on principles and we will fight tooth and nail to

ensure that those principles are embodied. I promise that we shall go through the Budget line by line, page by page and volume by volume to ensure that the public will is respected. The entire nation is watching, the entire nation is listening and the entire nation will judge this Tenth Parliament on the quality of the plan it produces by the end of this month.

3.04 p.m.

There are many promises in the Budget. Very frequently in the Budget you see the words “critical”, “crucial”, “prerequisite” and “essential”, but the test is whether the money is being provided to those critical functions. For example, when we hear that university education is a ‘prerequisite’, how much money do we give to the university? When we hear that security is ‘paramount’, how much money do we provide for security? When we hear that the protection of the environment is ‘crucial’, how much money do we pay to protect that environment? Or do we do some sort of events management when we have a tourism conference or when we have an international conference, where we have a clean-up campaign and for the next 364 days we have a “dash-it-away” campaign.

I refer again to Dr. Lawrence Peter who said that going to church does not make you a Christian, just as going into a garage does not make you a car – I am sure the reverent gentlemen present will understand that – and promises do not make a good Budget. What we want to see is that the money is provided for those same priorities, prerequisites and paramount functions. There is a mismatch between the promises and the provisions and I am happy to say that we have come to an agreement, even a tentative agreement, to try to ensure that the provisions match better the principles and the promises that had been made in the Budget.

We have all grown up in our school system learning about the “six sisters”: bauxite, fish, gold, rice, sugar, diamonds and timber. We all know that our economy is large based on primary products; it is an extractive economy. We all look forward to transforming the economy. We want to see a Budget which starts that process of transformation. We want to see a Budget which puts real money into agro-processing, real money into large scale agriculture and real money into manufacturing. When we look to see the returns on manufacturing and agro-processing we realise that the money is still going to the “six sisters”; it is still going into sugar and rice. We have not made that transformation. The Budget has to start that change; it has to start that process

of transformation. If we stay in the valley we will never get over the hill. We have to put money into areas and into people who can bring that transformation about. It is no point talking.

I can assure that forty years ago some of the biggest tomatoes and the biggest onions and the biggest potatoes have come out of Paramakatoi, Region 8. Unless the farmers can get their products to the market we will not be able to start that transformation. Unless we produce entrepreneurs, exporters and manufacturers we will not be able to bring about that transformation. That is why this Budget must put more emphasis on unlocking the potential of people. It must put more emphasis on education, and it must put more emphasis on employment.

Our talent is smothered in schools without appropriate facilities. I am sure that the Minister of Education itself is aware of some of the conditions in the schools in this country. Much has been done I am sure, but much more needs to be done. That is why the Budget must put money there. Right across the Demerara at the so-called Vreed-en-Hoop Secondary School the yard is flooded after every spring tide. If you go to some of these rural schools you will see big black water tanks which are empty and bone dry, and our young women have to get buckets to go across the road to dip water to flush the toilets. We are not yet at the level of putting Information Technology (IT) laboratories into the schools; we are at the level of fixing up lavatories! We have to get the schools right, because the children who come out of the schools will be leading this nation twenty and thirty years from now. The children who come out of those schools will be our future entrepreneurs, our future developers and our leaders. We have to get those things right.

If at the level of National Grade Six Examination, sixty percent of our students cannot get fifty percent of the marks then what? If at the level of our secondary schools the majority of students cannot matriculate then we have a problem. We are not here to knock the administration; we are here to sit with the administration and solve the problem.

There needs to be a new approach to governance in this country. There needs to be a new social contract. We have left the era of “*cuss-down*” and “*buse-out*”. We have now entered, because of the new dispensation in this Hon. House, an era of consultation. We must learn to sit down once again and speak with our trade unions in the sugar industry, in the bauxite industry and in the public service. We must be able to speak with civil society without calling people ‘fossils’ and ‘vultures’. We must be able to build back our institutions - an ombudsman, a public service

tribunal. We must have respect for the judiciary and we must have respect for the constitutional offices. [Ms. Teixeira: inaudible] We must have respect for the media and we must have the respect to not interrupt other people when they are speaking.

Mr. Speaker: One second, Hon. Leader of the Opposition. Hon. Members if there is one Member of this House who has not uttered a heckling word against any other Member it is the Leader of the Opposition. I would ask that the same respect he accorded to others be given to him this afternoon. He never uttered a single word against anyone.

Mr. Granger: Thank you Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we look forward to using this Budget as a tool to create the type of regulatory environment within in which national development could take place. We would like to know that when any citizen approaches a Police Officer, a Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit (CANU) Officer, a Customs Officer, a Forestry Officer, a Mining Officer or a Health Officer he will not be asked for a bribe or for a raise; he will be treated with respect. We have to rebuild that regulatory environment not just to attract foreigners, but in order to give our citizens the confidence that they are operating and living in a civilised society. Our public services must be moved beyond the level of taking bribes. They must be paid better, educated better, trained better and also better supervised.

In so saying, I see that there are five basic needs which our people need. First of all, as I said before and as I would re-emphasise, is the access to education. There is nothing more fundamental than to get our children in schools. We can quote the laws. We can talk about our aims and objectives, but the Budget must provide the means to ensure that our children can get to school. It is a problem. The Hon. Minister has been at pains to point out what are the problems in the Pomeroon River where the children from the lower Pomeroon cannot get to Charity. For the entire year I have been receiving calls from the Pomeroon and from the Essequibo Coast. I even spoke to my friend Mr. Ali Baksh who was very helpful. That is the way we want to see things done. He put me on to someone who spoke to representatives on the Essequibo Coast to make sure that the children from the Lower Pomeroon could get to Charity.

The problem exists in other areas. It exists in Linden. A university student in Silver City has to spend thousands of dollars to go to the University of Guyana. Every week, he/she must spend \$5,000-\$7,000. A young secondary school girl at Trafalgar on the West Coast of Berbice has to

spend \$5,000 to get to Rosignol and to cross the Bridge to attend Berbice High School every day. Transport is a problem. Books are a problem. Meals are a problem. Let us sit down and find out what these problems are so that we can get our children to school. That is the important thing.

Access to education is not just a matter of building a secondary school. It is making sure that every child could get there. What is wrong with having yellow school busses taking our children to school? In the Pomeroon the highway is the river. If you want to move from place to place you have to go on the river. Let us have school boats in the Berbice River, in the Pomeroon River and in all of our riverine areas. When a child has to paddle a corial for two hours to get to school and two hours to get back home, how much time does he/she have to study? How much energy does he or she have to devote to studies?

The second need, and I come back to it again, is the need for human safety. Crime is hindering development in this country. Contraband is hindering manufacturing in this country. Smuggling is hindering investment. Banditry is scaring people away. Regardless of what we got, we could have gotten much more. There need to be a national drug strategy master plan reintroduced in this country. There needs to be a review of the security sector. There needs to be an upgrading of the Customs anti-narcotic unit. As one speaker pointed out, it is a misnomer to call it a “Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit” anyway.

We need to ensure that the Budget puts money into these agencies. Failure to do so has a cost. If smugglers are going to be bringing in beer and cigarettes, people who manufacture those commodities in Guyana will face unfair competition.

We need jobs for our young people. Graduates, whether they come out of secondary school or the university, must be guaranteed jobs. It is not a matter for the state, but surely the Government can sit down with private enterprise and work out some mechanism, maybe in the form of tax relief or in the form of some rebate. Every company that employs fifty university graduates or fifty students to be trained or to run an apprentice scheme, would be given some sort of tax allowance to encourage them to recruit and train more people. We can work out something.

There are too many jobless young people. Persons with Caribbean Secondary Education Certificates (CSECs) are conductors of minibuses. People are liming about without jobs. People who go on some of the training programmes would go back into their villages such as in the

Moruca because there are no jobs for them. If we work out, in terms of our social contract some arrangements with these businesses then some relief for employing these people could have been made. I think we would make some headway in terms of jobs.

We need to adopt innovative approaches which bring about consultation or co-operation with the businesses. It is not just for the Government or for this Ministry or that Ministry. It is a National problem and we need to get our young people working again.

As my colleague, the Shadow Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance, pointed out, the social gap is opening in this country between the “haves and have-nots”; between the rich and the poor. There is also a form of academic apartheid which is taking place, which is not by design. Some people can go to good schools – “the big six once again”, everything seems to be “the big six” – where they are reasonable sure of matriculating and maybe going to university.

Many people who are sentenced to life in the community high schools do not do so well. Many people who live in rural or hinterland areas do not do so well. What is happening is that the education system, rather than being the great equaliser, is becoming a great divider. Those who went to certain top schools can be assured of a good life, and those who went to bottom schools or were shipwrecked in certain hinterland communities do not get the same opportunities. We need to look at that again to ensure that there is equality of opportunity and that sort of apartheid does not divide our society deeper.

Finally Mr. Speaker, I come to the point of quality of life. We need to know that all of us could enjoy good health in a clean and safe environment. Whatever the problems are in our Region, we need to examine those problems critically and listen to our members of the National Assembly, Members of Parliament here, who come from that Region.

It is no point as I said, living in a community where the authorities behave like eye servants and we only get a clean up when an event takes place. We need to ensure that, in all of our Hinterland communities, the quality of life and of the environment is raised. There are regional centres - I did not want to call it a regional capital, places like Bartica, Mabaruma, Mahdia and Lethem - where life is very hard. In Mabaruma, for example, there is no bank. People have to walk about with black plastic bags of money. This is the capital of one of the largest Regions of our country, the Barima-Waini Region, which is larger than Trinidad and Tobago. Yet, to live in

Mabaruma, to see that Kumaka Wharf, to face the blackouts, and to go to the Post Office gives you the impression that you are walking backwards in time.

Those are the needs of the people. When they look to this Budget they will say, “What is in it for us?” and “What is in it for my Region?” and “What is in it for me?” Will the Budget help the disadvantaged? Will it help to alleviate poverty? That is the test. When we look at the Budget provisions from tomorrow we will ask ourselves the question, what will the Budget do for the disadvantaged, the dispossessed and the depressed? Will it help those communities become more productive? Will it help those communities to become prosperous and will it help the citizens of this country to achieve a good life?

The Budget as presented on the 30th March in the view of A Partnership For National Unity has failed the test. It has failed to reduce poverty. It has failed to assure us that the measures are in place and that, over the next financial year, poverty will be significantly reduced. It has failed to reduce the cost of living. It has failed to give relief to the thousands of people who are labouring under a burdensome value added tax. It has failed to improve the quality of the University of Guyana which is the key to that virtuous cycle of education.

Giving the University of Guyana \$900 million is travesty. Unless we produce a higher quality of graduates, we will not get a higher quality of lecturers going into the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE). And, unless the quality of lecturers at the Cyril Potter College of Education could be improved we will not get better teachers. And, unless the teachers are not of higher quality, we will not get better students. We have to start with the University of Guyana and we have to fix the problem. \$900 million will not fix the University of Guyana. We need to give them what they need to make the University a centre of excellence, bringing it up to the level of St. Augustine Campus, bringing it up to the level of the Mona Campus and bringing it up to the level of Cave Hill Campus.

We need to improve public security. When we examine how much money is provided to re-equip the police force and the law enforcement agencies, we will see that, for the next financial year, we will not be able to experience a significant improvement in the quality of public service. There needs to be a fundamental reorganisation of the public security sector. We need to deal with the “E” and “F” division which controls three quarters of our territory. We need to make

sure that the commander of that division lives in the division and not in Rabbit Walk. We need to make sure that our policemen are better paid, that they have better equipment and that they are given aircraft and boats and all-terrain vehicles in order to enable them to do their work. Starving them of funds will not improve security. We need also to ensure that our regional centres are improved so that they become magnets for graduates to go back.

The Budget this year has failed. It has failed to provide funds to reduce poverty. It has failed to provide funds for lowering the cost of living. It has failed to direct its attention to the problems at the University of Guyana. It has failed to improve public security by the provision of sufficient funds. It has failed to improve regional administration by improving the quality of life and the quality of organisational administration in those Regions.

Hinterland development has suffered terribly over the last decade. The Hinterland contains our largest and richest Regions. Infrastructure development is essential if we are to get the best out of our gold, minerals, timber and tourism. We cannot any longer go forward by talking about upgrading roads and improving airstrips. We need to put real highways between Lethem and Linden. We need to put real motor-able, all-weather, roads between Bartica and Mahdia and between Mahdia and Annai. We need to build a network of roads in the interior. We cannot continue postponing it.

The Hinterland regions which contain our wealth can only be developed quickly and efficiently if they are provided with the infrastructure. Right now people are paying nearly \$3,000 a gallon for gasoline in Kamarang. You can only move about by boat or by canoes. We can get much more if we invest much more. The Budget must lead the way in investing in infrastructure. Infrastructure is not a liability, it will bring dividends and the less we put is the less we get.

As I said in the beginning, it is my hope that Budget 2012 will be the last do-it-yourself Budget coming before this House. As far as the Opposition is concerned, the door to dialogue is open; the lights are on. We are prepared to engage with the administration at any time to ensure that this Budget is one that satisfies the real development needs of our country. I repeat that we do not want a collision; we want to ensure that there is cooperation on this matter of the Budget. We will work day and night in the coming days to ensure that it is something that we could be happy about, both sides of the House. We are not going to be bullied nor are we are not going to be

dominated. We want to sit down and resolve the problems of priorities, the problems of policies, the problems of emphasises in this Budget so that we can work on reshaping it into an instrument that could bring about the development of our country.

I would like to feel that all of the people of our country, at the end of this Budgetary process could feel satisfied that all of us in this Hon. House worked sincerely to bring about a financial plan for this financial year of 2012, which we can be proud of. I would like for all of the people to be able to look back. Our children must be able to look back at the Tenth Parliament and say, "The Budgetary process is one that was satisfactory to all of us. It helped to move our country forward." We would like to give them the quality of life which they voted for on the 28th of November.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition I thank you for that heartfelt and nationalistic presentation. Hon. Members it is 3.30 p.m. I was hoping to take the adjournment, but I am advised that the caterers are on their way and would need time to set up. I do wish the Hon. Minister of Finance to have all the time that he needs to respond. It has been almost two weeks of debate. Whether he is prepared to start, at a convenient time you may indicate, Hon. Minister, you are prepared for a break. We could take an extended break.

Minister of Finance [Dr. Singh]: Mr. Speaker, I would prefer not to be interrupted in the middle of my presentation.

Mr. Speaker: I would have thought so. Hon. Members we will take the break, but I ask that you indulge with us at the Parliament Office for some twenty minutes or so, because we did not anticipate an early suspension of the session. We will take the suspension now. Thank you very much.

Sitting suspended at 3.31 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 4.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Members the Sitting is resumed. Please be seated. Hon. Members I now invite the Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh to give his rebuttal to the

presentations made or the responses to the National Budget of 2012. Please proceed Hon. Minister.

Dr. Singh (replying): Mr. Speaker, permit me first of all to thank my colleagues on both sides of the House who over the course of the past six days or so have devoted their every energy and almost their every hour to the task of debating Budget 2012. My colleagues in the House would recall of course that I had the privilege of presenting, on the 30th March 2012, the National Budget for this year under the theme, “*Remaining on Course, United in Purpose, Prosperity for All*”.

4.47p.m.

That theme was not chosen or formulated casually but instead, was the result of considerable reflection on the part of Government, and represented the outcome of an effort that was intended to capture the essence of where we are and what we needed to do to take us to the destination to which we all aspire. That aspiration, I would like to believe, we all share and embrace. The theme was built on a premise that our country has been proceeding and advancing along a path of progress - to this matter I will return shortly – a path towards a modern and prosperous Guyana. Most elements of the Budget, I daresay, few would disagree with. And, indeed, I was happy to hear in the presentation made by the speaker who immediately preceded me, the distinguished Leader of the Opposition, a number of pillars or principles which are reflected in the Budget and very consistent with those adumbrated in the budget as was presented. One could scarcely argue with these objectives that were captured. Equally, I would have thought that one could scarcely argue with the admonition that we remain on course, on this path; that we work more closely together; that we redouble our resolve to work more closely together as we pursue the objective of generating prosperity for our country, and the distribution of that prosperity which will see each and every Guyanese man, woman, and child benefitting from it.

Only in the Budget speech did I make the observation that the uniqueness relative to our own domestic history, the uniqueness of our current parliamentary configuration, brought with it both opportunities and challenges. I reaffirmed and emphasised that Budget 2012 presented us with an important opportunity to demonstrate this configuration at work, and at its potential best. Over the past six days an extended opportunity was allowed/provided, to Members of this Hon. House

to demonstrate their willingness individually, and our collective willingness, to rise to the occasion. We must not be shy of embracing objectives when we agree with them. We must not believe that we must oppose simply for the cause or purpose of opposing because we are in the opposition, or we sit on opposite sides. In fact, I believe, one of our newest Member of Parliament captured it best, I refer to the Hon. Member Cornel Damon; and perhaps it is significant that one of our newest Members of Parliament could capture it so appropriately when he said in his maiden address to this National Assembly that perhaps the time has come for us to stop speaking about sitting on opposite sides, speaking of the opposition, a word derived from the entomological root to oppose. I congratulate the Hon. Member Cornel Damon for that observation.

The Budget debate was never intended to be an exercise in intellectual exhibitionism; it was never intended to be a contest of linguistic or poetic ability; it was never intended to be an exhibition of oratorical versatility. Indeed, there are some who would argue that while those things – intellectual exhibitionism, linguistic ability, oratorical versatility or whatever you want to call it – might be helpful in persuading others, they need not necessarily be the best ideas available. Some might argue that the simplest ideas, which require the least sophistication in articulating them, are perhaps the best and most compelling. The Budget debate was equally not an occasion, if I might be permitted to venture somewhat close to the boundaries of parliamentary convention, intended to be a contest in hooliganism – who could shout most loudly, or who could argue most vociferously, or who could thump most enthusiastically. Even if those elements and aspects are much a part of our parliamentary tradition, Budget 2012, particularly and especially given this much vaunted parliamentary configuration, presented and opportunity for a competition of ideas, at the very least for an articulation of ideas, whether they be alternative policies, whether they be an identification of what we agreed with or disagreed with in a particular policy, whether they be the proffering of a suggestion with respect to another programme or project, or the embracing of a project or programme identified in the Budget. Tragically, with one or two notable exceptions, in my own estimation, my colleagues on that side of the House missed this opportunity completely. As I listened to the contributions made, speaker after speaker, instead of hearing a dispassionate examination of the policies adumbrated in the Government's 2012 Budget, instead of hearing an identification of what was agreed with or what was felt could be done differently, instead of hearing concrete and specific suggestions, of what

could be done additionally - and I hasten to emphasise with a few isolated exceptions; I will say those exceptions included refreshingly the Leader of the Opposition's contribution today – we were treated instead to a rehash of overworked rhetorical arguments, innuendos we have heard before, designed solely for the purposes of scoring political mileage, crafted clearly on the basis of wanting to offer sound bytes for newspaper headlines, and built largely on misrepresentation and in some cases blatant misrepresentation of the facts, the circumstances and the particular issue at hand. Nowhere was this better illustrated than in the presentation by the Hon. Member Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan this afternoon when we were treated , in the words of the Leader of the Opposition - if I were to borrow those words even if in a different context - to 'continuity at its worst'; a repetition of the same arguments. He did not use the phrase "control freakism", unless I missed it. That must have been the only element that was not replayed from years before. We were treated to a repetition of the same menu of arguments that we have heard over and over again. These were not grounded in any fact but designed solely for the purpose of political titillation. I made note of several of them and I must respond to some of the observations I made.

First of all aspersions were cast on the economic statistics produced by hard working professionals in this country. I heard Mr. Ramjattan speak of the rebased economy, resulting in him having what he describes as a qualified opinion. I do not know where he may have picked up that terminology, and thought them fashionable and nice to repeat, but the need to rebase Guyana's gross domestic product is one that has been long recognised. The fact that our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was last rebased in 1988, when the economy had such a fundamentally different structure from the structure it has today, is not a matter of dispute. So this rebasing was not an exercise concocted by the Government whimsically or fancifully. Countries all over the world rebase, periodically. We recognised the need to rebase our GDP and we did so with the benefit of extensive assistance from reputable international organisations which scrutinized our economic statistics. In fact, we received technical assistance from the International Monetary Fund's (IMF's) technical assistance centre in the Caribbean, the Caribbean Regional Technical Assistance Centre (CARTCA) which provided resident experts. We also received assistance in the process of rebasing our GDP and our Consumer Price Index (CPI) Basket, not only from the IMF's regional technical centre in the Caribbean but also from the US Census Bureau. These are credible international agencies that worked in collaboration with the very hardworking professional staff. I must associate myself with Minister Manickchand's comments yesterday in

expressing her objection at the besmirching of the professionalism of the hardworking people in the agencies of the Government of Guyana. These people are not politicians. And notwithstanding your very kind consideration of the option of a right to respond by members of the public, professional civil servants are not people who like to enter the political fray. I hear my colleague say they cannot. I do not blame them at all. It is downright irresponsible for Members of this Hon. House to stand up and besmirch their professionalism.

The Statistics Bureau is headed by a very capable, longstanding, professional of nearly 40 years of experience in official statistics, who started his career when Mr. Frank Hope, one of my distinguished predecessors, was himself the Head of the Statistics Bureau. I think it is an affront to the hardworking people of the Statistics Bureau. I do not single out the Statistics Bureau for any particular reason except that their work was highlighted by Mr. Ramjattan's attempt to cast aspersions on our GDP numbers. We moved from the skepticism expressed about the GDP numbers to, perhaps one of the overworked references in Guyana, reference to a 'donkey cart' economy. We might not be where we would like to be but, in fact, I doubt that we will ever be where we would like to be. I do not believe if you ask policy makers in the United States of America or the wealthy countries of Scandinavia whether they are where they would like to be, they would say, "Yes". The task of national uplifting, just like the task of personal betterment, is never complete; that journey is never complete. When a person acquires a home he does not stop and say he has arrived, he wants nothing else and stops working. He starts to furnish that home, and when the home is furnished he does not say he has everything he wants and stops working; he says he wants a motor vehicle to have his own independent transportation; and he does not stop there, he wants his own children to have their transportation; he wants his children to complete university education.

The reference to "donkey cart economy", a phrase that is well known to be associated with the dismal state in which our country found itself towards the end of the 1980s, is not only a passing reference. I will tell you why I highlight it. I highlight this reference by Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan because if we wish to have a sincere and frank discussion about where we are and where we need to go we must at first, at the very least, be willing to be honest and frank about the journey we have taken on. So to pretend that nothing is happening in Guyana, to pretend we are not moving in the right direction, that there have been no obvious improvements, is an

exercise in dishonesty; it is an exercise in self delusion; it is an exercise in misleading the people of Guyana. I do not believe that there is any citizen in Guyana who would objectively say we do not believe that good things are happening in Guyana. They may say they want more to happen, or they want some things to happen better, or they want some things to happen more quickly. Frankly speaking, I suspect that most of us on Government benches would agree with them. Frankly speaking, I feel that way myself. There are things that I would like to happen more quickly. There are things that sometimes do not work as well as I would like them to work. There are times when I feel that more needs to be done in a particular area, and if we had more resources we would happily plow those resources into those areas. But I do not believe there is a single citizen in Guyana who would honestly and frankly say that nothing has happened positively in Guyana over the last 20 years. **[Interruption]** Well I said honestly and frankly. I doubt that Mr. Ramjattan himself even believes it.

So I make the point not only to draw reference to a phrase that Mr. Ramjattan used – his reference to “donkey cart” economy – but to make the point that a frank, open and honest discussion is not and will not be possible if there continues to be a stubborn refusal on the part of some of the Members on the other side, to recognise the reality of where our country came from and where we are today. As long as Members on that side wish to live in denial about the fact there has been progress under successive People’s Progressive Party/Civic Governments since 1992, they are impeding frank and open and honest discussion.

Mr. Speaker, like I said we were treated to several overworked innuendos, and it is said sometimes if a particular thing is repeated often enough there are some who might believe it to be true. Some who work in propaganda I suspect would believe this. And, of course, Mr. Nagamootoo is himself a... **[Government Member: A propagandist]** ...I would not necessarily have used that word. I believe he has described himself in the past as a journalist. When I listened to Mr. Ramjattan’s presentation I heard reference to Budget 2012, and I heard Mr. Ramjattan say we are not getting the complete picture. Budget 2012, like all national budgets which come before this National Assembly, is the budget of the Central Government. The Central Government is defined and understood in statute to have boundaries - Central Government, ministries, departments, and the regional administrations comprising ten Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs). This is not an innovation. This is, first of all, a statutorily defined

entity whose boundaries comprise what are called budget agencies, are defined in law and indeed embraced by convention, custom and practice. The Central Government's budget is not a budget which includes entities set up by separate statutory instruments, enacted by this Parliament, or entities established under a statute enacted by this Parliament. For example, there was reference to the Guyana Geologies and Mines Commission (GGMC) and the Guyana Forestry Commission. These entities were established by laws enacted in this very House, perhaps not in the Ninth Parliament, and not in the tenth parliament. Indeed these are laws that predate the ascension to office by the People's Progressive Party/Civic in 1992 - all of those laws. And those laws include statutory provisions that define the basis on which these entities may raise revenue, the basis on which they may incur expenditure, the governance arrangement which applies to their operations, the circumstances under which they may retain their revenue and utilise their revenue to fund their own operations, and their reporting and accountability obligations, which incidentally includes the preparation of an annual report that comes to this National Assembly; and which incidentally includes the tabling in this National Assembly of an annual report. So the reference to the GGMC is but another example of an effort at political titillation, grandstanding; plucking these things out of thin air for the sole purpose of creating excitement but not grounded in any basis whatsoever.

The reference to National Industrial and Commercial Investments Incorporated (NICIL) is identical because NICIL is a company registered under the Company's Act. It operates within the framework of the Company's Act, it generates its revenue; it meets expenditure; it has subsidiaries; it prepares consolidated accounts, and those accounts are audited; it is a company operating within the framework of the Company's Act. So to argue that you do not see NICIL's operation is akin to saying you do not see the operations of any other company in the national estimates. GuySuCo is going to spend \$3 billion dollars of its own resources buying equipment, but those resources are coming from GuySuCo's revenue funded by GuySuCo operations. GuySuCo is a company so those resources are not included in the national budget because the company is not funded by the national budget; it is not being appropriated under the national budget. The Guyana National Shipping Corporation Inc., Guyana Power and Light (GPL), and GuySuCo are all companies incorporated under the Company's Act. To say one cannot find NICIL's operations in the Budget is akin to saying one cannot see GuySuCo's sugar sales brought into the national budget, or one cannot see GuySuCo's equipment being brought into the

national budget. It is misleading for Mr. Ramjattan to pick up this matter knowing fully, as he must, that these entities have their own laws applying to them; that these entities are governed by their applicable statute; and that the national budget is the budget of the Central Government. Mr. Ramjattan must be aware of this. There is a distinction between public money in the sense of moneys managed within the framework of the national budget and moneys managed by a company that is a public sector company. There are many other examples; GuySuCo is a perfect case in point; GPL is a perfect case in point. It is convenient for Mr. Ramjattan to be politically opportunistic and bandy this information around as if something is amiss. NICIL, like GGMC and the Guyana Forestry Commission, are all audited. Those audits are up to date or are being brought up to date; those annual reports are coming to this National Assembly. In fact, vast volumes of information have been tabled in this National Assembly by many of these entities – I am going to come back to that matter. Throughout the course of this debate I did not hear any reference to those documents. I heard instead a glib reference to a project, a passing reference to a project, then a political sound bite, and then the debate move on.

Let us take the Marriot project. We were asked certain questions about the Marriot; we tabled vast volumes of documentation in this National Assembly in response to a question posed by Mr. Ramjattan. Instead of reflecting on those documents, making a substantial point or comment, expressing concern of any consequence or of any material in it all we were treated to is, “We do not need another Marriot Hotel”. That is all we were treated to. There was no reference to the vast reams of paper that were shared. In fact, the reference is always, “it is the other document you did not give me I am really concerned about”, and not the hundreds of documents that we did give you which you never read and have not a single comment on. This is not unique to the Marriott project.

5.17 p.m.

We tabled mountains of documentation on the Amaila Falls Project. All we heard about the Amaila Falls Project was some little sound bytes. No reference to the vast volumes of documents that was sought and tabled more than a month ago. [Mr. Ramjattan: So you want us to praise it all the time.] But Mr. Ramjattan, what is wrong about praising what is good? If you are interested in a sincere engagement you must be prepared to say, I agree with that project.

In fact, His Excellency the President, within the framework of the Inter-Parliamentary Party Dialogue Forum, convened a special engagement on the Amaila Falls Project. We were treated, the Government, APNU and AFC representatives, to an excellent presentation by the Executive Director of NICIL on the Amaila Falls Project. A presentation, in fact, which was complimented and led to the project being complimented in the media by non-Governmental attendees at that meeting, yet, no where throughout the course of this debate... I have listened to hear whether my friends from the APNU or the AFC, would in fact demonstrate that they are sincere about an honest engagement with us and stood up and acknowledge that the Inter-Parliamentary Party Dialogue Forum had yielded an excellent opportunity to interrogate the Amaila Falls Project, that they avail themselves of that opportunity and having availed themselves of that opportunity, they think the project is a good thing or indeed they thought the project was a good thing except for the following specific observations. We did not hear any of that instead we heard glib references to the Amaila Falls Project and the Marriot Hotel Project as though these are things to be dismissed.

It is alarming that people who would be willing to say in private, I believe that is a good thing, who within the confines of the room where the presentation was taking place, would say, I think this project is a fantastic project and I have the following comments. It is a tragedy for this country that when they come to the theatre of the National Assembly, they are not prepared to come out and say that. It is a tragedy and it calls into question the sincerity of my friends on that side of the House about having a meaningful engagement on development of this country.

It causes me to wonder whether the Hon. Mr. Damon was right when he said that the Opposition believes their role is to oppose, because that is their name. I did not hear anyone say the Government did a lot of analytical work on the Amalia Falls Project. I listened to the spokespersons on infrastructure and energy. I did not hear that, in fact, except for this analytical work, I disagree or I agree with the analytical work done, but I would do the project a bit differently in this manner. I never heard any references like that. All you had, was political sound bytes and rhetoric designed to capture the headlines and to cast the Government in a bad light. How can that be the basis for a genuine meaningful engagement?

I do not expect you to say, I agree with everything in the budget, but I expect at the very least that there would be some objectivity and the things that I know many Members on that side of

House will say privately they agree with, I expect at the very least that, particularly because of this new and much vaunted configuration, some honesty and objectivity in the comments and the Amaila Falls Project is a good example. It is a national project. It was put up for enth degree of scrutiny. We invited any number of questions, we presented all, including confidential information. We said, this is the project ask any question. Things we cannot do in the public domain, because of confidentiality agreements, we said we would do an in-camera presentation to you.

Chaired by no less a person than His Excellency, the President who sat through the entire presentation, such is the importance we place on the engagement with our friends on that side of the House, but no reference to that information. It is easy to say, table these things or I want all of these hundreds of pieces of information, when you table them all you hear is, but it is not that hundred I wanted, it was number 101 that you did not table. That does not all go well for the participation of my friends on that side of the House in this new this “new dispensation”; this new and much vaunted dispensation, configuration of which so much is spoken; so more, more of the same.

The majority, as they like to describe themselves; the one seat majority; the slender one seat majority, I suspect with the empty chairs it is somewhat withered down today. But the slender one seat majority, as they like to describe themselves, must be prepared to make bold. You cannot want to be the majority and provide no leadership and you cannot lead if you are shrouded in negativity and you see yourself as having the sole purpose to criticise; and you see yourself somehow prevented or handcuff from agreeing. Is that how we demonstrate the power of the one seat majority? By using it only to disagree; by using it only to object; by using it only to oppose; and by using it only to wield the threat of the scissors being brought, as the Hon. Member Mr. Nagamootoo did?

If fact, I am reminded now of the phrase that was used. The Amaila Falls Project which was presented in details to my colleagues on that side of the House. Do you know the phrase that Mr. Ramjattan comes to this House today and calls them, “Fanciful Projects”? A project that will convert this country from almost 100% dependence on fossil fuel to 100% renewable clean energy; a project that will dramatically reduce our fuel import bill; a project that will reduce the cost of energy to the final consumer; and a project that will double our generating capacity for

the next five years or so and eliminate any shortage in our generating capacity, solving the issue of reliable power at least for the next four or five years. It is not a fanciful project... Is this a project to be dismissed as fanciful? This is not a project that Mr. Ramjattan can complain that we have not given him scrutiny of. This is a man who went to the electorate last November as an aspiring President and comes today in this National Assembly and dismisses a project of such national importance that was opened with such completeness and fairness to the Members of this National House, as fanciful. I cannot in stronger terms register my disappointment. This does not sound like the tone of a new engagement.

In fact, the Alliance for Change likes to advocate themselves and I say this of course with due difference to you Sir. The Alliance for Change likes to market itself as an agent of change, but I do not see the change in this. I see the same negativity that I have always heard from Mr. Ramjattan and I see the same obsession with objecting and opposing. More of the same, in the words of the distinguish Leader of the Opposition, "Continuity at its very worst". Is this the new dispensation at work?

I will say this, the projects which Mr. Ramjattan has elected to describe as fanciful, we on this side of the House have no difficulty presenting any level of detail to our friends on that side of the House and as we did with the Amaila Falls Project. We will continue to present and to answer any question they have, because we know that this project is a good project for Guyana. We know that this project will transform Guyana and we will spare no effort in ensuring that that transformation is achieved. If the Opposition wants to join us in this regard and remain engaged, we are available to do so.

There is no question that we are afraid to answer; there is no document we cannot show, except where there are explicit confidentiality requirements. We have said that where those documents have confidentiality provisions, we are prepared to have in-camera engagements. We have said that to our colleagues and I am sure they will acknowledge this publicly. We are prepared to have in-camera engagements with them to show them the details of these documents, even if we cannot put them in the public domain.

I wish to say, as I listened to the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan this morning, I became somewhat croissant, because I was hoping that the last day would have provided an opportunity for us to

rise above the fray of the last five days and to demonstrate the maturity of which we like to speak about so much and to demonstrate that there is a genuine and sincere willingness to work together.

I came today full of hope that even if there were isolated instances or even if there were frequent instances, as in some cases there were, of what I would describe as criticism for criticism's sake, refusal to embrace, refusal to agree, I was hopeful, given the lineup of speakers today that we would have seen a change in tone. Regrettably the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan disappointed me in this regard.

If I may briefly respond to the presentation made by the Leader of the Opposition; as I have already said, many of the objectives identified by the Leader of the Opposition are in fact, objectives I could scarcely disagree with. Who could disagree with educating and empowering our young people? Who could disagree with that, certainly not this Government? Who could disagree with ensuring that our institutions function better and more effectively, who could disagree with ensuring that our justice and security system protects our people, certainly not this Government? I was happy to hear those objectives identified and embraced by the Leader of the Opposition and I would like my colleagues to applaud this. **[Mr. Ramjattan:** That is it, beg for it.]

I heard Mr. Ramjattan said, "Beg for it". That is his attitude that if you agree with someone you are begging for it. Shame on you Mr. Ramjattan; we have no problem agreeing when something is good, unlike you Mr. Ramjattan. Shame on you! If the Leader of the Opposition outlines some objectives with which we agree, I will say so and I have no apology for saying so. In fact, I will go further and say that if I were, with the greatest of respect to the Leader of the Opposition, to offer one observation, it would be to say that I would have liked that Statesmanship and the embracing of those principles to be disseminated and distributed among his membership over the last five or six days. I believe that it was good and commendable that it came at the end of the debate, but it would have been better if it was distributed and emanated from the rest of his members. I did not see it for much of the last five days.

So if I were, with the greatest of respect to the Opposition Leader, to offer one observation, it would be to say that the Statesmanship at the end by the Leader, good though it might be and commendable it might be, it is not good enough. I would have liked to have seen the same coming from all of your members.

That is not to say... [*Interruption*] that I agree with everything I heard the Leader of the Opposition say. I heard for example his emphasis on the diversification of the economy, an objective that we agree with. I think he spoke of six traditional sectors, all the sectors which we are happy to promote and which we are promoting, but, I then heard the question of what is being done for manufacturing? Well we have exited State's involvement in the productive sector for some time and the State will not put money directly into manufacturing, nevertheless we will put money into things which affect manufacturing. So, I will say in this National Assembly that the one impediment to more rapid growth in the manufacturing sector is affordable and reliable power. When we say we will invest in the Amaila Falls Project, which will bring down the cost of power and remove from our investors the need for redundant power that is money that is going to our manufacturing sector. Every manufacturer coming into Guyana will no longer have to invest in redundant power. Right now anyone who wants to manufacture anything has to invest in redundant power because a manufacturing line cannot go down for one minute or else you will lose the whole line. Anyone who wants to manufacture anything has to confront the cost of power today and the cost of electric energy today.

The Amaila Falls Project, through you Sir to the Leader of the Opposition, is an example of a project that will affect and influence the environment within which the manufacturing sector operates and in which the manufacturing sector address. I maintain that there is no investment that is better for this country than an investment in hydro-power.

I heard the Leader of the Opposition called for more emphasis on investing in the potentials of persons. Again an objective, investing in our people, is a theme that is recurring in our budget and a theme with which this Government could scarcely disagree on. In fact, for a moment I thought the Leader of the Opposition was reading from one of my previous budget speeches when he referred to the importance of investing in the potential of our people. [**Member:** ...inaudible] No because it is a self evident objective, no right thinking Guyanese person, I do not claim any special talent in identifying that as an objective, any right thinking Guyanese person would identify this as an important objective and the Leader of the Opposition happily did so.

I was happy to hear the embrace of this theme of human development, a theme that we ourselves have long embraced. I would have been considerably happier if I had heard some explicit recognition of some of the programmes we have in the budget that solves those objectives.

Our investment in technical and vocational training, brought TVET and technical and vocation educational training to young people throughout the lengths and breathe of this country. A new technical institute was just completed in Lenora and one in Mahaicony, we are upgrading the ones in Georgetown, Linden, New Amsterdam, Corriverton and the Essequibo; that is investing in our people.

Our investment in Information and Communications Technology (ICT), ensuring that our young people are not denied the opportunities allowed and afforded them by the vast potential of Information and Communications Technology. In fact, if I were to disagree with one thing said by the Leader of the Opposition it would be when he identified correctly the issues of sanitary facilities at a particular school. I think it was a school on the West Demerara and he spoke of a lavatory I think that had a problem which needed to be fixed. Of course, all of our schools should have proper facilities. I agree with that, if there is a particular school that has a facility that is not working or is broken, it needs to be fixed. I was worried when I heard and I trust that I am not misquoting the Leader of the Opposition here, the reference to a statement that we are not yet at the level of IT Laboratories in schools, we are at the level of fixing lavatories. That may not be a verbatim quote, but I made a note when I heard something that sounded like “We are not at the level of IT Laboratories”. Because I will say that often times and experiences from other countries which have travelled this path before us, those who have invented the wheel that we are now seeking to make that experience have thought us that things do not need to happen sequentially. In fact, often the countries that progress rapidly are the countries that leap frog many of the intermediate stages of development. If Information and Communications Technology is available in the world and it is affordable and we are able to harness it for our young people, we will bring it to our young people; in every village and we will do so now. We will not wait until we fix the toilet. Of course, the toilet needs to be fixed and of course the steps, windows, roofs and all of those things needs to fixed, but you do not necessarily always have to follow the regimentation of a sequence, things can happen in parallel.

If we can leap frog the lessons learnt and the hurdles crossed by other countries, bring and information technology to our most remote villages so that our children in the most remote villages can go to a central point and access the internet and do research and learn about the computer so that they too can embrace the wide world of the internet. They too can benefit from the vastness that information and technology has to offer.

That is our commitment, to continue to seek out opportunities and ways in which we can accelerate the process of development in our country, ways in which we can bring to our people the best of what is available in the world out there and ensure that our young people receive the benefit of every opportunity that lies before them, so that they can compete in the world of tomorrow. This is our promise to the people of Guyana.

The observation made by the Opposition Leader on investment in infrastructure, again I thought was perhaps a restraint compliment being paid to the budget, because this budget recognises the catalysing role which physical infrastructure can play, it allocates significant amount of resources to putting in place the physical infrastructure that is required for accelerated growth to be realised in our country. I heard the Leader of the Opposition identified some particular roads, I think, the Linden to Lethem, I heard a reference I think to Bartica, Mahdia, Linden to Kwakwani and others. No doubt, depending on the traffic on these roadways and the traffic projection, these are projects that we would love to do. In a world of infinite resources, we would love to have a network of roads running through every nook and cranny of our country, allowing access to every corner, without, of course, compromising our forest resources. The reality is of course, that the finite resources we have to manage needs to be prioritised. We have to look at those roads, those projects that will generate the greatest return, particularly bearing in mind the time horizon, those that will generate the greatest return in the shortest possible time and we will invest in those roads. I will say that there are many roads that I believe needs to be done; that we believe as a Government believe needs to be done, but we need to bear the cost in mind. Minister Benn and I had a conversation during the break about the phenomenal cost of building, particularly, the Hinterland roads.

I will say that by and large, the observations made today by those who spoke before me, I respond to, with mixed emotions. On the one hand I am disappointment that Mr. Ramjattan did not see it fit to rise to the occasion. On the other hand I must register my agreement with many of

the principles outlined by the Leader of the Opposition, even if in some of the details my views were diverged from his and I have only given a few examples of areas in which such divergence might exist.

Against this background, I would say that the debate on the budget, barring the odd isolation, I mean not odd in the sense of peculiar, but odd, barring the unusual and isolated positive contribution that was characterised by factual inaccuracies in some cases and I have to address some of those. They are characterised by factual inaccuracies, grandstanding in an attempt to mislead.

In no place during the course of the budget debate was this resort to dubious facts more evident than in the presentation made by the Hon. Member, Mr. Moses Nagamootoo. I do not know what it is about that corner Sir, since you have ascended to your high chair... [*Interruption*] ...May I proceed Sir?

Were I to dissect Mr. Nagamootoo's presentation point by point, I would incur the wrath of my colleagues on every side of this House. There is neither an intention on my part, to do so, nor is there a need to debunked, discarded and consigned to the dustbins because so many of my colleagues who spoke before me, put many of the arguments he made where they belong. There was one in particular that merits special attention and I will only address that one, not only because it is a subject that is particularly dear to my heart, but because it is such a blatant illustration of what was wrong about his contribution and the negative elements during the course of this budget debate.

I heard Mr. Nagamootoo, the Hon. Member, profess his remarks by saying he was not a brilliant economist, so he did qualify with the cavalier that he was not a brilliant economist. He went on in fact to say that he was not an economist by any standards. He is a journalist, a lawyer and has distinguished himself in many other fields as we all know; and a politician, but Mr. Nagamootoo ventured to address the matter of Guyana's external debt and I thought he said the following, that in essence Guyana's external debt is more today than it was in 1992. I whipped out my pen immediately and I started to take notes and thought I heard him say that in 1992, when there was a change in Government, again there are certain clichés he likes, he is very good at that kind of thing, *the dawn of a new era*, he said with great flamboyant *bun ash* as if to emphasise his point

and to make it more credible. *The dawn of a new era*, he said it in a manner only Moses could. He said in 1992 when there was a change in Government, *the dawn of a new era*, in the typical Nagamootoo dramatic style.

5.47 p.m.

He said that debt stood at \$2.1 billion. He said to forget this Minister's reference to percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and so on; he is trying to fool you. He said to forget this reference to percentage of GDP, "let us just look at the numbers". He said "US\$2.1 billion", again, without looking at the percentage of GDP – insinuating that the computation of that ratio is irrelevant – "at the prevailing exchange rate of 125:1, the 1992 debt was \$252.5 billion". He said that today, 20 years later, "in spite..." – and again all of the Mr. Moses Nagamootoo drama was invoked: "...of write offs, cancellations and rescheduling our national debt stands at \$1.2 billion dollars which, at the current rate of GDS\$207 to US\$1 amounts to \$253.4 billion nearly \$1 billion more than what it was in 1992".

So he takes the 1992 debt and converts it by an exchange rate. He takes the 2011 debt and he converts it by a Guyana Dollar to United States of America exchange rate. He compares those numbers and he then says that the debt is more in 1992.

We could argue many things. We could argue, first of all that one cannot compute two nominal numbers at two disparate points in time. We could argue that, over a long window time series, one cannot compare two numbers at two points without adjusting for the time value of money, so we could argue that point. We could argue that because our debt was denominated in US Dollars one has to compare US Dollars. We could argue that the standard metric used in the industry is debt per GDP for the simple reason that if I am a wealthy man and I owe \$1 million I am not particularly indebted, but Mr. Robert Persaud is not such a wealthy man and he owes \$1 million he is a lot more indebted than I am. So if your economy has two different sizes at two particular points in time, the analysis of how indebted you are has to be done with reference to how wealthy you are. We could argue that too. Instead, we could argue arithmetic. I want Mr. Nagamootoo to be a brilliant economist or even... [Mr. Nagamootoo: You are.] No. I am not brilliant in anything. I do not claim any degree of brilliance, Mr. Nagamootoo. We could argue on the basis of simple arithmetic. Put aside the fact that Mr. Nagamootoo chose to use an

exchange rate of 207:1 – we could argue if it is 206 or 207 and so on. Let us use his exchange rates: US\$2.1 million x 125 – Mr. Nagamootoo’s numbers – will give you \$262.5, not \$252.5 as Mr. Nagamootoo said, so he understated by \$10 billion the 1992 external debt in Guyana Dollars. What is worst is, fast forwarding to 2011, \$1.2 billion – Mr. Nagamootoo’s number – x 207 – Mr. Nagamootoo’s exchange rate – gives \$248.4 billion; not \$253.4 billion, as Mr. Nagamootoo claimed. So, using Mr. Nagamootoo’s external debt numbers, using Mr. Nagamootoo’s exchange rate, the nominal debt in 2011 is in fact \$14.4 billion less than it was in 1992; using his method, using his numbers but using the mathematical aptitude of a primary school child who knows how to do multiplication.

So one cannot help asking oneself whether such a fundamental a mistake was made by accident or whether there was a deliberate attempt to mislead the people of this country on the basis of what was claimed...

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that we could impute that any Hon. Member of this House has a deliberate intention to misrepresent... It was a mistake perhaps but not a deliberate attempt to misrepresent.

Dr. Singh: I will say, Mr. Speaker, I withdraw any interpretation of imputation...

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that you made the imputation. I was cautioning you not to.

Dr. Singh: I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker for stopping me in good time. A mistake, nonetheless, with its consequence presented with such aplomb and pomposity that one can only imagine whether it was done for dramatic effect or some other effect. I will go further to say that I actually checked... I could not believe my eyes so I requested a verbatim transcript of what transpired just to check the numbers. I requested a newspaper report. I went to the Kaieteur Newspaper and I checked the Kaieteur news report and the same numbers were quoted by Mr. Nagamootoo. I will say this: It is most regrettable when one will venture into an area where one feels constrained to express a caveat about one’s own competence up fort, still venture into that area, present what one is purporting to represent facts on without even the most minimum of an effort to confirm accuracy and then seek to castigate and criticise and lambaste the Government for no purpose other than political mileage. If that is not political grandstanding at its worst I do not know what is. As I said there are many other grounds on which...

The same can be said about the issue of the Value Added Tax (VAT). Throughout the course of this debate and, indeed, in public commentary much has been said about the Value Added Tax and I wish to tarry a while on this subject because I believe that it merits some examination. It is easy when one is on the election campaign trail to identify hot button subjects, politically contentious subject and to trumpet them on the political platform; even if it is not excusable, it is understandable. I believe that we all do that on the hustings. It came as no surprise to me that during the course of the 2011 Elections political parties, particularly those now sitting on that side of the House, identified the issue of the Value Added Tax, made it a campaign issue, spoke of it repeatedly, characterised the VAT as a millstone around people's necks, as a burden on the people of Guyana and, in particular, somehow, as causing unfair disadvantage on the poor people of our country. This is a very emotive argument. Who does not want to pay fewer taxes? Frankly speaking I wish, as a tax payer, if my tax obligations over the course of time, could become less burdensome. Who would not? Which rational human being would say I am happy paying taxes or I do not want to pay fewer taxes. It was an issue that caught on very quickly. It was an issue which was embraced and the parties really hammered it during the course of the elections. I recall, for example, a billboard... Forgive me again, Mr. Speaker, I do not have any special fixation with the Alliance For Change – your billboards were in eye catching colours.

Mr. Speaker: It is understandable.

Dr. Singh: I recall a green and yellow billboard – I believe that it was at the top of Sherriff Street and what I would call the “Seawall Road”...

Mr. Speaker: Did you see it before it was taken down or after?

Dr. Singh: I am not aware, Sir, that it was taken down. I thought that the hot air took it away. I remember that billboard on the top of Sherriff Street and it said “Cut the VAT”. This was one of the big promises made by the Alliance for Change to the people of Guyana. I know the number fluctuated a little bit. I know at one time people were saying cut it to 8%, cut it to 10%, cut it to 12%, cut it to 14%. At several points in time, much like the lotto ball that is generated by random machine, different numbers were plucked out of thin air: “VAT should be 8%, it should be 10%, it should be 12%”. I have the chronology of those numbers. Sometimes it moved up and then it moved back down depending, I suppose, on how vociferous was the crowd's response. I wish to

say this: The issue, having reared its head and having become a subject for debate during election hustings, now that we are in this new dispensation that merits closer collaboration and closer cooperation needs an objective and, as I said earlier, dispassionate look. I will say this: anybody who departs or abandons or casts aside the temptation of popular political appeal and objectively and seriously examines the Value Added Tax will soon discover that a reduction in the Value Added Tax will bring little or no benefit to the poor people of this country. In fact, for reasons I will outline shortly, the most vulnerable will benefit least from a cut in VAT and it is in fact the well heeled that will benefit most from a cut in VAT. I would have thought that that would have been a self evident fact. In fact, if one wishes to assist the most vulnerable in our society a cut in VAT is the least efficient way to do it.

Take, for example, a hypothetical man with modest income. Let us say that this hypothetical person A with modest income takes home \$49,500 per month. He buys basic food items and spends \$25,000 on these. He pays an electricity bill because his house got connected under the Utility Assistance Programme (UAP). He has a telephone and pays a telephone bill. He buys clothing, pays for public transportation and sets aside in a box, under his bed or in a savings account at his bank \$5,000. So he buys food, pays for electricity, telephone, clothing and public transportation. The only “VATable” items in that list are his telephone bill and clothing and he pays, at 16% a total of GD\$1,280 per month out of his \$49,500 per month “take-home” pay.

A cut in the VAT from 16% to 12% - to take one of the several numbers bandied around in the weeks that led up to the 28th November – will result in him paying not \$1,280 worth of VAT on his consumption basket but \$960 on the identical consumption basket, resulting in the saving of the grand sum of \$320 per month. A man with disposable income of \$49,500 per month will save the grand sum, and have additional disposable income of GD\$320 per month as a result of a 4% cut in VAT from 16% to 14%. I believe that this should be reasonably obvious, based on the hypothetical basket that I described but one can do this for any basket.

Take hypothetical person B a wealthier person, whose “take-home” pay – perhaps a prominent lawyer who was a Vice Presidential Candidate in a small political party – is \$1,000,000 per month. He buys food but he buys a more complex basket of food, so he buys basic food items which are not “VATable” and he buys food items which are “VATable” – some of the imported things and some of the canned and packaged things and processed things. He pays for electricity.

He pays for the telephone bill. He probably pays for the internet in his home and cable or some other electronic service. He incurs entertainment expenditure, goes to restaurants or other entertainment places. He purchases some luxury items, whether they are electronic items for his children or flat screen televisions for his home or iPods or iPads, whatever they are called these days. He saves, let us say, \$300,000 per month out of his earnings. This hypothetical person 'B', on the basis of his consumption basket with VAT at 16% will incur a total of \$98,400 of VAT in one month, on that consumption basket.

Consider a cut in VAT to 12%. That 4% point cut will bring down person B's VAT bill to \$73,800 and generate for him a monthly saving of \$24,600. In other words, your poor person who is going to benefit by the princely sum of \$320 per month from a 4% cut in VAT is contrasted with your hypothetical wealthy person who will benefit from the grand sum of \$24,600 of additional income based on this consumption basket. Put simply, this 4% cut in VAT will give the poor man \$300 in his pocket and will give the wealthy man half of the poor man's disposable income. He will save on his entertainment, alone, \$10,000 as a result of the cut in VAT, compared with the poor man whose entire disposable income is \$49,500.

This is not rocket science. VAT is a tax on consumption. Those who consume a small basket of modest items incur a modest VAT bill. Those who consume a lavish and large basket of goods incur a large VAT bill and they will benefit most from the cut in VAT. Let us be clear; this argument that the poor man will benefit from VAT is a misrepresentation to the people of this country. It is a misrepresentation to this country and I will say this, as I said, is not rock science. Pick any basket of goods, pick up the list of zero-rated items, go through the list of zero-rated items and apply zero to the items that are zero-rated and apply 16% to the items that are "VATable" and compute what the savings will be. Take any basket of goods. One can do it for oneself or one's own household and one will see. It is indisputable that a cut in VAT will benefit wealthy people more than it would benefit poor people. That is indisputable. In fact, the VAT that a wealthy person will save on one flat screen television bought will be more than the VAT saved by a poor person for the entire year on everything that they will buy. Were we to be able to afford any revenue measure, I would submit to you that a cut in VAT would be the most inefficient way of assisting the poor people of this country.

It is precisely because of that we have progressively raised the income tax threshold. If one looks at the income tax threshold, the increase that we made to the income tax threshold from \$40,000 to \$50,000 places in the pockets of any tax payer who is above \$50,000 an additional \$3,333 of disposable income. For a person on the lower end of the scale – a person at \$50,000 per month – that represents a 6.7% of their income. For a person at the upper end of the scale – the person receiving \$1,000,000 per month – that represents a 0.3% increase. By design adjustments, such as the adjustment to the income tax threshold, do help the most vulnerable and that is the reason we implemented it. That is the reason we increased the income tax threshold from \$40,000 to \$50,000 per month. That is the reason over the course of the last five to six years we doubled, from \$25,000 to \$50,000, the income tax threshold. That is the reason this year we removed from the income tax net 21,000 persons that will no longer pay income tax precisely because of the benefits it will bring to persons on the margin.

Issue after issue, we heard the resort to these old and overworked subjects. It is time we lift the debate of this National Assembly out of the morass of these overworked themes.

Take, for example, the matter of accountability. We, as a Government, are committed to the strictest of standards of accountability. I will repeat that for emphasis. We are committed to the strictest of standards of accountability. We have worked diligently to put in place mechanisms to ensure that our legislative framework, as it applies to accountability, is stronger. We have ensured that we have, indeed with the support of our colleagues on that side of the House, a revamped constitution that provides very important constitutional mechanisms for accountability. These include, for example: the Public Accounts Committee with an enhanced mandate, including supervision of the Auditor General's Office; the establishment of special Sectoral Committees, the revision of the Standing Orders that provide for more timely responses to questions asked by Members of the Opposition. We have seen these mechanisms living, working and growing. We have seen, for example, in the area of accountability and transparency, how the Auditor General's Report has come to this National Assembly in a timelier manner. Gone are the days when the Auditor General's Report – I am sorry, Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge, I know this is a pet subject of his – will take 10 years to come to this National Assembly by which time it would become completely irrelevant. I have a timeline that shows that in the early 1950s and in the early 1960s our Auditor General's Reports used to come to this National Assembly within a

year. From 1954 to 1961 on no occasion did the Auditor General's Report come to this Parliament with a delay of more than two years. It is a striking coincidence that from 1954 to 1961, on no occasion did it exceed this time frame, and from 1954 to 1965 only one occasion – that occasion being 1962 – did the Auditor General's Report come with a delay to this Parliament of more than two years. We witnessed an immediate decline from 1965/1966. By the time we got to 1970 the Auditor General Report was coming to this Parliament with a nine-year delay. The 1970 Annual Report – often our colleagues on that side of the House do not like to go back in history and they argue that we should not go back in history... [Mr. Neendkumar: But they brought back history with Mr. Greenidge.] I would not necessarily repeat the heckle that I heard behind me but I think it was sufficiently audible for my colleagues on that side of the House. When one is treated or subjected to grandstanding on that side of the House as if this history did not exist, it is from this history we have had to rebuild this country. That is what has preoccupied us for many of the early years of our tenure in office. To pretend that that history did not exist or, worse yet, to stand in this House and seek to rewrite that history is, to put it mildly, most reprehensible.

By 1970 the Auditor General's Report was arriving with a nine-year delay – in bundles, in batches of years – although the law says that one must table accounts annually... Mr. Greenidge spoke of bringing them in batches. The 1971 Auditor General's Report came in 1981; a ten-year delay. Of what relevance, would those accounts be that were ten years old? All of the accounting officers would be gone or moved on or retired or passed on to some higher and more supreme service, records would not be readily available and memories would be faded. For the period of 1972 to 1981 this pattern continued; a nine-year delay. The 1981 Audited Accounts came in 1987...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you have been speaking for 90 minutes. Can you give some indication... There was an open-ended arrangement today for the Leader of the Opposition and yourself, in rebuttal, but can you give us some indication... I am sensing some anxiety as some documents started to be circulated around the House.

Dr. Singh: I must confess, Mr. Speaker, that I was so engaged in my presentation that I did not notice.

Mr. Speaker: You would not be aware.

Dr. Singh: I would be happy, Mr. Speaker, to go on for as long as you permit me.

6.17 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: I think, reasonably, you should give some idea of how long more you will take.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, will you permit me, Sir, another thirty minutes?

Mr. Speaker: Could we agree on fifteen minutes?

Dr. Singh: I would happily defer to your superior judgement in these matters.

Mr. Speaker: It is a suggestion. Go ahead.

Dr. Singh: Lo and behold! During the period 1982 to 1991, no audited accounts ever made their way to this National Assembly. No amount... [Ms. Ally: Every year you come in this National Assembly and it is the same thing.] Our friends on that side of the House do not like to hear it, but I will say this: If we are speaking of a new beginning, if we are speaking of this dispensation, working in a functional manner, there must be openness and honesty about the journey our country has travelled. We cannot continue to pretend that this history did not exist. [Ms. Wade: You have said it already.] I will say it again. As long as my colleagues on that side of the House would want to pretend that it did not happen, I will be constrained to continue to repeat it.

Much is made on the matter of accountability and Mr. Greenidge, in fact, made bold to lead the Opposition's charge on this matter. I have before me a copy of the 11th November edition of the *Guyana Chronicle*. [Ms. Ally: What is the year?] It is the 11th November, 1992. It is an article that captures an exchange between the then Auditor General Mr. Anand Goolsarran and the then Minister of Finance Mr. Carl Greenidge. The headline states, "Goolsarran claims Greenidge tried to muzzle him." I have the article here. I would be happy to share it. The article reads:

“Auditor General Mr. Anand Goolsarran is claiming that former Finance Minister Mr. Carl Greenidge tried to stop him from speaking to the press about the previous Government’s divestment moves.”

He went on to say that he had received a letter several months ago from Mr. Greenidge, “...in which he attempted to instruct me not to speak to the press and not to seek out information on divestment.” It is the same Mr. Greenidge who appears to have reinvented himself, who appears to have suffered some amnesia and wants to present himself, now, as a reborn champion of accountability. I would suggest that a good start would be an explanation of the dismal period, from 1983 to 1992, over which Mr. Greenidge presided, including his attempt to muzzle Mr. Goolsarran, as is quoted in this article. That would be a good start.

If we are to have a frank and honest discussion, we cannot pretend to be saints and that the pre-1992 period did not happen, and all of this is the figment of somebody’s imagination, and that these things are some concoction by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) to paint the PNC badly. That could scarcely be the beginning of this new dispensation at work. So I suggest that on the matter of accountability, that before my friends, on that side of the House, want to seek to denigrate the very tangible progress that has been made by this Government in strengthening accountability and transparency, they start being honest about the dismal state of affairs and their dismal legacy as it relates to accountability, and, indeed, their role in creating this state of affairs.

We have actively utilised the mechanisms available to us to ensure that documents are placed in the public domain. In fact, I have a summary of the documents tabled in the Ninth Parliament, and no less than one hundred and thirty-two Annual Reports of various entities and no less than seventy-one sets of audited financial statements were tabled for various entities - dozens of entities. I have a long list of them here, from public sector companies - Bauxite Industry Development Company (BIDCO), Berbice Mining Enterprise (BERMINE), Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA), Guyana Power and Light (GPL), Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA), Lethem Power Company Inc, and it goes on. There are more than two hundred documents placed in the public domain in order to ensure that there is good accountability for public resources. That is a principle that we, as a Government, will always embrace.

The fact of the matter is that if one were to ask oneself about the key issues captured in the theme of this budget...The theme speaks of remaining on course. So the questions are asked: In which direction are we travelling? Have we been moving in the right direction? As I said earlier, the resounding answer to those questions is that our country is moving in the right direction - whether it is the fact that our macroeconomic fundamentals are stronger than ever before; whether it be the fact that we have grown uninterruptedly for the last six years when our sister CARICOM Member States are floundering in the challenges of the global economic crisis; whether it be the fact that our rice production is now at its highest level ever, four hundred and two thousand tons as compared to one hundred and fifty-one thousand tons in 1991; whether it be that our gold declarations, setting aside Omai Gold Mines Limited, are the highest level, three hundred and sixty-three thousand tons as compared to fifty-nine thousand tons in 1991 – the list goes on - whether it be our examination participation rates, and Minister Manickchand spoke, notwithstanding her relative youth, of how rapidly the number of students registering for examination, school leaver examinations, as the Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate Examination (CSEC) and the number of students passing those examinations, and how phenomenally those numbers have grown within the span of the very few years, captured by her own recent experience and whether it is the indicators captured in our Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – access to basic health care, disease incidence, ratio of doctors to patients, number of hospital beds per population. Each of those indicators has moved steadily in the right direction.

This is something that we should be proud of. This is not something that we should be ashamed of. This is not something that we should view jealously as a PPP/C accomplishment. For a lot of this work, we have only created the policy environment. We have only endeavoured to identify priorities for investing resources. When our students do well, it is not only the work of Dr. Ashni Singh and Ms. Priya Manickchand. It is the work of the headmistress at Leonora Primary School; it is the work of the English teacher at the Stella Maris Primary School; it is the work of the Mathematics CSEC teacher at Tutorial High School.... [Ms. Selman: And it is the work of the parents.] It is the efforts of the parents; and it is the efforts of the students themselves. We must not be shy to acknowledge the progress that we have made in these regards. When we improve on our medical indicators, our disease incidence, that is not the work of Dr. Ashni Singh, Dr. Bheri Ramsaran or Dr. Leslie Ramsammy. It is the work of the doctors who are on

call, sometimes for twenty-four hours, at the East Bank Demerara Regional Hospital and at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC). It is the work of the nurses who attend to patients, day in and day out, and we must not be shy to acknowledge their efforts. We must not begrudge them the recognition that is due to them.

When our economy is growing, it is not only because we, the PPP/C, have created the right policy environment. It is because private sector companies are investing and reinvesting every day; it is because of the companies that are manufacturing, whether it is furniture, food products; it is because of the farmers who wake up at 4.00 a.m. to go into the fields to produce goods, put their goods on a truck that now drives across the Berbice River Bridge, instead of them rotting at New Amsterdam. We may have facilitated the construction of the bridge but it is the farmer from Black Bush Polder who wakes up at 4.00 a.m.... I see my colleague, and friend, the Hon. Member Jafarally nodding, because he knows many of those farmers who wake up at 4.00 a.m. every day, whether it is to milk their cows or go and harvest their crops. Hundreds of thousands of Guyanese people work hard every day to contribute to growth in this country. And so, we must not begrudge the people of this country. We are not spiting the PPP/C when we deny that growth happened; we are not spiting or taking away something from the PPP/C when we say that the health and education sectors are not improving, we are deluding ourselves and begrudging the people of Guyana due recognition for the hard work that they are doing.

Why is this observation especially important? This observation is especially important because over the course of the next six days we will be considering the national Estimates and it is easy - just as how Hon. Members brandish numbers that they pluck out of thin air even when they deliberately, and otherwise, multiply them incorrectly - to brandish the imaginary scissors in the air as if to drive fear in anyone. Over the next six days we will be considering the national Estimates and it is the legitimate right of the Opposition to ask any questions it wishes, within the Standing Orders, in relation to those numbers. It is, indeed, the legitimate right of the Opposition to propose any change, within the boundaries of the Standing Orders, to any of those numbers. We, in the People's Progressive Party/Civic, will always defend that right. Our laws provide for it; our Standing Orders provide for it, and we will defend that right. But I will say this: that that right shall have to be wielded and exercised responsibly because the people of Guyana are watching. It is easy to brandish your scissors and say, "I am cutting. I am coming

with the fearsome scissors.” It is easy to brandish the scissors as if it is an emblem of the tyranny of one, but I would urge careful and judicious judgement. I would urge responsibility. In fact, my colleagues are showing me that there is a document that is already circulated...

Mr. Speaker: I did not want to cause anxiety. There are certain documents which have started to make the round.

Dr. Singh: I see these documents being circulated – proposed cuts to staffing, employment cost, cutting on the number of people. I see a document circulated under the name of Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan...

Mr. Nagamootoo: I rise on a Point of Order, Mr. Speaker. The document alluded to has not been moved. It is not under consideration in the House and it cannot entertain a debate on a document that has not been moved as yet.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member Mr. Moses Nagamootoo has made a valid point. It is a notice of a motion that is proposed to be moved tomorrow. The Hon. Minister may take notice of its existence, of it being laid before the House, but whether or not we should begin our debate or comment on it now, I do not believe it is a wise thing to do.

Dr. Singh: As always Mr. Speaker, I am guided by your ruling. Without making any direct reference to the contents of the document, I will say this, that as we approach the consideration of the national Estimates, it is important that we bear in mind that we are speaking of resources allocated to fund important Government programmes - whether in health, education, housing and water, public infrastructure, public works, tourism, industry and commerce, general administration and foreign affairs. I believe that even if the opportunity was lost over the last six days to put tangible meaning to the intention expressed to work together, it would be my sincere hope that over the next six days there will be judicious and responsible conduct in this National Assembly. **[Mr. Nagamootoo: Judicious cuts.]** I hear Mr. Nagamootoo is threatening by saying “judicious cuts”. I hear a noise coming from that corner from the House’s resident arithmetician. He has already proved his arithmetic abilities. I am sure he will apply it when he is doing the cuts. I hope he does not compute these cuts the same way he computed the public debt, Sir, otherwise the people of Guyana will be in big trouble.

I will say this, that it is incumbent on all of us to ensure that we do not use this tyranny of one, the power of the majority of one, to cut solely for the purpose of cutting. I will say this, that it is the people of Guyana who benefit from the services provided under these programmes. It is the workers of the public sector who are employed and all of them can be named. It is the people of Guyana who do the work every day. It is the people of Guyana who benefit from the goods and services provided.

I will urge - I am looking particularly in the direction of the Leader of the Opposition now - that good sense prevails and that tangible and substantial meaning be put on the lofty statements made about working together. Were we to do otherwise...Were my friends on the other side of the House to capriciously wield the tyrannical scissors, I would say this, that they would be venturing perilously close to squandering the golden opportunity provided to us by the unique circumstances in which we find our country today. I say this for the following reason: At no other time in our country's history have we had as many ripe opportunities for growth and development as we have today. Investors' confidence is at an all-time high - whether it be in oil; whether it be in gold; whether it be in manganese and whether it be in information and communications technology. Every day the reality is that investors are coming to Guyana, they are investing their resources and thousands of jobs are being created. That is a fact.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, those fifteen minutes are up.

Dr. Singh: May I Sir, with your permission, go on for less than...?

Mr. Speaker: Is it to wrap up?

Dr. Singh: It is to literally wrap up.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Singh: Every day young Guyanese persons are finding jobs in these new industries. Every day goods and services are being delivered to this country. At no point in our country's history have we been as close as we are today to energy security and, in particular, energy security from a renewable source. At no point in our country's history have we been as close to achieving the long espoused objective of food security – cultivating and rearing of food crops and produce for export to the Caribbean, meeting the needs of the Caribbean. At no point in our country's history

have we been as close to realising that. At no point in our country's history have we had such a large and rapidly growing services sector. These things did not happen by magic; they did not happen by accident; they did not happen by chance. They happened as a result of diligent and hard work under several Government programmes and projects over the years.

I invite the Opposition to join us in this endeavour to ensure that these opportunities are embraced and are realised; to join us in this endeavour to ensure that the challenges that still lie before are surmounted and overcome. If we were to be guided by some of the platitudes offered, I believe there is still some hope.

I will conclude by thanking, again, those who spoke in favour of the budget and by thanking my colleagues on that side of the House for what I hope will be a careful reconsideration of how they approach the next six or seven days.

I thank you very much Mr. Speaker and I commend, once again, Budget 2012 to this honourable House. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Minister for your marathon rebuttal.

Hon. Members, we have come to the end of a long, comprehensive, deliberative exercise in going through the debate - six days. I would like to say thank you to the Hon. Minister of Finance for presenting his budget and to all the Members of this House who have either supported or responded to it. I would like to particularly thank the Leader of the Opposition for his remarks today and, of course, Mr. Ramjattan, the Minister of Foreign Affairs for her erudite presentation this afternoon, and particularly the new Members. For me, it has been sometimes entertaining, sometimes enlightening, sometimes excruciating, as perhaps it has been for some of you.

I believe that, as an Assembly, we have done well and we should compliment ourselves, and so I say thank you to the Hon. Prime Minister for being a good steward and guide as leader of the Government's business and the Chief Whips for taking us through the paces. I do not see Ms. Teixeira here, but thanks to both Ms. Teixeira and Ms. Amna Ally. I would like to thank the parliamentary staff, led by the Clerk; the Serjeant-at-Arms, Assistant Serjeant-at-Arms and all of the workers who worked. Many of you do not know that they do not leave here until we do and

many do not get home, across the river and elsewhere, until 1.00 a.m. and they are back here for 8.00 a.m. I would like to refer to the auxiliary staff, members of the Guyana Police Force, members of other agencies which are called out to support our work, even the drivers and others who attend to Ministers and Members of Parliament, thank you. Of course, I do not think that I should exclude the media for being responsible throughout the exercise, and members of the public who have graced us with their presence.

Hon. Members, before we go into committee to consider the report of the Business Subcommittee and the deliberations and findings as of yesterday, I would just like to say that at the commencement of this sitting, this afternoon, Hon. Member Mrs. Volda Lawrence asked a question which she had sought my permission to ask, that is, whether or not the Minister of Finance was prepared to engage with Members of the Opposition – A Partnership for National Unity and the Alliance For Change – in deliberations to avoid, I believe were her words, any potential confusion regarding the Estimates. The Hon. Minister responded in the affirmative. I believe he gave the answer that all Guyanese expected to give that at no time should the doors for discussion, negotiation or even for compromise be closed. So I applaud both the Minister for that response and Mrs. Lawrence for being courageous enough to ask the question. I say all of that to say that we have seen the first wave of what is likely to come tomorrow. I am going to, at the end of this sitting, this evening, invite a few Members from both sides of the House, perhaps two or three Members of each side, to meet with me in Chamber, because whatever may happen, whether you meet and speak, and you decide, or you agree or disagree, I still believe there is time enough for us to work out a *modus vivendi*, in terms of how we will proceed in deliberating and agreeing on the Estimates from tomorrow, and thereafter.

My sense is that both sides wish to have engagements and both sides will, of course, put in place the methodology to ensure that those engagements take place. I know that the Clerk would have no difficulty in saying that the National Assembly, and its offices, including my office, is available at any time to teams or representatives of the two sides of the three parties who wish to use these facilities and the building to meet before we commence the consideration of the Estimates. I believe, as the Hon. Minister of Finance said, that we are actually on the cusp of either something great, monumental, for the people of Guyana or we are on the cusp, as well, of something that could be disastrous, if not handled maturely, responsibly and patriotically.

With those words said, I would now ask that, before we adjourn, we consider and dispose of the report of the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply on the allocation of time for the consideration of the 2012 Estimates of Expenditure by the Committee of Supply. We will have to go into the Committee of Supply for this purpose. The Assembly will now resolve itself into Committee of Supply.

Assembly in Committee of Supply

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I wish to report that the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply met yesterday, 16th April, 2012, and considered the allocation of time for the consideration of the 2012 Estimates of Expenditure in that Committee and it passed a resolution on the matter. Copies of that Committee's minutes, resolution and schedule have already been circulated, as of last evening. I now call on the Minister of Finance to kindly move the necessary motion.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I now move

“That this Committee of Supply doth agree with the Business Sub-Committee in the said resolution.”

Question put, and agreed to.

Assembly resumed.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, I now ask that you move the motion for the adjournment of the House.

Mr. Hinds: I move that the House be adjourned to tomorrow at 2.00 p.m. when the consideration of the Estimates will commence.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, again, before I rise, I invite from, each party, two Members, if perhaps it wishes to bring three, relevant to, of course, the critical and important exercise that we are about to commence tomorrow.

Adjourned accordingly at 6.45 p.m.

