

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2006-2010) OF THE NINTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN

111TH Sitting

Monday, 15TH February, 2010

The Assembly convened at 2.06 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in Chair]

OATH OF A NEW MEMBER

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, following the passing of Dr. Desrey Clementine Ceaser-Fox, I call upon the representatives of the People Progressive Party Civic list of candidates. I have been informed that the name of Mr. Lloyd Joyston Pereira was extracted from the list and that Mr. Pereira was on the 8th of February, 2010 declared to be an elected Member of the National Assembly.

Before Mr. Pereira can take part in the proceedings of the National Assembly, he will have to make and subscribe to the oath before the Assembly as required by article 167 of the Constitution. As Mr. Pereira is present, he will in a moment make and subscribe to the oath which will be administered to him by the Clerk.

Hon. Members, following the resignation of Mr. Anthony Vieira, I call upon the representatives of the People's National Congress/Reform One Guyana list of candidates. I have been informed that the name of Mrs. Dawn Hastings was extracted from the list and that Mrs. Hastings was on the 4th of February, 2010 declared to be an elected Member of the National Assembly.

Before Mrs. Hastings can take part in the proceedings of the Assembly, she will have to make and subscribe to the oath of the Assembly as required by article 167 of the Constitution. As Mrs. Hastings is present, she will in a moment make and subscribe to the oath which will be administered to her by the Clerk.

The oath was administered to Mr. Lloyd Joyston Pereira and Mrs. Dawn Hastings.

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I would like on behalf of the Members of the National Assembly and myself, to congratulate Mr. Lloyd Joyston Pereira and Mrs. Dawn Hastings on their becoming Members of the National Assembly. I welcome them to the National Assembly and I extend best wishes to them.

Also I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Hon. Member Robert Corbin on his birthday. I must confess that I did not remember, but I was told this as I was on my up and made a mental note that I should make this congratulation. But as I was given my notes by my secretary as I came in, it was already there. So it is popular knowledge of this event of Mr. Corbin among my staff.

Leader of the Opposition [Mr. Corbin]: Thank you, Sir.

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

By Mr. Murray on behalf of Mrs. Lawrence (Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee):

The Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Public Accounts of Guyana for 2004 and 2005.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, there is only one question on the order paper and it is for a written reply. The question is under the name of Mr. Mervyn Williams. The answer is therefore in accordance with our Standing Orders that is being circulated.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTER INCLUDING POLICY STATEMENT

Minister of Foreign Affairs [Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make a very short statement about reports emanating from the Republic of Suriname that there were presidential instructions under the previous Surinamese Government to invade Guyana's territory namely; the New River Triangle. There were of course other recent statements from politicians in and out of the current Surinamese Government that seek to propagate the unjust Suriname claims to Guyana's territory.

It is a well established fact that in 1936 the Governments of the Federated Republic of Brazil, Great Britain and the Netherlands, identify the tri-junction point at which the boundaries of British Guiana, now Guyana, Dutch Guiana, now Suriname and Brazil meet. That tri-junction point clearly recognises the boundary as being on the head waters of the Kutari River, thereby recognising the New River Triangle as being within sovereign territory of Guyana.

In spite of that conscious Act, successive Governments of Suriname have sought, illegally, to annex Guyana's territory including, by an unsuccessful armed invasion in 1969 that ended when the Guyana Defence Force expelled the Surinamese military personnel from the area.

The public statements currently being reported in one of the Surinamese press have confirmed that in the year 2000, the very year in which Suriname violated Guyana's exclusive economic zone and forcibly remove the CGX rig from Guyana's waters, the then Government of Suriname also had formulated plans for the invasion of the New River triangle. Such an Act would have also have been in breach of international law just as the tribunal that heard the Maritime dispute between Guyana and Suriname which ruled that the removal of the CGX rig by Suriname:

“Constituted as a threat by the use of force in breach of the United Nations convention on the Law of the Sea, the UN charter and general international law”

Guyana has taken note of the confirmation of the stated hostile plans of Suriname in 2000 and is conscious of the fact that the current Government of the Republic of Suriname has not yet disassociated itself from the admitted invasion instructions, and has not sought to clarify that it opposes the use of force against the territorial integrity of Guyana in the wake of the public admittance.

This is of utmost importance in view of continued agitations in Suriname for annexation of Guyana’s territory. The Government of Guyana has alerted several key international and regional organisations of the publicly declared instruction to invade Guyana’s territory which, had it occurred, would not have only constituted a material breach of international law, but would have resulted in the destruction of the peace in the region. Guyana has also advised the organisations that it is hopeful that inflammatory statements emanating from official and unofficial sources in Suriname do not signal a return to an adventurist posture by the Republic of Suriname and that its Government would eschew its use of force.

The use or the threat of the use of force would indeed be a breach of international law that would require Guyana to take action to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity. I have met with the Surinamese Ambassador in Georgetown and registered Guyana’s grave concerns, not only about the admitted instructions, but also about the failure of the current Surinamese Government to reassure Guyana and the international community that the use or the threat of the use of force is not an option that Suriname currently embraces.

In the face of the admittance, the onus is left on the Surinamese Government to make a public statement to that effect, or else Guyana and the international community would have to interpret that silence as an indication that the use of force is still a component of the Republic of Suriname’s policy towards Guyana. I thank you.

Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communication [Mr. Hinds]: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. Hon. Members I rise to move a motion standing in my name, essentially this motion is for the suspension of Standing Order No. 71 which now sets five days for the debate. Our groups/various parties looking at the coming days have got together and suggested

that we agree on this occasion to extend the number of days for debate to six days. This is convenient particularly for this year because six days of debate will take us to next Monday and as we all know, next Tuesday is Mashramani. We will be off Tuesday but then we will come back Wednesday, Thursday and Friday to consider the estimates and conclude this budget debate process. Mr. Speaker, I expect that there is full support all around to this motion and I beg for it to be put to the House.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members the question is that Standing Order No. 71 (2) be suspended to enable debate on the motion for the approval of revenue and expenditure for the year 2010 to be extended to six days.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BUDGET DEBATE FOR THE YEAR 2010

Mr. Murray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the People's National Congress/Reform One Guyana, I congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance on the occasion of the presentation of his fourth budget to the nation. Unfortunately, once again the Hon. Minister has demonstrated the abandonment of the tenant of consultation as part of the preparatory process for the budget. This is a violation of both the spirit and letter of article 13 of our constitution.

On the occasion of our last budget debate, there were noises on the Government benches that consultations were continually ongoing in many areas and by many Ministers and Ministries. However, none of those or any other can be a substitute for direct consultation by the Hon. Minister of Finance with consumer organisations, labour, private sector stakeholders, including employers and even opinion leaders in our society on such issues of taxation, its effects on consumers, prices, wages and salaries, fiscal and other incentives to private investors, reform of the tax regime, etc.

I would therefore urge the Hon. Minister of Finance to return to what has become a tradition of consultation as part of the process of budget preparation. The thought is seldom far away since the current Minister believes that he does not need to be involved in such consultations since he knows it all.

On the budget itself, the P.N.C./R.-1G encapsulating observation would be the signal failure of the Government to cast this budget and indeed previous budgets within a clear over arching strategy, with clearly identified medium and long-term objectives. For example, what are the targets for job creation opening for the next five years and what of that number would be created in 2010? What are the protected levels of investment over the same period and in what sectors? What, if any tax reforms, are to be implemented to create a more competitive and welcoming business environment for investors, and what in medium term, is the rate of economic growth that we are striving for if Guyana is to attain its true and full potential and prosperity is to be realised?

The average rate of growth over the last five years has been 2.8%. Is this really the basis on which we could seriously expect prosperity to be realised? I think not. International development strategy, we were told that even with a growth rate of 6% per annum, we would be far from the forefront of developing countries. In this regard, he should note that the People's Republic of China and India are ruled by 8.7 and 5.6%, respectively in 2009.

It is therefore not enough to tell us each year the budget is the largest ever. When each year, we seem to cover little or no ground and putting this country on the sure road of prosperity. I will return to the economy later in my presentation.

As regards our social sector, every year we are regaled with the billions being spent in and on them. We hear of the emphasis being constructed and sometimes we are told of personnel being provided, training undertaken and equipment put in place.

Let us for a moment look at two sectors. First, let us take the Health sector between 2009 and 2010 alone. We would spend approximately \$130 billion in the sector. But surely the measure of success or progress in the sector ought not to and indeed cannot be shared by the mere expenditure of those large sums. The P.N.C./R.-1G with great modesty, suggests that the interests of citizens would be better served and the project would have a more human face if

qualitative tasks are identified for fulfillment in the context of an overarching strategy. Targets should be in areas like; average life expectancy, infant mortality rates, suicide rates, etc.

In the education sector between 2009 and 2010 alone, you would have spent some US\$208. However, while 96% of the children of primary school age are enrolled in school, secondary school enrollment is at 69%. The remaining children are still enrolled in primary school or drop out altogether. There is also a significant differential, that is, the lower rate of enrollments in the interior locations, and as between males and females. We also know that the performance of our students at examination, especially in certain subjects, needs to be improved. Again the P.N.C./R.-1G, respectfully suggests that quantifiable verifiable targets should be set in the budget as part of an overarching medium term strategy.

What about infrastructure? Could we not categorise roads in various grades with a definition for each grade, the length of time each grade is expected to last, and the cost per mile? Of course, we would need to have a special category called the election roads. A simple definition of which would be that roads to last until the next election. This definition clearly already exists in the lexicon of the ordinary citizen.

Interestingly seventeen years into the P.P.P./C. Government of Guyana, we hear that the President warned hospitals and schools to get up to standards. He said that this year his administration has given the commitment of getting value for money for the huge investments made in key sectors like health and education. Specifically on education, he has been reported to have said:

“We cannot just keep pumping all these money into the education sector and not get corresponding results”.

Some would say that these are crocodile tears. Closing the stable doors after the horse has bored it. I would say however, better late than never, let us wait and see.

I now wish to turn my attention to the Minister of Finance’s presentation of statistics on the performance and the projected performance of the economy.

A few examples would suffice to make a point that the Hon. Minister, by his presentation, probably concealed more than he revealed.

At page six of the budget speech, he said that the economy grew by 2.3% in 2009 and highlighted that it was the fourth consecutive year of positive growth. What he did not reveal, was that he had predicted real growth of 4.7% for 2009, hence the actual outturn was less than half of what was forecast, so much for his reliability of forecasts and growth.

Also at page six of the budget speech we are told that in 2009, sugar production amounted to 233,736 tonnes, an increase of 3.3% over the previous year. But what we were not told was that for 2009, the sugar production target was 290,000 tonnes and that the outturn was approximately 20% below what was forecast.

Further, the increase of 3.3% in 2009 production over 2008 has to be measured against the Minister's projection for a 28.2% increase in 2009 over 2008.

As regards to the statistics on rice, let me congratulate the rice farmers of Guyana on the achievement in 2009 of the highest annual production in a decade, a fact revealed by the Hon. Minister of Finance. What he did not reveal however, was that the earnings of the industry as a whole was stagnant. [Interruption- "He did say that!"]. He did not say so in his budget speech. I urge each and every one of you to go back and read it and Prime Minister could you find me the page please?

... on the account for lower prices in the export market. With respect to our debt situation, we note the Minister's reference to the: "Considerable reduction of the stop in recent years". This is a statement with which the P.N.C./R.-1G agrees.

What the Hon. Minister did not say was that the bulk of the US \$933 million stock of debt at the end of 2009 represents new money borrowed by P.P.P./C. Government. Further, this stock is projected to rise to some US\$1.3 billion in 2010, the building of which up of which could be an ominous situation for the future.

We need to remind ourselves that Guyana remains a country that is moderately at risk of debt distress. This situation therefore needs careful monitoring.

Before I move on to the 2010 scenario, I can do no better than summarising where we are in 2009 by quoting in parts from the Intelligence Unit of the Economists, a report dated 26th January, 2010 and this is what it says:

“For 2009 Guyana is ranked 101st out of 160 countries in the Economic Intelligence Unit quantity of life index”.

Within the Caribbean, Guyana scores better only than Haiti, 152nd, this is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. The country's core is held back by two scores for G.D.P. per head, life expectancy, security risks, corruption and political freedom.

Between 1995 and 2006, there was a massive buildup of public-sector debt and an unstable political situation which has catastrophic confidences for private investment. At 66.3 years in 2009, life expectancy was upped only by 4.7 years. Since 1989, Guyana had the third lowest life expectancy in Latin Americas and the Caribbean [Mr. Neendkumar: “Is everything bad so?”] You are now finding out.

... and falls even below the average 67.9 years.

High levels of unemployment, the report continues, and crime brings down Guyana's overall score. Poor economic management has led to weak G.D.P. growth, ensuring that unemployment has remained in the double-digit since the 1980s despite one of the highest rates of outward migration in the world. The score and the quantity of life index in 1999 were 5.13 out of 10.

In 2009, twenty years later, it is 5.26, but there is marginal improvement on that score.

In 1989, the Global rank for quantity of life was 109.

In 2009, it was near 101, again a marginal improvement.

I now want to turn to what we face in 2010. The Minister projects a growth of 4.4% using the rebase national accounts on which I need to extend congratulations to the Bureau of Statistics and the Government for achieving this rebasing of accounts, and for a relook and reconfiguration of the Consumer Price Index. But even if this projected growth were achieved, the average growth would then increase from 2.8 to 3%.

2.35 p.m.

This minimal average increase is unlikely to have any significant positive impact on our chronic and growing level of unemployment. This also makes it evident that prosperity is nowhere around the corner. Let us look at some specifics.

Sugar was supposed to be the flagship within the traditional sectors, but the present position shows that for the last years, the industry has been making significant losses and is projected to continue to do so until at least 2012, when it is projected to return to marginal profitability. This is the position notwithstanding the fact that Government has taken over significant debts from GUYSUICO and notwithstanding the bragging of about \$2 billion worth of cost reduction in 2009. This industry is being significantly subsidised by the Guyanese taxpayer. A massive investment to over US\$160 billion is expected to ramp up sugar production ultimately to 450,000 tonnes per annum. The issue is that at what cost of production and, therefore, how competitively?

In 1998, the cost of production was US21 cents per pound; current cost of production is about US28 cents per pound. Clearly this is headed in the wrong direction. **[Mr. Neendkumar:** “Where did you get those figures from?”] Your Minister said so in the Economic Services Committee last Thursday or Friday, Sir.

The new target is 15 to 16 cents per pound by 2014, but it is anybody’s guess as to how reliable this is. Given the recent steep cuts in the E.U. guaranteed price and the volatility of the international market price, it will be pure guess work or close to it, to predict with any certainty the viability of this industry.

The state of the Skeldon factory and the availability of the 1.2 million tonnes of cane necessary to feed it are also causes for concern. We are assured in the turnaround plan that the canes will be available. The question is: How soon? Until then, the Skeldon factory will continue to operate below capacity, thereby negatively affecting the cost of production and possibly the technical functioning and efficiency of the factory.

Beyond that, this industry is in a crisis from middle and higher level management and technical skills. There is acknowledgement that the reserves of experience and skills within GuySuCo are continually being depleted by the migration of the most talented people. The less experienced, many of whom are politically appointed, who fill their places, cause headaches for GuySuCo in achieving its production targets. The GuySuCo turnaround plan makes it very clear that the

future viability of the industry is dependent on accelerated mechanisation and the plan calls for a 44% mechanisation by 2014. In consequence, the number of estate labourers to be employed is projected to decrease from approximately 18,500 in 2008 to around 12,600 by 2015. In 2010, the number is expected to be reduced by about 4,000 compared with 2008. The Minister's often dubious asseverations that there is no policy to lay off workers cannot belie the stark reality that there will be increasingly less need for estate workers under the industry's public plan.

However, most worrying of all is the open politicisation in what should be at its core, an economic enterprise. GuySuCo is a company supposedly managed by a Board of Directors. In constituting this Board, one would have thought we would have tapped into relevant skills and experience which could assist in the formulation of sensible, implementable, economic policies for the company. For that to be the case, the presence of the Chairman of the Board being a high politically appointed official from the Office of the President, would be questionable. This is compounded by the fact that the General Secretary of the P.P.P. is also a Director on the Board.

As though this were not enough, there is the suffocating, ubiquitous presence of the Minister of Agriculture in all things to do with GuySuCo. Come in Minister and hear your praises. If the Economic Services Committee wants to interact with GuySuCo, it is the Minister who it must write and who heads the team. If you want to visit the Skeldon factory, you must get the approval of the Minister of Agriculture, and if we need a document or information relating to GuySuCo or sugar, it is the Minister of Agriculture who we must write. It is our view that it is for the Minister of Agriculture to form a policy and probably set targets in consultation with the Board. However, it is for the Board of Directors and the Management of GuySuCo to execute policy and achieve targets.

Given all of the above, one is bound to consider seriously when it is not the case that the heavy capital investment in sugar is more consistent with political calculations than with economic ideas and logic.

While the P.N.C./R.-1 Guyana wishes this industry well, we cannot in honesty say we are excited by its prospects. Then we are told that other agriculture products is expected to grow by 2.1% as Agricultural Diversification Programmeme and Grow More Campaign continue to reap rewards, so the Minister tells us. Back in 2007 we were told that:

“As a net exporter of food, Guyana is well poised to take a larger share of the US\$3 billion food import bill of CARICOM.”

Sadly, we have heard nothing since about the inroads we are making or hope to make in 2010 and beyond into this market. You would also recall the rather emphatic announcement by the Minister of Agriculture a few years back when we proclaimed that the three ‘Ps’ namely plantains, pineapples and peppers would make great production and export strives.

I have in my possession the Annual Report for the Bank of Guyana for 2008 because 2009 is not yet available, and this is what it reveals at table 10.1. Giving the year 2000, an index of 100, the production of a number of commodities is measured in relation to that index for the years 2001 – 2008. The 2008 index for plantains was 11; pineapples 41.2; peppers 41.5; cereals and legumes 10.8; cassava 9; other ground provisions 13.8. Among the non-traditional commodities, only in the case of coffee and poultry meat was the index higher than 100.

It seems therefore that there is no reasonable basis for great expectations any time soon even with the Minister of Agriculture’s effervescence and buoyancy. If we examine carefully the picture for growth in 2010 and indeed coming forward from before 2007, what is and has been significantly missing is the laying of a true foundation for the facilitation, encouragement and realisation of sustained, strong, economic growth through private sector investment, and in particular foreign direct investment.

I hope we would all agree that a growth rate of 2% and 3% per annum for a low, middle-income developing country like Guyana is hardly the basis on which prosperity can be built or expected in the foreseeable future. In this regard the P.N.C./R.-1 Guyana believes that there are four prerequisites for true take off growth. They are: one, comprehensive reform of the tax system; two, clear and uniformed ground rules for investment without the imposition of ministerial discretion; three, a facilitating institutional framework; and four, an aggressive programmeme for seeking out investors and investments. The budget is conspicuously silent on all of them and because of constraints of time; I will briefly deal only with two of them.

First, tax reform; in the 2008 Budget Speech, at page 41, the Minister of Finance said:

“Our Government is firm in its belief that our tax system must promote our competitiveness as an investment destination. It must be simple and efficiently administered.”

Truer words have never been said. We were also told then:

“In 2008, we will conduct a study of our tax system to determine how we will implement further tax reform.”

Sadly, there was no reference whatsoever to the study in either the Budget of 2009 or 2010 although we are told at page 51 of the 2010 budget Speech that:

“Consideration will be given to options for tax reform.”

The fact is that the review of the Guyana tax system was done in 2008, but for all practical purposes it has been gathering dust. Here, I want to say, are some of the findings and recommendations from that review:

1. Guyana tax yields have been high over a long period. Among lower, middle-income countries, Guyana ranks number one with an average tax yield of 33% compared to the group average of 17.7%;
2. Employees in Guyana are relatively heavily taxed. The income tax threshold is \$35,000 per month and there is a 33 1/3 flat rate of tax on all income after that. This is coupled with a 5.2% employee N.I.S. contribution. On top of this, employees like others in the society pay a broad based 16% VAT as well as excise taxes and import duties on a number of consumer items;
3. Guyana has high and differentiated tax rates on business income – 45% on commercial companies, 35% on non-commercial companies and 33 1/3% on all incorporated business. Within the Caribbean, corporate tax rates range from 40% in Barbados to 36% in Suriname; 33 1/3% in Jamaica; 30% in Haiti; and 25% in Belize and in Trinidad and Tobago. There are recommendations in the report that the rate in Guyana could be

lowered to a uniformed 30% with confidence that with such a rate, Guyana would be providing an effective foreign investment incentive;

4. Guyana has consistently scored poorly across a range of different country ratings that reflect the risks and costs of doing business in Guyana. It should be mentioned here that as regards to the ease of doing business in Guyana, Guyana is ranked in 2010 at 101 out of 183, slipping three places from a rank of 98 in 2009.

I call on the Minister of Finance to urgently address these issues as a matter of the highest priority in the interest of obtaining significant and sustained growth.

Secondly, an aggressive programme for seeking out investors. This task could be undertaken by the energised and restructured GO-INVEST. However, this institution did not even earn a mention in the 2010 Budget Speech. In 2009, we were told that a revised investor road map – an investor guide – was to be completed in the year 2009. In addition, three additional sector profiles were to be completed, but alas, we have had no word on any of this. We repeat our suggestion that in all sectors in which we need investment, we must work the international fora and the international network where investors are gathered to prosecute our calls for investment. We must become more proactive. This effort should be accorded the highest possible priority.

Of course ability, commitment and dynamism are prerequisites for success. Often we wonder whether this Government has any appetite whatever for foreign direct investment. Sometimes we get the feeling too that the Government fears that the presence of any large international company could affect its absolute control over the economy and attendant matters. Perhaps too, more recently, these matters have become irrelevant given the apparently new found panacea for development, namely the much touted and proclaimed Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). While the advocacy for the LCDS has been spirited and passionate and the promotion superb, we must regrettably acknowledge that the results have been disappointing. The lesson here is *'do not put all your eggs in one basket'*.

With almost a blinkered approach to the pursuit of this LCDS, the Government may have been neglecting other important policy issues and in the process has also incurred the wrath and fury of miners and foresters among others. Ultimate agreed annual receipts of US\$580 million are projected with the period 2010 to 2015 anticipated to yield between US\$60 million and US\$230

annually. We of the P.N.C./R.-1Guyana, hold the view that it would be gravely mistaken to believe that the LCDS, as currently defined, is likely to be significantly implemented in the foreseeable future. On the run up to Copenhagen, perhaps we built up the expectation of our people way beyond the likely and, as it turned out, proven outcome. Let us not perpetuate a myth. I would have expected that the enthusiasm and the expectation that the Government had before Copenhagen would have been tempered and severely dampened by the Copenhagen outcome. Although the Minister of Finance acknowledges: “The outcome was disappointing”.

... he clings to hope by mentioning that the door was left open for a successor meeting in 2010. I urge the Hon. Minister and indeed the whole Government to plummet back to earth so that the issues I raised earlier could be seriously and expeditiously addressed.

Let us examine where we are with this LCDS. The only money on offer in connection therewith is US\$250 million from Norway between 2010 and 2015, an average of just over US\$40 million per year. The Government has penned in an expectation of US\$30 million for 2010. This is a far and distant cry from the US\$60 million to US\$230 million per annum contemplated in the revised version of the LCDS itself in 2010 and 2015. In addition, we are informed at page 7 of the second draft of the LCDS that Guyana has 15 million hectares of pristine forest and that the President has offered to a REDD regime, the entire forest less the 13.9% of that amount owned by the Amerindians who may choose whether or not to opt in.

The US\$40 million average per annum from Norway represents just under 7% of the projected sum of \$580 million per annum or at its best 17% of the US\$230 billion projected by 2015. Yet in its MOU and concept paper with Norway, the Government is not limiting arrangements to the preservation of one million or 2.5 million hectares of forest which would be the proportionate amount of forest based on the two percentage just mentioned...

Mr. Speaker: Your time is up Mr. Murray.

Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly [Mrs. Riehl]: Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask that the Hon. Member be given 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Murray: Thank you, Sir. But rather the Government includes all of the forests under its deal in Norway. If we go to the ninth page of the concept note – and I am being very specific here – on the cooperation between Guyana and Norway, we will see that the system for calculating the maximum level of financial support from that country is based on a forest area of 15 million hectares which in fact, includes the Amerindian areas, although there is a note saying the areas would be less if indigenous groups did not opt in. What manner of madness is this?

If we commit ourselves to conservation of all the forests for a 7% or 17% level of financial support, what incentive would there be for anyone else to pay up any other sum? Somebody has a lot of explaining to do to the people of Guyana. If this is not a sweetheart deal, then Norway simply got a steal.

Additionally, when one reads and assesses the concept note, the assurances to miners and foresters, ring hollow. It is our respectful view that miners are particularly vulnerable. No one can reasonably take issue with the need to promote and indeed insist on higher standards of environmental sustainability. However, the real fear is that such an objective will be used as a basis for closing down miners' operations. This suspicion is reinforced by the statement on mining made at page 31 of the second draft of the LCDS which states that:

“Where necessary, compensation will be provided to those whose livelihoods have been impacted negatively as a consequence of REDD and related activities.”

Clearly, displacement is contemplated. Miners have requested that a certain small percentage of the forested areas be reserved for mining. I heard the President say that he did not want to name any percentage of land to be marked for mining since if minerals were found in 10% of the land, then it should be mined. With great respect to His Excellency the President, reservation of a minimum percentage of land would not preclude increasing the amount later, if necessary.

I could not leave the 2010 framework without reference to and comments on the statement that Guyana's largest budget ever, requires the introduction of no new taxes. Given what I have said earlier about tax yield and tax burden, the issue is not 'no new taxes', but rather doing something to lift the oppressive burden of taxation on the citizenry. That is what we have to do. And with that connection we call for the return of the VAT windfall to the people through a reduction. And we call for a reintroduction of a graduated progressive rate of income tax.

It also has to be noted that for the second straight year nothing has been done to increase the income tax threshold thereby, completely ignoring even the inflation effect of the real value of that threshold. I urge the Hon. Minister to reconsider these matters and give the poor man an ease in the burden he carries.

There has been no announcement of an increase in wages for workers and I guess the principle of collective bargaining for public servants will be honoured yet again in the breach, and that a unilateral decision at the absolute discretion of the Government, will be made later. How contemptuous of public service labour this is, could hardly be overstated.

I was amused at what the Hon. Minister of Finance mentioned in his two paragraphs on governance by suggesting that the parliamentary mechanisms established to promote good governance function effectively. I want to tell him that they do not; that the Parliamentary Management Committee, through no fault necessarily of yours, Sir, as the Chairman of that Committee, has hardly been managing the affairs of this National Assembly. We cannot get the Government to even bring us a list of the legislative agenda for any period of time – three months, six months or a year. They shirk the responsibility to do this. In fact, what they would like us to discuss at the Parliamentary Management Committee very often has nothing to do with the management of parliamentary affairs. If this Committee is to function well, as the Minister would like to think, then we have to get to the stage where it carries out the execution of the management of parliamentary business which is contemplated in the resolution that established it.

With respect to the Economic Services Committee, I have to highlight the unresponsiveness of the Minister of Finance to invitations to him to come to that Committee to update us on matters relating to C.L.I.C.O. There was a resolution passed in this National Assembly for this Committee to follow up on such matters. We have written him at least twice and he has not had the courtesy to even grant us the favour of an acknowledgement.

The constitutional amendment of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Security Reform was assented to since March 2009, and to this date, almost one year after; this Committee is still to come into being and to commence functioning. How could we say that the Committee system is functioning well? There are other matters to do with governance of which there has been no

mention. I will take the liberty of mentioning them. Corruption is a word that has been avoided like the plague in the Budget Speech. Not one time was it used. It is as though it does not exist when we all know that this tears away and eats at the sinews of our nation like a cancer that cannot be cured.

The Government has miserably failed to bring into being the Public Procurement Commission. This is a vital commission intended to oversee the procurement process of which there are many complaints, but the Government has for more than five years failed to give its names for the membership of this Committee so that we can get together and constitute it. I am afraid they always say that it is the General Secretary of the People's Progressive Party who is holding up giving the names. I am sorry he is not here today so that he can answer to this charge which I level against him.

Equally gravely, if not more so, is the failure of the Minister of Finance himself, a highly trained professional, to observe some principles of financial governance. He continues to allow the Lotto Funds to be placed into a separate bank account instead of being put into the Consolidated Funds. He continued to allow the sale of public assets to be put into a separate bank account instead of finding its way into the Consolidated Fund. And now under the LCDS he is talking about putting money through G.R.I.F. (Guyana REDD Investment Fund), but nowhere in the scheme of things is there contemplation for bringing this money into the Consolidated Fund which is where it belongs to be supervised by this Parliament on behalf of the people of Guyana.

3:05 p.m.

In January 2010, the Hon. Minister of Finance brought a request for supplementary provision for, among other agencies, the Ministry of Housing and Water in the sum of \$5.6 billion of which \$4 billion were for housing development. I cannot avoid commenting on this because, to me, it represents a brazen act of illegality which should not go without being mentioned and pursued.

Section 24 of the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act requires that any variation of an appropriation, except for virement, has to be authorised by a Supplementary Appropriation Act prior to the incurring of any expenditure there under. Yet the Supplementary Appropriation Act authorising those sums was accented on 14th January, 2010. However, when the estimates for 2010 are examined, the sum of \$5.6 billion is shown as having been included in the latest

estimates of capital expenditure for 2009. So we were merely going through the formalities when in January 2010 we were making believe here that we were appropriating \$5.6 billion to the Ministry of Housing and Water. It is clear that the Hon. Minister of Housing and Water, with prodding from and acquiescence of the Minister of Finance, missed the mark of truth in this Hon. House when in response to my question as to how much of the \$4 billion had already been released he said, and I quote:

“The resources sought here is the resources we are seeking to have in the Ministry.” “We are seeking to have...”

That is what he told us at the time of the supplementary estimates being brought.

We subsequently learned that the \$4 billion was paid to GuySuCo in 2009 towards the purchase of land for housing. The young ebullient Minister of Water and Housing then had the gall to say this, and I quote:

“We stand committed to transparency and accountability...”

Let us have a hearty laugh:

“...in delivering services to our people.”

And then he goes on:

“We will also stand strong against any force that seeks to walk out on a vote that sought to bring this benefit to our people.”

What utter rubbish!

Please I want it to be noted that I am not saying that the Minister is rubbish, I am saying that what he said is rubbish.

Again the ebullient Minister seeks to wander away from the truth. We never had any objection to money being voted for the provision of housing. We walked out because of the misinformation being given to the House and the absolute failure of the Minister to answer specific questions posed to him. So let us set the record straight on that issue.

Mr. Speaker, through you, I am making a public call on the Auditor General of this country for an audit of all the transactions executed under the Supplementary Appropriation Act, Act 22, 2010. I am specifically requesting a detailed audit of the transaction involving \$4 billion to the Ministry of Housing and Water.

This Hon. House needs to know when the request for supplementary provision was made, when it was approved, whether, and when the money was paid to the Ministry of Housing and Water. What laws, if any, in the process were violated and what redress there might be under the law. This report I propose, through you Sir, should be submitted to the National Assembly at the earliest possible date.

Mr. Speaker: Your time is up.

Mrs. Riehl: May I request that the Hon. Member be given 10 minutes to conclude. Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Murray: I wish to close with these sentiments. In monetary terms this is the largest Budget ever, as indeed, was each preceding Budget for some time now, but the measure of its worth to the Guyanese people, is the impact it makes on their lives. In it, I dare say, they would see no respite from the burdens they bare. Their personal and family futures would not sparkle with hope as a result of it. For most of them, it would be another year of struggling to make ends meet, to pay the rent, to meet transportation costs and to put food on the table. This year will be another year of trying to find a reasonable job, or of trying to get a visa to leave for 'Region 11' or of joining the ranks of the unemployed. This must be a sad state of affairs after seventeen years of P.P.P./C. rule, but then, I suppose, it could be blamed on the twenty-eight years of the P.N.C.

As I take my seat, let me say this. We feel no glee in saying these things, but we believe that we have a duty to tell it as we see it and hope that the Government will listen and act on at least, some of our suggestions. Will this Budget debate be the first occasion when this will happen? Only time and unfolding events will tell. Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Murray.

[Mr. Hinds]: Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, I rise to lead in commending our Budget 2010 to this House and indeed to the nation at large. We in this House should know that even as we grow and develop each year, closing the gap and catching up with already developed countries, this task is a task of many years. When we look around our country and recall how things were a decade or two ago, even a few years ago, one can point to a number of areas where things are much better today. Our challenge, as the Minister exhorts us in the closing paragraphs of his speech, is to stay prudent and cautious, and to be neither distracted nor diverted from the task of building our country.

With this understanding and with this attitude, our annual Budget provides us the occasion and the opportunity to review how we have been doing in the last year to adjust and to refine and to set our sights. From one Budget to the next, the major impression must be continuity as we consolidate, transform and sustain, which is our Budget theme this year.

With this in mind, we can readily cast aside some recurring criticisms; some which were repeated again by the Hon. Member who spoke just before me. Some of those criticisms have been explicit, as he has put them to us, some have been implicit about this and our previous Budgets - that they are unexciting. We disagree. With our view, our Budget is exciting.

The 162 paragraphs, in which the minister summarises sectoral developments to the end of 2009 and the agenda for 2010, are both comprehensive and replete with detail. It is in language that is readily grasped by the average citizen. Any citizen whose mind is open can find guidance in perusing these sections. Perhaps some critics may find our budget unexciting because it is written with the average practical Guyanese in mind and does not engage in arguments about one or other developmental theory.

Although we find excitement in our Budget, we value even more the excitement of our people as they move into thousands of new homes; as they attend new schools and see new medical facilities for their time of need; as they travel along many miles of improved roads; as more of our people, in difficult circumstances receive more assistance. This is where the excitement is and where the excitement ought to be. It is on this excitement that we call on our people to consolidate, to sustain, to achieve more and in the course of so doing, transform themselves and our country.

A related and repeated criticism is that our Budget presentations are pedantic with much harping about maintaining macroeconomic stability. I did not hear that one today from my colleague from the other side. Our Hon. Minister in his Budget presentation after a short introduction and a short overview of global and regional economic developments gets down, as he must, to a detailed review of domestic macroeconomic developments during 2009. He would be failing if he did not review and develop a sufficiently detailed and accurate judgment of how sound our foundation is, as he looked to continue the process of growth and development. Macroeconomic stability, a low rate of inflation and a low rate of depreciation of our currency are vital things to be concerned about.

It would be truly mistaken to be dismissive of macroeconomic considerations as being unrelated to our quality of life; the money we have in our pockets. It is true that macroeconomic stability requires discipline, the discipline of living today within our means of today, and true, it does set limits on wage increases which could be sustained. The necessary focus on macroeconomic stability should guard us against the lure of wage levels which we could not yet sustain.

I want to assure our ordinary citizens out there that macroeconomic stability and low inflation rate is more important for him or her. Not just because a high inflation rate signals increased cost of living, but because a high inflation rate devalues the money in his or her pocket, whilst the more sophisticated and the more able members of our country find fertile ground to bet against the currency. This causes even more inflation and in the process takes away and accumulates wealth from many ordinary poor people. That was the story of the first twenty-five years of our independence when, rejecting the macroeconomic fundamentals, the masses of ordinary Guyanese received neither a real \$14 a day – do you remember that? - nor real flour, nor turbines for G.E.C., nor hydro: all the things which we are now delivering in what some of our detractors call, our “plodding ways”.

Once we appreciate that the Budget for any one year is one of a stream of Budgets seeking to consolidate, transform and sustain growth and development, the criticisms of no consultation on the preparation of a particular Budget are without substance. The Minister and all of us in Government in our meetings with our people every day throughout the year are hearing, seeing, judging, and receiving ideas, requests and proposals. All of these are integrated and reflected in our Budget.

Our concern is about preparing a Budget the other way, with everyone coming to the Minister with oral and written presentations and much picture taking. We think that that approach with every sector, finding it, then, to make its necessary maximum demands of the Minister, would be a recipe for loss of control of the financial discipline of balanced Budgets and the maintenance of good macroeconomics. That, too, would be a recipe for a series of disjointed Budgets every year, reflecting more the strengths of the various social and political forces at the time that the Budget is written each year and not long-term views and visions.

However, most of all, I argue that we have had a good thing going with the steady growth over the last 'so many' years, and – let me get my notes here – the Hon. Member, Mr. Murray, spoke about our growth rate last year of only being 2.3% when many people want 6%, such as India, China and so on. However, he too did not talk the whole story and accused our Minister of only talking part. He is not talking about what was happening in the other countries of CARICOM. He totally ignored the fact that in the first half of the year, the whole world was still struggling with that deep economic crisis. He ignored that altogether. If there was any year that he would call for 6% it was not this year and when the conditions are good for 6%, we will get 6%. We have had a good thing going in the way our Budgets have been presented and I would like to urge that we keep it going that way.

I would like to speak too to the rebasing of our economy which is long overdue and a promise kept by the Government. Maybe it was promised last year, but it has come this year. I would like to count it as a promise kept and we note that our G.D.P., now rebased, has a more realistic figure and I have those figures here somewhere, but it removes some anomalies that were present before. For example, in the area of energy, for which I am responsible, it has always attracted a lot of criticism or a lot of attention that our purchases of fuel were coming in at 45% of our G.D.P., an incongruous figure, which suggests that our real G.D.P. may well have been nearly twice what was being calculated and reported. So I think it is a good thing that we have G.D.P. figures now rebased more realistically.

There has been this criticism, repeated again by Hon. Member, Mr. Murray, that this Budget, like our other Budgets, has no vision in them. I would agree where the critic is looking to see our vision written into the Budget speech, but our vision is stated in a number of other documents outside of the Budget. We are open to debate as to whether what we have in the budget comports

with visions in our manifesto, in His Excellency's address to the opening of this 9th Parliament in the NDS, and in the LCDS.

For me, and I think for us, a main element in our vision is that we would work with our traditional economic activities – bauxite, sugar, rice, timber – to reconfigure, refashion, modernize and reposition them so that they can better face the challenges on an open international market, whilst at the same time calling attention to and promoting a number of new modern economic activities in which we may engage.

We recognise that the work of our people is the most important factor when determining economic activities; whether our economic activities can compete successfully in the international market, covering costs and sustaining themselves. This drives us to allocating those large sums for educating our people, and for improving their health, and we do look to see how these sums should be spent effectively and efficiently. The Hon. Member spoke about this issue and he did recognise that our President has brought this issue to the fore. However, I think we should forgive him for taking the position of “crocodile tears”. I want to tell him that those are real tears. They are no “crocodile tears”. We want more effectiveness and more efficiency in the delivery of education and health, but growth and development comes along in stages.

First, we put in the physical things. A lot of money is being spent in the capital account and we have been spending money in training our people and arranging scholarships for training. The President's call for greater efficiency and effectiveness is a call for each of our people in those areas and in all activities in Guyana, to do better. To do better with the training they have had, and to do better with the improved health services that we all now enjoy.

We note too that for sustained growth and development our people need to be experiencing lives that are getting better, to keep their spirits up so that they feel enthused, and for that, we work at improving their housing and water, electricity and also spending and allocating money to sports and culture, also on security and assistance to those in difficulties.

At Budget time such as this, there have been sensitivities about differences in the way this Government has treated, or looks at bauxite and sugar. I did address this issue in the press, but as an old bauxite person and as a Regional Representative for Region 10, our traditional bauxite area, let me repeat what I have already put in the media, that this Government, guided by its

vision, varied the recommendation of the World Bank and I.M.F. in both cases. Let us recall that whilst we have resisted the call to privatise sugar, we also resisted the recommendation to have bauxite closed. Let us recall that bauxite had the benefit of two national, World Bank, I.M.F., and European interventions in 1983 and 1990 to try to make bauxite profitable. When the second attempt failed, bauxite was to be closed, but have we closed bauxite? No.

We have not closed bauxite. We subsidised it and kept it going. It is our assessment that with our bauxite sector being a mature sector, and with over-riding large natural disadvantage at this time, and being small in total world production, and there being no local market – neither in Guyana nor in CARICOM – for bauxite and alumina, our traditional bauxite operations need to be positioned within integrated companies as core partners with us.

We welcome the Foreign Direct Investment (F.D.I.) from RUSAL in the operations in Berbice and we welcome, eventually, the direct investment from Bosai in the operations in Linden. We believe that when we see how bauxite-alumina operations have been affected around the world in 2009, that we have benefited from having RUSAL as a co-partner in the operation in the Berbice River and Bosai in the operations in the Demerara River.

We are not happy with the furor between RUSAL and the Union in the Berbice operations. We are for harmony, but our traditional industries are faced with huge challenges and there may be need for revisiting some of our hallowed positions of the past.

I said recently, too, that whilst we are doing our best for bauxite operations, our commitment is not firstly to bauxite, the material, but to the people of the bauxite communities. Our people in the bauxite communities are not living for bauxite. Bauxite needs to be good for them and when bauxite is not good for them, we should find other things to do. This should be seen as following from an earlier statement that we want to get to a point where questions about bauxite and perhaps sugar too are only financial, economic questions, stripped of social and political implications. To get there, we need to develop much more opportunities for people in the bauxite communities and we need to get them to open their minds to new opportunities. This was what L.E.A.P. was about and what L.E.N. will continue to do.

We think we are being successful. Has anyone noticed how much bigger and brighter Linden is today, particularly Amelia's Ward and Block 22, even though direct employment in the bauxite

operations has fallen steadily from a peak approaching 7,000 in the late 1970s to just 700 today? Things are better in Linden today than they were decades ago. And for those who may hold that our concern for the bauxite communities of Region 10 is only words, I invite them to look at page 388 in Volume 1 on the page headed: Details of Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations under agency 0.3 Ministry of Finance.

3.35 p.m.

You would see allocations to subsidise community power in the Linden area of \$2.231 billion, and \$262 million for the Kwakwani Utilities Inc. which serves Kwakwani and areas around Aroaima. This totals \$2.493 billion. It should be recognised as being in addition to the \$1.668 billion allocated directly to Region 10 in its regional budget. So Hon. Members, we have put our money with our words of commitment to our people in Linden, Region 10, and indeed to the people all across our country.

This budget reflects our vision of consolidating, sustaining and continuing, and from time to time taking big transformative steps. In this year we have a number of large steps. This year our preparation over a number of years has brought us to the point where we hope to see the beginning of at least two large steps.

The preparation for the Amaila Falls hydro is one such. We are hoping it would be starting by the end of the year. And the optical cable from Lethem to Georgetown is another such. Again, Linden and Lindeners are on the path of both of those developments, and have opportunities to participate in various ways.

Preparatory work continues to seek ways for arranging to have the Linden/Lethem road paved, and for a sturdy bridge to be built across the Essequibo at Kurupukari. Estimates run from US\$250 to US\$350 million. But in the meantime, within our allocation for the hinterland roads, within the monies available to us, we will continue our steady upgrade of the existing gravel road and wooden bridges and pontoon crossing across the Essequibo.

I am pleased to report to this House that this year we are hoping to see significant use of the Linden/Lethem road, in particular, in the taking in of equipment for the drilling in the Takatu basin, in drilling for oil. We also are hoping that maybe the first occurrence of cargo be moved

by the middle of the year, some 40,000 tonnes or more, of various agricultural fertilisers and soil improvers from Linden towards Boa Vista. The road is starting to pay off and Lindeners have an opportunity to participate in that growth and development, and to find jobs in that growth and development.

This Government is pleased that it has been able to bring improved electricity supply to so many of our people in the urban and sub-urban areas, rural and distant areas along our coast, and a growing number of our citizens in a number of hinterland villages. It is true that at times we might have been seen to be marking time, and during the middle of 2009, when we were experiencing difficulties, there would have been fears that we might have been slipping backwards. However, at the end of 2009, with the opening of the new 21 megawatt US\$30 million HFO Wartisilla Station, we were back on track on the road of steady improvement in electricity. Our programme in electricity, as in all areas, seeks to resolve the conflict between the monies we have, the charges our people could afford, and the needs required to sustain the service.

We have had the speaker before me talking about Foreign Direct Investment. But Foreign Direct Investment always wants and needs a return of 25, 30, 35 %, particularly in the kind of circumstances that the PNC helped to create after the 1997 Elections, and for many years after the 1997 Elections. I can say this because that was the time when we were negotiating with various peoples for the privatising of the G.E.C. And in those circumstances, we were being told you are looking at 30 and 35 % for the country, but look at all that was happening in the streets. So if Mr. Murray is to be true, earnest in his call for a relook, for a welcoming of Foreign Direct Investment, he and his Party have a lot to reconsider. They have to get out there and say they have put aside their old ways so that people can more freely come into Guyana.

Our challenge in improving electricity has been how to resolve this conflict between the monies we have, the charges, the tariffs that our people could afford, and the need to sustain the service and reward the capital. We insist on obtaining value for our money as we aim for the lowest possible cost to sustain an adequate, improved service for the time.

We have, in the electricity sector, been seeking grants wherever available and known to us. We have been steadily seeking the largest amount of soft financing as interest costs on loans and

equity constitute a significant portion of the tariffs. To these ends, we have been ready to enter into agreements, to conditionalities, which we recognise as being realistic and good for us so that we may access grants and concessionary financing.

Current examples of this striving to improve electricity at the lowest financing cost include the comprehensive un-served areas electrification project which is coming...

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

Mr. Rohee: I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given 15 minutes to continue.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Hinds: We have had the comprehensive un-served areas electrification project which is now coming to an end; \$28 million in total, \$21 million coming in concessionary financing from the I.D.B. This was negotiated in the 2001/2002 period initially.

There is also the US\$30 million for the new 21 megawatt HFO generating station at Kingston which, as we know, was funded from our PETROCARIBE fund account.

Hon. Member, Mr. Murray, spoke just now very much about having all these accounts within the Consolidated Fund. I can tell you in particular, as I recall it now, that anticipating that CGX and other people looking for petroleum in Guyana would be successful, a number of institutions have been coming our way. They have been saying that it is good time for us to start making preparations for these inflows. They are also calling for these inflows to be put into separate accounts so that they can be followed more closely and not thrown into the Consolidated Fund where they would be mixed up with everything else.

Let me get back to the issue of G.P.L. and what is happening there. Let me recall the US\$40 million loan to G.P.L. from the EXIM Bank of China for the extensive upgrade of transmission and distribution systems along the coast. Let me say too, that the financing that would be required for Amaila when it comes on line is up to about US\$600 million. Our model now has a developer, FDI, providing about 25% of this sum and receiving the interest rate which FDI requires, and which we do not quarrel about. However, we are also looking along with the developer to mobilise about 75 % of the financing from some soft sources – the China

Development Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. We have been pursuing with these banks the detailed procedure for loan approval. We now see financial closure may be put back some months from early in the second half of 2010 towards the end of the year.

It should be noted here that since the provision of the road to the site could take up to ten months; since the major contractors would require the road within three months of closure and signing of the contracts, the Government has committed to starting the road early with funds available to the Government. A saving of six months in the project execution time of forty-two to forty-eight months will have a significant, favourable impact on the final capitalisation costs and the tariffs which will be required. On closure, the Government's financing of the road would be integrated into the overall project.

We are also pursuing smaller opportunities for electricity improvement amongst which I shall mention an invitation by the Government of Japan to developing countries to host a demonstration plant of about one megawatt of photovoltaic generation – something if we are successful, would be worth about US\$5 million; an invitation by the Government of China to developing countries for the development of a small hydro no more than three megawatts, and this too, if we are successful, could be worth about US\$5 million. And more than that, the site that we have in mind will provide power for a growing Lethem and Annai in particular.

There is also the development we have in process of a project with the United Nations Development Programme to improve the readiness of Guyana to receive individual projects, mostly small projects, which may be made available to and through the UN for establishing more efficient, sustainable, renewable energy and electricity supplies to meet the MDGs, particularly in hinterland and remote locations.

We will all recall the steady rise in fuel prices since about 2005, and particularly so in 2007. During that period, G.P.L. and the shareholders were particularly pressed to maintain tariffs or to constrain the rise in tariffs, and at the same time meeting the increased fuel costs. The Government in that period, provided increasing subsidy to G.P.L. and thereby to all those who use electricity, whether residential, commercial or industrial. During those times of high fuel prices, the expenditure for fuel rose from a figure of about 30% of all costs in 2002 to 88% in

2008. The year 2009 has seen a somewhat steady oil price and as a result the percentage of all expenses which fuel oil constitutes, reduced to 83%.

Indeed, during 2009 there has been a surplus in the operations of G.P.L., but not in any way comparable to the total subsidies since 2005. Nevertheless, this is a move in the right direction and it confirms our works towards maximising the use of heavy fuel oil in the short-to medium-term, and shifting to hydro power in the longer term.

Additionally, G.P.L., with cash in hand, has been able to begin catching up with deferred maintenance and improving its stock of various spare parts and components.

The difficulties that G.P.L. experienced in 2009 are reflected in some of the measures that are reported in its year report. For example, the number of network-wide interruptions increased from 152 to 182, and the average total hours in the year that people were without service increase from 178 to 217 hours. So we have put the numbers there very clearly for anyone to see.

The biggest improvement in electricity and the biggest reduction in tariff would come from the reduction of losses. During the last year, the reduction of losses was stalled from 34.2% in 2008 and we were only able to reduce it a miserly 0.6% to 33.6%. This, in addition to deferring a tariff reduction, has also put in jeopardy one of our loan arrangements with I.D.B. under the PSSP/PBL. It has put in jeopardy the second tranche of US\$4 million. So I call on all Members of this House to join with me and the management of G.P.L. in calling on all our people to end commercial losses, the theft of power. It puts off a reduction in tariffs and also ends a bad name for our country. We are known in the electricity circles as a country with high losses.

We are heartened that over 2009, the arms of the law and the Court are dealing more seriously with persons who engage in stealing electricity. At the same time, we are not happy that our people should be going to Court, being sentenced and convicted for stealing electricity.

Before I close, let me speak a bit toward telecommunications. The telecommunications sector is now very lively. Almost every Guyanese – man, woman and child – seems to have a cell phone. And you, Mr. Speaker, have been annoyed from time to time even here when our deliberations are interrupted by the ringing of cell phones. In this area, Guyana is not far behind other countries in the services available to citizens. There are complaints however about high costs,

restrictions on international access, and uncertainties about how many of the emerging technologies are to be treated in Guyana. The telecommunications law and the various agreements and licenses which provide the legal framework for the telecoms sector are crying out for reform and updating having been cast in the late 1980s with little or no anticipation of the revolution in the making, the technologies, and the practices, which were about to flood the world in rapidly successive waves. Developed, up-to-date, telecommunications I.T.C. sector is critical to improving the quality of life and enhancing productivity and efficiencies of our people, both socially and economically. A competitive advantage may be provided in a wide variety of sectors by an improved and even further improved telecoms and I.T.C. sector – sectors such as agriculture, health, finance, education and tourism. The adoption of up-to-date telecommunications and I.T. technologies promote business processes, re-engineering and other new technological interventions.

This Government a few years ago in presenting to Cabinet Members computers so that our cabinet meetings became paperless meetings, took the first step toward the comprehensive system of E-Government which will, among other things, allow for greater transparency, a more responsive public delivery of services to the populace, and lower cost for doing business with the Government. A major requirement for E-Government is high speed data access to all relevant offices in Guyana. It is with this in mind that the Government has embarked on laying a high capacity fibre-optic cable from Lethem to Georgetown, and in particular, Providence, where the port of entry, as it is called, is to be built.

The other reason for the Government doing this is this issue of redundancy. I was engaged with our head of GOINVEST on numerous occasions when we had to give comfort to QUALFON, a company that now has employment of about 1,000 in the call-centre business. I had to join Mr. Geoffery DaSilva of GO-INVEST in giving comfort to them on a number of occasions when we had failure of that one optical cable, the Americas II cable, coming into Guyana via French Guiana and Suriname. The big call by them and others, who have been coming to Guyana to look at developing call-centres, is for redundancy. Redundancy not only by satellite but, in particular, redundancy in other optical cables being available.

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

Minister of Health [Dr. Ramsammy]: I stand to request that the Hon. Prime Minister be given 10 minutes to conclude.

Mr. Hinds: In addition to the cable coming in from Lethem, we require a backbone also across the coast, and allocations are made in this budget for that as well. With these backbones in place, foundation would be set for our vision of having 80% of our homes with computers in them so that all our citizens, all our people, young people in particular, would be connected amongst themselves and to all the offices of Government at various levels.

Let me say that we anticipate, we expect, that there would be a number of pieces of legislation relating to liberalising and opening up of the telecommunication sector in Guyana, and also legislation that would give legal mandate to IT transactions.

I can say too that we anticipate that we would be bringing to this House once more a revised Broadcast Bill. I would like this House to recall that that would be either the third or fourth attempt to lay a Bill which we hope would garner broad support for broadcast legislation. We anticipate too that before the end of this session in August, we would bring a Freedom of Information bill.

I want in closing to address the ridiculous claims made about the cost of the President's trips abroad.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the issue of the President is a very sensitive one. There are certain Members who as soon as the word President is mentioned, jump up to object. If you mention the name of the President in relation to an issue please understand that Members would be permitted to deal with it in their contributions. You cannot open up the issue and then expect the rest of the Membership to remain silent. That is all I am saying. *[Noisy Interruption]*

4.05 p.m.

Mr. Hinds: All I would say is that if we look to Volume 1, Page 46 at Acct. Code 6262, we would see that the cost for travel and postage for the whole Government over 2008, 2009 and what is budgeted for 2010. I want to urge that we have a Government that has an Executive arm.

Our country at this time is, in its history, making new ventures. Many of our people have been talking for years about the continental destiny that we have. And for that continental destiny to be realised, we have to be meeting with people in the RIO Group, in MERCOSUR (Southern Common market) and in UNASUR (Union of South American Nations).

No doubt, Hon. Member Mr. Murray would point to the way private sectors do business as something we should look at. In private sector businesses, particularly in new relations, it is the C.E.O (Chief Executive Officer) who leads the way. Who is the C.E.O of this executive Government? It is necessary that the C.E.O of this Executive Arm lead the way in all the new areas in which our country must make contact; with people in Latin America, the people in the Middle East who are looking for new areas to invest their money, and with other members of the big countries like Russia, India and China.

It is for our President as the C.E.O of the executive to be meeting in these new areas and leading the way. If we look at the revenue he takes with him, the criticism has been that he takes too few people with him. That has been the criticism; and he does that conscience of the cost to Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, with more time I would have liked to respond to a number of the positions that were taken by the Member who preceded me, the Hon. Mr. Winston Murray. I have no doubt that my colleagues who will be following me would treat very robustly with every one of the points that he seems to have made in his presentation. With that Mr Speaker, I end my address. [Applause]

Mr. Fernandes: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on this, the largest budget. I do not know if all the Ministers listened to all of what the President said. But with your permission Mr. Speaker I wish to read a little article from the President: Wednesday December 30th 2009.

Mr. Speaker: What document are you reading from Hon. Member?

Mr. Fernandes: It is from the Kaieteur News.

Mr. Speaker: What date?

Mr. Fernandes: Wednesday December 30th 2009. The president said, and I quote: “I was elected to move the well-being of all the people of this country forward”, end of quote.

I wish to speak on employment, more so Region 1. To see whether what the President said is reflected in this part. Most of the people in Region 1 are self-employed. There are miners, fishers, loggers and small cottage industries, some work with the State. All of these people depend on fuel and lubricant to promote their businesses. They need to ensure that they have money to pay their bills and put food on their table. They need to ensure that they pay their debts to the agencies of which they borrowed money.

At Morawhanna there was this Guyoil operation which supplied all the fuel in Region 1. Mid last year, this Government closed down Guyoil at Morawhanna. After Guyoil was closed down there was a shortage of fuel in the area. The miners could not work properly, the loggers, the fishermen, even the regional administration. The fuel price went *sky-high* within the administration. The Minister of Agriculture went into the region and said that there is a new company which will take over, a Trinidadian company...

Mr. Speaker: Take over Guyoil?

Mr. Fernandes: Take over the running of fuel for the Region, and the operation at Morawhanna. Guyoil moved out of the area and closed down. Guyoil used to supply fuel to fishermen within the area. When the fishermen came in the area, there was no fuel and no ice for the fish. The prices continued to rise all the time, but the operation had to work. The region had to buy fuel from outside sources. Businessmen within the area felt that for them to continue mining, farming and fishing, they would have to get additional fuel. There is no other source of fuel, because Guyoil closed down and the Trinidad Company is not working any more. They worked for about two months and closed down.

Men started to smuggle fuel across the border, because the engine of growth has to continue. After this Government moved out Guyoil, they are now forcing the people in Region 1 to do illegal business, to buy the fuel from an illegal source. There is no other source to bring fuel into the area.

The MV Kimbia is a passenger cargo boat that can take in about 10 drums of fuel. But the people do not want to breach the law. They want to work within the law. I recommended sometime ago to the Prime Minister; why not let us legalise this fuel which is coming from Venezuela. The Prime Minister spoke about the Petro-Carib deal earlier. We have a Petro-Carib deal where the fuel comes to Georgetown. Put some system in place where Region 1 gets their own fuel because the people have to work. There is a multi-structured building already at Morawhanna. Therefore you can have a company to run it.

Mr. Speaker, a local business man by the name of Robinson approached Guyoil because he saw the suffering of the people in Region 1. He said, “We want growth, pay our bills, pay our loans, put food on the table, send our children to school and we must have food, therefore, why do you not give me the same concepts which you give to the man who is not loyal and their children ...from Trinidad? Why do you not give me that same opportunity and let me pay the same \$100,000 a month rent which you have given that man?” They replied “no, we cannot give you that, because we are hoping that this Trinidadian company will come back and do this project.” Up to today we have hardship with fuel in Region 1.

There is one source which you can get some fuel from, biodiesel. But that can only supply about one person or one agency probably in the region. It is important that the Prime Minister and other Members of Government think about the development of people, they should think of this \$142 billion. Think of how the self-employed people in Region 1 are going to survive and ensure that they put systems in place, if not with another company, re-open a station so that they will have fuel to supply the residents of Region 1.

We also need to cut down travel time for people who are travelling from farms to markets. There is a community called Yarikita, the road there has not been fixed for the last 18-20 years. This Parliament budgeted money for the road. No money was spent on the road. Now there are farmers who have to take their produce for about 5-6 miles to get to a market.

There is the Cam-Water Road; you have the White Water Road. You are talking about the development of people. If you want to ensure that people develop, you need to put the necessary road structure in place so that these people can take their produce to the market in *‘quick’* time. The people have long distances, and broken up roads with tractors, their lives are in danger. But

they still have to ensure that they take these goods to the market 5-6 miles away. You would not like that to happen to you.

The roads at Mathews Ridge are in a terrible state of disrepair. We need to fix the roads within the community, Heaven Hill, Hell Hill, Arakaka Road, all those roads. You are talking about development; these miners are bringing in special stone. You are talking about the budget and we have a lot of money....you have to support these people as well. You have to spend money so that these people can have easy access to go into the Hinterland. I saw in the Budget that there is money for part of Moruka road, and a part of Kaituma Road. Minister Benn has a large budget, when he is thinking about roads, he must also think about those roads which I mentioned in Region 1. Therefore you will have to talk to him and ensure he spends some money in Region 1, because we need the people to develop.

Mr. Speaker as long as I am in this Parliament I will talk about power (electricity), if we do not have the power to power our engines... If we have power, people will ensure that they find things to do so that they would have proper living; like the small industries. At Mabaruma you have 5 hours of power at night, from 6-11p.m. You have no power during the day. People want to ensure that they produce. We have the ladies who can do the small cottage industries in terms of fruits. We have people who want to do poultry. We have a lot of wood up there, people want to make furniture. The schools need furniture. But to use the old manual things; this is the 21st century that was a long time ago. What we need is more funds to buy fuel to ensure that we have power during the day. Talk about advance science and technology, we have to ensure these people have computers. Computers work with power.

Some time ago the President made a statement at Matthews Ridge saying that we would ensure that we have more power there. All we have at Matthews Ridge are people with their private generators. Over 4 years ago a generator was donated to the community by the Government. When the generator went into the community, the people went in with the wrong key. Four years ago, and up to now they cannot find the key for the generator to start. The people in the area said they would assist in raising funds, because there was need for about \$15 million to ensure that some of the wires and the transformer were replaced. The people raised \$5 million, but to date the Government cannot put the other \$10 million, to ensure that they find the key to work this

generator. If you are talking about development, we have to develop our people all over this country.

Some of the people heard what the president said, "I am responsible for delivering all the people." The people at Matikai need some assistance. I hope the Government takes note.

The last time I spoke in Parliament, I spoke about the people in Hobo and the people in the airstrip area, Barimanobo. There are a number of houses where people are not getting water. My friend, Hon. Mr. Whittaker said it is only 5 houses in that area, and they do not need water. We were talking about the priority areas. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture went in Linden afterwards, and he can tell you that there are about 20 houses around that area, behind the area there are about a further 25 houses.

Mr. Speaker I do not think the Hon. member Mr. Whittaker had wanted to mislead this house. When Mr. Whittaker was chairman, there was a survey done to put water in those areas. Not only was a survey done, the drain was dug to put the lines. I believe that there was a programme before, but for some reason or the other since he became an M.P. he forgot about that part. The drains and pipes were laid but not for all the houses, the pipes are there right now, but one of the problems we are having is due to the dry season, the people sometimes burn their farms and the pipes sometimes get scorched. But those pipes are there, all you have to do is link it to the main and rehabilitate the old ones and put the good ones between.

In the Mabaruma settlement, it is a hill; you have one hour pumping of water every week. This is the dry season, El Niño, we need more than that. The Port Kaituma area, although you have water in the area they are pumping the water from the Kaituma river. Local business men give persons of unsound mind garbage to take and throw into the river. Some of the sewage is being emptied into the river. What you need is a water treatment plant in the area. We are happy that the water is running through the pipes. We do not want to hear that there is an outbreak of disease in one of our Hinterland areas and where we do not have all the facilities. Therefore, when the Minister is looking at the area, we need a water treatment facility in the Port Kaituma area so you will therefore have...

The Minister of Agriculture went into Region 1 on the 22nd of October and the farmers raised the concern of the Sigatoka disease which affected the banana and plantain industry. There was an

arrangement whereby there will be a follow-up exercise. I had a discussion with the farmers recently and they wanted to know if there is any plan with the Ministry of Agriculture to ensure that these pests or disease, which is affecting the banana and plantain industry in the area, is eradicated. So it is only wise if the Minister could “wise up” the people, based on the information which he has.

There are also the Acushi ants. There is supposed to be a programme which should have started November of last year. To date, this programme has not started to control these Acushi ants. There was a programme once before to eradicate, well it seems difficult to eradicate or control... He also promised the people some yams and ginger planting materials. So far the people are still waiting on a word of when they are getting the planting materials for the area.

What is good about Port Kaituma is that there are two livestock officers operating in the area. In other parts of the Region, there are no livestock officers. But we can change it around. You can send one to Mabaruma and one to Marupa. Therefore the farmers will be serviced with technical people who are going to do all the necessary jobs. To ensure that not one area we have attention and in the others we have problems with our animals, cattle or poultry.

Mr. Speaker we also have a difficulty with contractors who operate within the Region. When the Minister of Health got up and spoke, he spoke of this state of the art hospital at Mabaruma. Upon completion of the hospital at Mabaruma, the building started leaking immediately... there was no grand opening. You have overhead water tanks, but no water is flowing into the building. There is some problem with the water system. It is my understanding that they do not have the necessary facility to go with this state of the art hospital. But of course you have the building. I was hoping that as we talk about this Budget, we can look at what funding is needed for equipment which is required for the building.

As we talk about contractual work; at Habakuia there is a health hut. The contractor *half-built* this hut. He was paid, but he has not completed the hut. Last week the radio set disappeared from the health hut. The police have been doing their work. The police went in and they arrested the health worker's son, her nephew and another boy within the area. I believe to myself that although the police is doing their work, the people in the regional administration who are

responsible for finance should also ensure the contractor do his work, and that the contractor fix the building properly.

There is no security guard there. As I am a security guard, there are a number of persons, mostly old men who work with the security service in Region 1. These security persons have a hard time in getting their payment. At times some of them work and do not get any kind of payment. They get pushed around and receive low payment. I believe that the Minister responsible for labour should look at what payment these people receive, as they are like anyone else. They are getting a very small amount of money, between \$18 and \$20,000 a month. They have their families to care for. They have their grandchildren and things to look after. You must ensure that you look after the wellbeing of these security guards, male and female. It is important, because everyone wants to ensure that their children go to school. They also want food on their tables. I just thought I should mention that.

Mr. Speaker, we have a company named Jailing in Region 1.

Mr. Speaker: You want to be careful how you are calling people's names. If you are going to attack them, be careful.

Mr. Fernandes: Yes, I appreciate that. This company in Region 1 seems to have preferential treatment. They only employ foreigners to work in their company. They have big trucks that run on the road, other vehicle owners within the area have to pay toll on this road to the N.D.C. It was said that someone at Jailing Company got instructions from 'upside'. When you say 'upside' you mean like a Minister or someone.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member you have to be careful please. Get off of that.

Mr. Fernandes: Yes Mr. Speaker. I take your word. They are not paying toll.

Mr. Speaker: Please. Pass on from Jailing. I am sure there are a lot of other issues you have there.

Mr. Fernandes: I would like to talk about market tarmac. In the last budget debate I spoke about the Kamaka market sinking, and a need to ensure there is somewhere else where the people can sell, because they want to do businesses like anyone else. When I listened to the Minister of

Finance, he was talking about market tarmacs in different areas, but he never mentioned anything about Kamaka. I saw the hon. Minister of Regional Development, he has some money there. I am only asking that he considered the market tarmacs. He should put on his programme: Mabaruma, Kamaka and Port Kaituma, because as I peruse the funds, he has a lot of money, and we need to ensure that everyone develops together, not leave back some and let some go in front.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member if you have reached the end of a point there, I would want to alert you that it is now 4:30 and if you are going to start on a new issue, I think it is better that we take the suspension now. You have a total of 15 minutes more. So you can resume when you come back on the points you want to raise. Hon Members I think this is an appropriate time for us to take the suspension. I want to indicate that we will start back on time, please, if not earlier.

Assembly suspended accordingly at 4.30 p.m.

Assembly resumed accordingly at 5.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Please be seated Hon. Members.

Mr. Fernandes: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I wish to speak on education. We all know how important education is for our children. In Region 1, like most regions we have a shortage of teachers. At Mathews Ridge we have 238 students with 4 teachers and 3 trainee teachers. They are claiming that they need the support, because after Matthews Ridge there is no higher institution of learning. Other than Matthews Ridge you may have to go to Kaituma to get higher education or you may have to come to Georgetown. What education they can get within their small communities, they work on that. It is important, because some of the students leave school very early and go into the gold fields and work, so they need that to be addressed.

At Arakaka the residents are claiming that they have the amount of students required for a school. The students there have to walk about 5-6 miles to the centre in Arakaka. Most days they have to walk six miles to go into the centre for school and they have to walk the same distance in the afternoon. It is very difficult. They leave very early in the morning and they return very late. The road is in a very bad state of disrepair. They are asking whether the authorities could investigate or do a census to see whether they qualify for a school within their community, which will ease that burden.

At Port Kaituma there are over 130 students who do not have accommodations, like benches and desks. The administration from the school is asking members of the community to make the necessary contributions, so their children will be comfortable. Some agreed to assist and many of the others do not want to assist. We are hoping that the Minister responsible could look into this situation to ensure we have more teachers and a school at Arakaka. We have better facilities at Port Kaituma.

I wish to now move to North West Ferry. For the longest while you were hearing that there is a roll on and roll off ferry which Government is building. We do not know whether it is going to roll on to North West or whether one is going to roll on to somewhere else. What we have now is a very old boat going to Port Kaituma. The residents are happy that we have a boat. The boat is older than every one of us in here. This boat is still running to the Port Kaituma area. Sometimes this boat will leave, and two hours after the boat will return to Georgetown because of some engine problem. It causes a lot of problems because a lot of the business men and women within the area usually take perishables from Georgetown to sell within the hinterland location.

Two week ago the Hon. Minister Benn had to use a different boat, the one which goes to Mabaruma and Kamaka to ensure that he shuttled those business people and other residents of Port Kaituma which disrupted the schedule of the other boats. To assist the situation, I would like to encourage those on the Government side in their planning to ensure that they ease the problem with those persons from the Matikai sub-region. This boat does not take 4-5 hours. It takes 24 hours and over to reach those locations, and the same time to come back to Georgetown. So to ease the problems with those persons in the Matikai area, I hope when the Government is putting their plans together, they consider a roll on and roll off boat also for North-West, Region 1.

Last budget debate I spoke about the buildings that housed the police in North-West including Mabaruma and Embitaru and other areas in the region. One senior police officer was living in a house where you had some of the *treaders* of the step missing. You had to jump from one step to the other to get into the building. The house has holes in it. Now, they removed the front step. There is no step. He cannot make a mistake and go through the front door. We may take it as a joke, but this is a Senior Government Official who resides in the city, who has gone to the hinterland to give service to the people, and he cannot use his front door. He has to use the backdoor.

Mr. Speaker: He might be happier using the backdoor.

Mr. Fernandes: There are other police houses in the same Government compound. That is the regional administrative compound. It is in a very bad state of disrepair. When you look at one of those buildings, you wonder if you would be living in one of those, in this time. Government Officials who leave their homes and their families to give service to the hinterland my heart cries out for those officers and I want to encourage those on the Government side of the House to ensure that they fix these things.

5.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the post office – I mentioned this last year and no work was done on this post office – things could be falling from within the building on the people who are going to visit the post office and the post office is an agency which does money transfer; people send money from different locations to the post office and it is not secure. If anything happens at the post office, the people will lose their money and probably, the Post Master would be locked up because of negligence and all sorts of things. He needs a proper building to secure the Government's assets and money. As we go on thinking about looking after the welfare of our people, that is one of the places that the senior citizens would go to collect their pensions among other things. You would not want them to lose the pension and then you have to think about where you are going to get the pension to give to the old people.

Port Kaituma is a community which is growing very quickly because of the roads opening into the Hinterland and the gold. In the community, people do not wear white clothing. If you wear white clothing, within the next hour your clothing will turn either cream or brown. When it is sunny, as it is now, there is dust all over and when it rains, it gets slushy. It is time now for asphalt roads, because other areas have asphalt roads. So as we consider our Budget and our Estimates, let us see if we can also assist the residents of Port Kaituma – the township – could have asphalt roads.

I just want to remind those on the Government side of the House to review the fuel situation in Region 1. To review the supply of fuel because people depend on that fuel for their livelihood and they do not want to be breaching the law, they want to be on the right side of the law. If you

can correct that situation and have another transaction where you can get the fuel legally from Venezuela or put some other agency to run this fuel supply.

In the area of power. For any community to develop, you need power and day time power.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, farm to Market Roads. The people are producing in the Hinterland but they need to bring their produce to the market to get sales and to purchase the necessary things they need to take back to their communities so that their families could live a better life. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Minister of Labour [Mr. Nadir]: Mr. Speaker, I join in expressing congratulations to our Finance Minister for another very sound Budget as we enter into this new era of the next decade of this century.

Mrs. Backer: The new era of the next decade of this century?

Mr. Nadir: Yes, and I will tell you why. It is because this particular period is going to deal with technology and there are some other congratulations too.

While I join in congratulating the two new Members of the National Assembly and Mr. Corbin on his birthday, we also want to congratulate the Finance Minister and his wife for their brand-new, bouncing baby who was delivered only recently. So, we can really say that this is a Budget baby and a Budget for the babies.

Mr. Speaker, before I start my particular area which is labour, I would like to make some comments on the presentations which spoke to the lack of vision of the Government, lack of dealing with competitiveness, the performance of the economy and also to make a little comment on this supposed windfall of VAT (Value Added Tax) which has been expressed.

First, the People's Progressive Party Civic (P.P.P./C.) Government, I am proud to say, having served here since 2001, makes decisions which are focused on a target, based on a rational process, powered by empirical data and with the uplifting of all Guyanese as the goal.

If you listen to the detractors of the Government, one would expect that every single decision that the Government makes, must be accompanied by a feasibility plan that comes to and have the approval of the National Assembly before it is implemented. We make decisions, as I said;

based on information that gives a fair basis for success. We cannot forget that the P.P.P./C. received a mandate from the people to develop our country and our democracy has checks and balances in it for oversight. The formulation of programmes and the implementation of these are the responsibility of the Government of the day.

If these persons have their way, we would never have a new Skeldon Sugar Factory. We would never have a National Cricket Stadium with floodlights; we would not have a new Eye Care Centre for our people; a new Hospital in Linden and we would not put the building of a new track and field facility in this year's Budget, if we listen to them.

In real income and expenditure terms, one can successfully argue that an investment in the Berbice River Bridge and the Stadium may not have feasibility of over a 25- year horizon, but how do you measure the value to the nation, when our people feel proud and when the stadium is packed to capacity to see King Pele? How do we measure that? How do we put a value on all those thousands of persons who used to wait hours for a crossing at the Berbice River? How do we put a value on that? Today, serving the Essequibo and Bartica a more improved ferry service. Those have been the intangibles of such investments.

This brings me to the much criticised efforts of the Government to make an investment and lay another backbone to the information super highway. No less than two times in this National Assembly, no – [Mr. Franklin: what backbone?] That is what it is called. That is why I am talking about this new era which you are ignorant about. We have heard that we have slipped three places in the competitiveness index and I do not have any reason to doubt the Hon. Member who said that from his research, maybe we did. I want to say; that today Guyana is almost at the halfway point among all the 188 countries that are reported in that particular index. We are almost at the halfway point.

Mr. Speaker, a competitiveness index is not only about lowering taxes it is about a number of other things. Today, economists speak not only of comparative advantages but also of technological advantages that countries have. The backbone to technology is information and communication. In fact, no less a person than Senator Al Gore, held one of the first hearings in the United States Senate and after he became Vice President to President Clinton, they went off in that early time, to Silicon Valley and had a most amazing presentation of what this

Information Communication and Technology (I.C.T.) sector can do for America and the world economy.

Yes, we are a little bit slow and the reliance on one fibre optic cable, as the Hon. Prime Minister said, has put us in jeopardy. It has put us in jeopardy over the past few years to the value of at least 10,000 jobs. Had we had redundancy and had we had more than one supplier of the service, I guarantee you, not only would we have seen at least 10,000 seats in call-centres but in e-government we could have doubled productivity, had we had alternatives.

Mr. Carberry: Ten years from now you are going to tell us the same thing.

Mr. Nadir: I hope the Hon. Member will be in his full faculty when I stand and tell him about it. Competitiveness in Guyana is being achieved by leaps and bounds. I think tomorrow, there is a reception that the Millennium Challenge Account, (the Finance Minister might correct me,) is holding to celebrate the successful completion of the targets that Guyana had to meet in the Millennium Challenge Account. What are some of those targets? Lowering the time it takes to register a company – we heard the Hon. Minister for Legal Affairs say that you can even get it in as fast as three hours now. We have, in that Millennium Challenge Account Target the lowering of the time it takes to clear custom procedures for importers and exporters.

In terms of other elements raised by the Hon. Member Mr. Murray when he spoke, in terms of direct foreign investment, I must say that the Prime Minister admirably dealt with that particular criticism.

This brings me to Economic Performance. I agree and everyone here agrees that we did not achieve the projected growth rate last year. We are not pleased, but we have to be satisfied. When one looks at the sloth in the global recovery. In fact, towards the end of last year there was talks about “double-dipping” – hitting bottom, going slightly above and going to a next bottom – when we look, at the negative 1.5% growth in the first half of the year, and we look at what happened in the second half, it must be reassuring to the Opposition, the words of a prominent person, Attorney-at-law and Chartered Accountant, who puts it in his analysis and I quote: “the economy bounced back strongly”.

Over the past four years, while the growth rate, averaging it out, is nothing to shout about, in 2001 we had 5.1%, 2007 5.4%, 3.1% in 2008 and 2.3% in 2009..., in a few days we celebrate our 40th Anniversary as a Republic and I checked the records. In 40 years as a Republic, never have we had four consecutive years of positive economic growth and that is from 1970.

Today, you do not have to ask the Minister of Finance for those records; one can go to the Bureau of Statistics' Website or the Bank of Guyana's website and all that information is at the click of your mouse.

Economists speak of going into a recession when they have two consecutive quarters of negative growth. More periods than that of negative economic growth and they say we are heading into a depression. But here we have our economy performing in four consecutive years with positive economic growth. Not only that, the last half of last year shows that we are on the right side of the curve. We moved from a -1.4% to a +3.5% in just six months. That signals to me, that in spite of the fact that we did not forecast sugar correctly, we did not forecast correctly – **[Mr. Carberry:** Anything else] - very wrong Sir, a few other performances in our productive sector, inflation was held tight and again this year, the Finance Minister was at his best ever when he spoke on the issue of inflation being to the benefit of every single man, woman and baby in the country.

I am very pleased with the performance. Some effort was made to compare China's 8.7% growth rate and India's 5.2% growth rate, but India and China are still low income countries. If you check three indices— The International Monetary Fund (I.M.F.), the World Bank and the Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.) Fact book – you would see that Guyana is pegged at about US\$1500 to 1600 per capita and India is just about US\$1000-1100. So, they are coming from a low base, that is the point and while most middle income and low income economies have struggled to post a positive growth rate, Guyana rebounded in the last half with a 3.75% increase in its real G.D.P. (Gross Domestic Product).

Mr. Franklin: Give us some unemployment figures.

Mr. Nadir: We will give you that too. I will give you this: given that there are no new taxes and given the sloth in the global economy and given the containment of inflation, I say to the

Minister of Finance, this was a sterling performance, congratulations on a job well done, keep up the good work for the people of our country.

There was a comment about this supposed windfall tax from VAT. All I have to say is that over the past three years, VAT receipt started off at \$21.5 billion and today it is \$23.2 billion, less than 10%. Where is the windfall? Normally, persons speak of windfall when they get 50 and 60% more than predicted. This is normal projections. They say you cannot teach an old dog new trick but sometimes the reason why you cannot teach it is because it lacks the nimbleness and the ability to learn, it also forgets some of the old things. I am not calling the Hon. Members on the Opposition old, but certainly, we can say that they are not old, but elder.

This brings me to what this Budget will do for our people, how it will uplift the lives of our people and more particularly, it will speak to the programmes and the achievements of the labour portfolio over the last year and what will happen during this year.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security has to be very thankful and grateful for the allocations in this year's Budget because among all the Ministries it has the largest percentage increase at 14% over 2009.

This year, 2010, is pegged for the Ministry at \$5.6 billion as against \$4.6 billion in 2009. A big winner within the Ministry has been our budget for workforce training. The big winner has been, the almost 40% increase – from \$86 million in 2009 to \$120 million in 2010 – for the training of our people, especially those who need a second chance.

I agree with the Hon. Member Winston Murray when he said that we have to look at the Government programmes, he did not say: 'not only' but I am putting it in – in terms of how big our budgets are but in terms of the quality of the service we provide to our people. He is very, very late in this regard, as His Excellency opened the 9th Parliament at the end of 2006, this was the particular charge he gave all of us – to serve our people to the best of our abilities and to continue to improve the services that we offer each and every Guyanese.

Mr. Speaker what has happened in 2009? In 2009, the Finance Minister said that we were going to train 1500 young persons who had dropped out of school and give them an employable skill. We officially graduated 1200 by July of last year and we placed another 1100 who will be

graduating next month, exceeding the targets. Included in that, is the performance of the young people of Linden. Let me talk a bit more about this vision; the Prime Minister mentioned Linden being the gateway to the new backbone for I.C.T. – [Mr. Murray: Why do you not give Critchlow its money?] You had a chance to speak. Please be quiet now. I was talking about Linden being the gateway. Two years ago, the Hon. Minister Mr. Benn said that if all of this is going to happen, we needed at least 300 heavy-duty equipment operators to be trained, so we took the programme to Linden and to the Government Training Centre in Woolford Avenue. In Linden, 120 young people registered for the programme and 117 of them graduated. Not only that, they refused to go and work at GuySuCo because they said they were making much more money at other places. They are presently making in excess of \$4500 per day. We could not find them, so we tracked them and discovered they were already employed. By the time they graduated 75% of them already had jobs. Mr. Speaker, I am speaking of better quality and skilled jobs and while there may have been a reduction in some menial work force at other places, there is better training, more skills and better jobs awaiting all those who are participating in getting their sound education and also making use of the opportunities from training at the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security.

Mr. Speaker, the old Labour Exchange has a nice, new fancy name – Central Recruitment and Manpower Agency. I remember after graduating from High School, I was looking for a job and I was told that I can go to the Labour Exchange, but first I must go and register at Congress Place. This was true. At the time Congress Place was located at Camp Street and the Labour Exchange was in Regent Street – by Bourda Market. Not only that, all Government vacancies had to be channelled through the Labour exchange. I am proud to say that today, anybody can walk off from the road and go to the labour exchange and fill in an application, and we will find a job for them. There is an 80% chance of that. Last year, we achieved a ten-year high in the placement of people and most of the vacancies are coming from the private sector. Over 95% are coming from the private sector.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to take this service to the next level. This year, as the Finance Minister said in his budget, we are going to have an interactive system. You will then make your

application online from any part of the country that has connectivity and when that backbone is laid, over 90% of our people will have connectivity.

The budget has in it a significant amount of resources to ensure that our labour programmes are as effective as they were last year and will be even better in 2010. In this regard, last year over 1100 persons sought the assistance of the Labour Department with their grievances against employers. Nine hundred of them have been successfully resolved and we collected in excess of \$38 million from employers for those workers. In fact, I have had many callers who said that our labour department is doing a better job than some of the unions.

What are some of the plans for the labour department? We have three or four sectors that have some chronic problems and these will be dealt with in a most frontal assault in 2010. I am speaking about protecting the rights of the workers in the mining and forestry sectors. The Ministry is going to go not only the extra mile, but it will go the extra dollar to ensure that those who are working in the mining and forestry sectors, -and we just heard a plea from the Hon. Member Mr. Fernandes on their behalf, we are going to go out there.

Another area where we are going to set new targets and standards, because we have seen too many accidents and deaths from those types of work, is people who are working with heights. Already for this year we have had two persons who were working at dangerous heights, who died by falling from buildings and getting electrocuted on rooftops. We have to set new standards to protect our workforce.

Another area is the registration of workers in the construction sector and this is very, very important, because what happens to a lot of workers in the construction sector is that they move from contractor to contractor and they do not get the benefits such as National Insurance Scheme (N.I.S.) coverage and Pay As You Earn (P.A.Y.E.) remittance on behalf of the employer. More particularly, when it comes to the non-payment of their wages, many times these workers are not paid for the period that they work. This is another area that we are looking to assault frontally. Work has already begun in the security sector for workers, especially those who are working with the guard services. Those are areas which need a tremendous amount of attention and we intend to “tackle” them frontally, as I said.

6.05 p.m.

As I speak to “TACKLE” this is a programme within the Ministry of Labour called “TACKLE” (Tackling Child Labour through Education). The Minister of Education has said he is setting the goal this year to half the amounts of drop out in our school system; he is going to cut it by half. [Interruption: I thought you did not have troubles] You do not listen.

And what he said is: ‘we have found providing the uniform, and the meal, has helped with increasing attendance and completion of your school curriculum. The Government in this Budget has provided a school uniform and a meal for the children of our country. But there is another area that we need to look at, that is: “Tackling Child Labour through Education” and we also have a small Budget of \$1M Euros over three years. This is a programme we have in collaboration with the International Labour Organisation funded by the European Union.

After a certain businessman heard of the target set by Minister Baksh he called to said look we have many areas where our children get transportation they will attend school more regularly and when they leave in the afternoon they will have enough time for play, do their home work and then get back to school on time the next day.

We have a programme that is going to start shortly where two buses, two coaster buses will be provided to ferry school children free of cost between the end of the Linden Highway to the South and from the Soesdyke junction to the North. All along the Linden Soesdyke Highway a bus will be provided to take school children free, so that they can get to school on time and they have enough time to get home and play. “TACKLE” programme is going to help with ensuring that we can provide the running cost for that service.

Close collaboration exist between “TACKLE” and the Ministry of Education. We are identifying from the data set that they have, those schools which have the lowest attendance. So those children can look forward to not only the uniforms and the meal, but also free transportation.

The Ministry is piloting this year as promised by the P.P.P./C. in its 2006 manifesto a very aggressive programme to energise cooperatives. What has happen over the many decades is that the movement has not only lost its spirit, but has been hijacked by a few persons. Many of them have been plagued by mismanagement, as we have seen at the Linden Utility Services Coop Society Limited.

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

Mr. Hinds: May the Hon. Minister be given another 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Nadir: Thank you very much Sir. The Linden Utility Services Co-op for many years has had problems with its management and while we have had the cause to intervene twice before, we had to appoint a management committee to bring the books of the Linden Utility Co-op Society Ltd and the membership register up-to-date. After all that was done in 2008 we returned. Our job is not to hold or manage the society, but to ensure good governance and accountability. We returned that society in mid 2008 to the co-operators of the Linden Utility Services Co-op Society Limited. I must say today, that we have not had cause to intervene again. Of the 900 co-operatives we have in the country I cannot say the same. And as I said many of these co-operatives have been hijacked by a few, many of them have become dormant and it is the manifesto promise of the P.P.P./C. to energise co-operatives.

Another example of how we need to get more involved is that some co-operatives have hundreds of millions of dollars in turn over every year and the members of those co-operatives do not receive, I would say; a fair income, dividend or bonus from those societies. There is going to be more aggression in the area of co-operatives in 2010. At the end of this year we can proudly stand at the next Budget and say: "this is another manifesto promise of the P.P.P./C. that has been fulfilled."

Last year, while we mentioned the training for young people, the Budget had \$25 million dollars in training for single parents. We were targeting then 250 single parents to be trained by the end of 2009. These single parents were drawn from the Register of single parents that was created earlier. We did not decide, well if Aubrey Morton was a single parent we tell him to come and train. What we did: we went to the register of single parents and identified those who asked for training, who were earning below a certain minimum and we sent out letters to them. The response by these single parents was overwhelming and instead of getting 250 of them we had in excess of 412 who applied. We decided not to turn anyone away, and while the \$25 million dollars that was provided in the Budget would make it tight to train the 412, what we sought to do was, to establish partnerships with community based organisation that had facilities, faith

based organisations that had facilities, and I am proud to say that in collaboration with all these N.G.O.s we were able to successfully graduated 372 single parents, 122 more than we projected.

I think the Hon. Member Winston Murray wanted some figures and targets here he is getting them. This year more money is provided in the Budget of the Board of Industrial Training for this particular programme. We have also gone a step further, we have said to them: we are not only going to train you, but we are going to give you the tools so you can work from the comfort of your home or you can form a co-operative and work among yourself to provide the services that you were trained for. We are going to give you the tools and shortly with money being available in the last Budget, people will start en-cashing their vouchers those who were trained, for \$65 000 per person. They will start going to the stores to start buying their tools from this month. \$65 000 in tools every single one of the trainees will get.

We cannot guarantee every single person who has been trained and qualified themselves, a job and a good job. We are on the market based economy, we cannot guarantee...

Mrs. Backer: You said so just now

Mr. Nadir: I said 80% of those trained had jobs in the single parent training programme. *[Interruption]* We will find a job. We cannot guarantee every single person we trained a job. Many times we have to use our own initiatives, we cannot want to be at the lowest level of skill and receive the highest level of remuneration.

Mr. Norton: That is what you doing.

Mr. Nadir: I am just following you; you do not teach at U.G. and you get paid. We have gone the extra dollar and given these trainees, the single parents the capacity to earn and look after themselves their children. We know what some of the consequences are if the children are left unattended. We are going to be expanding our “TACKLE” programme to increase the message to parents, grandparents and community for all our children. Our children need parenting, grand-parenting and community parenting in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. Our job is to ensure that the children stay in school and complete their formal secondary education. We are going to work diligently to achieve that target set by Minister Baksh toward lowering by half the dropout rate from our secondary schools.

Mr. Speaker we cannot be proud as a country after all these decades at \$US 1,500 per capita per person in Guyana, as against Saint Kitts at \$US 10,000, Antigua close to \$US 15,000, Saint Lucia at \$7,000. We recognise we have a very far way to go, but we know that starting at \$US 250 per capita in 1991, today we have more than quadruple that at \$US 1,500 per capita. Minister of Finance I am not using your numbers, I am using the independent numbers from the I.M.F., from the World Bank, and also the figures from the C.I.A. (Certified Internal Audit). I am confident with the rebasing, the bringing into account, the changes in the sectors in the economy that when the next publishing of the per capita G.D.P., we will see Guyana moving further up in terms of the income of our people.

This Budget again consolidates and set the tone. The consolidation in my view is the consolidation of the positive growth we have had in the past 4 years, we are not going to let that slip. We are going to transform, I am confident with better work force training the I.C.T. backbone that is being laid, the technologies that are being employed and the amount of additional quality services being offered to our people, we will not only transform the economy but we are going to propel even faster growth in the future. With these few words I offer my congratulations once again to the Minister of Finance and offer him my best wishes for a successful completion of the year 2010. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Mrs. Holder: Thank you Mr Speaker. Permit me first of all to extend congratulations to the Hon. Finance Minister and his wife on the birth of their child, I just learnt of their new baby. Permit me also to extend congratulations on behalf of the Alliance For Change to the two new members of Parliament and to advise them not to be disillusioned by what they will witness here in the next few days. I believe that congratulations are also in order - that we should extend to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition on the occasion of his birthday. Finally, I believe that it is necessary for me to extend words of congratulations to the lead opposition's speaker this evening on the budgetary estimates; I refer to the Hon. Member Winston Murray. I believe that he exhibited fortitude in the extensive work he did in presenting arguments which I consider to be pungent and worthy of adoption.

I must confess that I rise reluctantly for this the 10th time to participate in what I do not believe is a meaningful process to deal with the budgetary estimate presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance last Monday. The reason being, is that salient features related to the spirit of our

Constitution in the context of inclusionary governance and in the context of the meaningful role envisage for the National Assembly are not being met. They are not being met, to allow for the kinds of development, the kinds of growth desired by our people. In fact I heard nothing in all the presentations being made and the rebuttals on the Government side address some of the major issues confronting our people in virtually all villages of this country. I speak about the nepotism that is overwhelming our people at the local government level that we hear about where ever we go in this country. I speak about the high levels of corruption at every level of the Government that I hear nothing about. I speak above the level of victimisation that continues to bother me wherever I go in this country by the ordinary people. By the misuse of power by officials in every strata of the governmental system; these kinds of wrongdoings are not being addressed.

Therefore, I proposed in order to correct them that we in the Alliance for Change are of the opinion that they should be what we call an “ex-anti” review of the Budget in addition to the usual annual debate. Let me explain what I mean: we propose that the economic affairs services sector should have an advanced knowledge of the main features of the Budget. They should deliberate on the matter by having the Budget or indeed a summary of the Budget formally sent to the House.

Subsequently, I believe that the economic affairs sector committee should consider the proposals and render a report which will be sent to the National Assembly prior to the commencement of the debate on the budgetary estimates. Make no mistake about it, the Government benches are fooling no one but themselves about the value of this exercise, we call a Budget Debate. If the truth were to be told this exercise has become a charade with the annual hype about the Budget being the biggest ever, when the conditions of the people continue to deteriorate.

Mr. Speaker when nowhere in the Budget resides the hope of the thousands who are without jobs. Nowhere in the Budget there resides hope of the thousands more with insufficient disposable income for a decent livelihood. As I said some years ago a Budget ought to take stock of the socio economic political problems confronting the country and propose fiscal and economic measures to ameliorate those problems.

Like the other ten Budget presentations I have witnessed, this one has failed significantly to take the prevailing problems into consideration. Therefore, it must be described for what it is, doomed to be in-effectual and more of the same: 'Plenty Punishment, Poverty and Corruption,' the acronym of the P.P.P./C. which by the way a former P.P.P./C. sugar worker told me about just last weekend.

Mr. Neendkumar: What is his name?

Mrs. Holder: So that you could victimise and corrupt him, that is all you are good for? Mr. Speaker, I therefore will not go the route of the usual charade but instead attempt to fulfil all my duties by submitting specific questions to the subject Ministers I have been assigned to shadow.

Ministers I have been assigned to, you would know by now, starting with the Minister of Health. I would like to say that I expect that as the various Ministers attempt to regale us about all the wonderful things that are happening everywhere they will find the time to answer these questions which I submit, not on my own behalf, not on behalf of the party I represent, but on behalf of the people of this country.

To the Hon. Minister of Health I have the following questions, and if you like I can submit them later on.

- I would like to ask him if there is a health sector policy, will the Minister give the House a status report on the progress being made. Measuring where we are against where the policy says we should be.

Other specific questions to the Minister are related to the attrition rate vis a vis the expenditure being invested in health education. Other questions:

- How many resignations across categories of nurses and doctors and other health workers did the public sector experience last year?
- Can the Minister tell the House what efficiency and effectiveness measurements he applies to the health sector?
- How many vacancies in each category there are in the health sector across the regions and how does the Budget provide for these to be filled during the year?

- Will he ensure that the corporatised G.H.P.C. conduct its financial affairs according to the laws and avoid the annual reprimand of the Auditor General?
- Does the Budget take account of the supplementary financial papers approved by this Assembly late last year giving the health ministry money to buy drugs and medical supplies through to the end of April this year?
- Will the Minister be good enough to give us a sense of the reasons for the many patient cases being referred by the regional hospitals, that these hospitals were in fact set up to deal with?

Turning now to the Hon. Minister of Industry & Tourism, he is not here; I believe he also has the responsibility for Consumer Affairs. Can he say:

- What was the level of occupancy in 2009 at the hotels and guest houses in the country?
- Can the Minister say: what is the position with respect to the consumer protection and the hire purchase legislation?
- What is the state of labelling product, including those written in a foreign language that I still see appearing on products on our shelves in the supermarkets and other market places?
- To the Hon. Minister Manniram Prashad, what does he intend to do with the LCDS requiring significant changes to be used in regards to our forest? I would like him to give us a sense of the approaches he proposes to take with respect to tourism, eco-tourism, and sports tourism in that regard?

Turning now to the Hon. Minister of Public Service,

- On behalf of the many who are curious about the tilt in the expenditure of wages and salaries in favour of contract workers as against fixed establishment workers, what explanation would the Hon. Minister give for this?
- Can the Minister state, the Government's policy on wages and salaries in relation to a healthy diet vis a vis the cost of living, the percentage of expenditure and real increases?
- Will the Hon. Minister of the Public Service please provide the House with an explanation of the roles of P.S.M. and the Public Service Commission in the employment of contract employees and temporary employees?

- Can the Minister tell us also how many acting positions there are across the public service and the strategy she has to confirm these persons?
- Finally, can she say whether the travel allowances for public servants which have remained unchanged since the year 1995, will be reviewed this year?

To the Hon. Prime Minister who have responsibility for Public Utilities, I plea that you answer these three questions for the benefit of the public.

- Is there any intention to bring G.P.L. under real rather than nominal regulatory control of the Public Utility Commission?
- Can you state Sir, what efforts Government proposes to take to privatise G.P.L. and to save the tax payers the huge sums that are transferred each year to that utility service?
- And finally when will the memorandum of understanding between the Government of Guyana and the Kingdom of Norway be signed and laid in the National Assembly with respect to the Low Carbon Development Strategy?

And finally to the advisor of Governance in the Office of the President,

- Why is there no provision in this Budget for the setting up of the Secretariat to facilitate the work of the several rights commissions?
- Will the advisor on governance give us a status report on the failure to establish the National Procurement Commission that is a crucial government issue?
- Why is money being voted for the National Sport Commission, a body that has been defunct for more than two years? That is a major governance issue.
- Why is the Parliamentary Management Committee not more pro-active, and I am a member of that committee, in following up legislation passed by this House and held up by the Office of the President in which there is an advisor on governance?

Mr. Speaker I intend in another few moments to print out these questions and to circulate them to the Hon. Ministers concerned. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Minister of Public Service [Dr. Westford]: Mr. Speaker, for one moment I really thought that we were listening to the Questions without Notice section just now and not a Budget Debate. I

would like to ask my Parliamentary colleague, the Hon. Member Mrs. Holder to please send those questions to me officially and you will be given the answers promptly.

6.35 p.m.

I rise to add my contribution to this 2009 budget debate, like my colleagues who spoke before me... [Mr. Ramjattan: “2010 budget”] 2010 sorry, actually I was writing something for Mrs. Holder but I decided not to answer her tonight. Like my colleagues before me, I would like to congratulate the Minister of Finance and his staff for crafting timely completion and presentation of yet another piece of ingenious work. I use the word “craft” deliberately because this has been a skilled, precise process where no detail has been overlooked. After years of prudent fiscal management by this government, it is now opportune to consolidate the gains made, transform the socio-politico economic environment and sustain the economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, while on paper the budget appears as numbers and columns, it in effect represents goals and aspirations of this Government. This year’s budget was crafted on the premise that we would emerge as a stronger nation. Our goal is not merely to hold our own but to advance side-by-side of our peers on a global scale. We are by no means out of the woods. We anticipate more budget challenges should the global economic crisis intensify, but we are confident in the country’s ability to move forward. In order to consolidate and sustain the growths we have made as a country, a conducive environment must exist. As a fraction of the governmental equation, the Public Service Ministry is tasked with the responsibility of ensuring the availability of a well-trained professional work force and the ultimate provision of efficient service by public agencies.

In my budget presentation of 2009, I updated this Hon. House on the ongoing process of the Public Sector modernisation. I reported that the human resources analysis revealed, that the existing human resources governance structure was overly complex with multiple players and a resulting burden of duplicative and often unnecessary rules. The Public Service Ministry continues to implement changes to streamline and improve the management of human resources in the Public Service of Guyana. This serves to simplify the organisational structure for human resources management, reduce overlap and duplication and will provide Permanent Secretaries with the primary responsibility for managing the people in their own departments.

We have heard, and coming from the Hon. Member, Mr. Murray, who said that nowhere in the budget, was there any mention about corruption; the word corruption was not mentioned. Let me say, Mr. Speaker, we do acknowledge that there is corruption within the Public Service and I repeat: there is corruption in the Public Service but we are implementing methods and mechanisms to deal with it. And we will continue implementing those methods until we totally get rid of corruption within the government service. The changes I spoke about will advance our commitment to Public Service renewal by ensuring that, our public servants have the clear mandate and organisation they need to continue providing sound policy advice to government and a high quality service to Guyanese stakeholders.

Bearing in mind, that the Private Sector is one of the key stakeholders of the Government, let me today assure the following: that I, as the Minister responsible for the Public Service, am committed to transforming the performance orientation, service delivery effectiveness, overall productivity and efficiencies of the Public Service to facilitate the Private Sector's needs. This year the Public Service Ministry will accelerate the training of eligible candidates in various disciplines. Last year, a total of 124 graduates in the field of Human Medicine, Agriculture, Veterinary Medicine, Forestry, Engineering, Sports, Information Technology, Hydro Meteorology and Architecture returned to Guyana from overseas Universities. We also had 23 graduates from the University of Guyana and the Guyana School of Agriculture in the fields of Engineering, Agriculture, Information Technology and Management.

Mr. Speaker, the pleasure is mine to report that all and I repeat, all of these graduates are meaningfully employed by the government of Guyana in government agencies. Hon. Member Mr. Murray, none of them as yet, have sought visas to go to "region 11". As of this year the Public Service Ministry will also be responsible for the granting of scholarships to 25 teachers per year to attend the University of Guyana. This project which started two years ago, as a result of a negotiation between the President of the Guyana Teachers Union and the President of Guyana is bearing fruit and we are going to be responsible for those teachers. Today, there are 50 of such persons attending the University. Also scholarships were granted to 39 persons in 2009 to peruse studies in Cosmetology, Sewing, Carpentry, Masonry and Plumbing at local institutions. We are targeting 50 additional young people to be trained in these very disciplines for 2010. It is envisaged that these new skills learnt, will allow more of our young people to

become self-employed, and just for information sake, the government usually assist these graduates with an initial start-up grant after they have graduated.

In order to facilitate the more advanced services by government agencies, the training of specialists in the fields of Anaesthesiology, Pathology, Hydrology and Automation Engineering will be a key feature of this year's budget. Also, courses in Climate Change will be incorporated into our local staff development calendar for the first time this year. Eight computer engineers will be returning in July of this year and will be part of the team to implement and operate the new government-funded fibre optic cable.

Again, let me reiterate that the Government's training agenda is one fraction of the whole equation of nation building. The view was expressed by a Member of the Opposition that the budget has nothing in it for the average worker, this Sir, could have only originated from someone who genuinely cannot understand what was presented in the budget or one who revels in political grandstanding. We as politicians Mr. Speaker, must be able to link activities and look at the bigger picture. We must not speak for instance, as the construction of a two mile stretch of roadway as a standalone activity. We have to translate this activity into how many persons will benefit from the rental of their trucks to transport sand, stone and other materials. We have to calculate how many persons will be employed as labourers, also the calculation of the long term benefits that will be derived from the improved carriage way.

We must appreciate the positive impact of every new project that this budget is going to afford us.

Yes, we need to look at issues holistically and stop being myopic. We will continue to implement methods by which the employment benefits of public workers will be enhanced. We all know, that as a result of the global economic crisis, hundreds of thousands of workers are being retrenched in the United States of America (U.S.A.) and other first world countries. Here in the Caribbean, there is retrenchment of public workers, salary cuts and even freezes. In Guyana the public servants benefited from a 6% increase across the board in wages and salaries, not retrenchment or salary freezes. This government must be commended for its commitment to enhancing employment benefits, especially when we were told that on the quality of life index Guyana ranked as second lowest country in the Caribbean. We as a government will continue

working with the Guyana Public Servants Union (G.P.S.U.) to ensure that we maintain a harmonious industrial relation climate.

Mr. Speaker, like the rest of the country, Region 7 for whom I have some Parliamentary responsibility, and which received an 8% increase over 2008 in its budgetary allocation, will also be implementing projects designed to transform some communities and in some instances to sustain the transformation of others. High on the agenda will be the construction of the Five Miles Housing Scheme which will be housing hundreds of persons. The Bartica/Potaro road that was constructed would be receiving the addition of drains to complement and improve the drainage of that road way.

At the Three Miles Secondary School, there is a problem with water. The Three Miles Secondary School will be getting a shallow well to upgrade their water system. Also the Three Miles Primary School will be upgraded and extended to accommodate additional students.

The Bidrabu sea defences will also be upgraded. In the upper Mazaruni we will be seeing the Kamarang Hospital, this will be refurbished once again and the Amerindian Hostel at Kamarang will be repaired and put into operation. In Kako, the road from Kamarang to Kako is going to be upgraded and made passable so that persons can freely ply. The sanitary facilities at Bidrabu will be upgraded, this follows a trend that the region has been doing since 2008, and they have been upgrading the sanitary facilities for all of the schools in the riverine areas.

Those of us who know Chinowieng, there is a creek called the Haieka Creek that is going to be bridged and I know that is going to be a huge relief for persons who live there. All of these projects that I have outlined, which are just a few of the projects to be undertaken in Region 7, will obviously be creating jobs for some of the persons in those areas. Again we should look at this budget holistically.

Definitely, one must be myopic or suffering from a decelerated sense of celerity not to see the developmental progress that has been made over the years. The stakes of this year's budget are high; our collective ability to combat the fall out of the global economic crisis will define our generation of leaders. More importantly, it would determine the standard of living of future generations of Guyanese. Successfully overcoming this period of global turmoil is not just the most important task we face as a government, it is the most important task we face as a society.

Mr. Speaker, let me state categorically that the government of Guyana is prepared to use every tool at its disposal to combat the economic difficulties that are likely to surface.

Our history in Guyana is replete with missed opportunities. In the past, we have place political opportunism above the national interest. Far too long has been postponed the inevitable and belief that we can do the same thing, the same way, under the same conditions and yet expect a different result. Many times we have underestimated the good sense and intelligence of our people. Even though time and time again they have proven their strength, resilience and deep appreciation of what is good for us and the development of our country. It is time for both sides of this Hon. house to equate a national development with their future wellbeing. The prospects of our country must now become everybody's business.

We dare not miss this moment; we cannot afford to lose this opportunity. Guyana's potential for growth and prosperity remains to be fully exploited. Our democratic values are robust, our people are incredibly talented, resilient and capable of beating insurmountable odds time and time again. I have no doubt, that if we come together, are prepared to accept shared sacrifice and approach of problems realistically, constructively and with the calm, cool strength displayed everyday by ordinary Guyanese, there is no question our best days are ahead of us. We must now seize the opportunity beckoned to us. With all hands we must grasp victory to rebuild the foundation of our economy and secure the future of our country. Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, as a proud dedicated Guyanese I am confident that together with God's help we will consolidated, transform and sustain the development of this country we call home. May God richly bless you all and may God continue to bless this dear land of ours. I thank you. [Applause]

Ms. Selman: Thank you Mr. Speaker, I wish to offer my contribution on the 2010 budget presented by Dr. Ashni Singh under the theme: 'Consolidate, Transform and Sustain.' Before I do, allow me to extend congratulations to Mrs. Dawn Hastings, Member of Parliament (M.P.) on her election to serve in the Parliament of Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, article 13 of the Guyana's Constitution requires that citizens and their organisations be provided with opportunities to participate in the management and decision-making processes of the State. Regrettably, the citizens were not consulted and therefore were not afforded the opportunity to contribute towards the crafting of policies and programmes outlined in the 2010

budget. I believe that the title of the budget is quite appropriate. When one takes into account the government, it's meaningful consultations with stakeholders as provided for in the Constitution and thus the title illustrates that the P.P.P./C. Government intends to: continue to disregard articles in provision of the Constitution, which address the question of meaningful consultation with stakeholders and civil society; strengthening of their practice of awarding contracts in a discriminatory manner; being unresponsive from the call of the P.N.C./R.-1 G and other stakeholders to reduce the burden brought on by the imposition of a value added tax; not create and enable an environment for foreign direct investments.

Consequently, as a result, hone for the realities of Guyana compounded by the government arrogance and blatant disregard for the various Constitutional provisions and the citizenry. The title of the budget offers no hope for the advancement for the transformation agenda of building a modern and prosperous Guyana, in keeping with the Government's 2007 budget theme. The title of the budget; Consolidates, Transforms, Sustains suggest that the government has no intention of offering any relief to the Guyanese people by reviewing its policies and making adjustments where appropriate and to this extent it could be said that the 2010 budget offers no hope to the Guyanese people.

No mention has been made about tax reform, though we have always expressed the view that a reduction of the Value Added Tax must be part of a wider taxation programme which would encompass an overhaul of the tax system, so that Guyanese would be less burdened by tax impositions than they now are. The question of tax reform was addressed in the 2005 budget presentation by the then Minister of Finance. What looms large in Guyanese minds is, when would the P.P.P. administration undertake these reforms?

The raising of the tax threshold to \$35,000 in 2007, in the judgment of the P.N.C.R., has not yielded any relief and therefore we propose that the government raise the personal income tax threshold. The Minister of Finance Dr. Ashni Singh says on page three of the 2010 budget presentation:

“This fourth budget of the current P.P.P./C. administration in the ninth Parliament of Guyana is informed by the following imperatives: Firstly, to guard and protect the stability we have achieved for our economy and our country in the immediate term and

for the long term. Secondly, to lay the basis for continued economic growth, social development and improvement in the quality of life enjoyed by every single Guyanese man, woman and child. Thirdly, to pursue the catalytic changes that would enable us to realise rapid transformation into a truly modern and prosperous Guyana to which we all aspired”.

It is interesting to note, that the third objective seems to suggest that the Government has finally recognised, that they have a list to achieve their objectives of building a modern and prosperous Guyana as outlined in their 2007 budget. I can vividly recall the Minister of Finance boasting of charting policies and programmes that would ensure the emergence of a modern and prosperous State. It could be assumed from the third objective as outlined in the 2010 budget, that the policies and programmes were not yet completed. There is no tangible evidence to indicate that Guyana has been transformed into a modern and prosperous nation and as such Guyanese wait to see the realisation of those lofty plans or processes put forward in 2007 and again in 2010. The P.N.C.R. would welcome such a transformation since our vision of a modern and prosperous Guyana would include meaningful consultation with stakeholders on national policies and issues; subscription to the rule of law by every citizen irrespective of class or political persuasion; establishment of constitutional commissions, for example - the Public Procurement Commission; the creation of job opportunities for Guyanese nationals through Foreign Direct Investment (F.D.I.) and enabling conditions for the creation and establishment of small businesses; proper remuneration for skilled and qualified persons; adequate sports and recreational facilities.

7.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the People’s National Congress Reform is concerned at the vagueness and the lack of foresight associated with sports in Guyana under the People’s Progress Party Civic (P.P.P./C.) Administration. Every year the Minister boasts of allocating millions of dollars in upgrading and purchasing sports equipment, and the 2010 Budget is no different. But these are useless in the absence of a national sports policy. We hear talk of such a draft policy. Such talk is laudable and familiar, but given the track record of unfulfilled promises by the P.P.P./C. Administration, one is not even sure that such a policy would be implemented in the near future. There should be a sports policy which - I would welcome - would ensure that young people are afforded the opportunity to keep fit; sports be used as a mechanism to develop leadership and ensure

participation in the community; career opportunities are created; and the economic potential of sports is maximised.

Apart from the proposed state-of-the-art athletic track, proposed for the West Coast Demerara, what other proposal is there to improve athletics around the country? This facility will certainly revitalise interests in the sport. What we need is more expenditure on sports throughout the country. We wish to see more funds on the promotion of sports in communities throughout Guyana. While being conscious of the importance of sports in urban centres, we believe that the provision of funds, facilities, the coaching services and other areas of assistance will yield untold benefits to rural and hinterland areas. This would also create a greater sense of community consciousness that is so much necessary for social cohesion and nation building. For example, on the East Coast of Demerara, other than the facility at Enmore, there is no other proper facility that is in an appropriate condition to be used to promote the training of athletes on the East Coast. On the East Bank of Demerara, barring the National Stadium which is not usually open to the public, there is no other adequate facility for athletes. The Providence Ground is often fit for jungle training. It is bad that even football is no longer being played there. The people on the East Bank are also in need of recreational and sporting facilities. As a matter of fact, throughout the length and breadth of Guyana there is need for facilities suitable for various sports. It appears that the hinterland has been forgotten. Do we not have indigenous athletes? Of course we do. For the last two years, two promising athletes were spotted from the hinterland at the National Championships.

Mr. Speaker, it is evident that grass roots games are not on the priority list of this Government in advancing sports. The budgetary allocations indicate that there are no definite plans to aid the Guyana Football Federation so as to enable it to push football across the country. Approximately forty per cent of our young people are keen on football. This is evident from the many soccer matches held on the streets, busy or not, because there are no facilities for them to improve their skills. On the East Bank of Demerara, for example, from Agricola to Soesdyke, there is only one space suitable for football which is located in the Grove area. There is no other ground suitable for football and apparently the Providence Ground is forgotten and destroyed.

The Diamond Cricket Ground has a bias for cricket, notwithstanding, the lack of facilities. The Minister of Finance has failed to allocate moneys towards the upgrading or maintenance or

establishment of facilities that would encourage sports to develop. The playing of football goes beyond the mere kicking of a ball. It involves teamwork. It also has a positive impact on reducing crime and the use of drugs by our youths. Years ago it was a norm to see young men playing football on the Providence Ground; today, due to lack of maintenance of the ground that is a thing of the past, and many of these young men are now seen loitering and in many cases gambling on the street corners. Mr. Speaker, these grounds should be developed and maintained, and be used for sporting, cultural, and civic activities in every community. The National Sports Commission, or whichever body is responsible for the maintenance and rehabilitation of such grounds, is urged to ensure that these are maintained so that the young men and women can utilise the resources available to them.

I would like to suggest that the Government invite private initiatives for the development of these sporting and recreational facilities, since it is quite clear that it is unable to do this on its own. I had pointed out in my 2009 Budget presentation that a group of civic minded Guyanese had approached the relevant authorities in Essequibo for the use of the ground at Charity to be developed by them and their request was turned down. This should not have occurred as there are many civic minded Guyanese who are prepared to support the Government in these initiatives to develop recreational facilities for all Guyanese. Against this background, I would again recommend that the relevant authority invites this civic minded group to discuss the initiative for the development of the ground at Charity, as even our senior citizens will be well served if they have somewhere to go in their communities for recreation and exercise. Mr. Speaker, we believe that actions speak louder than words. We believe that this Administration should provide the enabling environment for the promotion of all sports. There are several grounds throughout Guyana which are abandoned and undeveloped, besides those that I have already mentioned. I urge the Minister of Culture Youth and Sports to put mechanisms in place so as to ensure that these grounds are rehabilitated and maintained.

The Minister of Finance pointed out on page 42 of the 2010 Budget that:

“Furthermore, Government has allocated \$392.5 million to upgrade sports infrastructure in 2010, including the completion of an Olympic sized swimming pool, upgrading of Colgrain Pool, a new athletics track, tennis courts, and squash courts.”

We heard a grandiose announcement so many years ago about the construction of an Olympic sized swimming pool. When will this be completed? This pool will stimulate interest around the country. But what arrangement will be put in place to ensure that the young people throughout the length and breadth of Guyana benefit from such a pool? It is ironic that the Government would conceptualise the construction of squash and tennis courts when less than one per cent of our youth plays squash, and worst, less than one per cent even knows what is squash. Personally, I have no problem with the Government promoting sports in Guyana, and promoting squash, but it makes no sense unless training and coaching are introduced in schools so that all of Guyana can be familiar with this sport. When such allocations are made to these types of sports with minimal or no consideration for cricket and football, games which are played by a wide cross section of the society, one has to wonder on what basis these allocations are made.

Tennis has reached a high level of world recognition. But what is the Government doing to teach our young people to play tennis? Since less than five per cent of Guyanese play or even have an interest in tennis. Those who do have an interest have their own tennis courts. So it seems as though it is only the wealthy who will have facility for sports and leisure. There have to be training and coaching programmes around the country so that all of Guyana can maximise the benefits associated with such sports.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I wish to recommend that with each new housing drive, equal emphasis should be placed on sport facilities to keep our youths from the ills of new and growing communities. Numerous youths are affected by the lack of recreational activities, a void which can be filled by sports. We need to see a more comprehensive plan on how the moneys that are allocated will be dispersed for the benefit of all of Guyana. A comprehensive sports policy in place would define the relationship between the National Federation's Associations and the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. Youths are unique, in that all policies and programmes affect them, be it health, education, housing and water, culture and sports, etc. The Minister of Finance, in presenting the 2008 Budget said the following, and I quote:

“Mdm. Speaker, it is our duty to ensure that their future is secure and that our young people are fully engaged in their communities and the development of their country and they are empowered to lead the generations that follow.”

Mr. Speaker, the Government does not appear to be committed to making this a reality in the immediate future, having regard to the fact that there is no national youth policy which will identify focal areas for youth participation and empowerment.

In 2009, the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, Dr. Frank Anthony, alluded to a draft youth policy. The Government does not appear to be serious about the implementation of such a policy, since it is yet to accept the offer from the Canadians and the Commonwealth Youth Programme to provide technical and other advice on such a policy. Yes, there have been talks about a national youth policy, but a few Youth Officers in various Regions are neither sufficient nor a substitute for a comprehensive policy. The introduction of a national youth policy would certainly represent the Government's genuine commitment to implementing genuine agenda issues, programmes and projects that are critical to youth development.

A number of the nation's youths, between the ages 15 to 24, figured prominently in Guyana's crime statistics either as victims or perpetrators. Many of them are unattached and deemed to be at risk. Many are not actively engaged in positive activities nor linked to any form of uplifting social groups, and are perhaps involved in illegal and destructive activities. The Minister should tell us what has been done to determine what programmes are best suited for these youths and what policies the Government intends to design to address these challenges.

Perhaps the most fundamental problem facing young people today is unemployment. Unemployment pervades all communities in Guyana. The P.N.C./R. recognises that youth unemployment is not unique to Guyana but believes that as the unemployment rate grows, the Government, in collaboration with the non-governmental organisations and youth serving organisations, has to find effective measures to tackle the problem through a comprehensive national youth policy. Four years later there is no framework for rolling out the promises that the P.P.P./C. Government made to young people in the 2006 election campaign. The Minister has failed to mention job creation and, thus, young people have concluded that there is nothing in the Budget for them. Job creation featured prominently in the 2004 Budget, under the theme: *Investing for Sustained Economic Growth and Enhanced Social Development*. The then Minister said, and I quote:

“Government will continue to encourage and facilitate a number of private sector investments that will add value and create jobs in the economy.” End of quote.

In the 2005 Budget, under the theme: *Confronting Challenges, Sustaining Growth and Development*, the question of job creation was also mentioned. On page 29 of that year’s Budget, we read:

“Mr. Speaker, employment creation is critical to the Government’s efforts to reduce poverty. It thus remains a priority of ours to raise the overall level of employment in the economy. We are convinced that we can achieve this objective given the legislative and other changes that we have instituted to facilitate private sector expansion.”

In the 2010 Budget, no mention is made of job creation. Is it that we now have 100% employment? Or is it that poverty no longer exists? The ad hoc allocation of resources, allegedly for specialised training of youth outside of the long established training institutions, is a blatant attempt to politicise this activity, while ensuring the continued strangulation of the Critchlow Labour College by withholding allocations to that institution. Once again, I wish to commend the Minister for recognising the importance of youth training centres and making budgetary allocations to the upgrading of youth training centres at Kuru Kuru, Sophia, and the New Opportunity Corp. It is ironic that while the Minister has announced such huge allocations for technical training outside of the established institutions, nothing has been allocated to improve the quality of training at our Government Technical Institutes, even in the face of current industrial action by the teaching staff of those institutions. The electrical laboratories at the Government Technical Institute in Georgetown lack up to date electrical equipment for the students to perform their practical exercises. Thus, the Institute is producing students who possess the theoretical knowledge but no practical appreciation of the theory. The P.N.C./R. urges the Government to address this issue.

It was noted on page 39, paragraph 4.41 of the 2009 Budget Speech that:

“In order to ensure greater accessibility for all of our young people to alternative pathways, a stronger emphasis on technical and vocational education will be seen in 2009. This has resulted in the allocation of more than \$400 million for the

construction of the two new technical and vocational training centres in Regions 3 and 5, which will commence later this year.”

Mr. Speaker, construction work is yet to commence on the training centre in Region 5, in 2010 - another unfulfilled promise by the Government. While the construction of training centres is commendable, a stronger emphasis on technical and vocational education will not necessarily ensure greater accessibility for all of our young people. What happens to those who are mentally and physically challenged? And what about the thousands of youth who are idle in all of the villages on the coastland? What about the Hinterland youths?

In concluding, Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the P.P.P./C. Administration is incapable of presenting any coherent plans to create the necessary economic and social conditions to lift the growing army of pauperised Guyanese out of poverty and improve their quality of life. Regrettably, as a result of the systematic under-investment in the youth development programmes in Guyana by the P.P.P./C. Government, it is the youth of Guyana who will suffer most. Thank you. [Applause]

Minister in the Ministry of Health [Dr. Ramsaran]: Thank you Mr. Speaker for this opportunity to join in the discussion of the National Budget. I rise also to, at the same time, congratulate Minister Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh and his hard working, predominantly a young but qualified team in presenting so coherently to us this costed plan, the National Budget. Before I get into the meat of what I will like to say, and it will be short today, I would also like to congratulate the two new Members of our family, the two new Members of the National Assembly, and in particular, Mr. Lloyd Joyston Pereira who has been knocking at the door for some time. He is a demonstration that hard work, dedication to community, will catch the eyes of those who are elected to manage the affairs of the nation, and here he is among us. I would like to congratulate him and hold him up as a symbol and a role model for young people, especially for young people who are coming from resource-poor communities.

It would be remiss of me if I did not add another congratulation before I start the discussion. Being a graduate of the People’s Friendship University, I must note a certain happening. It has not been highly or widely publicised locally, probably because it has happened in a far-off land. I will like to note, and on behalf of fellow graduates of that University who are sitting Members of

this National Assembly, that is, on behalf of myself, Dr. Frank Anthony and Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo who are also graduates of the People's Friendship University, named initially after the anti-colonial freedom fighter Patrice Lumumba, I would like to congratulate our President with being awarded a honorary doctorate. I would like to note the fact that in his acceptance, in the far away cold Moscow, he took it not only on his own behalf, but he recognised it as a linked cooperation between the two nations, Russia and Guyana.

I would like to recognise that University for having produced a lot of leaders in this country, some of whom would have sat on the Opposition benches, and some of whom are in academia, heading the University and so on, and forth. That was a unique experience of multiculturalism which has served us as leaders in this country, not only with our academic qualifications, but to grapple with the daily problems. I will like to recognise that contribution and to congratulate the University for achieving its 50th year.

I noted also the contributions from many of the speakers from the opposite side, across the aisle. I did note sometimes, in many instances, there was a lack of spirit. I noted the much respected Mr. Winston Murray making a very good presentation, making some good observations, but his criticisms seem to lack the edge. He did not seem to have the mind or the conviction of what he was saying. I fully empathise and I fully understand why. For example, he said words to the effect that the populace had no respite; despite it has been the largest Budget. Further down, Ms. Selman has indicated that the People's Progressive Party might not have delivered on some of its promises given in the 2006 Election Manifesto. I would like to point out, that this Budget is a roll over from what we have already achieved. It is a continuation and a consolidation of what has been done in previous Budgets.

For example, let me take a few things from the health sector. There has been massive investment in infrastructure, and this Budget, if you were to check, for example, the relevant line items, will be consolidating, will be making sustainable the services that those very good facilities will be offering. One person attempted to trivialise them by jokingly referring to them by the now much used term "state-of-the-art facilities". He was referring, in that instance, to the Mabaruma Hospital. Mr. Speaker, colleagues, as promised in the 2006 Manifesto, we have cardinaly changed, significantly changed the infrastructure in the health sector. As a matter of fact, I can say that there is a significant change in the landscape of the health sector. This is not only in

terms of infrastructure. It is in terms of providing consistently and in an expanding fashion the brainpower to man these facilities. I will like to call to your attention, Mr. Speaker, that that is reflected in this Budget. I would like to thank Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh and his team for reflecting that - the need, now not only to have constructed these edifices, but to now put the teams, the comprehensive teams, the right skills mix, in those facilities.

And I will like to call your attention, for example, to the relevant programme in the Ministry of Health which has been adequately financed, that is, referred to in the Budget as Programme 5 in the Ministry of Health, which is called officially *Health Sciences Education*. If the media, the general populace and our colleagues here were to reflect and look and see there, we have had significant increase over the past few years. Last year we ended up using some \$140.9 million. This year we have been allocated \$190 million just in that programme for training. If you look back in 2008 it was a paltry \$16 million, I think. So there has been an increase. Why has this been needed? Why has the Budget Office, why has the Ministry of Finance found it necessary to make these massive increases? It is because we are addressing those questions that the Opposition Members are now awakening to. How are we going to make these things sustainable? Over the past few years, you would have witnessed, if you have been attentive, and if you have been doing the people's business, and following how the Government has been correctly investing the taxpayers' dollar, that there has been an astronomical expansion in training in all aspects.

Let me walk you through it a little bit to show you the comprehensive package. (They are a bit slow, so we will walk them slowly, and this, of course, is also for the benefit of the media.) Mr. Speaker, before I go to training let me quickly review... *[Interruption]*... what we did for infrastructure. We have been able to establish in communities which in the recent past had run down hospitals, good quality hospitals. They might not be, at present, fully staffed, but as I will show shortly, that we are in the process of achieving that. I will like particularly to mention a few, the impact of which I think is not fully understood. Let us take the new facility that we have built right here on Cemetery Road, the new East La Penitence Health Centre. It was a joint venture between the U.S. Military and the Government of Guyana, the Ministry of Health.

7.35 p.m.

Already if you were to check it, if you were to go and have an interaction with the patients who visit that facility; what will you find? You will find that they come from the surrounding community which is on the poorer level of the economic scale; working class; living in homes which are now becoming a bit crowded, because families are now expanded with a lot of children; and what you will also find is that they will honestly tell you... [Mr. Norton: Did you ever go into East Ruimveldt?]. That is why I have built it there. I know what they need. So to answer your question Mr. Norton, I know the area; I am grass roots man; and we decided to build the facility there because those people needed it. For all the years that you were in office, you did not find it necessary to put something in that area. We specifically, Mr. Speaker, placed that good facility in a densely populated working class area.

I was trying to relate to you before I was interrupted by the goodly Mr. Norton, that if you were to speak to the patients who visit that facility, they would say: "Yes, we used to go to the Georgetown Hospital, and we will get our tablets; we will be seen by the doctor, but it took some time." It took the better part of a day because Georgetown Hospital, being as good as it was, has to serve everybody. Now you would note that those same people would tell you this: "I can come across to the health facility and get services from 45 minutes to an hour." That is progress. That is an evidence based approach to providing services and implementing one of the tenets, one of our approaches to the provision of services, that is equity of access of services.

What I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, colleagues, is this, we have not stopped there, and I am not emphasising too much on this small facility, I am using it as an example, a teaching tool, for the Opposition benches. Already, within a few days of us having opened that facility late last year, we started to add facilities and we started to add services which previously had not been envisioned for the original plan. In other words, dental services were added within the second week of operations. This is the pattern that you would observe if you were to look at the other facilities that we have built. Those facilities that some people want to snicker at. They are not ideal but they are evolving. Similarly, within a few weeks you would have passed and seen construction work going on, a larger waiting area made and the original waiting area now will be made into a comfortable dental suit, so that dentist will now visit, not on a scheduled basis, but more frequently.

Yes, it is a large Budget. It is the largest Budget, and because it is the larger Budget, and in spite of Mr. Murray's criticisms, the people are benefiting from it and will continue to benefit. This Budget will allow us to consolidate and at the same time to introduce at a faster rate those new services I just used as examples to demonstrate.

My colleagues are pressing me to tell you about the training, because they know what we are doing, and they suspect or well know that it is not ventilated adequately in the local media. Dr. Jennifer Westford has whetted your appetite just now when she mentioned certain aspects of training. I would like to go a little bit more in depth and remind you that I have already called your attention to the massive amounts of moneys, not only the massive in terms of absolute amounts, but the percentage increases over the past few years that are contained in the provisions on page 179 of your document, Volume 1, and you can turn to it and you will see under Health Sciences that the moneys are there for the training.

What training? I am going to put a little bit on hold here about the training that we are doing for doctors and nurses. I want to tell you about the other categories that are necessary which will help us to create the right skills mix, what we call a health team, because it is not only good facilities – the state –of- the- art facilities that we have built, not the x-ray departments and the theatres, and the good buildings, those are needed, but they alone, even if I were to put the best doctors in them with the best nurses, would not be able to deliver the quality of services that the P.P.P./C.ivic has envisioned and that which this nation deserves in all of its Regions. We would need to have what I would like to define as the ancillary workers or auxiliary staff, the technical support staff - the x-ray technicians, the pharmacists and the pharmacist assistants, the dentex. Many times we tend to overlook these people, and only when we are really in trouble and we need to go to the hospital, as a citizen, we realise how crucial the service of even the lower level of workers is, or their services are. Over the past two years, and as is consolidated in this Budget, we have expanded the training of those categories. Right now, we have in training, right here in Georgetown, some 150 young people from all walks of life and they are being trained in some 10 different areas – the x-ray technician, the support staff for the laboratories and even one of my favourite categories - the refractionists, because there is in the Budget speech some small mention of the National Ophthalmology Hospital.

I would like to emphasise this, this Administration has put over the past few years eye care on the front burning. It is not ideal, we have way to go, but we have put eye care on the front burner; and to make that sustainable and to make the services even more accessible to more and more communities we need to train the lower level workers. It is not possible or not even needed, for example, to have an optometrist or an ophthalmologist – that is an eye specialist – to go to a small village to screen. He or she needs to be in a well prepared or well appointed facility like the National Ophthalmology Hospital at Port Mourant to do the things that the expensive skills that have been imparted onto him or her can be done there. That person would need the support of lesser trained people, younger people who later in life can probably become more qualified to go into the Amerindian villages and so on. Eye care has been put on the front burner, quietly. Like, for example, mental health is being put on the front burner; but we are putting it quietly on the front burner and probably it is not recognised. Let me talk a little bit more on eye care and I was trying to link the fact that this Budget will be supporting or continue to support training of these support staff.

Right now, Mr. Speaker and colleagues, quietly, every single week, we screen people far away from the main hospital in Port Mourant and we do all of this free of cost. For example, at Diamond, at Leonora and we continue Mission Miracle in its local variant. Before I tell you about the screening that we are doing and how this Budget is consolidating it, if you check the necessary line items, for example - *Other Services Purchased*, because we will have to purchase or charter minibuses, using other services, you would see that those provisions are expanding.

Previously, our President, our Administration, with the Cuban's Administration crafted what is called Mission Miracle for Guyana. Some 6,000 patients were sent to Cuba free of cost. This was an expensive venture. We would take them out, to say Wakapau or Philippi or somewhere, bring them free of cost to Georgetown after having screened them, and then take them to Cuba on a plane to have their eyes fixed. That was expensive, but we had needed to do it because of the backlog of cases and because we wanted to bring a better quality of life. Get rid of your cataract and you will start to see even while you are on the operating table. Change! This is definitely a change! Persons who have experienced it can tell you that their quality of life changed. That was an expensive venture, taking a planeload of people every two weeks to Cuba. We have decided to create the hospital and we have done that. Now we have to find how we will get the patients to

the hospital and your Government has been doing that quietly over the past few years and it is reflected again in this Budget that we will continue. In other words we will sustain what we started.

Right now, we screen every day about eighty patients just at the Diamond Hospital for eye diseases. I am not speaking about the other 250 patients who we would look at the Diamond Hospital for the chronic diseases, for the childhood diseases, and so on. I am speaking specifically to the category of eye diseases, because within a short space of time when we put an end to the expensive cost of going to Cuba or the foreign-based Mission Miracle, we introduced this service at Diamond. Just as, within a short space of time, I introduced new services at East La Penitence Health Centre – quick time, *quick lick-down action* – we added new services to Diamond Hospital.

To wrap up this little legend: we are now taking, free of cost, ordinary Guyanese from all walks of life from such centres which we still like to determine or describe as state-of-the-art, to screen their eyes. When one goes for eye surgery, we are not operating for a disease or on a disease, we operate on a patient. That patient might also have hypertension or that patient might have “sugar” - what we call diabetes - therefore, each single patient, each of those eighty patients who is screened every day will have a comprehensive check. If I were to decide or the doctor was to decide who is doing the screening that “come two days from now I am putting you on this free minibus to go to the Port Mourant Ophthalmologist Hospital to get your eye’s surgery for cataract.” The patient cannot go and have surgery if he or she did have his or her blood sugar check. The patient cannot go and have his or her eye’s surgery if he or she did not have his or her blood pressure check. All of that is being done and that is sustainable.

The point I want to drive home is this: if you were to check the demographics, the poorer and the poorest folks are availing themselves of these services. Further to that, I want to emphasise the user-friendly aspect, the well thought out mechanisms that we set up. We would pick the patients up at the Diamond Hospital; they would turn up there six o’clock in the morning; they would have been tested and given an appointment as to when they would be going to Port Mourant, at the National Ophthalmology Hospital. You do not have to go to Port Mourant or call the hospital; they would be taken on the minibus; they would be given a snack if necessary; they would have done the surgery the same day and taken to a recovery room; and in 99.9% of the

cases, they would return home the same day on the same minibus. Something more, Mr. Speaker, this arrangement is a drop-to-spot, free of cost, and the minibus would not be parked in way to cause accidents. The attendant on the bus would arrive at a certain home and say: “*Old man look I bring back ya old lady. She seein’ betta now.*”

But what is more interesting about this legend is the path that it takes. While this minibus was going up to Berbice, I had instructed the driver to stop in the middle of the Berbice River Bridge, which was commissioned on the 23rd December, two years ago, and these old people would for the first time see the infrastructure that this Administration has made. I would like to call that to the attention of Mr. Dave Danny who at a previous time tended to criticise the bridge. These people with their cataract or other... are on top of the bridge and they are given this panoramic view and then [*Interruption*]. No, they see it blurred, but the essence of the story is that they feel the power of what the P.P.P./C.ivic is doing because whether they were blind or not, in the past they would have had to have spent hours at the ferry stelling. So whether they are blind or not they appreciate progress. We are, Ms. Selman, modernising the nation, but it takes some time. The gist of it, the punch line is this - when they would be coming back over the bridge, after we would have implanted the lens, after we would have given them that snack before we sent them home from Port Mourant - I told the driver to stop again in the middle of the bridge. Now you know the rest. These are some of the things that we have achieved and I have only related it to you using eye care.

The National Ophthalmology Hospital at Port Mourant is a visionary thing, literally and figuratively. I did not really mean it that way but it came out like that. That will allow this nation to address certain diseases of the eye that would have been expensive to remedy if we had to send these people overseas, whether it is to Cuba by Mission Miracle or to other destinations. That is something that this Administration needs to be congratulated for and the sustainability of that is guaranteed in this Budget. During the next days as we discuss and debate it you will see in the relevant line items where maintenance is provided for, not only in the Central Ministries’ Budget, but in Region 6 under the relevant line item - *Maintenance of Buildings*.

So, Mr. Speaker, those are some of the things I would like to bring to your attention, but there is another thing I want to talk about, the aspect of equitable access to services...

Mr. Speaker: Before you go onto equity, Hon. Member, your time is up.

Mr. Hinds: For equity, I move that the Hon. Member be given another 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. Ramsaran: Thank you for your kindness Mr. Speaker, Mr. Prime Minister. Now another hospital that I think is doing a very good job and has the potential to do better, but which is not catching the eye of the media, is the Doctor C.C. Nicholson's Hospital at Nabaclis. That hospital has existed for some time, but unfortunately, in the decades past, it had deteriorated to the level of a health centre. This Central Administration and the Regional Administration have invested significantly in its repair, which means we are responding to special requests from the community. That community has a subculture where the ladies like to give birth in their homes and so on. They do not like to come to the Georgetown Hospital, but we wanted to do this. We wanted to encourage them to come to a good facility where they can get face to face with a birth attendant and the C. C. Nicholson's Hospital has been raised to that level. The hospital is also capable of a few inpatients. This Budget has resources to see that the works we are about to complete are maintained and sustained. What is more is this, Mr. Speaker, that just prior to the efforts to repair it, I already had doctors there, but because we had a little downturn in activities we have sent them elsewhere. So you were having and, soon again, will be having doctors at this little hospital. Do you know how you are going to be having those doctors, Mr. Speaker and colleagues? Because of the massive investment in the preparation of doctors and nurses. Remember I said in my opening paragraph of this presentation that I was holding back a little bit on the doctors and nurses. Well let us get down to brass tacks.

This Administration, in a visionary fashion, has decided that renovation of the health sector, the reshaping of the health sector, is necessary to be achieved as a package, not only in the glorious infrastructure that I have related or described but creating the... [Ms. Selman: What glorious infrastructure?] We have to get her in this year's programme. I do not understand it. Now what we are doing is creating large numbers of doctors and not only are we creating them but we have already started the process of, not only placement, their professional progression. Next year 300 graduates will come back to this country. Check your gazette at the beginning of this year

and the beginning of last year, and look at where it registers the amount of doctors, and you will see that those 300 that we are expecting next year are about double the amount that is currently registered at one fell swoop. Before we get to next year, we have to live in this year and we have to reflect on what we did last year. Last year 66 Guyanese graduated out of Cuban's universities as doctors. Those are the one that Minister Nadir is referring to. Those are being sent and they have been passing through their rotations at the Georgetown Hospital and other areas and are now prepared for placement to those distant hospitals I just spoke about – Lethem, Mabaruma and so on and so forth.

I want to speak a little bit on this thing attrition, because there is a kind of snickering, a kind of negativism from the Opposition benches. Many of those people are voluntarily coming to the Ministry and indicating where they want to go. Two want to go to Lethem, one wants to go to Mabaruma and so on, and so forth. I do not intend by this to say that there are not those who have other intentions, but presently the atmosphere is very positive. We must congratulate our young people for that.

I would like to relate this to you, Mr. Speaker, recently we had some difficulties in Region 1, particularly Moruka. The doctors just graduated, *baby doctors* let us call them, but some of them had other lives before, some would have been pharmacists before they became doctors. Now when we made the call, "Look young ladies, young men, we need you to depart immediately". The ink had not even dried on their documents making them doctors legally in Guyana, they willingly departed, ten departed, and they were paddling their own canoes, literally speaking, in Amerindian communities, reporting by cell phones and, incidentally, they can report by cell phones because we have been modernising, Ms. Selman. So these people departed without snickering; without negativism; without saying: "I got to tie on to my old lady's skirt tail," and so on. They must be congratulated for that. Unfortunately, they are too numerous for me to mention their names now and because I am now getting to know them too, I do not want to make mistakes in miscalling names. Attrition there will be, but this Administration is taking the necessary steps to provide. We cannot stop people from leaving. If you try to do that you will come up against another set of criticisms.

We have to train and retain. The enlightened policy of the distribution of house lots to professional groups, and I see my colleague over there, Minister Irfaan Ali, he has been

instrumental in that, is giving nurses and doctors as groups. That is enlightenment! That is enlightened policy! I quite understand when Mr. Murray made his presentation he seemed not to do it in the usual spirited fashion that I am accustomed to and I respect him for, because he recognises the extremely impressive work that the P.P.P./Civic is doing. So attrition and loss of qualified staff are still a challenge, but this Administration has taken the bull by the horns, and we are fashioning ways and means to address that issue - non-salaried ways of retaining them.

Somebody is talking about Mahaicony Creek, but we have at the head of Mahaicony a big hospital which we never had before. Now more boats are available, more boat engines are available, people are willing to come out where you have thirty doctors there. Mora Point, for example, we put a little facility there, and right now, a health worker is returning there to work, but the residents are more willing to come out because you have more boats, you have more facilities; and it takes fifteen minutes to get to the head of the creek. Those are realities, so we do have the facility but we are not having the use of it. It is not an empty facility. It is a facility that is providing services, and if the patients so decide to bypass it, we have no control over that. But we have provided them with a viable alternative in the form of the Mahaicony Cottage Hospital - the Mahaicony Diagnostic and Treatment Centre is now staffed by thirty qualified Cubans, and supported by seven young Guyanese doctors. That is progress.

In wrapping up I would like to point out that we have been able, first of all, to radically change the landscape in the health sector in terms of infrastructure – you are quiet, you are not going to argue with that – and in terms of training, but we have been able to do it in a sustained fashion. This is not to say we do not have problems. We have to look to see if there is a haemorrhage. Are we losing things? For example, how our resources are managed. In some cases there are complaints that drugs are not there. In many instances it is due to human error and such other weaknesses that administratively can be addressed. It is not a Budget issue. It is not a technical issue.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to close by saying that if you were to take a look at any television screen now, CNN, Al Jazeera, anyone of them... President Obama is in trouble. The man is losing popularity, allegedly. Why? Because his healthcare plan is under attack; because his economy is in trouble. [Mr. B. Williams: That is old news]. That is not old news and who says that does not understand the dynamics of what is unfolding. It will get worse, not better

for that economy. China, India, Brazil and Russia will now dominate, but President Obama, the man with the most powerful economy, is having difficulties with his Healthcare Reform. [Ms. Selman: What is the relevance to it?]. The relevance my child, I really need to take you in hand and train you, and tell you something. The relevance is this... [Interruption] President Obama has difficulty with his economy and Health Reform. In Guyana, we are showing you how we have not only started the change, not only started what we inherited, we started to repair that, but we are also making it very sustainable. That is the relevance. Some 40 million Americans are in jeopardy because they do not have sound and secure health insurance. In this country, we take such things for granted - free. Do you want eyes to be tested? Go to Diamond Hospital and get seen; jump on the minibus; go to Port Mourant – National Ophthalmology Hospital, get your eyes tested and fixed; and we expect that to be free.

I would like to close by saying that this Budget is very inspiring. This Budget generates a lot of hope. I am excited about it because of the significant increases I have seen in certain sections, particularly for training. I have not mentioned, for example, the Georgetown Public Hospital which, despite its problems that arise from time to time, has continued to deliver better and better services. Problems there will be, but Georgetown Hospital is also evolving into a premier training centre. Check the Budget, the relevant line item and you will see that Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh intends in this Budget to continue supporting the training activities of our premier hospital. We have already started, through that institution, certain postgraduate programmes. This Budget will insure, under the line items relevant to training for the Georgetown Public Hospital, that that will continue.

I tried to put in a nutshell the things we have been doing and I tried to put it against the wide canvass about the crisis that is happening - the international financial crisis - which is forcing large economies to downscale and to take away services in the health sector for their citizens. I would like to congratulate in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, colleagues, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh and his team, a predominantly young but very qualified team, for presenting a Budget that I appreciate much because it would help my sector, and it will make the efforts already started in the health sector, and indeed other sectors, sustainable. It will help us to continue the transformation and, of course, we will be able to consolidate and move forward. I thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Members. Hon. Members I think this is an appropriate time for us to suspend for a very brief period.

Assembly suspended accordingly at 8:06 p.m.

Assembly resumed accordingly at 8:35 p.m.

Ms. Kissoon: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to make my contribution to this 2010 Budget Debate, in this Hon. House. We all know at the end of the day the ayes will have it, nevertheless, I must contribute to this debate, as the people of Region 10 are much aggrieved, and so feel disarmed by this so-called caring Government. The Minister of Finance went on to bore this Hon. House for three hours with much words and no substance, nothing for the people of Guyana to shout about.

It is very disturbing to sit in this Hon. House... if I was boring you, you would not have been taking on... and listen to the Prime Minister who said that Linden or Region 10 is becoming bigger and brighter. I believe that the Prime Minister visits Region 10 with his eyes closed. However, the residents of Region 10 will be totally disturbed when they hear the rubbish that was said in this Hon. House by the Prime Minister. I did not say the Prime Minister is rubbish. I said what he said is rubbish.

Mr. Speaker: Mind your language, Hon. Member. We have certain standards in this House.

Ms. Kissoon: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. Let me bring you, and Hon. Members of this House, up to date with the reality of what is really happening in Region 10. Mr. Prime Minister, I think it is time you wake up and smell the coffee. The Hon. Prime Minister went on to speak about bauxite. First of all, this Government, from the inception, showed its willingness to keep sugar afloat, but it did not do the same or show the same willingness to deal with bauxite. Take for instance, this Government is buying GuySuCo lands, pouring money into GuySuCo, but when it comes to Linden, it shows its contempt for Region 10 and the bauxite company when it dealt with our assets like a Chinese's cook-shop. The Government by refusing to invest in the bauxite industry in the way it has done in sugar is denying young people employment and is responsible for the high unemployment in Region 10. The P.P.P./C.'s aim is to deprive the people of Region 10 of employment and their daily bread.

The Hon. Minister of Finance boasted about the new hospital this Government built, and much is being mentioned about the new state-of-the-art, or so-called state-of-the-art, hospital at Linden. Much is left to be desired of this hospital. I would have wished, while the Minister of Health was busy purchasing that thing, that he would have paid much more attention to the needs of the people in Region 10. The newly constructed hospital at Linden still has a high percentage of inadequacies. Take for instance, we still have a shortage of drugs in the Region, even the people of Kwakwani, Three Friends, Maria Elizabeth, and other outlying areas have to travel all the way to Linden to be treated, only though, to their surprise when they arrived there, there are no drugs to treat them, so they have to be transferred to Georgetown. A well known P.P.P. activist visited the hospital to be treated for his hand. Unfortunately, he was told that there are no drugs available and he, himself, went on to say, and I quote: *“Wah nonsense is this, yuh all build a big fancy hospital and yuh all ent get drugs, this is a waste of money”*. It is a crying shame. It would have been nice if that particular individual had taken that matter under the microscope.

After being launched and boasted about being a state-of-the-art hospital and a facility designed to meet the comprehensive health care needs of the residents of Linden, and surrounding areas, the Linden Hospital Complex remains plagued by a shortage of trained staff and a lack of equipment that compelled many cases to be referred to the Georgetown hospital. It was also reported that since the commissioning of the hospital, in last December, management still has not been able to effectively operate all sections of the hospital. The lack of key elements at the Complex continues to hinder its effective functioning.

There is a lack of vital equipment such as CT scans, ultra sound machines, and intensive care monitors. Even though some equipment has been installed in the I.C.U. it remains non-functional, due to a shortage of monitors and trained I.C.U. nurses. It was also reported that a letter was written to the G.P.H.C., C.E.O., Dr. Michael Khan, on the issue, but to date there has been no response. A number of tests still cannot be carried out by the laboratory, such as those tests for electrolytes, acid base and cultures. Even with the necessary equipment in place, those equipment can be rendered as white elephants due to the lack of trained personnel to operate them. It was also reported that for over a decade no cultures were done at the Linden Hospital Complex, and not even now in the new hospital. A few years back the Bureau of Standards was forced to close the laboratory department because it found that the rooms were not applicable

due to the shortage of microscopes, technicians, among several other shortfalls. Because of these facts, the Linden Hospital Complex takes samples and sends them all the way to Georgetown to be tested.

In addition to all this, the new so-called state-of-the-art hospital is in dire need of a resident bone specialist, anaesthesiologist, and an orthopaedic surgeon. Even though, there are three Chinese anaesthesiologists assigned to the hospital, these doctors are frequently absent, since they leave so as to observe all their holidays which totalled about 25 in 2010; and these doctors also observe Guyana's national holidays, it was reported.

The Linden Hospital Complex is located in the centre of 80% of Guyana's mining location, where accidents will and do occur regularly. On most occasions, patients who are brought to the institution suffer and sometimes die, because of the lack of effective corrective care and the delay, because most times patients have to be transferred to Georgetown. There is the lack of gynaecologists to attend to babies at risk. Only recently a mother and her baby suffered, and they died because of this. Babies born prematurely, twins, triplets, etc., all have to be transferred to Georgetown. The Linden Hospital Complex maternity ward is also not fitted with an adequate number of incubators. It is also reported that these incubators, and I quote: "*barely give lil oxygen*". For a number of years, hospital's administration has been budgeting for these things but still no moneys were supplied or provided to purchase these capital items.

Can you imagine this new hospital which is supposed to be a Class 4 hospital, still does not have a specialist in internal medicine? It has been this way for as long as this PPP Government has been in power. Also, the re-opening of the maternity ward at the Upper Demerara Hospital
[*Interruption*] ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, could you allow the Hon. Member to make her presentation uninterrupted? Please!

Ms. Kissoon: At the maternity ward at the Upper Demerara Hospital there is still an urgent need for a second ophthalmologist. With the Chinese ophthalmologist being absent every weekend, the hospital is still not certain with her schedule.

Even the doctors are complaining bitterly of the many challenges they face on a day to day basis. It is reported that even the theatre has a shortage of scrub nurses in light of the many nurses that are being trained. I would like this Hon. House to know that because the construction of the new hospital took twice the estimated time for construction, and the \$400 million which was budgeted for the purchase of new equipment had to be diverted to enable the completion of the building, because of the rise in the cost of materials.

Presently, in Region 10, there is an outbreak of vomiting and diarrhoea with no explanation of the real cause of this dilemma. I know the Minister will say this is not so, but based on investigations carried out over 100 children were admitted from December to present, and I am not talking about the adult cases. We have those too. I know my colleague, the Hon. Dr. George Norton will elaborate on this matter, as it is not only affecting residents in Region 10, but other areas also. The Linden Hospital Complex continues to be poorly managed. The C.E.O. needs to go. He has long passed his retirement age.

Mr. Speaker, housing and water. The housing sector is a sham in Region 10, and much is left to be desired in this sector too. According to guidelines for managing the housing sector, the Regional Housing Committee is responsible for facilitating the allocation of house lots by conducting interviews. Sad to say, for over two years now the Regional Committee in Region 10 has not been allowed to function. Allocations of house lots were, and still are taking place without the Committee's knowledge. It is almost one year since the Housing Officer of Region 10 has resigned and it is a shame that to date no effort was made by this Government to fill that position.

There is a greater concern about the policy that is used over the past couple of years of not establishing new housing areas with the requisite infrastructure as the other Regions. I must say that this Government seems to be contented to play musical chairs with the distribution of house lots within the Region, by repossessing house lots from one set of persons to give to persons of its choice. This act could never address the dire need of the people of Region 10 for house lots, especially, since the Minister is aware that there are over 4,000 applications still awaiting to be considered at the Region 10 housing office. These are more than all the house lots available in the schemes, Amelia's Ward and other areas combined. Even if house lots are repossessed, these still cannot satisfy all the applicants. Government still needs to establish new housing schemes to

meet this demand. Let me make it known that even though we are asking for new housing schemes we are not asking for it in the jungle. We need this Government to supply roads, water and light as it did in New Hope, Diamond and other areas. The people of Three Friends and Maria Elizabeth were promised by Government's Ministers during their last campaign for the national elections that their house lots would be regularised. To date nothing has been done. Some of the residents have been living there for thirteen, fifteen and twenty-five years, and one resident said she was there for over forty years, and to date they cannot have ownership of their land. Shame on you! Shame on you!

Mr. Speaker, we all know the new thing in the air, which is being advocated by no lesser a person than you, Mr. Speaker, is that of overseas voting.

Mr. Speaker: Leave me out of your debate, Hon. Member.

Ms. Kissoon: I would not debate the reason. What I would like this Hon. House to know is that from Region 10 there are overseas based Guyanese who are desirous of returning to their country of birth, and more so, the area where they grew up and live, but there is no proper system in place for these individuals to apply or acquire a piece of land. With all due respect to you, Mr. Speaker, I would only hope, and I would not mention you again, that in your next article you would shed some light on this issue.

It is very frustrating for the residents of Region 10 as their issues concerning house lot allocations are only being addressed two days of every week, and before their issues can be dealt or heard, in some cases, the residents have to travel all the way to Georgetown to meet with the Minister himself. The residents of Region 10 would like to know if there is no one in the Region who is qualified enough to fill the position of housing officer. The people of Region 10 dare the Minister. Why is it personnel from Central have to go to Linden to deal with the residents? Give the Regional Housing Committee a chance to function again. The residents of Region 10 are anticipating a speedy and sensible response from the Minister, personally.

Water supply is another issue in the Region. And, as you can see I brought it tonight. [*Holds up a bottle of water.*] This is the water that looks like mauby that we are drawing from our taps in Region 10. Also in the hospital, this is what we have to deal with. I will leave it here... I do not know, the Minister is not here. You might think, Mr. Speaker, that we are fortunate, but we are

not. I would like you to know that we, the residents, feel that this water has contributed to some extent to the outbreak of vomiting and diarrhoea in our Region. The residents of Kwakwani are still to benefit from water pipelines which were laid since 2004. Over \$23 million was spent to lay pipelines so as to rehabilitate the Kwakwani network, but it is a crying shame that after nearly six years the community of Kwakwani is still to benefit from this million dollar project. The main road to the water treatment plant is in a deplorable state, thus causing the exposed pipelines to become damaged. Here is another clear example or case of ‘millions gone down the drain’. All we are asking for is pure, potable, drinkable water – not mauby.

I know the Minister of Agriculture would say that a lot is being done in the agriculture sector, but we still need to see much more to be done in areas such as Kwakwani, Ituni and Muritaro, and also ensure that not only a selected few would receive equipment and materials. In addition, we need to see technical officers coming and lending their support. The rice sub-sector received subsidies in the form of fertilisers to the tune of \$400 million. However, I would like to ask the Hon. Minister if he has ever considered the young farmers, those who are now learning the basic principles of Agricultural Science in the school system. I am not talking about those schools which are selected based on some special project. Nor, I am talking about a few cutlasses which were donated. I am speaking about all the secondary schools which are doing the subject in the normal general system. I can recall under the previous People’s National Congress (P.N.C.) Government, schools received fertilisers, chemicals, planting materials, seeds, and I can go on. I was also reliably informed that fertilisers do go to the Region, but the big question is - who get this stuff? In the P.N.C. time we had farm hands now we do not have these things, at least not in Region 10.

Mr. Speaker, this year’s Budget caters for drainage and irrigation and much more is still needed. However the residents are concerned and their hope is that works will be given to the residents of the respective areas, especially those of the areas where rehabilitative works will be done to the Wakrinabo and Karakara Creeks as these will create employment for the residents who are in dire need of it because the unemployment rate is still very, very high in Region 10.

Mr. Speaker, another sore point in Region 10 is the substandard works being done within the Region. The way contracts are being awarded or tendered is very unfair. The local contractors in the Region are suffering severely, since approximately 60% of the contracts are given out of the

Region, and those that are given within the region are given to P.P.P./C. supporters and activists. At present a well-known P.P.P. supporter lives in a mansion and has more equipment and building materials than the Town Council and the Regional Democratic Council (R.D.C.) combined. Some of these people are not even qualified but they are given contracts worth millions. A major concern is: Are these supporters being assessed for property taxes with all the wealth they are acquiring without proper reason and explanation? This Government awards contracts to the lowest bidder and in most cases these contractors do not have all the equipment they claim to have. So in the end substandard works are being done. We do not get value for money. It clearly shows that this Government deals with quantity and not quality.

The newly constructed building that was handed over last September to the staff and students at the McKenzie High School was given to the lowest bidder. Now the students who are occupying this building are suffering owing to the Government's cheap policy of granting contracts to the lowest bidder. Months after the building it was handed over, major cracks appeared; classrooms were flooded and the students were forced to occupy the school's auditorium which is not conducive for learning. When the janitors sweep the floors, they collect pounds of sand. We do not have concrete floors, we have *sandcrete*. The doors cannot lock and the wood is already splitting.

The Christianburg Nursery School suffered the same problem with its floor. That problem was rectified since the \$3 million that was allocated to the McKenzie High School for the playfield and physical education activities was diverted to the Christianburg Nursery School. This Government digs one hole to fill another hole.

There is still need for more fully equipped computer laboratories in schools in Region 10. We also need laboratory assistants in our schools. I am speaking about the schools in Region 10. In the P.N.C. time these were provided.

Mr. Speaker, this country seems to be competing with Hollywood and Bollywood to produce actors, as we have many teachers and Government's officials who act on a regular basis – and I may say some Ministers too. Within the school's system, many teachers have to wait for long periods to be confirmed and they also experience difficulty in receiving their moneys. Teachers need more benefits. One of the things teachers are asking for is that their gratuity, instead of

waiting for so many years, be done like the nurses and other workers; that they receive gratuity probably after every three or five years. Teachers are also asking that their uniform allowance be raised. The pre-vocational teachers receive \$1,000 for risk allowance and this is not enough. We still have schools where teachers operate under adverse conditions. The teachers too are crying for help.

I know the Government is building an Olympic sized swimming pool. It is our hope that at the opening of this pool, Mr. Olen Thom will be honoured. He was the young man who had represented Guyana in swimming at the Olympics Games, 2008. Region 10 has produced athletes in all forms, and we are calling on this Government to provide more sports scholarships for our young people.

Physical Education is now being done in schools, so there is a great need for equipment for the students who are doing the subject. These students have to do what is called School Based Assessment (S.B.A.). Region 10 needs much more inputs into sports, be it in athletics, football, basketball, cricket, boxing, etc. More grounds need to be developed within the Region, especially that of the McKenzie Sports Club Ground. Despite all the negatives that were said when National Schools Athletics Championships was kept in Region 10, the Region 10 team travelled all the way to Albion, last year, and won the overall Championships convincingly. This proves that Region 10 is full of talents.

Mr. Speaker, security. The situation of security guards is a serious issue. The security services within the Region need serious attention. I am appealing to the Minister of Labour to act quickly and speedily. Female guards are suffering as they are not trained to defend themselves. They have no batons and no firearms. These women have to work long hours during the night and in most cases the buildings do not have adequate lighting. They work all by themselves.

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

Mr. Carberry: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be allowed 5 minutes to complete her presentation?

Question put and agreed to.

Ms. Kissoon: Security guards, both male and female, are being treated unfairly. These guards also face problems and discrimination when it is time for them to receive their pay, and they dare not say anything as they fear they may lose their jobs.

9.05 p.m.

I want to close by saying, Linden or Region 10, more so, continues to be denied radio and television channel. The Government is not honouring the Court's decision to permit private radio and television channels in Region 10. The P.P.P. regime by its action has signalled to the people of the Region 10 that it discriminates against them. P.P.P. punishes Region 10; refuses to repair Linden Soesdyke Highway. The people of Region 10 will recall that when the P.N.C. left Government in 1992, it had negotiated and had available a loan to rehabilitate the Soesdyke Linden Highway. While discriminating against Linden it has repaired those areas where it has party supporters; placed lights on those roads; while allowing the Soesdyke Linden Highway to deteriorate without lights.

We the people of Region 10 demand the following:

- That the bauxite industry be dealt with fairly.
- Those incentives be provided to create employment and develop viable businesses in the Region 10.
- That the people of Region 10 be granted licences to establish private radio stations and television channels, now.
- That Linden cable television providers be allowed to expand and provide *Lindeners* with a proper service as in the case in other parts of Guyana.
- That the young people be given hope and opportunities.
- The rehabilitation of the Linden Soesdyke Highway, now.
- Prevent road deaths; install lights on the highway, now.

Thank you Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to signal, immediately, my wholehearted support for the 2010 Budget as presented by the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, and in the same vein to congratulate Dr. Singh and members, and staff of the Ministry of Finance for

crafting a Budget that reflects the solid foundation that was laid after successive Budgets presented by the P.P.P. Civic Administration.

I would also like to join my colleagues in welcoming and at the same time congratulating the two new additions to the National Assembly. First, welcoming them here and congratulating them as Members of Parliament. Further, Sir, to congratulate the Hon. Leader of the Opposition on his birthday. I think he does look his age. He looks like 50 years old from here, but I am certain that if times were harder he would not have looked as good as he does this evening.

Mr. Speaker, after the presentation of the Budget last week by the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, I have heard words like “long on talk and short on action” being used to describe this Budget. I must say that those words were uttered by some lawyers, attorneys-at-law who are also politicians, and both categories are known for being long on talk. To describe the Budget as “being long on talk and short on action”, Mr. Speaker, is to give an indication that one does not truly appreciate the context in which this Budget was prepared. I am certain that if Members had gone through the Minister’s presentation in a detailed, thorough manner they would have had a greater appreciation of what it is that this 2010 Budget is presenting to the Guyanese people.

Earlier this evening, Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member Mr. Murray sought to highlight certain issues as it relates to the rice sector itself. I think in the process, unknowingly he tried to mislead this House when he said that the Minister in his presentation spoke about the high production of 2009, but failed to mention that prices were lower than 2008. I suspect he was reading from page six, paragraph 3.3 which states that:

“...production in the sector expanded its output by 9.2% to produce 359,789 tonnes, the highest annual production level in a decade...”

If we look at page four, paragraph 2.3, I wish to quote a sentence in this paragraph which begins

“In the case of rice, the average price in 2009 was US\$589 per tonne, 15.8% lower than 2008, but the price at the end of 2009 was US\$606 per tonne, 10% higher than at the end of 2008.”

Clearly in his presentation, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance was giving information relative not only to the high production level of 2009, but also an indication of prices.

He also mentioned the other sectors. We knew that 2008, as far as commodity prices go, it was very chaotic. Food, especially grains and cereals, it was more so, given the fact that in 2007 stock-to-use ratio of grains and cereals, worldwide, was very low at 17% as against a norm of 35%. This caused a panic reaction that led to purchasing of volumes that were not needed by major importing countries, but as a reaction to the perceived shortage of grains and cereals in the world. That trend saw Guyana as an exporting country for rice benefiting from the high prices, but they could not have been maintained, because, the situation was not read properly and it was as I said earlier, a panic reaction. Guyana's rice sector benefited tremendously. We saw prices ranging from \$400 to as much as \$1,100 per tonne for value added rice. Then, the bubble burst and we saw the reverse happening in 2009.

Notwithstanding, the decrease in prices, 2009 achievement was not without its challenges. For the Hon. Member to be so dismissive of the performance of the rice sector also gives an indication that he does not truly understand, or if he does, does not truly appreciate the difficulties that farmers are faced with in a sector, where most of the inputs that are used for the production are being imported and subject to prices on the international market. We should, and we must congratulate our farmers for their sterling performance in 2009, notwithstanding those factors that I have mentioned.

This year, the challenges are greater, especially given the continuation of the El Niño weather phenomenon. It was described as mild in 2009, and we experienced below normal rainfall. In 2010, I, personally, will not describe it as mild, though the hydro-meteorological experts might continue to do so. But given the severity of the phenomenon itself, the dryness throughout the cultivation areas, I would say that we are in a full-fledged El Niño situation. Two of our major crops, rice and sugar respond differently in different periods of dry spells. Sugar for example during harvesting period, if the weather is dry it is conducive to harvesting, and a higher of what the sugar people will call, cane-per-ton sugar conversion. Uitvlugt Estate, for example, is now having a ratio of cane-per-ton sugar of just about 10.6 tonnes, which is remarkable, because, in rainy conditions there is need for as much as 18 are 19 tons of cane to produce 1 ton of sugar. So for sugar now which is being harvested, the dry conditions are ideal.

On the other hand, rice, lots of which is now going through what is called heading stage - 60 - 75 days old, if there is not adequate irrigation during this period, the effect is the reverse. It

means that the production will be less as against it being more in terms of sugar. That is our greatest challenge right now, to provide for rice, we know that we do irrigated rice here in Guyana, during these extremely dry seasons. From Crab Wood Creek right down to the Pomeroon, massive programmes are in place in partnership with the stakeholders to monitor the system; to put in additional pumping capacity; to harness additional sources of water; to manage it in the proper ways to ensure that we bring the crop out in a reasonable state.

In the Mahaica Creek for example, emergency work have commenced to link a creek called Butenabu Creek and Kuliserabo Creek into the Perth/Baiabu Canal to guaranteed irrigation supply for the areas between the right bank of the Mahaica River, and the left bank of the Mahaicony River. Tomorrow, or the day after, we will have excavators working on barges in the Boerasirie Conservancy to link the Boerasirie Channel with a lake of water that has been isolated from that Channel because of the lowering level of the conservancy at an area called Broad Water, to guarantee additional source of supplies to the West Demerara area.

In the Region 6 area, mechanical pumping continues at Manarabisi pump station to supply the Number 52 Village to Village 74 areas, in the Mibikuri pump station to supply the Black Bush area and the front lands, and the Canje Creek would have been depleted if it was not for the linking of Canje Creek to the Berbice River via the Torani Canal. That project was a brainchild of the late President, Dr. Cheddi Jagan.

In Region 2, pumping has stopped at the Dawa Station because the salinity level of the Pomeroon River has been creeping upwards continuously. That is understandable, given the fact that we have not had any serious rainfall, whether it is on the Coastland or in the interior itself. Notwithstanding that, the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority, two weeks ago, commenced operation to bring additional water into the lake so that we can supply the cultivation area.

In Region 4, we are fairly safe there.

What I want to demonstrate is that all these efforts would result in us saving the rice crop by and large. We have already experienced minimal loss in Region 3, and the efforts which we have put in place will see a halt in further losses in the rice sector. We must have, as legislators, an appreciation of the difficulties that natural weather phenomenon can cause on our farmers and

our productive sector itself. This is also against the backdrop of the understanding by our President of the need for further protection of the environment. Hence, Guyana's path towards a Low Carbon Development Strategy that will see us contributing, playing our part, our role in giving protection to the environment, and hopefully, to minimise the erratic behaviour of weather as we have been experiencing in the past.

Mr. Speaker, the 2010 Budget, having looked at it, I am certain a lot of us will wish for more. But, in the context of the global financial crisis, and in the context of the economic situation that prevails not only in the region but internationally, it will be unreasonable to expect that a third world, developing country can provide more than this Budget is providing. The Minister of Finance adequately captured the reality of the situation when he said, and I wish to quote from page 2, paragraph 1.5, that:

“...in the final analysis, the domestic economy achieved positive real growth in 2009, inflation declined, the fiscal deficit was reduced, a balance of payments surplus was realised, our external reserves were increased, and the exchange rate remained stable. At the same time, visible progress was made in expanding and upgrading our country's physical infrastructure, and our Government's longstanding pact to invest heavy in social programmes continue to be honoured.”

I doubt whether any sister Caribbean country in its 2010 Budget can boast of our level of achievement as stated by the Minister of Finance. As a matter of fact, some previous Members who spoke before me sought to again be dismissive of the projected growth rate of our economy without taking into consideration the fact that most of the other Caribbean countries will be experiencing negative growth. Without taking into consideration the fact that in 2009 when major developed countries, superpowers, had to embark on a programme of dismissing workers because they were unable to maintain their employment contract, and reducing work and causing workers in the developed world to take lower wages and salaries. The reverse happened here in Guyana. Indeed, Sir, the achievement has been as a result of our prudent management of our national affairs by the P.P.P./Civic Government.

In his presentation, Mr. Murray lamented that there was no consultation by the Hon. Minister of Finance. I think the Hon. Member Ms. Selman also raised this matter. Where is the lack of

consultation? Are the Members saying that because the Minister of Finance did not physically interact with every single Guyanese in this country that there were no consultations? Mr. Speaker, in compiling a Budget, consultations by the P.P.P. Civic Government is an ongoing process. As a matter of fact, earlier today the Chief Planning Officer was in Region 3 looking at farm-to-market roads. I suspect he was looking at those roads with the intention of incorporating whether it is the rehabilitation, upgrading or enhancing of the infrastructure for the 2011 Budget. Notwithstanding, the consultations issue, we have never stopped to consult with stakeholders at different levels. Not because one did not see the Minister of Finance, and it is humanly impossible, there is no way the Minister of Finance, given his busy schedule, given the work that he has to do, can meet with everyone and be consulted on the Budget. The Minister of Finance, I am certain will take this matter further and state who and whom he consulted with. But I can tell you that for the agriculture sector consultation is an ongoing process and for the water sector too. I worked a short time there. Consultation is an ongoing process. It never stops and it never will be ended. The Budget that we are debating today is as a result of consultations that started since the laying of the Budget of 2009.

For those who say that the Budget is “short on action”, Sir, they failed to see the emphasis that is being placed on the development of the economic sector, on the allocation for development of the physical infrastructure, and on the allocations to the social sector. The increases in this Budget to the various Ministries that are involved in providing social services are phenomenal. The Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, the Ministry of Housing and Water. The allocations to these Ministries clearly demonstrated the intention of the P.P.P./Civic Administration in delivering on social services to the Guyanese people.

The rice sector recorded significant progress under the management of this Government. Acreage cultivated has increased; quality has improved; productivity has also increased, and I am certain the Hon. Member Jennifer Wade would agree with me; and a critical component of the overall process is farmer’s participation. For some time now we have developed the concept of Farmers’ Field School activities. Here is where we provide the environment for farmer’s active participation - not in an air-conditioned room with flip charts and these kinds of things that can be intimidating to farmers, but in the fields itself, under a mango tree or a breadfruit tree, or

under any shaded area these Farmers' Field School activities are taking place. In 2009 fifty-one Farmers' Field schools had over 4,000 farmers active participation. These farmers had been involved in research activities, in extension activities, in delivery of services and also in doing experiments as it relates to not only insect pests and disease control, but also fertiliser application. Mr. Speaker, already for this year, and we are only half into February, we have conducted forty-eight sessions from fifteen Farmers' Field schools with three hundred and thirty-two farmers participating. As part of these sessions is the consultation for the 2011 Budget. That has already started.

Mr. Speaker, expanding allocation to the drainage and irrigation department, farm-to-market roads, improved regulatory framework, construction of new seed facilities, construction of more drying facilities in all the rice growing Regions had improved farm techniques. The Minister of Finance mentioned an example whereby we have now adopted laser levelling techniques at the rice research station to ensure that all our lands using laser technology are levelled to optimise on the use of irrigation. This service is expanding to ensure that farmers themselves also benefit from this improved technology.

Similar trends can also be observed in the non-traditional sector where the New Guyana Marketing Corporation is playing a critical role in linking farmers with markets. Unlike the traditional crops of sugar and rice, we have been exporting rice for over 102 years now, sugar, I do not know, may be over 300 years, farmers are not so experienced in dealing with the export market. Hence, the New Guyana Marketing Corporation providing this critical service to farmers themselves. These services are not in Georgetown. They have been decentralised and the Budget itself provides not only for the decentralisation of these services, but also diversification, modernisation and training for farmers in the other crop sector, the livestock sector and aquaculture, a greatly improving sector of the agriculture subsector itself.

Whilst all these things are going on, we must also appreciate that the regulatory frameworks are also being modernised to take into consideration the changes that we are seeing in the modernisation of the sector itself; the modernisation of regulatory frameworks like the Rice Factories Act, which we did last year, then again, the one which the Minister of Agriculture brought forward for the livestock sector itself. The legislative framework is being provided for, to guide and to regulate these expanding sectors.

Mr. Murray also mentioned sugar, GuySuCo. We all know that sugar is going through some problems, but we also have to recognise that the greatest contributing factor to the problems that sugar is encountering right now is the reduction in the preferential prices. The unilateral reduction, not only in the preferential prices, but the unilateral reduction of contracted prices with Europe. Because when we were having a price for sugar that was below the world market price, it was considered to be a contract with the European Union (E.U.). Now that the prices are above the world market price, unilaterally it is being labelled as a preferential price. Mr Speaker, it is the unilateral reduction of our contract price with Europe that has put us into these difficulties. Notwithstanding that, we have comparative advantages in sugar unlike the sister Caribbean countries that have already gone out of sugar. Our transportation system for example, caters for us to be highly competitive in this area. The modernised factory in Skeldon... and Mr. Murray admitted that the Turnaround Plan for GuySuCo has projected that in the year 2012 sugar will start to make profits, not large but small. That will be a remarkable achievement.

9.35 p.m.

In closing, the Budget which have been presented in this National Assembly for 2010, like other Budgets of the P.P.P./ Civic, is designed to consolidate, is designed to transform, and is designed to sustain the achievement of the past, and Sir, it will also guarantee the advancement of our economic welfare. Sir, I venture to say that the acceleration of our growth and development will be such that many Guyanese will be returning to Guyana, and the amounts that are coming in today will increase ten-fold. As the Hon. Member Ms. Kisson said, is that with the return of all these Guyanese, we would not need to debate further the current issue of overseas voting because we might not have any Guyanese left overseas to vote, given the projection of the People's Progressive Party Civic Administration and the design of our Budget itself.

Sir, I wish to commend the 2010 Budget to my colleagues on both sides of the House. On this side of the House, my colleagues who are "long on action" and on this side of the House, my colleagues who are not "short on words". Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. P. Persaud: Mr. Speaker, I stand here to do my bit in embracing the Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, in presenting once again a wonderful budget to guide our country forward.

Mr. Speaker, please allow me as the geographical representative of Region 2 to give you some highlights, of some of the sectors, the developments and progress we have made in 2009. My colleague, Hon. Member Mr. Farouk Khan, will deal with other areas such as health and agriculture.

I want to start with education. Mr. Speaker, in our Region, the education sector and the Department of Education believe in maximum student performance and strengthening community alliance. Because of these in mind, my Region has been meeting with all the players in the education sector to assist in the teaching and learning process. We believe that with these meetings the results we are getting that the community played a very, very important role.

Mr. Speaker, in 2009, we had maintenance work done to thirty-two schools to the tune of \$24,963,000 and these schools, I can name some of them; the Abram Zuil Secondary, Unity Primary in the Upper Pomeroon, Mabel Sandy in the Wakapau area, Saint Monica in the Upper Pomeroon, Mashabo, Sparta Primary, Queenstown Nursery, Huis t' Dieren Primary, Eight of May Secondary, Martindale, Friendship and Hackney, in the Lower Pomeroon. We also had seventeen schools which received supplies such as benches, desks, teachers' tables and chairs, freezers and stoves to the tune of \$7,153,000. Construction was done to the Headmaster's quarters in Wakapau and the Headteachers' quarters in the Karawab area – the Unilly Primary School.

The Department of Education still remains understaffed. We only have the Regional Education District Officer (R.E.D.O.), a District Education Officer (D.E.O.) for the Primary level, D.E.O. for the Secondary level and one for Nursery level. Nevertheless, we are managing in a very simple manner twenty-nine nursery schools, thirty-eight primary schools and seven secondary schools. Assisting in teachers' training, there is also the Cyril Potter College of Education (C.P.C.E.) branch at Anna Regina, the Guyana School of Agriculture, which is a new sector in Essequibo, and also the Essequibo Technical Institute. These areas, technical areas, the objectives are to provide universal primary and secondary education and to see that all children and young people have access to quality education.

I want to give some results for the primary level at the Secondary School Entrance Examination (S.S.E.E.) last year. I want to give you the top ten students in Essequibo. What was good that last

year in Region Two 2 was that we had widespread of good results from the schools, and it was not only like before where we had the coastlands or two schools getting the results. The Sparta Primary School gained the top place with 559 marks; the C.V. Nunes gained second place, Jack Lowe in the Pomeroun gained the third place – that is a school in the very rural areas; Taymouth Manor Primary School , Charity Primary, C.V. Nunes again, Taymouth Manor, Sparta Primary and C.V. Nunes .

I just want to give you an idea as to the Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate (C.S.E.C.) in Essequibo too, and in this area we have always been excelling, and the Ministry of Education can bear with me that Region 2 is one of the regions which always brings good results. I can tell you from our results that we have students with 15 passes at one sitting and these include Mathematics, English, Science and Social Studies. Areefa Mohamed of Anna Regina Secondary School, 11 Grade Ones, 2 Grade Twos and 3 Grade Threes; Davindra Persaud of Anna Regina Secondary School, 15 subjects - 10 Grade Ones, 3 Grade Twos, 1 Grade Three and 1 Grade Four, and I can go on with a series of results from all the schools across the Region. We have over 20 students with 15 passes last year.

I want to now touch on some issues with Local Government and I want to tell you that in the preparation of the 2010 Budget, as the Opposition is talking about consultations, all the local authorities in Region 2 had community meetings in most of the villages across the Region, consulting with the citizenry of the Region to confirm what we were going to do for the Budget 2010, and this is what we have here. I want to say that consultation was done in Region 2. Rates and taxes collected in the region to an average of about 72 % for 2009. [Mr. Corbin: I want you to tell us about the rice.] My colleague, as I have mentioned, will deal with the rice and agriculture sector. We now have 3 Members of Parliament (M.P.s) from Region 2 and we are dealing with different sectors, Opposition Leader.

Mr. Speaker, during the year 2009, the Ministry of Local Government organised training for members of the Local Government committee in:-

- Capacity Building;
- the Role of Chairman and Vice-chairman of Sub-committees and the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (N.D.C.s);

- Financial Accountability and Tender Board Procedures.

I must mention that our Region is very grateful for the community enhancement Drainage and Irrigation (D&I) Programme which is reflected in its cleanliness. Anyone who goes to Region 2 can tell you about our environment; we are always praised for our cleanliness in Region 2. Once again, I want to inform this House that we have a problem in terms of rates collection in Region 2. That is, we need new appraisalment for newly constructed and renovated buildings so that we can get more rates and taxes to make our N.D.C.s and Local Authorities function more effectively.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague, Hon. Mr. Lloyd Pereira would have dealt with Hinterland Affairs, but seem that he newly sworn in today, he has asked me to do it. We have nine Amerindian communities, and I want to report to this National Assembly, that there is a similar situation with all the sectors. Our regional administrators have a community called Hinterland Affairs Committee which meets regularly with all the Toshaos and the Clerks of these Councils and discuss whatever issues are affecting them in the various communities – be it health, education, sports, etc.- all the issues which would come up in those areas.

What is important too, Mr. Speaker, is that budgetary allocations are allotted to all these communities so that they can function effectively. All of these communities have their own bank accounts, so that whatever royalties they collect from lumber or sand, they have their own accounts to deal with their finances. In the Akawini area, I want to say that this is a huge community and it is exporting of lumber, and purpleheart is one of the most important species coming out of that area. The Wakapau area also deals with lumber and it is going back fully into coffee production. Last week Wednesday I went into Wakapau, I want to report that the kind of image and atmosphere with which Wakapau is moving. That the residents were cleaning a trench of about 200 rods by manual labour to get boats to access the lumber and tow it to the river so that they can ship it to Charity. If one was to look at how these people were operating with buckets, spades and shovels, one would have seen that they are working very hard to develop that the community. There are lots of people doing lumbering there and Hon. Mr. Lloyd Pereira was there also, and all of this work they were calling it the Mashramani Self-Help Programme.

Mr. Speaker, I want to touch on some points with Culture, Youth, and Sports. The highlight is a day of interaction organised by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, under the direction of the Director of Sports, Mr. Neil Kumar, where we bring young people from all walks of life, be it race, colour or religion or what; villages - villages teams will meet in the Anna Regina Community Centre Ground to participate in a day of interaction. The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports also will involve approximately 300 youths in Youth Camp in the August holiday. I want to also tell you Mr. Speaker, because I can recall that the Hon. Member Ms. Africo Selman had given bad picture about New Opportunity Corp (N.O.C.). I just want to say ... [Ms. Selman: What?] Not at this year's Budget but at last year's. [Ms. Selman: That is true.] The N.O.C. continues to be managed by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports and while inmates are there, they have access to academic studies up to the C.S.E.C. programme and those who are not academically inclined have opportunities to choose vocational training such as welding, tailoring joinery, catering, masonry, etc. When the inmates are released from the NOC, they will come out from there with a skill and can be self-employed or attached to different firms.

The Region 2 Administration is continuing to execute programmes directed by Central Ministries and the Government of Guyana to maintain law and order, and to execute all programmes in a timely manner. I want to say that Region 2 has been doing well in executing its work programmes in a timely manner. Mr. Speaker, we managed to complete our work entire programme ahead of time in all areas.

National Events: The regional administration continues to organise national events such as Flag Raising and the Mashramani Float Parade; the Independence Flag Raising Ceremony; Arrival Day, jointly with the Indian Arrival Committee; Freedom Day in August - there is usually a big activity in Anna Regina at the Damon Square. I want to say that for Amerindian Heritage, every single one of nine Amerindian Communities organises its own Amerindian Heritage programmes in the Month of September with huge celebrations; Remembrance Day. I want to tell you and to invite each and every one from of the National Assembly, that this year when we will be celebrating our *Essequibo Nite*, to come and participate with us.

Guyana Water Incorporated. Construction of Water Treatment Plant Lima is nearing completion and we are certainly sure that this year, over 20,000 people will benefit from treated water in

Region 2. Upgrading of service connection and installation of water metres from Queenstown to Waldron Hall – 100% completed - and this will facilitate the people who will be getting the treated water. Drilling of a new well at Somerset and Burks is 70% completed. This year the people of Charity... and I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that before I left Region 2, I had a negotiation with the G.W.I. Department there as to how we can get potable water for the people in the Pomeroun, and I am telling you why, is that the entire Pomeroun from the Kabakaburi unto River Mouth, the water is very much salted. What we are trying to do is to get a pipe at Charity leading to the river, so that rather than people travelling to Akawini or Wakapau, way of to the river, for sweet water, we can access potable water at Charity for them.

With all these in mind, I want, on behalf of my Region, to join with all of us in this Hon. House in comment the 2010 Budget. This year's Budget will consolidate our economy and our country's development; it will transform Guyana to new stages taking into consideration where we came from, and the resource provided in the 2010 Budget will definitely sustain our gains. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I move that the House be adjourned until tomorrow at 2.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Members. The House is adjourned until tomorrow.

Adjourned accordingly at 9.50 p.m.