

Official Report

*PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST
SESSION (2012) OF THE TENTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE
CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE
PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN*

4TH Sitting

Thursday, 15TH March, 2012

Assembly convened at 2.15pm

PRAYERS

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

(i) Thanks to Mrs. Debra Backer

Mr. Speaker: I have a few announcements. One of them is to thank the Hon. Member Mrs. Deborah Backer for presiding over the Assembly in my absence at the last sitting whilst I was out of the country.

(ii) New Parking and Seating Arrangements

Mr. Speaker: I would also like to announce, administratively, that I have asked, and the Clerk has been good enough to facilitate, some new parking arrangements. Some of you may have observed in the car park that there is specialised and reserved parking for the Leader of the Opposition, the Government Chief Whip, the Opposition Chief Whip and Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan.

Further, new seating arrangements have been put in place for The Alliance for Change.

(iii) Women and Gender Equality Commission

Mr. Speaker: I would also like to announce, that the Women and Gender Equality Commission had requested and I had kindly consented to have an exhibition in honour of Women's History Month and the International Day of Women. That exhibition is ongoing and can be viewed on the corridor leading to the library.

As of a few minutes ago a forum appropriately entitled “A Celebration of Women in Parliament” was held, informally, at which female Members of Parliament and female members of staff were present along with members of the Women and Gender Equality Commission. We wish to congratulate all women who serve in the House, those who work here and those who are here either as members of the press or otherwise.

I wish to single out Ms. Amna Ally who received an award from the Clerk of the Assembly for being the longest serving female Member of Parliament at present and my own confidential secretary, Ms. Jaitun Haniff, who is the longest serving female member of staff.

(iv) New Initiative

Mr. Speaker: Lastly, I had also requested of the Clerk that we commence another initiative – that of engaging Former Members of Parliament to be our guests at sittings. We had issued two invitations; one to Mr. Feroze Mohamed and another to Mr. Oscar Clarke, General Secretary of the People’s National Congress. I am happy to see Mr. Clarke here. Welcome, Mr. Clarke, as our guest this afternoon. I hope that we can continue these and other initiatives in the period ahead. The Clerk has handed me an apology from Mr. Mohammed who, unfortunately, could not be here. We hope that he will be able to grace us with his presence on another occasion. Thank you very much.

PRESENTAION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Reports were laid:

- (i) Report from the Police Complaints Authority for the period ending 2010.

[Minister of Home Affairs]

- (i) The Annual Report of the Guyana National Printers Limited for the year ended 31st December, 2010.
- (ii) The Guyana National Insurance Scheme, Annual Report and Audited Accounts for the year 2010.
- (iii) The Annual Report of the Linden Electricity Company Incorporated for the year ended 31st December, 2005.
- (iv) The Annual Report of the Linden Electricity Company Incorporated for the year ended 31st December, 2006.
- (v) The Annual Financial Statements of the Guyana National Shipping Corporation Ltd., for the year ended 31st December, 2009.
- (vi) The Annual Report of the Guyana National Newspapers Limited for the year ended 31st December, 2007.

- (vii) The Annual Report of the Guyana National Newspapers Limited for the year ended 31st December, 2008.
- (viii) The Annual Report of the National Industrial and Commercial Investments Ltd., for the year ended 31st December, 2002.
- (ix) The Annual Report of the National Industrial and Commercial Investments Ltd., for the year ended 31st December, 2003.

[Minister of Finance]

ORAL QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, early this morning I received a request from Hon. Member Mrs. Volda Lawrence for some questions to be put regarding allocations, I believe, for the Police Force and I consented to them being put as oral questions this afternoon.

Mrs. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Home Affairs, the Hon. Clement Rohee. I have four questions and I am going to ask them one at a time so that he can respond to them.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I crave your indulgence. Questions Without Notice can be given but it is normal courtesy that the person who is being asked is given notice prior to the sitting and the normal practice has been that the questions had to be with Mr. Speaker by 11.00 a.m. and that the Hon. Member would be so informed prior to the sitting at 2.00 p.m. I am advised by Minister Rohee that he has no such knowledge.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member, but that does not mean that the questions are out of order. The Standing Orders say that the questions may be asked after permission is sought from Mr. Speaker; those were given. If it is that the Hon. Minister is unable to provide the answers this afternoon, I will give him the opportunity to do so on a latter occasion. The questions did come to be before 11.00 a.m. and no embarrassment is intended but, as I said, if it is that he is unable to answer I would have no hesitation in affording him the opportunity to do so. I have never known the Hon. Member not to be able to answer but, as I said, if he is unable I will give him an opportunity to respond in due course.

Mrs. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first question: Would the Minister kindly inform this House whether the documents in support of the disbursement of moneys for the feeding of ranks in-lying for the 28th November, 2011, General and Regional Elections to all divisions have been received and accounted for by the Finance Department of the Guyana Police Force?

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Rohee]: Yes, those documents have been received.

Mrs. Lawrence: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Would you further inform this House of the total sum of monies accounted for “F” Division and who signed the receiving order and the date it was signed?

Mr. Rohee: The sum of money that was allocated to the “E and F” Divisions was \$320,000 dollars and it was paid to the Commander of the “E and F” Division, D. Ramnarine and signed for by Inspector M. Anthon.

Mrs. Lawrence: I did not hear the last part of the name. Would the Minister just let me hear the last part of the name of the person who signed for the \$320,000?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, could you assist please?

Mr. Rohee: A-N-T-H-O-N.

Mrs. Lawrence: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. Mr. Speaker, supplemental to that, the sum given was a collective of both divisions “E” and “F”; my question is: Would the Minister tell this Hon. House how much money specifically was sent to Division “F”?

Mr. Rohee: I regret to inform the Hon. Member that finances for the Guyana Police Force of this nature is not divided as such. It is given to each Division. Each Division Commander gets an allocation and the Commander determines how the subdivisions will receive their allocations.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

Mrs. Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, could the Minister inform this House, of the \$90 million, if any of the moneys were allocated to the Police Central Welfare Fund?

Mr. Rohee: Moneys were allocated to head quarters. I believe that I would wish to read a document that I have before me properly before I misinform the House but a sum of \$1,100,000 was allocated to Head Quarters.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Minister.

Mrs. Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, the Minister did not answer me specifically. I was not asking about the Head Quarters. I was asking whether any part of the \$90 million that was given to the Guyana Police Force was allocated to the Police Central Welfare Fund. If the Minister does not have that information I would be very happy if the Minister can present it, perhaps, at the next Sitting of the National Assembly.

Mr. Rohee: Mr. Speaker, \$10.5 million was allocated to the Police Central Welfare Fund.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister.

Mrs. Lawrence: Could the Minister indicate to the House what the relationship is between the Police Central Welfare Fund and providing meals and transportation for the ranks in-lying for the General and Regional Elections of 2011?

Mr. Rohee: I cannot answer that question. That question will have to be put to the Finance Section of the Guyana Police Force and could be forwarded eventually.

Mrs. Lawrence: Thank you very much Mr. Minister. I would look forward to receiving that information. Mr. Speaker, I would hope that the Minister would be able to provide that for the next sitting. Thank you.

My fourth question to the Minister: Would the Minister inform this House of the year of the last audit of the Police Co-op Consumers Association?

Mr. Rohee: I am not in a position to provide that at this point in time.

Mrs. Lawrence: Supplemental, given the controversy over this particular allocation of \$90 million to the Guyana Police Force I am asking the Minister whether he would be calling in the Auditor General to carry out an audit on this specific allocation to the Police Force to cover the 2011 General and Regional Elections.

Mr. Rohee: I do not think that that would be necessary. I do not believe that there is any mystery about the sum of money. Today, a press statement was issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs perspective, to further clarify, how this moneys was spent. I have here with me a cheque from Republic Bank. It reads “pay to the order of D. Ramnarine, Assistant Commissioner \$320,000”. It was signed by D. Ramnarine behind the cheque and I believe that all of the clarifications could be found in the press release issued by the Ministry at about 10.00 a.m. this morning.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Thank you, Mrs. Lawrence.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Written Replies

1. PROGRAMME FOR THE REHABILITATION OF JUVENILES

Ms. Ally: Could the Hon. Minister of Education tell this National Assembly whether there is a programme for the rehabilitation of juveniles in particular at the Paramakatoi Secondary School where twenty three pupils were expelled due to their alleged use of marijuana?

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: “Yes, there is a programme for the rehabilitation of juveniles, but the Hon. Minister of Education is not the most appropriate Minister to articulate the details thereof as said programme does not fall under her gazette responsibilities/jurisdiction. Further the question seeks to assert information that is inaccurate. Twenty three pupils were not expelled from the Paramakatoi Secondary School. Three students were expelled from the school

based on findings by professionals and in an effort to serve in the best interest of all the students at the school and the dormitory.”

2. PARAMAKATOI SECONDARY SCHOOL

Ms. Ally: (i) Could the Hon. Minister of Education explain to this National Assembly whether one Warden and one Matron are adequate to shepherd four hundred children at the Paramakatoi Secondary School dormitory?

(ii) Could the Hon. Minister indicate whether the Minister of Education has a plan to detail adequate security at the dormitory for the Paramakatoi Secondary School and if so how soon?

Ms. Manickchand: (i) “Again, this question seeks to assert information that is inaccurate. Four hundred children are not housed at the Paramakatoi Secondary School dormitory. The Hon. Minister urges the Hon. Member asking to determine facts before seeking to make assertions. The Hon. Minister, in a sincere effort to raise the standard and quality of the work of the National Assembly, remains accessible and available and indeed would be happy to provide the Member asking said factual information prior to the presentation of questions to this Hon. House so that the Hon. Member asking could be prevented from misleading the House and people of Guyana.

Advertisements for additional staff members have been placed but thus far no suitable individuals have applied.

(ii) There is indeed such a plan in place. Efforts at recruitment are underway.”

3. UITVLUGT SECONDARY SCHOOL

Ms. Ally: Could the Hon. Minister of Education tell this National Assembly how soon works are expected to be completed to make the Uitvlugt Secondary School habitable and conducive for the education of our Nation’s children?

Ms. Manickchand: The Hon. Minister of Education is advised that, again, this question seeks to assert information that is inaccurate. The Headmistress as well as the Regional Education Officer and Regional Engineering Department have confirmed that on September 2, 2011 work was completed at the Uitvlugt Secondary School and that the school is habitable and conducive for the education of the children schooled thereat.

4. TEACHER – INCENTIVE FOR IMPROVED PERFORMANCE

Ms. Ally: Could the Hon. Minister of Education indicate whether there is a plan to increase emoluments for teachers as an incentive for improved performance? If so, how soon can teachers expect an increase and how much?

Ms. Manickchand: The Ministry of Education has signed with the Guyana Teachers Union a multi-year agreement detailing many benefits to Guyana's teachers. The Government of Guyana is committed to honouring said agreement as it has been thus far doing.

5. PILOT PROJECT TO IMPROVE THE TEACHING OF MATH AND ENGLISH

Ms. Ally: Could the Hon. Minister of Education outline the programme for the spending of the 85.7 million dollars earmarked for the pilot project to improve the teaching of Math and English in the Ministry of Education, as announced by Dr. Roger Luncheon, M.D., Cabinet Secretary at his weekly post-Cabinet news briefing on Wednesday, 4th January, 2012?

This question was deferred.

6. AMAILA FALLS ACCESS ROAD PROJECT

Mr. Ramjattan: (i) Can the Hon. Minister of Public Works provide copies of the contract document/s for the Amaila Falls Access road project?

(ii) Can the Hon. Minister also provide a breakdown of all payments made to date on this project?

Minister of Public Works [Mr. Benn]:

(i) Answer is available in the Parliamentary Library.

(ii) See Appendix.

7. CONSTRUCTION OF A TERMINAL AT CHEDDI JAGAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Mr. Ramjattan: Can the Hon. Prime Minister provide copies of the agreement with China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC) to design and build a terminal at the Cheddi Jagan International Airport?

Prime Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs [Mr. Hinds]: The Agreement is available in the Parliamentary Library.

8. DEFECTS OF THE SUPERNAAM STELLING

Mr. Ramjattan: Can the Hon. Minister of Public Works provide copies of the report by the independent engineers on the defects of the Supernaam Stelling?

Mr. Benn: The Report is available in the Parliamentary Library.

9. OLYMPIC-SIZE SWIMMING POOL

Mr. Ramjattan: Can the Hon. Minister provide a complete schedule of cost, inclusive of design fees, construction cost, land acquisition, etc., for the Olympic-size swimming pool?

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports [Mr. Anthony]:

Summary

Costs of consultancies for Design and Supervision = \$22,534,500

Cost for construction = \$558,833,432

Cost for land acquisition = 0

The total cost of the National Aquatic Center was **\$581,367,932**

Details

Design and Supervision – was provided by E&A Consultants Inc., Fotcon and Vikab.

Construction services provided by:

Companies	Total
Kares Engineering Inc.	\$276,195,151
Myrtha Pool USA	\$208,396,407
Guyana Power and Light	\$4,249,268
Guyana Water Inc.	\$3,400,000
R. Persid Construction	\$20,246,127
Pioneer Construction	\$9,796,270
Dipcon Engineering Services	\$23,013,350
G. Bovell Construction	\$3,488,870
Liabilities covered by the MCYS	\$10,037,989
Total	\$588,833,432

10. MARRIOTT GEORGETOWN HOTEL

Mr. Ramjattan: (i) Can the Hon. Minister provide a copy of the agreement between the Government of Guyana and China Shanghai Construction Group for the construction of the Marriott Guyana Georgetown Hotel?

- (ii) Can the Hon. Minister provide a copy of MOU/Agreement(s) entered into with Atlantic Hotel Inc.?
- (iii) Were any feasibility study and any environmental impact study done prior to Agreement(s) being signed? If so, can the Minister provide a copy of each?
- (iv) In relation to the financing of the Marriott Hotel, could the Minister give the facts on financing structure and arrangement of this project, namely, how much equity has been committed and by whom, how much will be borrowed from which bank, and whether any (and how much) state funds have been spent and are committed?
- (v) Is there any Government Guarantee to any financial institution or Chinese company?
- (vi) Who are the shareholders of Atlantic Hotel Inc.? Could the Minister provide documented evidence of this?
- (vii) Who are the owners of the land on which this Marriott Hotel is to be built? Could the Minister provide the copy of transport or title or lease?
- (viii) How much management fee is going to be paid per annum, and to whom, for operating this US\$52M hotel?
- (ix) What rate return is the taxpayer going to get per annum?

Minister of Finance [Dr. Singh]:

(i) The Government of Guyana has not entered into an agreement with China Shanghai, but rather Atlantic Hotel Inc., has entered into a contract with S.C.G. International (Trinidad & Tobago) Ltd., (a subsidiary of Shanghai Construction Group China) on the 16th November, 2011. Copies of the Contract between AHI and SCG are attached hereto (Copies of Contract are in the Parliamentary Library).

However, Section 1.10 of the executed contract prohibits the Employer (AHI) from making disclosures of the Contractors Documents meaning drawing, software or other documents required under the contract, without the consent of the contractor; as such these sections of the documents are not included in this submission.

(ii) There are several agreements/MOUs entered into by Government and/or Government agencies with Atlantic Hotel Inc., which are listed below and copies attached hereto (Copies of same are in the Parliamentary Library).

- (a) Tax Agreement between the Government of Guyana and Atlantic Hotel Inc., dated 14th April, 2012;
- (b) Investment Agreement between the Government of Guyana and SCG dated November 15, 2011; and

(c) Lease Agreement for Tracts P and R (referred to below).

(iii) Yes, there was market feasibility study conducted by the Marriott Hotel Group and one conducted in 2010 by an independent American firm which is being updated for 2012. There is also a draft ESIA report which is awaiting final issuance by the EPA pending the receipt of building permission. These documents are confidential at this time; however, the Government is willing to have a closed door presentation that will allow certain details of these documents to be made available under the condition of utmost confidentiality and discussed with key opposition members without these documents being made public.

(iv) No state funds from the Consolidation Fund have been allocated to this project or are expected to be allocated from the budget. The financing structure includes:

(a) Equity participation of USD12M (\$8M (Private)/\$4M(NICIL));

- US\$8M will come from private investors; while various groups have expressed interest, to invest a portion or part of the US\$8M investment, a selection of this investor has not been made (the closing date of a publicly advertised Expressions of Interest (EOI) is March 12). Once one or more private investors are selected, the/parties will need to be approved by both Marriott and Republic Bank, given that the 67% shareholder will be deemed to be the majority partner.

(b) Senior debt syndicated by Republic Bank (Trinidad & Tobago) Ltd. of D\$27M: there is a binding Term Sheet that relates to the debt and the terms and conditions;

(c) Subordinate Loan Stocks of USD\$15M invested by the NICIL: and

(d) Outfitting costs for the Entertainment Complex estimated at US\$4M that is expected to be funded by the operators (casino, nightclub, and restaurant) once these operators are selected via an REP to be issued.

NICIL will review periodically after completion of the project, the timing for the sale of its investments.

NICIL has spent or will spend less than US\$2M on development costs for the project including design costs to ADUA and preliminary costs prior to Financial Close; these costs are not part of the capital structure of AHI.

(v) There is no Government Guarantee to any financial institution or Chinese Company for this project. NICIL, and the majority shareholder(s) will have to stand behind certain risks – costs overruns and any debt service shortfall until certain debt service ratios are achieved. However, these risks are considered to be minimal given the Feasibility Studies, the deal structure and the form of the “FIDIC Plant and Design Build Contract.”

(iv) NICIL is currently the sole shareholder of Atlantic Hotel Inc. However, once the private investor is identified the share capital will be increased to facilitate the equity participation and the shares will be divided accordingly, based on the capital structure.

(vii) NICIL is the owner of the land which the Marriott Hotel will be built by virtue of the Vesting Order No.61 of 2010. AHI will have the option to purchase this land once the project is built for a price of US\$1M. In addition, there is a 99 year lease issued by GLSC for Tracts P and R (sections of the sea defence) in favour of Atlantic Hotel Inc. This is the area earmarked for the promenade. Other than the promenade, no physical permanent structures can be placed on Tracts P & R. Copies of the vesting Order and the Lease Agreements are attached to this answer. (viii) The Marriott Hotel group through one of its subsidiaries will be managing the hotel in accordance with standard Marriott rates per annum set out in the Management agreement of 2010 comprising of a Management Fee which is a percentage of gross revenue with an Incentive Fee being a percentage of Operating Profit as well as other fees based on services are also applicable based on international norms. The actual percentages cannot be disclosed due to confidentiality clauses contained in agreements. However, the Government is willing to have a closed door presentation that will allow certain details of these documents to be made available under the condition of utmost confidentiality and discussed with key opposition members without these documents being made public.

(ix) This will be based on the hotel performance and dividends declared over time or the sale value of NICIL shareholding and common shares as a block. The subordinate loan stock is expected to be repaid as principal only.

11. APPLICATIONS FOR RADIO LICENCES

Mrs. Hughes: (i) Can the Hon. Prime Minister provide a list of all persons/businesses whose applications for radio licences were approved?

(ii) Can the Hon. Prime Minister provide a list of the criteria used to assess applications for radio broadcast licences?

(iii) Can the Hon. Prime Minister say what scoring system was used to evaluate the applications for radio licences?

Mr. Hinds: (i) Approval of requests for radio broadcast licences was issued to the following entities in 2011:

- (a) Matthews Ridge Community Council
- (b) Little Rock Television Station
- (c) Alfro Alphonso and Sons Enterprise
- (d) New Guyana Company Limited (NGCL)
- (e) National Television Network
- (f) Hits and Jams Entertainment
- (g) Wireless Connections
- (h) Mr. Rudy Grant
- (i) Telcor and Culture Broadcasting Inc.

- (j) Linden Wireless Communication Network
- (k) Television Guyana (TVG) Channel 28

(ii) Entities with applications which were more than five years old were written to via registered mail and ask to confirm their continued interest in same. Only those who re-confirmed were considered. The following criteria were used to assess the applications for radio broadcasting licences:

- **Guyanese Citizens** – preference was given to applicants who were citizens of Guyana.
- **Fit and Proper** – Background security checks and consideration of current and previous business ventures.
- **Experience and Capability in Broadcasting and Communication Fields** - preference was given to entities with relevant experience and capability in broadcasting and communication fields.
- **The Need of the Community** – consideration was given to the need for the service in the particular community.
- **Financial Capability** - consideration was given to this financial standing of the applicants to prevent prolonged occupancy of allotted frequencies without the intention to utilise same.
- **Merit of Broadcasting/Business Proposals and Conformity with National Legislation**
- **Spectrum Considerations**

(iii) No formal scoring system was employed. Each application was considered on its merits.

12. EXISTING TELEVISION STATIONS

Mrs. Hughes: (i) Can the Hon. Prime Minister provide a list of all existing television stations whose applications to extend their signal were approved?

(ii) Can the Hon. Prime Minister provide the names of all persons who were responsible for identifying the applicants to be granted approval to operate radio stations?

Mr. Hinds: (i) No television stations were granted such approval within the last year.

(ii) A number of persons were consulted in the evaluation of applicants amongst which were the following persons:

- Head of the Presidential Secretariat and Secretary to the Cabinet – Dr. Roger Luncheon;
- Press and Publicity Officer to His Excellency, President Donald Ramotar – Mr. Kwame McCoy;
- Network Administrator, Cabinet Officer, Office of the President – Mr. Roy Jadonandan;
- Head, Project Cycle Management Division, Ministry of Finance – Mr. Tarchand Balgobin.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTIONS

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, in your Order Papers you would see the consideration of Financial Paper No. 8 for consideration. I would like to give some rulings arising out of the events of the sitting of the 15th February pertaining, firstly, to the disallowance of four heads from Financial Paper No. 7 and the Motion moved by Member Mr. Carl Greenidge and seconded by Mr. Ramjattan with regard to Financial Paper No. 8. I will have the staff circulate them now, thank you.

On the 15th February, 2012, during the consideration of Financial Paper No. 7, the majority of the House voted to disapprove four head of the Financial Paper tabled by the Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, M.P. There was no proposed amendment of the Head of Expenditure to either reduce or increase the sum allotted. (See Standing Orders 76(1), (2), (3), (4) and (5) which provide for Members to introduce amendments.)

Secondly, when the question was put for the adoption of the above mentioned heads a majority of the House voted against that financial appropriation under the heads in issue. This was tantamount to them being disallowed. The legal and other consequences of this disallowance are not being considered in this ruling and I will not dilate on them.

Thirdly, the Hon. Prime Minister and Leader of the Government's Business by way of a letter dated 6th March, 2012, to me, challenged the propriety and legality of this removal of heads and requested me to consider his challenge. The relevant Standing Order governing supplementary estimates and statements of excesses is standing order 78. The procedures relating to the estimates of revenue and expenditure are set out in Standing Orders 71 to 77 and are somewhat distinguishable from those relating to supplementary estimates. Standing Order 76.7, for example, which deals with estimates of revenue and expenditure, prohibits any amendment in the Committee of Supply to "*leave out a head*". On the other hand Standing Order 78.3, in dealing with supplementary estimates specifically states that when the Minister moves that the Assembly approves the proposal or proposals set out in the Financial Paper amendments to that Motion may be made to "add words, either leaving out or reducing the item or subhead of any particular proposal or, if there be more than one proposal, leaving out any particular proposal".

My ruling, therefore, is based on my considered opinion that this Assembly or a majority there of is within its right to leave out or exclude any item or subhead of a supplementary estimate or statement of excess and that the manner in which the Assembly dealt with Financial Paper No. 7 seems to be in order. It is unusual for a notice to be given for voting against a question put. This is exactly why the question is put, that is for adoption by the House for Members to exercise their constitutional function of supporting or voting against a proposal. A question is put to the

Assembly for a decision and is determined by a majority and that was the case here. Voting against the items was not wrong.

The Hon. Prime Minister made reference to Standing Order 1.1.3 which refers to the usage in the British House of Commons for matters not provided for in our Standing Orders. I observed that only where there is a lacuna we should resort to the application of Standing Order 1.1.3, however it appears to me that the procedure followed in dealing with Financial Paper No. 7 is consistent with our Standing Orders. There is no need, therefore, to import rules from other jurisdictions. We should not apply other countries' customs and procedures once we have Standing Orders dealing effectively with such matters. In so far as the Standing Orders of the Parliament of New Zealand, which were cited, are concerned. I note that the New Zealand Government is normally a coalition government or a minority government supported by one or more of the Opposition Parties; therefore, their rules of procedure reflect their unique situation. The Prime Minister's application of many of the Standing Orders he quoted seems to be much flawed. What he seems to be advocating is that the Financial Papers must not be subject to an affirmative vote or negative vote in the Assembly. In that case they should be laid only for the information of the House.

I therefore rule that the exclusion of the four subheads, Agency Heads 0.1, 0.1.2, 5.1-5.1.6, 4.2-4.7.4 and 0.1-0.1.1, on the 15th February, 2012, was duly and properly done by the Assembly in keeping with the Standing Orders. A decision to vote for or against a supplementary estimate or a head or subhead, therefore, cannot be reversed by the Speaker though I am of the opinion that the Hon. Minister of Finance or his designate may reintroduce them for consideration. I believe that the House acted properly but those heads may be reintroduced by the Minister. That is something that will have to be worked on with the Clerk and others as to how that can be done.

I now come to Financial Paper No. 8 at which I believe there was a motion moved by Mr. Greenidge and seconded by Mr. Ramjattan. The Hon. Prime Minister, in his letter to me, also questioned whether that motion was properly put before the House and so I put a ruling into written form.

Hon. Members I have received that letter which I referred to consisting of five pages and 40 paragraphs from the Hon. Prime Minister requesting a ruling on the motion moved by Mr. Greenidge at the last sitting for the withdrawal of Financial Paper No. 8 and voting against the four heads. I have dealt with the matter of the four heads previously.

The letter also claimed that Mrs. Deborah Backer, the Acting Speaker, during the last sitting, allowed Mr. Greenidge's motion which was seconded by Mr. Ramjattan for the withdrawal of Financial Paper No. 8. On my resumption to work on the 17th February, 2012, i.e. the day after the last sitting, these matters were drawn to my attention by the Clerk of the National Assembly. Hon. Members, I have had ample time to examine the concerns raised by the Hon. Prime Minister and after reading the Erskine May and other rules of procedure and with the advice of

the Clerk of the National Assembly of Guyana, the Clerk of the National Assembly of Trinidad and Tobago and of the Former Clerk, Mr. Frank Narine, I would like to state the following:

Mrs. Backer did not allow Mr. Greenidge's motion for the withdrawal of Financial Paper No. 8. The motion was merely moved and seconded after which Mrs. Backer heard arguments for and against the admissibility of the matter. I am informed by Mrs. Backer that she suspended and thereafter sought an adjournment of the sitting to advise herself on the admissibility of the motion. To allow a motion, in my opinion is to put the question to the House; this was not done. The Clerk of the Assembly shares my opinion. I believe that Mrs. Baker was not certain about the admissibility of the motion and instead of proceeding in contravention of the Standing Orders she was right in suspending and asking for an adjournment to be properly advised on the way forward.

With respect to Mr. Greenidge's motion to withdraw Financial Paper No. 8 it is my opinion and that of the Clerk of the National Assembly, the withdrawal of Financial Paper No.8 was out of order and I so rule. Standing Order 78 clearly sets out the procedures to be followed when Supplementary Estimates are before the House. A Motion to Withdrawal is not one of the stated procedures except that the Minister who introduces the paper or papers may withdraw same or defer it or them as he or she chooses.

Standing Order 63.1 says that a motion can only be withdrawn at the request of the mover provided that there is no dissenting voice. In accordance with Standing Order 78.3, when the Assembly resolved itself into Committee of Supply to consider Financial Paper and a Minister, having signified Cabinet's consent, moves "that this Assembly approves of the proposal or proposals set out in Financial Paper "whatever"" any Member may move to add words either to leave out or reduce an item of one or more proposals. A relevant amendment with reference to a Financial Paper appears to be an amendment to the proposal or proposals contained in the Financial Paper and not the motion, per se. If such amendment is carried then it would consequently cause the motion to approve the Financial Paper to be amended. However, it must be noted that the intent of the motion was not to abandon the consideration of the Financial Paper but for the submission of more details, according to the Prime Minister. This would seem reasonable if the wording of the motion did not include the word "withdrawal". After the motion that this Assembly approves, the proposal set out in Financial Paper No. 8, was moved Mr. Greenidge could have moved the words after the word "that" be deleted and the following words being inserted: *"This Assembly does not approve the proposal set out in Financial Paper No. 8 until the following details are made available to this Committee of Supply"* or he could have moved an amendment which says "This Assembly defers consideration of Paper No. 8 for the purpose of receiving more details of the expenditure incurred in respect of the proposals to be approved" or he could have moved an amendment that *"This Assembly approves the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 8 after the details there on satisfactory to the Assembly are submitted to it"*. In the circumstances I move that the motion purported moved by Mr. Carl Greenidge, Member of Parliament, and seconded by Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, was not a

permissible motion within the meaning of the Standing Orders and cannot therefore be entertained. The Hon. Minister, will proceed with Financial Paper No. 8 bearing in mind that he stands or faults by the content or lack thereof within the said paper. Thank you.

Assembly resolves itself into the Committee of Supply to consider Financial Paper No. 8 of 2011.

Assembly resolved into Committee of Supply

Minister of Finance [Dr. Singh]: Mr. Chairman, I believe I had on the occasion of the last sitting signified Cabinet's assent but I will do so once again for the purposes of today's sitting. I will now proceed accordingly.

Mr. Chairman, in accordance with Article 171(2) of the Constitution I signify that the Cabinet has recommended for consideration by the Assembly the motion for the approval of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 8 of 2011. Supplementary Estimate Capital for the period ended 31st December, 2011, totaling \$3,471,047,823, and I now move the motion.

2.45 p.m.

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Chairman, I rise to recommend to this House, in keeping with the suggestions you have made in the paper that you just read, Ref: No. 2-2012, that the...
[**Mr. Nandlall:** Are you recommending to the House?] I am just trying to cite. The pages are not numbered, but on the bottom of page three you ruled that an alternative formulation would have been, if you like, consistent with the rules. The alternative formulation that I find acceptable is one that would state that: "This Assembly does not approve the proposals set out in the Financial Paper No. 8 until the following details are made available to this Committee of Supply;"

Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the Member, Mr. Greenidge, has proposed an amendment to the proposal before us.

Dr. Roopnarine: I rise to second the motion, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Chairman, Standing Order 30, "Exemption from Notice", states that there can be exemptions from actually having a motion on notice except "other than the Committee of Supply." If the Hon. Member wants to move an amendment then he has to do it with a motion on notice.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you Hon. Member. My interpretation of the Standing Order is that whilst we are considering, a Member may move an amendment to the Papers being approved when the question is put. I do not share your opinion. I believe that at this stage a Member may move, as I ruled, that amendment...because it is specific in Standing Order 76 that an amendment may be moved at this stage without notice.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Chairman, I very strongly ask you to consider Standing Order 30 (g) which makes it clear, “a motion made in the Committee of the Whole Assembly...”, that there can be an exception to the motion on notice, except in the Committee of Supply. Therefore, Mr. Chairman, I ask you to reconsider, in that it is clear that Standing Order 76 allows for amendments to a Financial Paper or a motion before the House on a Financial Paper. The difference is whether it is Standing Order 76, or not, a notice of motion, that is, a written one submitted with the normal procedures, has to be done.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you Hon. Member. For the benefit of the House I will once again read Standing Order 78 (3) which states:

“When the Assembly has resolved itself into a Committee of Supply to consider such a Paper, a Minister may move without notice (the recommendation or the consent of the Cabinet being first signified) “That this Assembly approves the proposal (or proposals) set out in Financial Paper No.....” to which motion amendments may be moved to add words either leaving out or reducing an item or a Sub-Head of any particular proposal or if there be more than one proposals leaving out any particular proposal.”

It is quite clear that, at this stage, any Member may move to add words, either leaving out or reducing an item. I have also taken the advice of the Clerk who described this as a dilatory motion that does not require notice.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Chairman, I do not wish to be disrespectful. The Standing Orders that we have before us speak about exceptions to motions on notice, and while Standing Order 76 is clear, and I appreciate your point, why would the Standing Orders, created in 2005, by this same

House, make it clear that there is an exception of the following – “a motion made in the Committee of the Whole Assembly, other than the Committee of Supply”? These are not my words, Mr. Speaker. This is in Standing Order 30 (g).

Mr. Chairman: What we have is a clear case, Hon. Member, of an ambiguity, contradiction, and it falls on me to resolve that. I can either wait for two or three years for the Standing Orders Committee to make recommendations, but we do have two orders which speak specifically to this matter. I am dealing with the one which speaks specifically to “**Supplementary Estimates of Expenditure and Statements of Excesses**” and I recognise that a Member “...to which motion an amendments may be made to add words either leaving out or reducing an item or Sub-Head...”, obviously, that is

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, may I, Sir, with your permission...

Mr. Chairman: Proceed.

Dr. Singh: ...draw your attention to the said Standing Order 78 (3) to which reference is being made? Standing Order 78 (3) states:

“When the Assembly has resolved itself into a Committee of Supply...”

It is such as we have done currently.

‘...a Minister may move... “That the Assembly approves the proposal set out in Financial Paper No. 8”...’

As, it has been done this afternoon.

“...to which motion amendments may be moved to add words either leaving out or reducing an item or a Sub-Head of any particular proposal or if there be more than one proposals leaving out any particular proposal.”

That seems to me to be a very clear formulation of the conditions that restrict the nature of the amendments that may be moved to the motion originally moved to approve the Financial Paper. Standing Order 78 (3), in my mind, states very clearly that amendment may be accommodated where it has the purpose of adding – and this is a verbatim quotation from the Standing Order –

“to add words either leaving out or reducing an item or a Sub-Head...” Of course, the Standing Order goes on.

Any other motion that is being moved without notice would fall, I believe, appropriately under Standing Order 30. Standing Order 30 states:

“Unless the Standing Orders otherwise provide, notice shall be given of any motion which is proposed to be made, with the exception of the following:

(g) a motion moved in the Committee of the Whole Assembly, other than the Committee of Supply;”

which seems to be quite clear, to me, that a motion moved in the Committee of Supply, other than motions contemplated by Standing Order 78 (3), to which I have just referred, require notice. That would be my interpretation of Standing Orders 30 and 78. Needless to say, Sir, I would defer to your superior judgement in this matter and submit myself to any ruling that you deem appropriate. But I thought it necessary that I make that submission and representation to you. Like I said, I believe the language is quite clear.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Hon. Members, I believe we have come a far way from saying that no amendments are permissible to hear that amendments are permissible, and the Hon. Minister is correct. Amendments are permissible but they must be circumscribed within the context of sub order (3). But to say that there are no amendments possible...That is why I ruled against Ms. Teixeira’s supposition. The amendments are permissible but they must be amendments which either add words, to leave out or to reduce an item or a Sub-Head.

Mr. Nagamootoo: I want to draw the attention of this Hon. House to the fact that this National Assembly regulates its own procedures, and the temptation to veer off into controversy over technical issues is perhaps a subterfuge to creatively deal with issues that could be divisive and that could harm the national wheel or the national welfare.

My intention here, Sir, is very simple: that if we are on the precipice of gridlock, then no amount of resort to procedures, Standing Orders, practices and conventions would help us to unlock the gridlock. Simply saying “any motion to amend the motion” is permissible under the same Standing Order 30, but Your Honour has ruled on the motion as raised on the last occasion. It is

for within your competence, Mr. Chairman, to decide at this stage whether or not an amendment could be made to a motion in any form whatsoever – whether it is to amend an item or a Sub-Head or it is, in fact, to bring some clarity to an issue on which a deliberate and sensible judgement can be made.

As I understand it, in conclusion, the intention is what is more important than, perhaps, the wording. As I understand this, it is to ask the Hon. Minister that if he wishes for these provisions to be approved all he has to do, as an act of responsibility to this National Assembly and the nation, is to provide more details. Why should this National Assembly give its consent to the expenditure of \$3.4 billion which has been brought here under supplementary estimates?

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Nagamootoo...Okay.

Mr. Nagamootoo: The resort to the rules is just, in my opinion, a form of trying to avoid being frank and open to this National Assembly in financial matters, as the Government did on the last occasion when it came here with the issue of the specialty hospital, Your Honour, and totally misled this National Assembly.

Mr. Chairman: My ruling on this matter is that any Member, Mr. Greenidge is included, may move any amendment but that amendment must be as set out in No. 78 (3) - an amendment which either add words leaving out or reducing an item or a Sub-Head of any particular proposal. That is the only amendment that we will entertain, but I rule that amendments can be made at this stage, and it must be within that context. I have so ruled. We will proceed.

Dr. Singh: Having signified that Cabinet has recommended for consideration the Financial Paper, I believe that we may now proceed to an item by item consideration of the Paper.

Motion proposed

Mr. Chairman: We will consider the Financial Paper as usual. That is, the items will be taken from the Capital Estimates in order for which the Minister is responsible.

CAPITAL ESTIMATES

Item 1 02-021 Office of the Prime Minister – Prime Minister’s Secretariat - \$491,593,186

Mr. Chairman: Hon Members, the item is before the House. Does any Member wish to speak to that? Failing which, I will move to item 2.

Deputy Speaker [Mrs. Backer]: Mr. Chairman, I believe that what needs to be done is that the question has to be proposed, if there is a silence then it will have to be put and at that stage there may be the 'ayes' and the 'noes', and we will proceed from there.

Question put.

Ms. Ally: Division.

Mr. Chairman: I would find that the 'ayes' have it but there is a call for a division.

Mr. T. Williams

Ms. Marcello

Dr. Ramayya

Mrs. Garrido-Lowe

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Chairman, I indicated, here, through Mr. Nagamootoo, that we just want some time to get some clarification. Could you just start again?

The Committee divided: Ayes 31, Noes 26, did not vote 7, as follows:

<u>Did not vote</u>	<u>Noes</u>	<u>Ayes</u>
Mr. T. Williams	Ms. Ferguson	Mr. Jaffarally
Ms. Marcello	Mr. Morian	Mr. Damon
Dr. Ramayya	Mr. Allen	Dr. Persaud
Mrs. Garrido-Lowe	Mr. Jones	Rev. Dr. Gilbert
Mrs. Hughes	Mr. Adams	Dr. Mahadeo
Mr. Nagamootoo	Mrs. Baveghems	Mr. Seeraj
Mr. Ramjattan	Mr. Sharma	Mr. Neendkumar
	Mr. Bulkan	Mr. Lumumba

Mr. Bond	Ms. Shadick
Ms. Kissoon	Mr. Chand
Mr. Trotman	Mrs. Chandarpal
Ms. Selman	Mr. Nadir
Mr. Allicock	Ms. Teixeira
Ms. Wade	Bishop Edghill
Mr. Felix	Mr. Whittaker
Ms. Hastings	Mr. Baksh
Mr. Scott	Mrs. Campbell-Sukhai
Mr. Harmon	Ms. Webster
Mr. Greenidge	Ms. Manickchand
Mrs. Backer	Mr. G. Persaud
Dr. Norton	Mr. Benn
Mrs. Lawrence	Dr. Anthony
Mr. B. Williams	Mr. Ali
Ms. Ally	Dr. Ramsaran
Dr. Roopnarine	Dr. Westford
Brigadier (Ret.) Granger	Mr. R. Persaud
	Dr. Singh
	Mr. Nandlall
	Dr. Ramsammy
	Mr. Rohee
	Mr. Hinds

Motion carried.

Item 2 31-312 Ministry of Public Works and Communication – Public Works - \$261,020,509, \$2,558,794,562

Item 2 31-312 Ministry of Public Works and Communication – Public Works - \$2,61,020,509, \$2,558,794,562 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 3 41-415 Ministry of Education – Education Delivery - \$159,639,566

Item 3 41-415 Ministry of Education – Education Delivery - \$159,639,566 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: This completes consideration of all the items.

Question

“That this Committee of Supply approves the proposals set out in Financial Papers No. 8 of 2011 – Schedule of Supplementary Provision on the Capital Estimates totalling \$3,471,047,823 for the period ended 2011-12-31.”

put, and agreed to.

Prime Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs [Mr. Hinds]: Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I move that Standing Orders No. 13 (n) and 54 be suspended to enable the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 4 of 2011) - Bill No. 1 of 2012 to be introduced at this stage.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, with your permission, and paying due deference to the Hon. Prime Minister, I believe that I should have reported the outcome of the deliberations of the Committee of Supply and the Assembly should have resumed before that suspension be requested.

In that regard, Sir, I do now proceed to report that the Committee of Supply has approved of the proposals. Once the Assembly is resumed, it is my intention to report the Committee’s approval of Financial Paper No. 8.

Assembly resumed

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I now rise to report that the Committee of Supply has approved of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 8 of 2011 - Schedule of Supplementary Provision on

Capital Estimates totaling \$3,471,047,823, and I now move that the Assembly doth agree with the Committee in the said Resolution.

Question put, and agreed to.

Motion carried.

Mr. Speaker: Hon Prime Minister, you were a bit premature.

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I now rise to move the motion that Standing Orders No. 13 (n) and 54 be suspended to enable the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 4 of 2011) - Bill No. 1 of 2012 to be introduced at this stage.

Question put, and agreed to.

Standing Orders suspended.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with paragraph (2), article 171 of the Constitution, I signify that Cabinet has recommended the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 4 for 2011) – Bill No. 1 of 2012 for consideration by the National Assembly. I now present the Bill to the Assembly.

Before I move that it be read for the first time, Sir, might I point out that given the result of the Committee's and Assembly's deliberations on Financial Paper No. 7, in which case the majority of the items contained therein were approved, but the four items to which you alluded to in your ruling earlier did not receive the benefit of the Assembly's approbation on that occasion. May I, Sir, indicate that in accordance with your ruling it is my intention, on a subsequent occasion, to resubmit those items for consideration, as you have indicated is permissible. That notwithstanding, it is my intention to ask that the Assembly doth proceed with the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 4 for 2011) – Bill No. 1 of 2012 with the appropriate amendment inserted to accommodate the expunging of those four items which will be the subject of a separate submission on a future occasion.

With those remarks, Sir, I now move that the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 4 for 2011) – Bill No. 1 of 2012, as amended, as I have indicated and requested a minute ago, be read for the first time.

Mr. Ramjattan: On that score, Sir, now that the Supplementary is before the Assembly, could I request of the Hon. Minister of Finance that, in accordance with section 24 of the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA), he states the reasons for these proposed variations as against the estimates of last year February and provide a supplementary document describing the impact that these variations, now that they have been approved, will have on the financial plan of last year?

As you know, Mr. Speaker, under this new regime that we have, the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act, section 24 specifically states:

“(4) The Minister, when introducing a supplementary appropriation Bill, shall present to the National Assembly the reasons for the proposed variations and provide a supplementary document describing the impact that the variations, if approved...”

And they now have been approved.

“...will have on the financial plan in the annual budget.”

I am hoping that that will be done now that it has been approved. It is with that undertaking, I hope that he is going to abide.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Finance, will you be in a position to give an undertaking to the House that you will accord and abide by the conditions of the Act?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, as has always been the case, the relevant submission will be made in accordance with the law.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much.

INTRODUCTION OF BILL AND FIRST READING

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

SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 4 FOR 2011) - BILL NO. 1 OF 2012

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to provide for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure (not otherwise lawfully charged on the Consolidated Fund) of Guyana for the fiscal year ending 31st December, 2011, estimates whereof have been approved by the National Assembly, and for the appropriation of those sums for the specified purposes, in conformity with the Constitution.” [*Minister of Finance*]

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read for the first time.

3.15 p.m.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 4 for 2011) - Bill No. 1 of 2012 be read a second time.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BILL – SECOND AND THIRD READINGS

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to provide for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure (not otherwise lawfully charged on the Consolidated Fund) of Guyana for the fiscal year ending 31st December, 2011, estimates whereof have been approved by the National Assembly, and for the appropriation of those sums for the specified purposes, in conformity with the Constitution.” [*Minister of Finance*]

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 4 for 2011), Bill No. 1 of 2012 be read the third time and passed as amended.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read the third time and passed as amended.

COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE OF SELECTION

WHEREAS the House selected nine (9) members to the Parliamentary Committee on Selection of the Tenth parliament on 10th February, 2012;

AND WHEREAS the House selected four (4) members for the governing PPP/C, four (4) members for the opposition APNU and one (1) member for the opposition AFC;

AND WHEREAS the allocation of a nine (9) member Committee of Selection was by way of an amendment by the combined APNU/AFC opposition to the motion tabled by the Leader of the House for a ten (10) member committee with five (5) for PPP/C, four (4) APNU and one (1) AFC;

AND WHEREAS Standing Order No. 94(1) provides for “each Select Committee being so constituted to ensure that, as far as possible, the balance of parties in the National Assembly be reflected in the Committee”;

AND WHEREAS the existing balance of the parties in the Tenth Parliament is as follows:

PPP/C:	32 seats
APNU:	26 seats
AFC:	7 seats

AND WHEREAS the balance of the parties in the existing Committee of Selection does not conform to Standing Order No. 94(1)

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That the decision of the House on the composition of the Parliamentary Committee of Selection be declared inconsistent with Standing Order 94(1);

BE IT ALSO RESOLVED:

That the House takes immediate steps to ensure that the composition of the Parliamentary Committee of Selection is brought in conformity with Standing Order No. 94(1); and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the currently constituted Committee of Selection be prevented from discharging its functions under Standing Order No. 81.” [*Prime Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have on the agenda, now, a motion in the name of the Hon. Prime Minister. Before he is invited to proceed I believe he has an announcement to make on this matter.

Mr. Hinds: Yes Mr. Speaker. I rise to request that this motion be deferred pending the determination of the court on our constitutional motion.

Motion deferred.

Mr. B. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order. Might I respectfully refer this Hon. House to Standing Order 26(e) which might render osseous what the Hon. Prime Minister is proposing? This reads:

“In order that a motion may be admissible, it shall satisfy the following conditions, namely:

(e) It shall not receive discussion of a matter which has been discussed in the same Session.”

We discussed this matter at the last sitting, and we voted on the composition of the Committees and the motion was passed. So it is not for the Hon. Member to say he wishes to withdraw the motion. He cannot present it because he is restrained by Standing Order 26(e).

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I had intended to indicate to the Hon. Prime Minister, if he had sought to proceed, that there were certain procedural hurdles that he would have had to surmount. If at this stage he has signalled that he wishes to defer the motion and not proceed then, Mr. Williams, with respect to your argument, it would be a bit premature. So I believe that

with the passage of time, and the happenings elsewhere, certain things would be done. But seeing that it is not being proceeded with, those arguments, at this stage, would be precipitous.

Mr. Ramjattan: In relation to what was just uttered, I rather suspect... *[Interruption]*... It stands as if it is admissible, and it is my submission at this part that it ought to be withdrawn in view of that being brought to light.

I also want to make this point. Apart from that, Standing Order 26(e), there is Standing Order 25(3):

“When a question for debate has been proposed, debated and decided, it shall not be competent for any Member to raise a question substantially identical thereto in the same Session except upon a substantive motion for rescission.”

We had already done everything in relation to the exact remedies they are seeking. So we are asking that it must not even be another bundle of documents on our desks. Let it be withdrawn.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Member. As I said, I took due note of Standing Orders 25 and 26. I will, in due course, speak with the Hon. Prime Minister about the way forward, but, as I said, I had indicated and flagged that it had procedural hurdles to surmount before it would even be considered.

APPROVAL OF GOVERNMENT’S POLICY IN PRESIDENT’S ADDRESS

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly expresses its sincere thanks and appreciation to His Excellency the President, Mr. Donald Ramotar, for his Address to the National Assembly which was made on the occasion of the Ceremonial Opening of the First Session of the Tenth Parliament of Guyana on Friday, 10th February, 2012, and approves of the policy adumbrated therein.” *[Prime Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is now twenty minutes past three o’clock, we have one motion before us which we may either proceed to debate, that is, “Approval of Government Policy in President’s Address” or we may take an adjournment and return earlier and leave earlier. I put this before the House for consideration.

Hon. Prime Minister, what is your opinion?

Mr. Hinds: Yes Mr. Speaker, I think there seems to be the prevailing sentiment that we should proceed with this traditional motion to express sincere thanks and appreciation to His Excellency the President, Mr. Donald Ramotar, for his address to the National Assembly.

Mr. Speaker: Proceed Hon. Prime Minister.

Mr. Hinds: I rise to move the motion standing in my name that we, the Tenth Parliament of Guyana, at this sitting of the National Assembly, commend and thank His Excellency for his address made at the ceremonial opening of the Tenth Parliament of Guyana on Friday, 10th February, 2012, and approve the policy adumbrated therein.

We must, first of all, think of the circumstances in which our President would have had to frame his address, and in which we must consider it. As we know, after our citizens, who were moved to do so November last, 28th, had cast their votes, and after their votes were counted, it was found that, for the first time since our independence, none of us of the contending parties had received the majority of the votes cast. We of the PPP/C had received 49.2 per cent of the votes, receiving thirty-two seats; the APNU forty per cent, receiving twenty-six seats; AFC 10.8 per cent, receiving seven seats.

According to the provisions of our Constitution, Mr. Donald Ramotar, the head of the PPP/C list, was proclaimed President of Guyana and soon thereafter was sworn in as such. It is commonplace to describe the outcome of our last election as a new dispensation, and justifiably so. It is also common among commentators to say that the people of Guyana voted for a situation where no party would have won an absolute majority. I would challenge that spin. I would recognise it as an outcome; for I am sure that everyone who voted, voted for his or her party to win with an absolute majority. I make this point because not only our President, and not only us, as politicians here in this House, but all of us, as citizens of Guyana, find ourselves in a new situation. In my view it was this background that must have been before our President as he worked on his speech.

I can concur with those who say that His Excellency's address has been short on Government, that is, our PPP/C's detailed positions, policies, strategies and programmes, but I differ with

those who may want to view this as a shortcoming. For me, this address meets our situation. It points out the dangers and opportunities ahead of us, as we look to the next five years. In staying away from detailed PPP/C positions – and we have our positions – the door is kept open for ideas, suggestions and proposals; much has been left open, and no doubt deliberately so, to encourage participation and to develop a sense of inclusion.

In his address, the President has come across as what he is: a man of the people, a man for all people – courteous, referring to others kindly, not triumphant, not boasting, not reluctant to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker and our Deputy Speaker, acknowledging the valued enduring friendships he built during his twenty years as a Member of this Hon. House, not only among his colleagues, but also across the aisle. He offered advice to and encouraged new Members of this honorable House. Certainly, it was a President and an address for this season of a new dispensation, when for the first time we are faced with a situation in which no party has an absolute majority.

In considering the President's address in greater detail one can see that he addressed the main issues of concern to our nation.

- Firstly, it was the prospects for the success of this Tenth Parliament with a minority Government.
- Secondly, the international situation, complicated and complex, and in which we must keep aware of what is happening, and we must build partnership.
- Thirdly, the state of the economy and how we can, and how we must, earn our way in the world.
- Fourthly, education and labour, enhancing our capacity to work smarter, better, faster and less costly, and improving our attitude to work and working.
- Fifthly, he spoke about health issues, raising the level of health care services available locally.
- Sixthly, he spoke about housing and water, continuing our programmes to have every Guyanese well housed and well supplied with water.
- Seventhly, he addressed crime and security. Criminal activities keep evolving and advancing, and we must make sure our security forces stay ahead.

- Eighthly, he addressed vulnerable groups in society and pointed out that they always need our compassion.

He ended by calling again for us to work together.

Concerning the prospects for success of this Tenth Parliament, with a minority government, His Excellency pointed out that experience and guidance for this new dispensation could be garnered from the annals of history. Minority governments have not been uncommon in Canada, Australia and England over the years. The Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Sweden and Norway have had minority governments for more than two-thirds of their post World War II period. Denmark, Sweden and Norway have had more minority cabinets than majority cabinets. Most of the minority governments in all three countries have been single party cabinets rather than coalitions. None has shared ministries - without a coalition.

His Excellency acknowledged the mixed results that minority government administrations have yielded in these various countries and he asked, of this Tenth Parliament of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, how will ours perform? As His Excellency asserted, the answers lie ahead of us; they are also within us, and a lot will depend on what attitude we take at this time. I will add, not only we in this House, but every member of the electorate, every citizen of our country, has the answers within him or her. It is not only citizens, but also those who would consciously or subconsciously seek to influence developments in this land of ours.

His Excellency acknowledged that, yes, we have our differences. This is perfectly natural. We will continue to have varying views on many issues. The important thing is how we move forward in resolving our positions. His Excellency further admonished that if we are to avoid gridlock and inertia, political cooperation in the interest of development of Guyana must exist.

His Excellency forthrightly warned that, given the significant development under the PPP/C over the last nineteen years, this administration would be loath to accept gridlock that can stymie Guyana's development and, while willing to exercise patience, forbearance and reasonableness in the interest of all our people, will not be held ransom to intractable postures. Bearing in mind is His Excellency's call for consensus and compromise, and resistance from the temptation for any party to ride roughshod over another. Although, from our perspective, we have seen repeated

attempts to ride roughshod over established parliamentary customs, traditions and practices, and Westminster conventions, consensus and compromise remain the Government's foremost desire.

With reference to the international situation, His Excellency stressed that we are living in an international environment that is very complicated, and also very difficult. We therefore have to keep focused on international events, maintaining awareness of the international socioeconomic and political developments, such as the current deepening economic crisis being experienced by some European Union nations, the United States of America and Japan; the oil embargo against Iran and the escalating oil prices in the Middle East, which is the traditional supplier of the world's petroleum. We must keep aware of all of these, since any, and more so all taken together, have potentially heavy ramifications on our lives and livelihood.

His Excellency affirmed that we must continue to build and consolidate our relations with our traditional partners while, at the same time, broadening our relations with others. In this regard, His Excellency directed us to the fact that the BRIC countries - Brazil, Russia, India and China - emerging on the global financial scene, are broadening the base of the world's economic activity and helping to provide stabilisation against global recession. The PPP/C Government can proudly boast of the significant ongoing strategic relationships being nurtured with these growing powerhouses.

With respect to Brazil: Guyana has been the co-beneficiary of the Takatu River Bridge, constructed by Brazil and opened 31st July, 2009, linking Lethem to Brazil. Following the meetings and joint communications by Presidents Jagdeo and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a Brazilian Government mission came to Guyana, and subsequently a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was entered into for the Brazilian side to develop a study of potential hydropower sites within Guyana. Both the Guyanese and Brazilian Governments are keeping before them the attractive possibilities for the development of hydropower sites in Guyana, for the sale of electric energy to Brazil – specifically into northern Brazil.

With respect to Russia: In August 2010 Guyana decided to add Russia to the list of countries for which the visa requirement was abolished. In 2011, the Russian Government, through the former Russian Chargé d'affaires, had reiterated its interest in providing debt relief to Guyana, for the remaining portion of debt owed by the Government under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries

agreement. Only last week, the current Russian ambassador, while briefing the press on the election victory of President Vladimir Putin, indicated that Russia is seeking to open more opportunities for Guyanese students to study there. In September, 2011, students were sent from Guyana to Moscow University to study. The ambassador further indicated that the local embassy was moving toward finding ways to bring more Russians to sample Guyana's tourism products. Despite its local industrial disputes, and recently exposed boat problems, the Russian company, RUSAL provides great potential for increasing levels of bauxite production and all economic activity along the Berbice River.

With respect to India: The outgoing Indian High Commissioner, at the end of February, 2012, reiterated the commitment of the Indian Government to support the development agenda of Guyana, making reference to the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC), the medium through which the two countries share development experiences. The outgoing High Commissioner said: "Relations are on the upswing. We are getting more Indian entrepreneurs interested in Guyana; and we have cooperated in Guyana's agricultural diversification programme, and we hope to continue doing more in Guyana."

So, we are building relationships with new countries.

With respect to China: This year, we know, marks forty years of relations between Guyana and China. With a recent visit by a Chinese Government delegation, the Governments of Guyana and the People's Republic of China further deepened bilateral relations on 2nd March by executing agreement for a US\$4.726 million economic and technical cooperation grant, and for the provision of firefighting equipment costing US\$2.46 million. We have had a number of projects successfully completed with the assistance of the Chinese Government. We look forward soon to having the two roll-on roll-off ferries put into operation between Parika and Supenaam, greatly increasing the traffic for increased development in Essequibo. Today, there are Chinese companies in Guyana working in the ICT area. We know that ICT would play an important role in the development of our economy as a whole.

Reference was made also to Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). His Excellency went on to expound the pivotal role that Guyana stands poised to pursue as a bridge between the Caribbean and South America. Within the last

three years Guyana has held the critical roles of chairmanship of both CARICOM and UNASUR. The time is ripe for the much needed broader integration between these two trading blocks, and this administration is committed to being a catalyst toward this venture.

His Excellency also referred to Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy and the prominent global stature into which same has catapulted this nation of ours. This administration remains committed to implementing this strategy which will yield environmental rewards to be reaped for generations to come, not only by Guyanese, but by the entire world.

As we look to the future, we need to look back to where we had come from, so that we could be heartened with the progress we have made, and so that we can assure ourselves that we can, working together, make even more progress. This would have been the intention of our President as he referred to the journey that we have been taking over the last nineteen/ twenty years, from being a heavily indebted poor country, when forced to enter into an agreement in 1989, experiencing since then growth from a US\$317 million economy in 1991 to a US\$2.261 billion economy in 2010, largely under this PPP/C administration. With that, there has been an increase in our average per capita annual income, from US\$304 to US\$2,533 through good management and prudence which the PPP/C has always demonstrated and will continue to demonstrate.

His Excellency cited the numerous financial indicators which are testimony to developmental success during the period of this Government's administration - the increase in commercial bank assets; increased volumes of loans to the private sector which significantly decreased interest rates; slashing of the country's external debt to less than half of what it was; the reduction and stabilisation of the inflation rate to single digits for more than a decade. These are real significant achievements that the PPP/C, during the last nineteen years, has achieved, and we will continue on the same course.

His Excellency opined, and Government echoed the same sentiment, that Guyana is indeed poised for a rapid take off. The key to this would be the availability of less costly renewable energy and the slashing of our fuel import bill, enabling greater manufacturing and agro processing.

His Excellency also pointed to the PPP/C's ongoing policy for maintaining and improving the traditional sectors such as sugar, rice, bauxite, gold mining, and at the same time developing

non-traditional agriculture including aquaculture, livestock, fruits and vegetables, and all the new areas which we have been speaking about.

In particular, where we are today, before us, we see the prospects of a petroleum discovery. His Excellency went to great lengths to caution that prudence needs to dictate the way forward in this venture, and that the experiences of other countries should serve as lessons to us. We must avoid - and this is a caution for all of us, all citizens of Guyana – what is referred to in the literature as the resource curse. I saw in last Wednesday's newspaper article, former Minister Henry Jeffery referred to this particular issue, which we should bear in mind, the issue of resource curse. We need to take lessons from other countries and avoid such a development in Guyana if our hope of finding oil and gas in large quantities is realised. For this, we have been making preparations with the assistance of our traditional partners. The United States of America and Canada have been holding seminars so that we can become acquainted with what is required, the regulations that would be required, and we are beginning to make arrangements for such to come in place in good time.

3.45 p.m.

The President spoke about us continuing to pursue programmes for the construction of a deep water harbour, road and possibly rail links to northern Brazil, and a road link with Suriname by the constructing of a bridge across the Corentyne River.

He also spoke about the need for us to develop ourselves to provide globally competitive goods and services, and it was pointed out that we must not rule out any form of organisation of production of goods and services once it meets our people's needs. So we will embrace small and large companies, public and privately owned firms, cooperative societies, and so on. We will embrace new technologies also and there is the programme of providing the additional fiber-optic connections, particularly the one to Brazil in which Government has invested in, and also providing a backbone along the coast. We must do things better, faster and cheaper while creating thousands of much needed jobs for our people. We must note that, as the good book states, "we will learn our keep through our work", and if we need to be kept better, we must learn how to work better, faster, and it keeps us less costly.

His Excellency established this administration's cornerstone for the development of Guyana, as the people are the drivers of development. This Government is committed to invest heavily in developing its human capital through improvements in the education, health, housing and water sectors. So, we are equipping our people to produce better and to earn more. In education and labour, we have been focusing, in particular in education, in making acceptable educational facilities available throughout our country, to make the educational opportunities in the Hinterland and in the countryside as good as in the cities.

We are heartened about the achievements of our students at the Caribbean Examination Council/Caribbean Secondary Examination Council (CXC/CSEC). From 1997 to date, Guyana has produced the most outstanding overall students in the Caribbean nine times and our students have received nineteen other CSEC regional awards. We are almost returning, as I look across the aisle, to the time when a young Rupert Roopnarine and others were winning for us, at times, a half of all the open scholarships at the University College, then, of the West Indies. So we will continue along this track, and we continue to expect that our students would do well in CSEC and other examinations.

We expect to continue the training of teachers; we expect to continue the improvements in the provision of all text to exercise books. We intend to continue to seek scholarships for our secondary school students, and we intend to continue working to increase the capacity of our workers. In this regard, we could not help but refer once again, as our President did, to our programme of the One Laptop Per Family. It is only this morning that a lady from the south of Georgetown who had taken herself to help organised some boys and young men, who would be playing around the area, into a football team, and I was pleased to hear her, said that she has been using her laptop - this "One Laptop Per Family" that she received - to help to arrange...*[Interruption]*

Health care services were referred to, our achievements thus far and our continued programmes to raise health care service in Guyana to even higher levels. Some of my other colleagues will speak in more details about our programmes which have brought more hospitals in the Regions, dialysis treatment, kidney transplant, cancer treatment, burnt treatment, heart surgery. We are speaking now and the President referred to our plans, with the assistance of the Government of India, to establish a specialty hospital.

For improved housing, we are continuing our programme to provide every Guyanese with adequate housing. Our plans are ongoing to provide some thirty thousand additional families with the possibilities for improved housing within the next five years.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Ali, it is difficult for me to hear the Prime Minister moving a motion on behalf of your President.

Minister of Housing and Water [Mr. Ali]: Sorry.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much.

Mr. Ali: [*inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: But I am hearing your voice.

Mr. Hinds: Our President recognised crime is a phenomenon that keeps evolving every day and all nations are in a constant battle to provide effective and efficient security for its citizens. Our Government continues the fight against the narcotic trade which spawns so many other related criminal activities and which threatens to destroy our society if left unabated. The Government has expended considerably sum of money in equipping and building both the security personnel and security infrastructure. Capacity building exercises such as the recently concluded Fused Response 2012, conducted in partnership with the United States of America Government, which has been aimed at combating crime and illicit trafficking, and these are all testimony to Government support of the fight against crime.

I would refer also to the recent training undertaken with assistance from the Government of China so that the officers in our Guyana Defence Force (GDF), in the air corps of our GDF, can be better equipped to operate and maintain our Y12 aircraft.

We were called upon to recall our fellow citizens who may have suffered, who may have been left behind for whatever reason, as we grow and develop. We must be compassionate and we have had a programme to deal with the problems of vulnerable groups in society. It is our programme, the legislative programme, to bring greater penalties against persons who would do violence to women and youth, differently able and the elderly poor, which is well known.

I would end, as our President did also, calling again for us to commit ourselves to work together in this new dispensation and, in this, we are committed to an environment characterised by respect for the rule of law, adherence to internationally acceptable human and social rights, including respect for the independence of the media and respect and confidence in the functioning of public institutions, including, most of all, this National Assembly.

The Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Brigadier (Ret.) David Granger, on Friday, February 10th
...[*Interruption from Opposition Members*]

Mr. Speaker: Allow the Prime Minister to conclude.

Mr. Hinds: ...in his brief response to His Excellency address, opined that under this new dispensation and configuration the Tenth Parliament should seek new methods to manage its business. This administration holds firm to the principles enshrined in the Constitution of this Republic, which is the supreme law of the land. This administration will continue to respect the rule of law and honour the body of tried and tested conventions and practices established in this and other Westminster parliaments throughout the Commonwealth. The Hon. Leader of the Opposition also called upon the Speaker to invite His Excellency to make more functional visits to Parliament, a notion warmly embraced by you, Mr. Speaker, in your brief remarks thereafter. The Hon. Leader of the Opposition further called upon the Speaker to invite the President to report on the state of the nation every year before the presentation of the budget. We do hope that these were earnest wishes.

In closing, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition called upon the Speaker to ensure that the will of the majority in this House is respected. I wish to remind the Hon. Member of this National Assembly that the Speaker's mandate is to also respect the voice of every Member of Parliament, as he has been so doing, and to uphold the Standing Orders and not to allow arbitrary changes.

The Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan had made the observation that no legislative agenda has been declared in the said address, but expressed the hope that same could be worked out at the tripartite level, and we would accord with that. We would say that if this new dispensation had put forward a lengthy unilateral legislative agenda when the President spoke to this House we may have heard "who say that it is going to pass". So it is open, and we want to encourage the

other Members in this House, at the tripartite level, the tripartite meetings, to work together, to develop an agenda, a legislative agenda, that is relevant and suitable for us at this time.

As leader of this House, I wish to commend Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan for signalling his party's commitment to work with the Government to ensure the greater happiness and full peace for all Guyanese. This is the ultimate aim of this administration and I have no doubt that it is the aim of everyone of us in this Hon. House.

As leader of this House, I wish to sincerely thank His Excellency for his address to the National Assembly which was made on the occasion of the ceremonial opening of the first session of the Tenth Parliament of Guyana and I herein move the motion for the approval of the policies adumbrated therein. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Members, I wish to propose the motion to invite thereafter Members to speak to it. However, I do believe that this is a very convenient time at which we can take the suspension for half an hour, so the Assembly is suspended.

Motion proposed.

Sitting suspended at 4.03 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 4.54 p.m.

Minister of Public Works [Mr. Benn]: I rise, on this side of the House, to pay acknowledgement and to consider, along with the other Hon. Members, the address by His Excellency Donald Rabindranauth Chandarpaul, the new President of the Republic of Guyana...[*Interruption*]... It is Donald Rabindranauth Ramotar. In so doing, I want to pay tribute to our new President. Our new President in his address did speak to his long years in the National Assembly, and the fact that during those years he has been able to build enduring friendships on all sides of the House, amongst all colleagues. He also spoke to the issue and said that it strengthened, fortified, and I quote, "my faith in the inestimable value of Parliamentary democracy and the importance of this institution in our national life." I recall too, during the recent elections campaign, Mr. Ramotar did also say, and there are a few billboards of him which are around, that we must continuously strive to unite our people. I take, again, great heart in this statement and in his attitude.

Mr. Ramotar has been an affable, sometime jovial presence in this House, but also one who has been deeply involved in the cut and thrust in the debates and issues related to our national life, in chartering the course also, in the House, of the People Progressive Party and the Civic and its programme, with respect to its perspectives on national development.

It has been thrust upon him now to lead Guyana during this, admittedly, challenging new period where the continuation of the development of our country has to be pursued on the exponential path which has been left under President Bharrat Jagdeo. I repeat - the “exponential path”.

I believe Mr. Speaker..., and there are many assertions as to the results of the elections and the new make-up of the House and all of these things. I note that at the time that the speech was made there was a lot of, perhaps, overexuberance on the part of some, in some quarters, in respect of their new positions in the House.

President Ramotar said: “I urge that we put the interest of our people first.” He said again “...my government is as willing as ever to exercise patience, forbearance and reasonableness in the interest of all our people”. President Ramotar, in my estimation, is perhaps, from his background and ethnic make-up, and all of those things, the most complete Guyanese person who has acceded to the position of the Presidency in Guyana - the most complete Guyanese person. On this side of the House, the PPP and the Civic, at various times... [**Ms. Selman:** Times! What [*inaudible*] do you all have?] ... as a result of various elections, Madam, has been able to provide leadership of this country in the form of a large and wide-ranging spectrum of persons of various ethnic backgrounds to lead our country: President Jagdeo, President Cheddi Jagan, Mrs. Janet Jagan, President Samuel Hinds. [*Interruption*] Yes, Mr. Samuel Hinds was indeed a President of this country. I am sure, based on our team and our strivings and our willingness, on this side of the House, and I can assure for national development and the unity of our people that we are prepared that we will always work so that, from this side of the House, at any time, we will complete the full spectrum of all the races as president of this country.

We are committed, and the urgencies, the utterances, the efforts of the PPP/Civic in Government, the effort of Mr. Ramotar as General Secretary of the People’s Progressive Party/ Civic, over the years, these strivings, are in this direction. We believe and we take on board his urgencies, his encouragement in the speech, where we can continue the efforts of building our country and,

as he said, that we are on another open path - "...that we are at the threshold of a rapid development that can take us to great heights."

In terms of my responsibilities as of Minister of Public Works, the speech refers to the issues of facilitating, making our goods and services being globally competitive. He said "we must reduce transport cost and improve market access for our exports" and he has spoken, in the speech, about the need of achieving "...a deep water harbour, a road and bridge link to Brazil and Suriname respectively". These are said to be very important projects, so that we can "...become a major hub for the movement of goods between South America and the North while reducing transport costs and providing easier and freer access to larger markets for our producers."

Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Speaker, we are all aware of the efforts which have been made in creating, in developing, over the years, the road linked to Brazil. We have had the success, which was mentioned by the Hon. Prime Minister, of the Takutu River Bridge where Presidents Jagdeo and *Lula da Silva* were together in heralding the new bridge and in having discussions with respect to the financing of the link from Linden to Lethem. We are all aware of the great developments that are occurring now in Lethem, itself, with respect to it being the first *entrepot* to Guyana, in respect of goods coming into Guyana from Brazil and with respect, too, in terms of having the Guyanese goods go over to Brazil and further afield to enhance our economy and to increase trade between our two countries.

The next significant port and population centre related to this development is, of course, the town of Linden. Linden is the first port at which ten to twelve thousand tons of cargo can be lifted from to go northward into the open ocean for exports, not only of products from Guyana, but also products from Brazil. Linden is also one of the first beneficiaries of the developments in relation to the Linden/Lethem road to Brazil with the fixed link, that there is now, of the friendship bridge, the Takutu Bridge.

5.06 p.m.

It has been suggested sometimes that the development of a deep water port in Berbice, which is natural based on all the calculations and planning with respect to the movements of goods and services, may see Linden being bypassed. I want to set aside this notion, comprehensively. The first port with access to the open ocean, with respect to the movement of cargo between Brazil

and Guyana, is the port of Linden which has been a port now for close to a hundred years in terms of ocean going cargo. So Linden will not be bypassed in terms of infrastructure and will always remain as a viable port.

In respect of the deep water port, the waiting and the bias of movement of sugar, rice, hopefully petroleum and the bauxite coming down the Berbice river and the geographical position and makeup of the Berbice river, makes New Amsterdam, Berbice, the area where the deep water harbour would be established. We anticipate and we are very hopeful that out of the two efforts that we are having now – the Prime Minister did refer to it – of Repsol and CGX Guyana Inc. where there are, right now, two large platforms...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, one second. Mr. Williams and Mrs. Backer, I am hearing the conversation all the way up here.

Mrs. Backer: Sorry.

Mr. Speaker: Continue Hon. Minister.

Mr. Benn: ...drilling for oil which, hopefully, will solve some significant gaps in our energy equation, some terms in our energy equation, if we do find oil out there on the ocean of the Corentyne Coast, Berbice, the positioning of the places for the establishment of a refinery and for the export of those products would be in that region.

President Ramotar has spoken to the supporting of sectors, Ministries and firms in respect of the potential to produce globally competitive goods and services. He has also spoken on the issue of having a diversified economy, one in which large public and privately owned firms will be embraced, that small businesses are known to sustain growth and have the ability to use managerial skills and expertise, develop skilled workforce and improve access to resources. These things will allow us to venture deeper into regional and global markets.

The Hon. Prime Minister did mention the issue of – and it is also stated in the paper – the question of the global environment in which we live, the issue that the world economy is being driven by the appearance of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, Indian, China and, now, South Africa). And it is said that within the next ten years or so, Nigeria, with its large population and market base, aside from the traditional European, North American countries, these are the countries

which will drive global development. These are the countries which are bringing their populations out of deep poverty. These are the countries which are also helping other lesser developed and medium developed countries to bring large sections of their population out of poverty. Without them, if we were to have the situation of the 1929 to 1933 global recession, there would have been total global collapse. So with this, we want to take the charge to look towards the regional markets- of course CARICOM. We want to facilitate *entrée* and transportation links in the regional markets. We want to be able to facilitate that. We have had discussions, up to yesterday, with His Excellency the Ambassador of Singapore, too, in respect of developing air links to Singapore over Africa and Brazil so that the links between the South-South cooperation, between third world and developing countries, could be developed to drive the development of our economy so that businessmen, technicians, professionals and entrepreneurs otherwise would not have to go all the way to New York, Miami or Europe to be able to go to Africa or to go to Asia. It would have a Southern Air Bridge between the Southern countries created that is viable and will further deepen sustained, economic development of the Southern countries. So we want to continue to work - and we have had commitments in that respect - and we are looking at finding ways, looking at doubling the number of companies that come to Guyana in respect of air transportation which is the main link for the movement of people and also the main link, particularly and emotionally, for keeping the links with our Guyanese Diaspora. We want to continue to provide opportunity for competitive air fare, cargo transportation, and an expansion of the ability to move into new markets and new areas, not only East-West but also in the South, in Latin America.

In terms of embracing new technologies, we are heartened by the position and the recognition of how these drive growth and we want to point to the changes that we have recently made at the Cheddi Jagan International Airport and the Tower in terms of the air navigation systems which have been completely upgraded. We want to indicate, too, that we have recently adopted, in terms of international over-flights, global positioning, and routing of flights over Guyana's airspace which is resulting in the reduction of costs in fuel and time of international air traffic.

The interest is also encouraged, from the speech, in terms of further modernising, upgrading, and rehabilitating, in many ways, our infrastructure. Issues in relation to roads and bridges - we know that the talk abounds on the issues of the four-lane highway that we are doing on the East Bank

to Timehri and, of course, issues relating to the results of the elections and the question of people's perception of how development occurs.

People have spoken about apathy. People have spoken about disinterest otherwise. There have been various criticisms, but I would like to point to one thing and that is that perhaps after a long period, in the first instance we were threading water in Guyana to survive... [Ms. Selman: What?] ...threading water in Guyana to survive. There was a period when the national resources were sterilised and not available for investment for a long period. There came a change and then there was a great effort to prevent being taken over or swamped by the sea and to rehabilitate all of the roads. I think we have been successful at doing that. And then there came a new period when we started to grow, when the National Budgets grew in terms of the amount of funds available for health, education, and infrastructure. With this growth and, perhaps, great expectations all around, many people on all sides of the House thought two things: one was that if there were a lot of moneys around, it meant that there was corruption; and secondly was that we can build all the roads and meet all of the expectations of all the people, all at the same time; that if I build a road on this side of the house then maybe people on that side of the house will think why it was not built on their side. [Mr. Greenidge: That is what you do.] I want to remind the honourable gentleman and I will present, again, and set aside all the lies and misrepresentations, again, with respect to the development and placement of roads and other infrastructure in this country and to show that the prioritisation is apt and that the sequence of these activities is appropriate. But I state again, the point that perhaps since there was a great effort and we now had the ability to build on the past and to do many new things, there was an expectation right away that we can do all of these things everywhere and all at the same time. This is not possible. We would like to do it, but it could not have been possible. We had to get the income from Value Added Tax (VAT) and other taxes. We had to bring more persons into paying their fair share of taxes. However, we could point to some successes. We could point to the successes of the roads going all the way to Moleson Creek being completely rehabilitated. We could say now that for the first time we have an all-weather, all-year roundly; we will have that soon into the year into Regions 7 and 8, into the Pakaraimas. We can point to these things. And so... [Mr. Greenidge: Is it Kofi you are talking about? You better be talking about Kofi.] I am a shirt-jack man, Sir. I do not wear cufflinks. [Mrs. Backer: We could see that.] Yes. The jesting aside, I want to point, particularly, to the efforts and to the commitment for the

continuation of the exponential growth that we have in Guyana and that President Ramotar continues and has said he will continue on the strong base that has been provided. Indeed, we have new challenges in the House and nationally, particularly, and it is strange that sometimes I am happy, in one way, that, maybe, the makeup of the House has changed because now, maybe, the Opposition will not walk out of the House when important Bills have to be passed. Every time we had important things to debate and discuss, there was no interest other than grandstanding. And as soon as the cameras were off, they left. I am glad you are all here now and fully represented so you can make sure of the... *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, could you stick to the debate? And Hon. Members, could you allow the Hon. Member to speak and not call him a “liar” and things like that. It is quite unparliamentary.

You have five minutes to conclude.

Mr. Benn: In this House, perhaps, it is that .01 per cent or less of the Guyanese people who represent themselves to the rest of the country as the political elite. President Ramotar has spoken about putting the interest of our people first. The question of patience and forbearance, the question of being reasonable, the question of being rational, and I am aware that President Ramotar who was an affable man, as I said, who is open to meeting all the people, any person, has consulted the Guyanese people on all the perspectives in relation to our national development. I say, again, that President Ramotar has consulted the people and this document is as a result of the consultations and the understanding he has of the new dispensation and of the challenge that he has! President Ramotar has consulted the Guyanese people. The challenge is not only for President Donald Ramotar; it is for all of us here who hold ourselves out to the Guyanese people as the political elite. It is not in a democratic system here for the political elite to be carrying on as if they are fighting over the national trough or having a feeding frenzy over that trough or making statements and assertions without understanding the full import for our national development.

In this House, now in this Tenth Parliament, if this Parliament is not to become a short Parliament, now is the time, Mr. Speaker, for the true patriotic and nationalist Guyanese to stand up. Now is the time for the true, patriotic, nationalist Guyanese! And so in the vein of President

Donald Ramotar, I am repeating that he has said, based on his political experience, that his faith in the in-estimable value of Parliamentary democracy has been fortified. I am thinking, too, that good sense will prevail on all sides of the House and that this purported or supposed elite in this House will, on all sides, examine not only their heads but their hearts in this matter. I anticipate that we will serve the Guyanese people properly and well and that we will also ensure, as we pray in this Hon. House, for the safety, honour and happiness of the President, Donald Rabindranauth Ramotar! [*Applause*]

Mr. Nagamootoo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much, Your Honour, for the initiative that you have taken to reflect that in this Parliament there are three sides and we are grateful for the humble accommodation to make that third side, although it is a tight fit. So I crave your indulgence as I try to move a little so that I can get some standing space.

“The current Parliament is one which has had a fresh breath of democratic air blown through its hallowed walls. In its reconstituted state, it must remain sacrosanct, and it must guarantee the protection of the interest and wishes of the general populace with which it has been entrusted. The public gallery of this Parliament Chamber must be utilised to capacity. And deliberations of Parliament must be fully ventilated. Its current configuration allows for the full and frank exchange of views on the Order Paper... It is true that, a fundamental characteristic of democracy is that the will of the majority prevails over that of the minority.”

I am quoting from the words of the great man, the Address of His Excellency Dr. Cheddi Jagan, the late President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, at the Ceremonial Opening of the First Session of the Sixth Parliament of Guyana on 17th December, 1992 to this august Assembly. Those words spoken by the late President Cheddi Jagan form the basis for the recognition that there is a new dispensation in Guyana and that there is a majority in this House that reflects the will of the people.

And in commenting, after listening to the speeches, the regurgitation and the repositioning of what President Ramotar has said to this House, I am tempted, immediately, since my learned and good friend, the Hon. Robeson Benn, reminded us, like Chanderpaul, to hit that for a “six”: It has

to be remembered that the minority cannot masquerade itself as the majority. The majority belongs over here.

There has been a fundamental change in our democratic makeup and that is as it should be. And it is not new to anyone that we have guidance with regards to how this new dispensation should be treated. The Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, the supreme law of our Co-operative Republic provides, in its preamble,

“WE, THE GUYANESE PEOPLE,

Proud heirs of the indomitable will of our forebears, in a spirit of reconciliation and cooperation, proclaim this Constitution in order to:

Safeguard and build on the rich heritage, won through tireless struggle, bequeathed us by our forebears;

Affirm our sovereignty, our independence and our indissolubility;

Forge a system of governance that provides concerted effort and broad-based participation in national decision-making in order to develop a viable economy and a harmonious community based on democratic values, social justice, fundamental human rights and the rule of law;”

And it went on...

“As citizens of Guyana, we adopt these fundamental laws and make provision for their amendment to reflect changes in our society, inspired by our collective quest for a perfect nation, whose characteristics include the commitments, concepts, and other principles proclaimed in this preamble”

The foundation of the Constitution and dreams of the fathers of the nation have been that there shall be a democratic republic based on the consent of the governed and based on the cooperation and participation of all the representatives of the people. And, therefore, in speaking to this motion tabled here in this House by the Hon. Prime Minister on the Address to the Parliament by His Excellency President Ramotar, I wish to say that that speech was characterised more by what it did not say than what it has said – by its omission.

And I do not share the view of the Hon. Prime Minister that the President has addressed the most important issue that faces this nation. He has not! And, immediately, that issue that I speak of has to do with what the late President Cheddi Jagan has said and what the Constitution has said... [Interruption] You boys over there should know that I helped to craft this speech. So I have the freedom of artistic liberty to quote from it at any time. And as I have done for speeches for then President Samuel Hinds, President Jagdeo and the late President Janet Jagan, I wrote all of their speeches. So just ease up.

The issue that is paramount to this nation and to which I alluded to is one of national unity. And it is with that background that I would have expected President Ramotar to have come to this Assembly because he, himself, is on record on the 21st September, 2002, at the Port Mourant Congress of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) as talking about the national democratic state and the need for national unity. He, himself, is on record on page 29 of that speech as saying:

“The national democratic state in Guyana seeks to involve all the legitimate task forces in the task of nation building. It is an inclusive state. It seeks to broaden and deepen democracy.”

And this is, for me, the single most glaring omission from the address to this Parliament because the nation suffers from a lack of national unity and cohesion. And when I was over on that side, I helped to craft the Political Programme of the People's Progressive Party. On page 21 it states that the PPP does not believe in “winner takes all”. It does not believe that one party can successfully pilot this nation to success and prosperity and that it believes in a government of national unity.

5.36 p.m.

Therefore, I say that that ingredient is missing. Anyone who comes to this House knowing how the people have voted in the elections would have known that they voted for change. Having voted for change their expectations would have been that there should have been on the agenda, as a matter of national priority, the formation of a government of national unity based on the prerogative of uniting our people.

The Elections of November 28, 2011 have shown that race rules in Guyana, and we cannot hide that fact that there is racial polarisation, racial division and racial mobilisation which is being exploited even to this day as I speak. Recently, we have had to go to the press with regards to the specialty hospital on the East Coast in Turkeyen. We were told in this insidious, vicious, hostile and wicked propaganda, that the AFC had joined with the PNC – they did not say APNU – to vote against an Indian hospital because race had become this invidious mechanism by which to imprison people of Indian descent as if they belong as shackled slaves and property to the PPP.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, may I seek your indulgence? This play on race is extremely reckless. When the comment was made in this House that this was a specialty hospital funded by the Indian Government, the word “Indian” referred to the country and not to any specific race. Mr. Speaker, I am seeking your indulgence to protect.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Member, you have heard the Hon. Advisor, Ms. Teixeira, speak to the context in which the reference was made to the word “Indian”.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Your Honour I have listened to the Hon. Member and I am prepared to produce, after the debates in this House, comments on those issues alluded to, by Members of Government who have gone on record - on television - to tell this nation that we had voted against an “Indian” hospital. That having been said Your Honour... [*Interruption*] You shall know the truth and the truth shall set thee free.

Your Honour, in his remarks addressed to this House, the President, (and let me say this for the record: to this date I have known Mr. Donald Ramotar, who is President, now for forty five years, longer than many of those quislings heckling me would choose to remember or would know. Most of those years were good years of association, of comradeship and of dialogue, co-operations and struggles for the people of Guyana. So I speaker here with no bitterness, no rancour, but out of respect for Mr. Donald Ramotar who is the President of Guyana – not Chandarpal - Chandarpal was highly qualified. Either of the two Chandarpals in the House could have been President, but the process was not one that would have facilitated competition that was fair). So, I can only allude to the fact that the President spoke to the issue of Parliamentary democracy and the importance of this institution to our national life. [**An Hon. Member:** That is why you went shopping for a Vice president!] I have shopped for nothing; I have only

given all to Guyana and the people of this country. I have asked for no privileges, no rights, no honour; I have refused national honours twice or thrice.

The President spoke, and I have a list of ten issues apart from the issue of national unity. We were also told by one of the speakers, the Hon. Mr. Robeson Benn, that in keeping with the President's Address that the Government is fighting corruption and that people like to talk about corruption. Well if the President came here (and he himself had said elsewhere that there are aspects of corruption in Guyana that he recognises – and no one is disputing that), but the mechanism to deal with corruption is contained in Article 212W of the Constitution of Guyana, which is the establishment of the Procurement Commission.

The Procurement Commission has not been established. How are you serious about dealing with corruption if there is no plan? When the President came here, either in the legislative agenda of the ruling party or as the Leader of the Nation to say how serious this issue of corruption is and how it will be dealt with since every single person in this country knows, particularly the starving ones among us - babies and women - that corruption eats the resources of the State. It denies people of their fundamental right to food and for a decent life. You have to come to this Parliament seriously and say:

“In the period ahead we will, in accordance with the Constitution of Guyana, establish the Public Procurement Commission and a Tribunal to enquire where contracts and procurements are made contrary to law and in violation of regular norms of descent behaviour in society”.

Otherwise, we would not have had the fiasco we are having right here in today's Sitting, having Members of this House questioning the allocation of votes to Policemen for food on Elections day. We would not have had anyone standing during these appropriations bills to question whether or not \$29.1 million voted as an emergency, unforeseen, expenditure was in fact spent on a piece of land where I saw twelve heaps of dirt, which I call the “dirty-dozen”, where the specialty hospital is supposed to be erected. I have the photographs right here to show the “dirty dozen”. I can pass it around to show the twelve heaps where we were told that the land is being prepared for a hospital.

His Excellency President Ramotar has failed in his delivery to tell us in this House that the cancerous development in Guyana that is eating up the sinews of the society and eating up the resources, that this corruption will be dealt with by his presidency and under his tenure.

When we look at the quality of the speech we have to comment on how many jobs we were told in this House have been created. We had what appeared to be a Post Elections Manifesto on what had been done in a propagandistic way as if we were preparing for another election, after the election in which the ruling party had failed so badly and miserably that they were thinking of going back to the poles for another failure.

We were regaled with the litany of development projects and achievements. Throughout, this word “jobs” seemed to be a “state secret”. We cannot have the statistics. How many people are unemployed in Guyana? How many people are underemployed? How many able-bodied people are there? How many jobs have been created, so that we can say, “what we see as a developmental splurge is in fact providing jobs and food to our young people and able-bodied men and women?”

We are waiting with dry lips. I am right now waiting with dry lips. *[Interruption]* It is a pleasure Your Honour to drink the water from this House, because I cannot drink from the taps. I do not believe anybody in Guyana in their right mind will drink any water from the taps flowing in Guyana. The one who is heckling me should come to this House and say what the quality of the potable water is. We would have liked to hear that from the President, and whether or not we are permitted to drink the water from the taps. We should hear how large the bottled water industry is and how much money is spent by hard working people to procure water in bottles. That is what we should have been hearing.

We would have loved to hear about measures taken here to ease the tax burden on tax payers. The income tax is so onerous and oppressive that to give one third from your salary after you would have worked hard, with no deductions for dependants and no deductions for children, to be able to come forth here in a new dispensation and not giving the Guyanese people an assurance, for me, Your Honour, it is a great disappointment and we hope it is forthcoming. *[Interruption]* I wrote the manifesto and I expected it to be fulfilled. I am doubly and triply annoyed and angry here that it has not been fulfilled. It is a betrayal of promise.

We would have liked to hear in this House what the plans are to ease the misery of the elders in our society, that pensions would be increased and that the pensioners would be getting more than seven thousand five hundred measly dollars per month to survive on. That is the responsibility of governance, but Your Honour I do not believe we would have change in governance unless we have change in this Government! I do not believe we would ever have change in governance unless we have a change in Government.

Mr. Neendkumar: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member should speak on the motion; he is not doing so.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Your Honour, we would like His Excellency to say in his first Inaugural Address, – he is an honourable man and he is a great leader – what would be done to ease the miseries of the people of Mahaicony, Mahaica and Abary who are periodically and regularly flooded out and their livelihoods are damaged. Whether there is hope if the Hope Canal does not come on stream in a timely manner that there is hope for them to be compensated if they are going to be flooded again.

This is what I pointed out as a glaring omission from the speech addressed to the Parliament. We have come here and been told much of what had happened. There is nothing new. We were told years ago, and the Hon. Minister of Finance will know that many years ago – and I have these estimates – we were told about the bridge across the Corentyne River. So that is not new. We have been told before about the Takatu Bridge. When we are told that we are going to have these things, this is old khaki pants. We are repackaging all the time and coming to the House as though these are new initiatives that will be taken.

In the President's Speech he said:

“For the first time we are faced with a situation in which no party has an absolute majority.”

That may be so, no party has an absolute majority, but the combined Opposition has an absolute majority. We know that whenever a minority rules over a majority, we are quick to say that that is a dictatorship. When South Africa had apartheid, the minority racist government ruled over the majority. We said that was apartheid, it was worthy to be condemned and that it had to be

boycotted, isolated and brought down by all means possible. When Rhodesia was ruled by Ian Smith's minority government, we supported revolution in this House. The united position of Guyana was that there was a minority government imposing its will on the majority. [Mr. Neendkumar: Nagamootoo you are getting senile.] We are now hearing that Nagamootoo is senile. The senility of politics that wants to turn a minority into a majority and wants to turn thirty-two into thirty-three. Whether by way of proportionality or non-proportionality, you cannot turn arithmetic on its head. It is illogical.

We have a Constitution that says it is possible for someone coming from a party with a plurality of votes to become the President. It is possible that you can have executive power under the Constitution. That does not change the fact that the Government is a minority government, except that now it is a constitutional dictatorship permitted by the Constitution.

Those who want to have disrespect for this House and the decisions of it and want to mock this House, to be used as an Appeal Court against its own decisions in matters that are virtually, *res judicata*, we should know that there is no place for that. This reference of the President to parliamentary democracy should be qualified. I believe that it means the majority should have respect for other opinions and views, and that there would be no arrogance as we have witnessed here, even to provide details for expenditure, the arrogance for position, which is why we abstained today and did not vote in favour of those provisions. We realise that this Parliament, which is formed by the sovereign will of the people and which has sovereignty, is being disrespected when it is not being given details for expenditure.

Mr. Speaker, I will not be tempted, because we are not irresponsible. We may be a small party on this side, a prophetic minority; some call it the "magnificent seven", but we are not irresponsible. We are patriotic and nationalist. We will be motivated, not by the howling of the detractors who would wish to set us up for propaganda effect. We do not want to create gridlock, because gridlock is being exploited by those who want to show that we are anti-patriotic, anti-national and irresponsible. We do not want to play that game. I believe that there is a smarter view of how to deal with those who think that they can do a spin.

I would like to say this, because it is about this Parliament and it is important. His Excellency said that we do not have a unified model that we can follow.

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

Mr. Ramjattan: Can I ask that the Hon. Member be granted fifteen minutes to continue his speech?

Mr. Speaker: To conclude?

Mr. Ramjattan: To conclude, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Proceed Hon. Member.

Question put and agree to.

Mr. Nagamootoo: The President said that we do not have a unified model we can follow by which we can make this democracy work. I have said at the beginning that we do have a model. It is a model that is not based on “winner takes all”. It is a model that is premised on a government of national unit. If we want to save this nation; if we want to ensure its perpetuation and if we want to ensure that this country is blessed with resources, but we are unable to tap the resources, because our most important wealth of this country - our people - are not united. Once divided, we will fail and we will fall and that is not what anyone would want for our beloved Guyana.

There is a model, and it has to be an autochthonous model that is born out of the circumstances of our own country, not imported nor copied, but out of the circumstance that I have spoken of in alluding to the Constitution, the Preamble, that talks about our forebears - the travails and sufferings of the Indigenous people, the Slaves, the Indians, the Chinese and all the people who came here as indentured. Their sacrifices are important and worthy for us to try something that is pertinent and relevant to Guyana. That is why I would have said that the model which we are looking for, for national unity cannot be engineered in a Constitution. It cannot be engineered. It has to take cognisance that once you have power in your hand, as those over there seem to have, the power must be used to transform the deficiencies of the society, whether it is political, whether it is historic, whether geographic, or psychological. It must end marginalisation and alienation and bring this country together as one nation. That is the servant responsibility of leadership. That is the singular mission of power – to be able to correct the deformities alluded to in the Constitution.

Those of my friends who know me, know that I have always passionately and almost singularly fought over the many years for a formula for national unity. When I brought it forward in writing on one occasion my speech was ordered to be banned. I had to remind some of the Stalinist about what had happened to Bukhanin, Trotsky and some other people. **[Interruption: Produce the speech]** I can produce the speech and leave it... We do have a model, and we cannot work if we do not have a model to bring about what is desired by the people of this country.

There is another issue here that I quickly want to turn to. I started off by saying that there should be the full ventilation of the views of Members of this House. As part of the first speech that have been made by the late President Jagan, and on to this day we do not have in this House coverage that would carry the debates live so that the taxpayers who fund us all here, (they call them the elites over there or the “Pradoville gang”), can know what their tribunes are doing for them in this House. The media have been dominated. At one time I supported State control of sections of the media. We have a Broadcasting Act which provides for private radio and private media; therefore we must have liberalisation of the media in Guyana. The stranglehold on National Communication Network (NCN) – I am hoping to see when we will vote on the estimates whether a cent is being allocated to NCN. You will know then what will be my position on the issue. You cannot be fed by state and at the same time you work against the people whom the taxpayers put to represent them in this House.

As I said, we want political cooperation. The President has said, and my other friends have quoted, in extension, from the speech itself – I do not intend to regurgitate or to quote from it at any length – he spoke in one paragraph on page three, to political competition and diversity as essential of democracy and they should not foreclose on the possibilities for compromise and consensus in the way we do business.

I understand some of my friends they like to call themselves “revolutionaries”. Revolutionaries do not litigate differences in the Court of law; that is a principle in the revolutionary life. The first thing we had here, when this House, in its own wisdom being empowered by the people in the way it was empowered, made a decision, we saw a recourse to the courts in an attempt that is futile, to undo and to undermine this House. How can you have cooperation if you decide you will play with us here and you will attack us outside? How do you have co-operation if you set

the infrastructure for hostility and animosity and if you try to undermine the most important democratic institution of this country, which is this Parliament?

6.06 p.m.

The President has to go back, I believe most respectfully, to the drawing board and let us know what the mechanisms are by which he will find the consensus. What are the formulas or formulae by which we can find the cooperation? What are the mechanisms by which we can develop a political culture that will not go back to where we came from - a political culture that has been rifled with division, animosity, suspicion and even hatred? We cannot go back there.

I am here on this side of the House because I have been spawned by a process that was more than transparent... The internal democracy was rigged. Now I fear for national democracy. Therefore, we feel in conclusion that we do not want to go down the political path in Guyana, where we will have no return. We do not believe that you can come here in good faith to address this House and in a way subliminally tell us that we all are here through a fraudulent and rigged process; that the elections held on November 28, 2011 was rigged and manipulated and the results were intercepted and somehow changed.

We do not want to be lectured over the will of the people. That is dead and gone, in the sense that it is written and as it is written, so shall it be respected, not violated - that decision by which we came in this House. We cannot accept any kind of provocation as a vehicle to take us to national unity and cooperation. We want to cooperate.

I applaud the Government and all Governments in fact that have brought to this House and to the attention of the nation that we need clean energy. In fact we should applaud ourselves; Guyana should pride itself that long before the pundits had started to talk about environmental issues and talked about "climate change" (that word was only a recent invention), we in Guyana were talking about harnessing the Tiger Falls in the 60's under the late Dr. Cheddie Jagan's administration. Then we were talking under the late Forbes Burnham's administration of the Upper Mazaruni Hydro Project. For various reasons we were visionaries, we were ahead of the times, we were ahead of the world, and we did not need to see an oil crisis of 1967 to tell us that fossil fuel was going to endanger us like the millstone of destruction around our necks.

We need, as I speak on this platform of the Alliance for Change, to assure this House and the people of Guyana that we will support any policy that is based on transparency and any agreements... I saw now a plethora of agreements has just been thrown at us, when we have been asking many months for disclosures. Once we have transparent processes; once we have accountability; once we have proper procurement procedures, we will support our nation's policy in terms of energy: clean energy, fossil fuel energy, wind energy and even solar energy. We will support any initiative in the interest of Guyana and for the Guyanese people, so that we can give priority and our cooperation, for anything that will work for the interest of Guyana and we have nothing to hold back because we love this country dearly.

We do not want to be like *the States* now, once parading and holding Olympics for the world to see how extravagant they were and suddenly they have gone broke, like Greece. We are hearing the media talking loudly now about the "P.I.G.S" Portugal, Ireland, Greece and Spain - countries we had all looked up to in Europe as great models and some of them were former colonisers, so-called mother countries. They have failed and we have to look at those examples where accountability, corruption and extravagance could take our people down and we must smell the coffee and wake up now, and move with the times. [Interruption]

We know that we live in a competitive world and we stand to benefit from the new "B.R.I.C. countries", Brazil, Russia, India and China. These are countries with which we are associated and we want to see in all these countries, except Russia for the time being, (where there are questions being asked in terms of the transparency of the electoral and other processes), are trying to grapple in one way or the other, with corruption and accountability. So, if we cite these countries as a model with which we will go forward, then we will have to be accountable just as these countries.

Your Honour, the President's speech to this nation and to this Parliament was not without his simplicity. I applaud President Ramotar for the manner in which he delivered his Address. It was without arrogance; it was without any flare that he had been consumed by power. The man I have known and, I hope, will continue to know, is someone I have come to respect as rooted in the working people. I would like him to deliver on those promises that he has made to this Hon. House.

And going back to his old roots in the working people and the working class, that they would refrain from attacking the sugar workers, threatening to ban the Unions; that they would try to make peace with people of this country who have worked hard and all the working people who are under assault, for example, the Bauxite Workers Union and the Bauxite workers where some action has been taken. We are hoping to see some further action in that respect.

I know that we can count on the President. I personally feel though I have not exchanged any word with him of any consequence since the elections – yes, my friends feel I am asking for something - inspired by what we do in this House and as serious as we can become, we believe that we can become the motivator to help him to take those cohorts and not fall in the pit of his predecessor. That he can take and navigate the narrow path, the so-called between the rain drops of transformation and change and difficulties that lie ahead. That we can all help him in this process to take our country forward, to bring unity among our people, to bring prosperity and, most of all, to be able to say at the end of our term: we too have worked for Guyana; we too love Guyana as much as those would have claimed that they love Guyana.

I thank you for your patience. I thank you, Sir, for allowing me to speak with extension of time. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Rohee: Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the motion, endorsing the President’s speech at the opening of the 10th Parliament. I do so by first of all referring to page 11 of his speech, which states, “My entire political career was shaped within a political party that have always been grounded within the working class and I would do all that is possible to enhance the skills and capacity of the working people so that they would be able to enhance their earning power. I intend to ensure that workers in Guyana are not left on the sidelines of development. Herein lies the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of the Ramotar’s administration. As if this was not sufficient, if we turn to page 16 of the speech, he said, “Today we are on an open path. I believe that we are at the threshold of a rapid development that can take us to great heights.” If you are looking for vision, I humbly submit that this is the vision we should seek after as a nation, taking our country on a trajectory, the rapid take off and developments that can take us to great heights. It reminds me of one of our national songs, “Onwards upwards may we ever go, day by day in strength and beauty grows.”

I believe that these two paragraphs in the President's speech are what underpin the direction in which our country must go. I was somewhat pained when I read subsequent to the President's speech, reported in the *Stabroek News*, Sunday February 12th, 2012, in an interview given by Dr. Rupert Roopnarine where he said that the speech was disappointing and that it did not provide a vision. He went on to say that he did not hear a legislative programme or a vision for the future in the President's speech and that are some evidence that the PPP does not seem ready to accept the new reality. It may be late to respond to a dated statement as of today, but since we are debating the President's speech, the relevance of these remarks by Dr. Roopnarine is relevant in the context of this speech. I disagree with what was said, because I would show later on in this presentation where the legislative agenda or the legislative programme as well as the vision for the future manifest itself in the President's speech.

There is much talk about a new reality. One of the buzz words around the country now is this question of a new dispensation. I think a lot of persons talk about a new dispensation, a new reality, without fully understanding the profoundness of this statement. I wish to submit that the history of the People's Progressive Party and subsequently the People's Progressive Party Civic, is a history of interpreting and grappling with new realities. Ever since the foundation of the People's Progressive Party with *new* challenges that were thrown up, the party with its ascension to Government 1957-1964 was able to grapple with these *new* challenges and still remain a party that has the largest number of seats in this National Assembly since its formation in 1957.

Many have sought to destroy this party. Many have sought to destabilise Governments of the PPP ever since its formation, but the bedrock of the People's Progressive Party, as the President said, is the working class and the working people of this country. They have never, and I seek to emphasise, they have never abandoned or let go of the People's Progressive Party.

When we speak about comprise and new realities, you have to look at the history of the PPP; we have to look at Governments formed by the PPP and you have to look at the PPP today as we speak. When we speak about consensus and compromise, the history of the PPP is one of consensus and compromise. There is no way that any objective historian could speak about compromise and consensus, could speak about new realities and new dispensations without making reference to the party which has the majority of seats on this side of the House.

The President in his speech made the link between development and security and in making that link he struck a familiar cord in respect of improving constantly the well-being of the working people of this country. He recognised the importance of maintaining the peace and good order in society and that of development. The President in his speech recognised and demonstrated the inextricable link between development and security; between peace and development. If a nation is not at peace with itself, if a nation is not characterised by peace and good order, development will be a challenge or will be so illusory that it will be difficult to accomplish.

When we look at other countries of the world and we need from time to time to cast our minds beyond the shores of Guyana and to make the challenges, which so many developing countries such as ours are facing. In Africa, Asia, even in Europe, the emerging economies and the more developed countries are facing challenges that they never imagined they would ever face, but the fact of the matter is that in Guyana we continue to grow. The President did recognise that growth and development must go hand in hand and not to the disadvantage of the security of our nation.

Moreover, we were told to guard against having growth without development. This is a lesson which many developing countries have learnt over the years. I think it was Mr. Wilfred David, a famous economist, who worked many years ago in Guyana, who warned against growth without development. Even though everyone in the Opposition in those days took heed of that warning, so that when we drew up our developmental plan while in the Opposition, it was reflected in so many of our manifestos and our programmatic platforms as well. We were careful to ensure that growth and development took place with people at the centre of development.

For us development... and when we speak of development we did not speak about bridle, capitalist development, we spoke of development in the human phase; development that is characterised by people being at the centre of this developmental model. A development that might appear to be difficult to achieve, but we all know that development is not an overnight process and for it to be accomplished a nation must be at work, there must be common objectives and perspectives. Many persons will ask: why is it that Guyana is lagging so far behind compared to Barbados, Trinidad & Tobago and some of these other countries in the Region? The answer is quite simple, because those countries did not go through the experimentations that Guyana went through, in its search for true economic and social development. Those countries were consistent with the philosophical approach to development. All the political parties in those

countries were united in respect to the path for development of the country, there was no flip flopping; there was no wide divergence of peace in respect to what should be the trust of the developmental policy of those countries. Regrettably we have experiments in this country, political, social and economic experiments, which put us many years backwards. We are now seeking to remove those factors and those impediments that held us back. I believe that the speech of the President makes a contribution to moving in that direction.

Fortunately for us today there is no ideological debate about the direction in which the country must go. There is no philosophical debate with respect to the political economy of the country; there is no debate with respect to the model of economic development. I think notwithstanding the differences among the political parties in the country by many of the stakeholders in respect of the approaches, the overarching consideration to my mind, is one of unanimity and the speech of the President must be seen as contributing to trodding that pathway so that at the end, the achievement must be improving the well-being of our people.

It is our people, by any stretch of the imagination; it is the people of Guyana that must drive development for our country. That is why a forum as the stakeholder's forum, which was recently convened by the President in order to share with these stakeholders, who do not have a seat in the National Assembly; who do not have a voice in this National Assembly, but has influence in the society. The President saw it as important to convene this meeting of these stakeholders and to share with them his vision for the future development of our country. This developmental path that runs as a common thread in the speeches or the speech of the President seems to me must also take place at the grassroots level. It is not simply an academic exercise; it is not an exercise of whose is the brightest and who knows best. This is not a question of who is going to win the debate tonight. This is a question of life and death of our people, this a question of development taking root at the grassroots level so that every Guyanese, every man, woman and child and student whether they are at the waterfront, in the cane fields, the rice fields, in the universities or where ever, we recognise in the speech of the President that they are making a contribution to the development of this country's future. We must recognise them for that, "there is no harlot high or no harlot low", as Balzac would say in his novel.

The social and economic development of our country must without exception bring benefits to every single Guyanese. Critical to this pathway of development is encouragement of foreign and

local investments. The partnership with the private sector, the captains of industry is very critical to the development of this country. The active and aggressive pursuit of foreign investors to participate in the new economy, the new sector - the growing sectors – which has been so often adumbrated by Ministers of Government, outside the Parliament and inside the Parliament, it is in these sectors that we are seeking to attract investors. The Government of Mr. Ramotar, the President, had the vision to see the need to harmonise the natural resources and environmental sectors by creating a new Ministry of the environment of natural resources.

6.36 p.m.

This, Mr. Speaker, is a strategic move. We must see it not just as the creation of another Ministry or the creation of another bureaucracy. We must see it as a strategic move on the pathway leading to a more rapid and coherent development of our country.

The foreign and local investments which the President touched upon in his speech must be consummated in the overall developmental policies of the Government of President Ramotar. We recognise, as has been done in the speech, that there has to be a comfort level for the foreign and local investors. That comfort level must be a secure and safe environment for them to come and invest their resources, to bring expatriate labour and that is precisely why we took the decision to liberalise our immigration policy to allow foreign labour which we so badly need given the accelerated development of some sectors such as the construction sector, the mining sector. We have opened new vistas in order to accelerate the development of our country.

This is not a time for walking around this country and complaining that, this or that is not happening. Gone are the days when we should be complainers; it is one of the most freely traded commodity that has no VAT. We are not going to get anywhere by complaining. The nations abroad, foreign investors abroad, are not interested in complaints. What they are interested in is what you are prepared to provide to them to encourage them to come to invest. In other words they want you to, rather than sitting, doing nothing but complaining, do something. What is this something? The something you must do is: “When the going gets tough the tough get going.”

That is the comfort level that is required by investors foreign and local in our country, and to achieve this comfort level the fight against crime must be fought on all fronts. In the President’s speech he gave certain directions as to how this fight must be conducted. Whether it takes the

form of piracy, gang-related crimes, domestic violence, drug related or white-collar crimes, money laundering activities, we have to maintain a consistent, no-nonsense approach to these matters. As a matter of policy I think the law enforcement agencies are very clear to what the policies of the Government are, generally speaking with respect to the fight against crime or any one of the manifestations of crime.

The President pointed out in his speech that Guyana cannot do this alone. Transnational organised crime affects Guyana. The global fight against narcotics affects Guyana. There is a market of approximately \$80 billion with respect to drugs worldwide. I think that it is recognised by any 5th form student that we need to have and to promote international cooperation to fight these scourges in the world and in our society and we have to begin, first and foremost, in our own homes – meaning Guyana. We have to begin, and in circumstances where we have started we have to continue aggressively down this road. When it comes to cooperation on these matters we have to begin with our immediate neighbours – countries within the CARICOM, Brazil, Venezuela, Suriname, not forgetting the Atlantic Ocean which some people think is not a neighbour but which is used by the narco-traffickers, by the gun smugglers, by the pirates...

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

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

Mr. Rohee: Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, the President made reference in his speech that in the conduct of this struggle we need to work with our traditional partners and the donor community. As I stand here I can say and report to this Hon. House that the President has already taken a number of initiatives in this direction with the British, the United States and, soon to come, with the Canadians. I think that Guyana stands to benefit from those engagements and what was decided as a result of those engagements.

The President in his speech made reference to projects which were started by his predecessor in the context of continuity. At a subsequent speech not so long ago at Babu John, I think he made his position clearer on these matters. As a Guyanese and as someone who has been in the

vineyard for some time it seems to me that nowadays reference is made to the Jagdeo Administration and projects that we consummated during that administration; some people get the jitters. It seems to them as though it is anathema to speak about the Jagdeo Administration and projects that were started in those days but we have no reason, none what so ever, to distance ourselves from the Jagdeo Administration. We have no reason whatsoever to distance ourselves because it is the same PPP/Civic that is sitting over here. We have no reason to distance ourselves from the projects initiated by the Jagdeo Administration. Why should we, to please whom? The people of Guyana, having been aware and are more conscious of these projects, I think have an appreciation of what hydro-electricity, exploration of hydrocarbons, a new airport, expansion of the tourisms sector infrastructure and the four-lane highways on the East Coast and the East Bank mean for this country. Let us not with due respect, fool ourselves and bury our heads in the sand believing that because we follow a particular political persuasion the people, when they sit by themselves and with their families and begin to, as they say in local jargon, “*suss tings out*” they do not recognise that when hydro-electricity comes to this nation that they are going to be the beneficiaries; when hydro-carbon development and exploration come to this country the people are going to be the beneficiaries of these projects.

Irrespective of who is PPP, APNU or WPA, if people are guided by their economic interests it does not matter. That only surfaces at political party rallies at election time when we seek to stir them up to make them vote for us according to party political lines but I am telling you that when the elections are over “*yuh got to start tinkin ‘bout the people belly*”! You have to start thinking about the stomachs! Economic and social development projects are what will make people react in a positive direction because they know that they will eventually benefit from these projects.

I want to conclude by saying to this House, Mr. Speaker, if there is one person on this side of the House... If there is one individual on this side of the House who knows about the Hon. Member Moses Nagamootoo I believe it is yours truly – chapter and verse.

Mr Speaker, I do not want, to end up in a slugging competition between individuals in this House. But as the Hon. Member spoke I asked myself “What manner of man is this?” I do not want to sound personal but if you want to find someone whose ego is bigger than Manhattan, he was in your camp.

I want to give some free advice to my AFC friends over there. Do you know Francisco Slinger? Slinger Francisco sang a song called “*Snake in the Balisier*”. He did not end there; he did not only say “*Snake in the Balisier*” – balisier is a flower that is the emblem of the PNM (People’s National Movement). He went further. He did not only sing “*snake in the balisier*”. He said: “*snake in the balisier and they bightin’ haaad...*” He went further, “*snake in the balisier and they bightin’ haaad, a sorry fu’ Trinidad.*” Let us put that in the context of the “Nagamootoo Phenomena” and the AFC. Thank God it is not with the APNU. I congratulate you for dumping him and not giving him the *Speakership*. You consider that a blessing in disguise. Mr. Granger is a very strategic thinker and he knows something called “*psyops*”...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, could you confine yourself to the motion at hand, please? Let us confine ourselves to the motion to express appreciation to the President and thanking him for coming. Thank you very much.

Mr. Rohee: Mr. Speaker, we were virtually entertained about some of the issues that bother the AFC with respect to this speech. I do not want to carry this House through memory lane we can do that at some other forum, but when one talks about corruption – because I heard the Member speak *ad nauseam* about corruption – the first act of corruption that was committed was when the Hon. Member sought to dupe the leadership and the followers of the PPP into believing that he was the chosen one after Dr. Jagan died.

Mr. Speaker: I do not know that that is a matter for this debate. It goes way outside what we are here for – the motion moved by the Prime Minister to express thanks and appreciation to His Excellency and to prove his policy as adumbrated. It goes way outside and that indeed may be a matter for the hustings out there but certainly not for this debate.

Mr. Rohee: I respect your ruling, Mr. Speaker, but I simply want to say... [**Ms. Ally:** Withdraw] There is nothing to withdraw here. I sought to put my argument on my view of corruption in a context. I sought to contextualise it and I started out by saying that I did not want this to end up in a slugging competition in this House nor to personalise something, but to accuse the Government of being corrupt, as many have sought to do... I think it is only just for those of us who speak on this side of the House to defend the Government policies, to see the Government as engaging in best practices and to say that the Government is open for scrutiny. I made the

promise the last sitting when the Hon. Member Mrs. Backer, who was seated there at the time, said that we on this side of the House make a lot of promises that we will provide information that we said we will provide. I provided some information and I want to say in the end, when we speak about transparency and accountability... We can also speak about transparency and accountability. We are not afraid of transparency and accountability. We are never afraid of transparency and accountability. We have nothing to hide but people are free to make accusations of any nature at any level because, after all, this is a democracy.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to conclude by stating that... [**Ms. Ally:** Why did you say that about Ramnarine?] Mr. Ramnarine signed a cheque that is going to appear in the papers tomorrow. In the same way, Mr. Speaker, I think, an honourable gentleman from Linden came and did not sign a cheque for a house lot and then eventually the cheque was revealed.

I wish to thank you for your indulgence and I would like to say that the speech of the President, I believe, provides us with a pathway, makes a contribution to the general debate. I do not considerate a thrown speech. I consider it a speech that makes a contribution to a debate that will continue for a very long time in our country about the direction in which this country must go. Each political party would have its own vision for Guyana; the President shared his vision, his Government's vision, his party's vision with this National Assembly and I believe that the Hon. House should do the honour of endorsing the President's speech as the speech for the day to take Guyana forward. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, it is 6.59 p.m. according to my watch. I am thinking of the suspension. We have ordered some snacks which are on their way. I am not one that likes to interrupt speakers. Mr. Greenidge is slated to go next. If he would have no objection to speaking for about 15 minutes and then taking the break, if not then we would take the break but I would ask that we be disciplined and we return here in half of an hour. The snacks are on their way but some of you may have some coffee, use the wash room and so forth. I believe that there seems to be a move for use to take the suspension. Some of the ladies are hinting that they may prefer to have a suspension now. We will take the suspension but we will resume at 7.30 p.m. I would ask that we utilise them as quickly as possible. Thank you very much.

Assembly suspended at 6.59 p.m.

Assembly resumed at 7.38 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: The sitting will resume. Be seated. Thank you.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to address the presentation by His Excellency Mr. Donald Ramotar. Unfortunately, in spite of the preceding contributions that we have been privileged to have listen to tonight I cannot bring myself to embrace the invocation of Prime Minister Hinds to express thanks and appreciation for the speech and its contents. Minister Benn informed us a little while ago that the President is the first complete Guyanese; well, if that is true, I can certainly commend him for that. I do believe him to be a very personable politician who has a sense of decorum; a sense of decorum which his predecessor lacked but I do not think that it would be prudent for us to dwell on that aspect of the debate too seriously.

The characteristic of niceness does not prevent the President from demonstrating, what I call, the “PPP disease” – namely, rewriting history to show that nothing of value occurred before the PPP came into office and we see that at the beginning of the statement in terms of reference to single-handedly bring Guyana to the point where it is poised for rapid takeoff. Whilst we are talking about being poised for rapid takeoff, if one looks at recent reports by the IDB (Inter-American Development Bank) – one of our major financiers – and by the IMF (International Monetary Fund) one will see that many of them focus upon trying to define why growth in Guyana has stalled after 1998. I one had a look at the works one would see all of them address that problem. I am not going to waste time by mentioning the reason. The point I want to make is to some extent, in this presentation, something of a flight from reality. It also is significant that in the presentation of this report one finds that the last section is devoted to the history of Guyana. Normally one begins with that part and then gives a vision of the future and I think we had hoped that that is what the presentation would have perhaps offered to us. So if there have been criticisms as the Hon. Member on the other side has mentioned pertaining to a lack of vision there is good reason for coming to that conclusion.

We are in this 10th session of Parliament faced with new imperatives. I think that that has been said so many times that it is perhaps unnecessary to repeat it but I think it is perhaps important for me to try to say a little bit about what it should mean for this House, especially as regards

these programmes. I heard a lot of things said about the programmes that the President mentioned, but there is a difference in the way that those programmes can be treated and viewed in the light of the configuration of this House.

The powers of the Government have, in effect, been circumscribed by the arithmetic of this House as far as legislation is concerned and in the context of the frequent complaining by the PPP that the Government is being prevented from doing its job it is laughable. In effect what is being said is that they are being prevented from doing what they wish which is a different point. There can be no more politics as usual. I think that should be obvious and it is not evident that the statement by the President captures fully an understanding in that regard.

In the past, for example, the recommendations of the Auditor General, the recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee have simply been ignored by a majority configured on the other side. There is a new situation now and that has to change; they have been routinely ignored, decisions of the courts have even been ignored similarly and a number of abuses of this kind have been perpetrated on the Guyanese public and that behaviour – and it is apt that the distinguished AG has just entered... I am reminded of this particular issue when we looked at a certain argument he put forward in a note to us talking about convention of this House. A convention is crafted in a certain context; precedence is crafted in a certain context. The fact that something has been done in the past does not make it justifiable, defensible or acceptable and that is what I think needs to be understood.

7.43 p.m.

You cannot argue for convention if the convention has been that the Government routinely breaks its own laws, and we have seen that. Therefore this the ideology underlying the complaint which was captured in the President's statement, in which there is this underlying undercurrent that the Government is being prevented from doing its job really needs to be understood in the context of patterns of behaviour that have been perpetrated in the past and that can no longer be acceptable if a government itself does not have a majority.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that you will agree with me that trying to bring such patterns of behaviour to an end is not an indictment on the Opposition, neither is it an acceptable basis for an attack intended for this side of the House.

It has been said that, in his presentation, the President was trying to set out some map of where it is we are going. It is true; it was admitted, and I again refer to the distinguished Minister of Home Affairs, that it did not offer us a list of legislation to be enacted in the coming period. The concern is not the absence of legislation; it is the absence of integrated policies - policies related to one another that enable us to understand where the Government is going; what it will do and what it would not do. I am reminded, again, of an exchange we had during your absence, Mr. Speaker, when one of the Ministers – I need not embarrass him by mentioning it - was asked to explain a certain line that was being pursued in terms of the acquisition of communication equipment and the content was “well, you know, the business of the Minister is not to deal with policy.” Unfortunately, I think the understanding of every Member in this House is that the responsibility of the Minister is to formulate policy, whether it is in the purchase of equipment, in policies of discrimination, policies of promotion, or what have you. *[Interruption]* I am sorry. I can understand, Mr. Speaker, that some of our colleagues would not have heard because at times, I think, they probably fell asleep or were speaking to themselves. Consequently, they could not have heard and I have no doubt that we may yet return to that situation. **[Ms. Manickchand:** Why are you looking at me?] Am I not supposed to look at you? *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, I am not sure whether I need your protection at this point in time, but let me just point to something that I missed the last time.

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: Sir... Well, it on a point of elucidation, so I can only do that if the Hon. Member sits. I do not recall any Member saying, the last time, that a Minister is not responsible for making policy. The Hon. Member is asserting that a Minister, at the last occasion, said that Ministers do not make policy, and I do not recall that.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, in the fourteen years that I have been here I have heard all kinds of statements made, and it may or may not have been said. Unless we have the verbatim transcript, we will never know. I believe that the Hon. Member was good enough not to name anyone and therefore it is difficult to ascribe that *faux pas* to anyone. Let us proceed. But it is noted.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. You are very kind. I am glad that you brought some sense of balance to our debates.

Perhaps, I should tell you something else since we are into the issue of stories arising from the President's presentation and reflected in the exchanges that we had the other day. I am saying to you that from what I see of the President's statement there are lots of things that are missing. I think many of us had expected that the statement would outline changes that would be reflected in new lines of policies. I am suggesting that not much has changed. We were presented, at the last sitting, with a Financial Paper, and that Financial Paper had an item. The item arose during a discussion a short while ago. I am just trying to draw to your attention, Mr. Speaker. At least one area which the President did not touch on and, in which, the policy, clearly, has not changed from what was going on before.

We were presented with a Paper proposing an additional amount of thirty million dollars, rounded, more or less, for a certain project - I will come back to the project in the end - and moneys had already been provided for that project under a specific label. I am making this point, Mr. Speaker, because I gather from our colleague Minister of Finance that it is proposed that this matter come back here, and I am trying to show to you the practice of abusing office by virtue of having a majority does not seem to have changed although the majority does not lie with the Government. We are able, in the exchanges, to establish that the moneys were there for a specific purpose. One hundred and fifty million dollars was spent for the design and a study associated with the design - it was all spent - and yet we had a request for supplementary. The supplementary was for, according to the note, which is a one-word note, simply "mobilisation." When we asked, the explanation that was given was that it was for mobilisation, not for the design or for the study. Yet, it is going to be brought back.

Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasise to you a couple of other points arising out of this side of the House, listening to the explanation and refusing to approve that project. A former distinguished Member of this House put an article in the newspaper suggesting that the attack on this item - and I was named - probably arose because Mr. Hamilton Green had mentioned that the hospital was to, in his words, "colonise Guyana." I am not going to take it any further than that. The important thing is that the explanation that he offered in coming to the Minister's defence was that this item was for the purchase of land, not mobilisation. It was for the purchase of land. On the one hand, in the House, we were told that it was for one purpose, which purpose actually was not in keeping with the rules and in another breath we were told that it was for the acquisition of

land. The only problem with the acquisition of the land story is that the land was compulsorily acquired. Mr. Speaker, I am saying to you that... [Ms. Manickchand: How is this relevant?] It is relevant because the President has addressed the problem of corruption and I regard this as an item pertaining to corruption.

Mr. Lumumba: Mr. Speaker, as a Member of Parliament, I would like to know the nexus, if he can please do that, between this and the motion. I think that as a Member of Parliament I have a right to ask this. Why is this rudeness? *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, am I at the Stabroek Market?

Mr. Speaker: You are not. Thank you Hon. Member. I believe that what Mr. Lumumba is adverting to is the relevance and I would ask that the speakers confine themselves to the motion before us. We will expect, from time to time, that there will be some diversions, but I believe that we are moving slightly away from the motion, that is, to thank the President and to adopt his policies as adumbrated when he came here.

Mr. Lumumba: Thank you Mr. Speaker. That is my point.

Mr. Greenidge: I believe that in one instance, in the President's statement, he made reference to corruption. I have also made reference in my statement to the fact that he does not seem to be on any path that is any different from that of his predecessor, and I am continuing along that line. That is the context in which I made the comment.

I can acknowledge that in one sense the President has acknowledged or accepted the change in circumstance and he, in that sense, had spoken at some length to the tripartite process which, I believe, refers to a consultative arrangement which many of us try to sell those things as being a useful path for taking us forward. That consultative process, however, is one that has yet to be exploited. A number of processes have been put in train, but the truth is that it is a typical case of whether "the proof of the pudding is in the eating", because we have yet to see evidence that there is... [Mr. Benn: ...inaudible] I was party to one of the discussions. That is why I can speak authoritatively on this issue. Thank you very much. What I am saying is that the point to note is that it is cheap and easy to speak to principles. The test is one of putting in place the measures that actually lead to decisions and we have yet to arrive at that point on any of the

issues in that regard. In this regard, I would have thought that the President might have looked at, with a view to committing himself, to the communiqué that had been signed by his predecessor and Mr. Corbin in 2003 which sought to pull together a number of the issues and principles that most of us believe are germane to the smooth unfolding of decision making within this House and in achieving the goals that I think many of us felt that the electorate cast their votes for.

As regards the specifics of the statement itself, I would add that the most distinctive feature was what was omitted, rather than what was said. The President did not say whether and how his approach would differ from that of his predecessor, I have said that already, especially in relation to areas that loomed large in the election period – areas of discrimination, corruption, lack of decorum and decency in the conduct of public affairs. The election was fought on these issues but we now have to divine from the statement what exactly will be done in relation to achieving these things.

The President omitted to explain, for example, what he was going to do about the scandalous level of vacancies in key constitutional and public offices. There are over a hundred vacancies at the highest level of the public service. They range from the Chancellor of the Judiciary, the Registrar of the Supreme Court, the Registrar of the Deeds Registry Office, who has been acting since 2000, the Auditor General; there is no Ombudsman, and all of the officials in the Auditor General's Chambers have been in acting, it appears, since 2004. There are also issues pertaining to the Appellate Tribunal.

The persistent absence of any reference to the Regional Executive Officer in the budget...I hope that would be remedied this year, but there was no reference to it. What I am saying is that for some of these positions, such as the last one I mentioned – the Regional Executive Officer – they are very important because these are posts upon which the Government policies, at the regional level, are to be implemented and we are unable to identify the information informing the recruitment process, the status of the incumbency and of their contract arrangements.

Indeed, I would say that for the public service, in general, we have seen, in the regime of President Jagdeo, an exponential increase – if I may borrow the term from our colleague who seems to have been falling in love with it – in the contract employment and it is cause for worry because it is used as a basis for doing other things which are undesirable.

Judging from the actions, in relation to areas that I mentioned in the context of the communiqué of 2003, nothing much has changed. We still have a situation in which Mr. C.N Sharma is in the courts in a bid to protect his rights as a broadcaster; where Mr. Freddie Kissoon has been fired by a politically appointed and professionally incompetent University of Guyana (UG) Board. In Georgetown and on the Corentyne, although we speak of being a House which is a House of elites, and some say that there is a Government which is a Government of the working class, we find the working class are being shot at for exercising their rights to protest. Those were people who were not rioting; they were protesting and they were shot at, both in Georgetown and on the Corentyne. The instructions given to shoot, when we checked we found out, were given by people who were not part of the Guyana Police Force. We can come to that if the House wants. There has been no inquiry into those shootings as there has been none in relation to the death of Mr. Satyadeow Sawh. That is the reflection of an approach that has not changed from what has been going on before. I am saying that we are in new times and we would have expected and would like to see those changes. The failure to initiate these sorts of inquiries has left us unable to see the full extent of links between the Government, its associates and the criminals, such as Mr. Roger Khan - what links they had with the security apparatus and with the People's Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C). But it has allowed other so-called businessmen to ply their trade by buying into sport. So you can see now the issue that is facing us which the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport is embroiled in, at the moment, is an area that reflects how the trappings that we fail to investigate and curb, in terms of trading, people trafficking, drug trafficking and violence, all now find themselves in an area that we regard as critical to our national standing and our pride and self-confidence. That is the consequence of failing to do these inquiries in the past and of now embracing a system that does not commit us to doing any work in that regard in the future.

As regards the future economic policies, Mr. Speaker, the studies, which I made reference to you, in relation to earlier, identified some of the major causes of the lack of growth post-1998 at the same rate. They speak to issues of inadequate levels of investment. They speak to issues of the flight of skill at all levels out of the country which it seems, in our presentations, we try to ignore; they speak to infrastructural inadequacies, and also to political and social problems in this country.

As regards the President's statement, the President, himself, only referred to a few of these; and where he referred to them, such as in the case of infrastructure and transport, the studies have identified clearly that one of those bottlenecks, marine infrastructure, remains inadequate and could continue to be an area that we need to pay attention to. The important point I want to make, Mr. Speaker, is not so much whether he covered all of the areas because, in fact, if you look at the investment projects that he identified, whether it is clean energy or whatever, I think, on both sides of the House, you will find that there are support for such projects, in principle. The difficulty that we have, and where we did not know from him, is that in all of the projects that he has embraced, all the ones he mentioned, were projects inherited from his predecessor. All of those projects, every single one of them, Mr. Speaker, I am sure you are aware, is associated with some cloud or irregularity - every single one of them. So much so that today we had to be offered yet another explanation as for why the head of the One Laptop Per Family project has been removed. Another head has been removed. So, it is the airport project, one laptop, desktop projects, Marriot Hotel project and Amalia Falls project - all of these are associated with corrupt and other acts. There needs to be a commitment... The President, himself, has publicly committed himself to looking at some of these. Nothing has been done since. He has admitted. So if you seem to be alarmed to know that some people regard him as corrupt, I am sorry to inform you that the President himself has...

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, in terms of imputing, reference to the President...

Mr. Speaker: Well, it is the President's motion, however...

Ms. Teixeira: It is an imputation that the President is corrupt. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, allow me to speak please. I think, Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge, that you have labelled those projects as being corrupt. It is one thing to make these statements on the outside of this House but there is a responsibility when you are here to be able to support them. So you may say that there are allegations, you may say that there are suspicions but, of course, when we are out there we say these things, but until such time that there has been a finding... I have no doubt that people have reasons for their beliefs, but to label them as being corrupt as a matter of fact I would caution that you do not go that far.

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Speaker, as a matter of routine, although it may appear otherwise, I try to use my words carefully. I am not aware that anyone in here is a project, and therefore what I am saying has nothing to do with whether the individuals in here feel that by association they are smeared. I am not the one who is making that association. I am speaking to the issue of a cloud and queries hanging over every project - every single one of the projects; and that is in the public domain. I am not speaking of allegations; I am speaking of a range of projects in which, in the public domain, there is extensive debates. If the colleagues find that uncomfortable, it is unfortunate; but that is the reality. The problem of infrastructure... [Mr. Nandlall: The Speaker said you have to produce the evidence.] I did not hear that. The problem of infrastructure, as I was saying, is not only one of insufficiency... [Mr. Nandlall: Like you want to be the Leader of the Opposition.] And you want to be Senior Counsel, but it does not stop you from *pompazetting* and making a lot of noise over there. The problem of infrastructure is not only one of insufficiency but one of inadequacy of the regulatory regimes which have given rise to the lawlessness and caprice that we find in many of the economic areas that we have to live with. Those problems can also be found by way of uneven distribution of services among communities and the absence of acceptable methods for the choice of projects. We seem to be committed to methods of choosing projects that are determined primarily by the cronies of those who are close, or were close, to the former President.

In relation to the public service, there are major systematic challenges that face us throughout the region and as we live through the second decade of this second millennium we find that the level of vacancies is at an all-time high and I made mention of this before, but it is true that the President has, in fact, taken steps to fill some of the top posts, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example. That move has, I think, been welcomed all around, but the point is: What are his intentions?

Today we are overwhelmed by crime in our cities and in our countryside, and Hinterland. At the same time, those who are appointed to defend us are part of what I might call a theatre. I say "theatre", because, almost in all instances, the senior officials are acting. The Police Chief is acting, as is his deputy. The Commissioner has been acting for over five years and, to crown it all, he has already reached the age of retirement. There is no change in policy where it needs a

change. In this specific case, there are other clouds hanging over the officer. The Chief Justice has been acting for an equally long time; the Chancellor of the Judiciary has been acting.

In the presentation by the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, recently, I was heartened to see him announced zero tolerance of corruption, but he is doing this even at a time, as I have contended elsewhere, the instructions he has given, as regards expenditure, seem to be at variance with the law. We find ourselves also in a situation in which there is the Elamadam Enterprises, for example, still seem to be operating and are apparently the beneficiaries of fiscal concessions. What has changed? There are situations in which Ministers are being accused of employing *trunkers*, apparently to catch other criminals. What is really happening? The Government seems to be in a process of breaking its own law for all sorts of other reasons. There has been, in this presentation, no...

Ms. Manickchand: With the greatest of respect, Mr. Speaker, Ministers comprise a small enough group that if...I heard Your Honour earlier and I sat. Your Honour said that the Hon. presenter was generous enough not to name a Minister. Ministers comprise a small enough group, Sir. This is a basic principle in the law of libel, that if you say Ministers employ *trunkers*” you are speaking of all of us. I would like the Hon. Member to name the Minister, provide the evidence, or withdraw that statement and apologise for it.

Mr. Speaker: I have some vague knowledge of *trunking*, but I also know that policing methods are not always what people desire them to be, and if it is that a Minister, the relevant Minister, I do not know if it is him or her, has deployed or employed persons who previously had a predilection to doing things...I do not know. It may not necessarily be a bad way of fighting crime. I do not know. If the Minister, on the other hand, has an objection ..., but I do not know the context. I know that in the world of international security there is an adage which says, “It takes a terrorist to catch a terrorist.” I will take an explanation from the Minister who has indicated that he wishes to speak but, indeed, if it is that there are Ministers who are employing criminals, the Hon. Minister is correct. It should be specific so that the relevant Minister, if he or she feels offended, should be able to defend himself or herself. If not, it will fall on the heads of all and that will be unfair.

Mr. Rohee: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 40, I would like to have your permission to elucidate on this matter.

Mr. Speaker: What I will do, Hon. Member, is to give you an opportunity, at the end of Mr. Greenidge's presentation, if you wish, to do so. Bear in mind that the Hon. Member is right. In so far as you make general statements, Ministers and other Members can and do feel slighted and, in fact, if you wish to refer to a particular Member, that Member should be referred to specifically and be given a right to clarify, explain or challenge what you say.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you very much for your most wise decision.

Mr. Speaker: But I will say that it would seem that your statement has drawn out a particular Minister. Go ahead Sir.

Mr. Greenidge: I think the expression is: "*I throw my corn, I ain't call no fowl.*"

Mr. Speaker, as you are fully aware, I said that Ministers have been accused of these things and this has been in the public domain. I am not saying something that has not been in the newspapers.

Anyhow, Mr. Speaker, in the presentation...*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, proceed.

8.13 p.m.

Mr. Greenidge: ...I can say that, in turning to the question of foreign policy, the President's statement did not address this in any meaningful fashion, although he ranged widely over international affairs, developments on the international front, and so forth. I think the challenge of attracting foreign investment, or foreign investment that is deemed desirable and the lamentable state of CARICOM, and of the integration movement, is something that warrants attention by the President himself in a presentation as this one. Right now, before the Heads of CARICOM Government, is a report on the reform of CARICOM. There is a report on the reform of CARICOM which states a lot about the failure of the governments to implement the integration movement. It states a great deal about the need to restructure the secretariat which is based here in Georgetown. Given the President's statement which made mention of the

importance of the traditional partners, and of CARICOM, it is a pity that he did not give us the benefit of his views in relation to this area.

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

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

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Before you proceed, there is no objection to the continuation. It was allowed for Hon. Member Rohee, but I am asking in the interest of time that, perhaps, hereafter, we try to conclude on time. Thank you.

Go ahead Mr. Greenidge.

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

The President also made reference to national achievements in relation to health and education. We have seen, again, in the debate in the public domain, not only concerns about what is happening in these sectors, and what seems to be confusion between infrastructure and policy within these sectors. So, there is a situation in which we seem to be confusing, for example, in relation to the figure sighted for CXC results, the top results with average performance. Is it the average performance that we need to pay attention to than those at the bottom?

It is also the case in relation to health, that in January the Ministry of Health and the Guyana Nurses' Association seemed to have very radically different views on what is happening in the health sector. In fact, a Mrs. Barkoy called for the Government to halt the nursing programme. That was on 9th January. So these areas need attention, notwithstanding the fact that they are being sold to us by the President as areas of outstanding achievements compared to the rest of the region, and compared to our historical performance.

A recent report, even by the Ministry of Health, in the newspapers, on 9th January, I think, cited the fact that the Ministry had no database of nurses, complained that there was no coordination between the university, the Ministry of Health or the training institutions, and stated that there was little or no manpower planning, which was the reason why the sector was both demoralised

and experiencing the exceedingly high rates of migration. This is what I mean when I was speaking about flights to fancy. In other words, we are turning upon what we wish rather than what is the reality. Colleagues need to be aware that if they do not recognise the existence of a problem they are not going to be in a position to fashion policies which will treat with that problem. So the first instance is to recognise its existence and then fashion policies. If they just walk around here, into Hadfield Street and beyond, they will see the difficulties that people face on a daily basis.

One of the most important scourges facing Guyana today is the problem of child abuse. As we meet today, not only does it embroil a prominent member of the Muslim community, but the Government's behaviour in the event... [**Ms. Manickchand:** It embroils one of your supporters – a strong supporter.] It does not matter. I am making a point. The Government's behaviour in the event highlights one of the undercurrents of our time. One, or more key officials, responsible for prosecution is associated with a sleuth of questionable decisions and it is widely believed that these decisions and recommendations are influenced by factors other than the merits of the complaints. I am saying that that needs to be attended to. If the President wants to attend to them, part of the way to attend to them is to deal with the agreement that the former President and the former Leader of the Opposition had agreed to in 2003.

The address, and the complaints about the address, has yet to come to grips with the political realities. We are facing a reality which means we are done with absolute PPP governance. The last word lies with this Assembly, not elsewhere. The President's address is silent on too many fronts, but, in the interim, the abuses by his predecessor that led to the loss of the PPP majority continue. The Government still employs ministers, ambassadors and senior police officers – to name but a few – who also have clouds hanging over their performance, and hanging over them. It still... [**Mr. Neendkumar:**...*inaudible*] I assume that he knows something about his own colleagues. It still employs, at the taxpayers' expense, relatives and friends of Ministers with no particular competence and, as part of their arrangements for jobs for the boys, Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) recently paid to Foley and Hoag and Company and Cameron & Shepherd some US\$2 million for their work on a copyright infringement against a certain Mr. Bedessee. The important point here is that we have been told that those decisions, those payments, were part of the company's private business.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that you are aware that GuySuCo, itself, is a wholly owned public company, and, judging from the Minister of Finance's statement in January, its subsidies from which those payments were made came from taxpayers' money. Therefore the way that the taxpayers' money is spent we need to know. It cannot be that it is business as usual and one is not being given the information because it is private. What therefore has changed?

Whilst the President is silent on too many issues I am saying too many things remain the same. We would ask, to the extent the President proposes to address us in future, that he tries to capture in that address more of the key issues, however difficult they may turn out to be, because in the absence of well-defined policy on this part we cannot, in good conscience, support the set of policies that a speech as this carries, however affable is the President.

Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, can you, in two minutes please, give some clarification, under the Standing Order, as to the issue of hiring *trunkers*?

Mr. Rohee: I will be very brief on this.

Mr. Speaker, the justification the Hon. Member used to associate a Minister or a Ministry with *trunkers* is that it is out there in the public domain. So anything that is out there in the public domain could migrate to the National Assembly and be elevated to a truth, and a fact. But what is also out there in the public domain, which I think, for the sake of balance which the Member seems to be attracted to quite a lot, is a statement issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs disassociating itself ... *[Interruption from Opposition Members]* You know about that and that is why you are referring to it ... from an inference by a letter writer that the Ministry of Home Affairs hired *trunkers* to engage in activities of an illegal nature. We issued a statement disassociating the Ministry from that position.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Rohee: So I think for the purpose of balance, Mr. Speaker, apart from saying that it is outside in the public domain, it is also necessary for you to say, which you know, that a statement was issued disassociating the Ministry from that position. **[Mrs. Backer:** How you know he knows that?] I know he knows that.

Mr. Speaker: Very well. I believe that clarifies the matter sufficiently. We will move to the next speaker who will be Dr. Ashni Singh, on behalf of the Government.

Dr. Singh: The privilege is mine tonight to add my voice in support of the motion moved by the Hon. Prime Minister that this Hon. House thanks His Excellency the President for his inaugural address and that we endorse the policies adumbrated therein. I say it is a privilege for me, so to do, because I do not believe that there is anything, at all, in the broad policy objectives identified in His Excellency's address, or indeed amongst the specific initiatives named by his Excellency in his address, that any rational or right-minded Guyanese person could disagree with. In fact, I would have liked to think that the objectives outlined are objectives that we could all readily embrace. Indeed, who could disagree with an objective that we work towards the continued development of our country; that we advance the progress in fighting poverty and improving the lives of all our citizens; that we continue to modernise and transform our economy, and facilitate the establishment and growth of new industries so that we have a more diversified productive base; that we promote the creation of jobs and the generation of incomes; that we work towards a more competitive Guyana; that we situate ourselves within a global context that is increasingly, by the day, challenging; that we position ourselves to survive and navigate this global environment in a manner that promotes and protects our national interest; that we work on social programmes that will improve the lives of our people.

Notwithstanding the temptation to engage in partisan politics, as one would do typically before an election, I would shudder to think that we, in this Hon. House, could not come together to embrace objectives such as these, because, surely, if we could not achieve a meeting of minds on objectives such as these, one is left only to wonder on what else we could possibly achieve a meeting of minds on.

So I waited with some anticipation as the Opposition chief spokesperson on finance and the economy commenced his address, really hoping that, as a former Minister of Finance, I would have heard at least some semblance – I hesitate to say some pretence – of magnanimity around these objectives, because, as I said, I am really struggling to comprehend that any right-minded Guyanese person would disagree with these objectives. Instead, we were regaled with irrelevancies, with innuendos, with diversions, deviations, from objectivity and truth. We were

treated to a very healthy dose of biased and prejudiced analysis and accounts, and, frankly speaking, an overdose of distortions.

From the very commencement of the presentation made by the speaker, who came immediately before me, we were treated with the most immediate and blatant distortion, and I believe this, and the other distortions, must, for the public record, be corrected. The Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge commenced by making reference to an unnamed Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) reports that spoke of the Guyanese economy stagnating. Notwithstanding that the Hon. Member demitted office some years ago, I would like to think that he was not referring to reports that dated from his tenure, although the assertion he made would certainly be applicable were he referring to his own tenure, because I could only imagine that anybody who has been following recent economic developments in Guyana, and in particular reports issued by international agencies on Guyana's economic performance, would be aware of the manner in which Guyana has been singled out for its outstanding economic performance of recent years - whether it be the International Monetary Fund acknowledging the robustness and the resilience of the Guyanese economy; it did, and this is in the public domain; whether it be Heads of our sister CARICOM states such as the distinguished Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the Hon. Ralph Gonsalves, who described Guyana, and in particular the Guyanese economy, as the shining star of the Caribbean; whether it be extracts from the reports of the Caribbean Development Bank's annual reports of recent years which clearly and explicitly identified Guyana's economy as one of the principle drivers of growth in the Caribbean; and whether it be the regional economic outlook analysis published by the International Monetary Fund that identifies Guyana amongst the resource exporting countries of the Caribbean, and, by extension, amongst the most outstanding economic performers of recent years. So to come here and to pluck out of thin air an unnamed and unattributed report and to present a conjecture that if one were to be kind it could be described as careless; if one were to be less kind one would describe it perhaps as fabricated,...

Mr. Speaker: I see the Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker. I would just like to raise a Point of Order.

[**Ms. Teixeira:** Are you interrupting or hallucinating?]

Mr. Speaker: Allow him to speak please, Hon. Member. Go ahead.

Mr. Greenidge: Two points were raised by the Minister with which I have a difficulty and to which I wish to respond. First of all I made it very clear that the studies to which I made reference... [**Mr. Robert Persaud:** Name them.] I can provide them. [*Interruption from Government Members*]

Mr. Speaker: Allow the Member to speak please. Go ahead Mr. Greenidge.

Mr. Greenidge: The studies pertain to the period post-1998... I did not make any reference to stagnation. [*Interruption from Government Members*] I made reference to... That is the first point.

Secondly, the question of fabrication, I want it to be withdrawn because the Minister, I am sure, is well aware, as I am, that even in relation to the contention that... [**Hon. Members (Government):** Name the report.]

Mr. B. Williams on his feet.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Williams, the Hon. Member is still on his feet.

Mr. B. Williams: On a Point of Order Mr. Speaker, Mr. Greenidge, I think, requires your protection.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Greenidge is doing quite fine.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I hope that the Economics Intelligence Unit (EIU) means something to the Minister, over which he and the editor of the unit engaged in exchanges arising from the fact that they had, in effect, accused us of fabricating growth rates for the first decade of this period. So do not let us get into that area.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister, I did not hear you say that what Mr. Greenidge stated was fabricated, but I was going to ask you to clarify that. You said that if you wanted to be unkind, but you are not going to go there. Are you?

Dr. Singh: You are absolutely correct, Mr. Speaker. In fact, what I said was, “if one wanted to be unkind.”

Mr. Speaker: But you are not going to go there.

Dr. Singh: I was not going to extend the argument.

Mr. Speaker: Very well.

Dr. Singh: I think the point was made.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Proceed.

Dr. Singh: Let us be clear that if one wants to present a current picture of recent economic developments one cannot go back to a report that is now ten, fifteen, twenty years old, or, indeed, that dates back to the period from 1983 to 1992.

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Speaker, I made no reference to a twenty- year-old report. Reports are of the growth period post-1998.

Mr. Speaker: What are you asking?

Go ahead Mr. Singh.

Dr. Singh: If I may move on, what is most astonishing is that this presentation comes from a Member of this House who, merely at the last sitting of this House, if I am not mistaken, or the last two sittings of this House, made an endeavour to correct his own track record on matters of public accountability, and conveniently made the claim that, as a champion of accountability, he has been tabling audited accounts, but conveniently omitted to tell this House that he was referring to audited accounts produced in relation to the fiscal years during which his predecessors were in office - conveniently omitted - claimed as his principal achievement, the tabling of audited accounts that dated back to Frank Hope's tenure.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, it is a rule that no member may impute improper motives of another Member. So I would ask that you move on and move away from that, please.

Mr. Greenidge on his feet.

Hon. Minister, the Member, I believe, wishes to rise on a Point of Order.

Mr. Greendige: Yes Mr. Speaker. It is unfortunate that the distinguished Minister chooses this line of argument, because we have been there before. We have been through this before. On the last occasion I drew attention to the fact that... [**Ms Manickchand:** You gave the report of your predecessors.] Mr. Speaker, let me just tell you something. During my tenure, eleven audited reports were presented. I did not serve all of those years. [**Mr. R. Persaud:** Name those years.] I am not in a dialogue with you. The point is, I indicated at the time, on the basis of the records of the House, that records for eleven years were presented, and let me add, what was not said the last time, that the accounts for the remaining period of my tenure were left... [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: You are on a point of clarification and I need you to be protected. Make your clarification because I would really like the Hon. Minister to complete his presentation.

Mr. Greenidge: They are not distracting me. I am wondering how long you would like me to use the floor in order to answer these questions.

Mr. Speaker: You are on a Point of Order to clarify a statement about the filing or laying of reports on audited accounts.

Mr. Greenidge: First of all, this issue, as cast in an unfortunate way by the Minister, was an issue raised by President Jagdeo to which I answered in writing in the newspapers. In answering, what I said was that I came to office with a backlog of audited public accounts and sought to bring that backlog up to date. At the time when I demitted office the audited accounts up to 1992 were with the Accountant General and the Auditor General with an agreed formula for the completion of that office's... [**Mr. R. Persaud:** It is not Goolsarran.] To name Anand Goolsarran does not frighten me. I can tell you more than you could possibly know about Mr. *Goolsarran* and his work.

8. 43 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Greenidge, if it is clarification, I need the Minister to move on.

Mr. Greenidge: So the point was this, Mr. Speaker: Nine years as Minister, eleven audited reports were presented. The balance, to 1991, was left with the Auditor General and the Accountant General with the understanding that they would have been presented by 1993. Let me just explain this point to you...

Mr. Speaker: A clarification must be very brief. A clarification under the Standing Order must be a brief clarification.

Mr. Greenidge: I am making it as brief as I can, Mr. Speaker, because it is a complicated matter. The issue of bringing the outstanding accounts up to date arose from a question trying to establish a balance for previous years. So the accounts for 1992, for example, Mr. Goolsarran recommended and that is why you have suddenly arisen at 1992 with audited accounts, and there was a gap before. *[Interruption from Government Members]* The time that it was taken to bring the remaining accounts up to date arose from establishing a closing balance. In those closing balances, it has taken them some time. So the accounts were closed at the end of 1991 on Mr. Goolsarran's recommendation on the clear understanding - a last set of accounts was presented in 1991 - that the balance, which was outstanding, would have been concluded by the two offices. The reason why they were not completed... I do not want to venture into it, but they are not unrelated to the very reason why the *Hansards* for the same period cannot be found. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: I do not know. Could we allow the Minister to proceed uninterrupted?

Dr. Singh: Thank you Mr. Speaker. The indisputable fact of the matter - Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge opened and belaboured the point, the issue of accountability - is that the last set of audited accounts produced and tabled in this National Assembly prior to 1992 related to 1981 which was just about one year and a half before Mr. Greenidge assumed office. Those 1981 audited accounts were tabled by Mr. Greenidge in 1987. Mr. Greenidge assumed office in 1983. No audited accounts were prepared for 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991. No audited accounts were produced for every year that coincided, rather mysteriously, with Mr. Greenidge's tenure. The Hon. Member, Mr. Greenidge, has never come to this house or come to the people of Guyana to explain why he failed to produce un-tabled audited accounts... *[Interruption from Government Members]* He has the audacity to come to this House and lecture us on accountability.

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Greenidge, what I will do is what I did in the case of Mr. Rohee. At the end of Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh's presentation, I will ask you to give a brief elucidation and clarification,

but I will not, at this stage, wish to have anymore, as entertaining as it is becoming... I would like us to finish because we have a Bill to go through tonight. I see the Government Chief Whip rise on a Point of Order. Is that it?

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Greenidge seems to wish to keep taking the floor all the time. Maybe under “Personal Explanations” Standing Order 23, he may want to come to this National Assembly and personally explain how for ten years we did not get Auditor General’s Reports.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Greenidge, I will allow you, after Dr. Singh, to speak. Is this a function of the seating arrangement, that the two of you are directly opposite each other?

Dr. Singh: May I proceed, Sir?

Mr. Speaker: Very well. Go ahead.

Dr. Singh: Thank you Sir. I submit this evening, in this Hon. House, that the Hon. Member Mr. Carl Greenidge does not have the moral authority to lecture this Government on matters of accountability. If one were to examine the track record of this administration, as it relates to accountability and transparency, audited accounts every year, annual reports relating to public entities being tabled at virtually every sitting. In fact, only today I had the privilege of tabling nine sets of annual reports relating to public sector entities, and the Hon. Minister Rohee, tabled one, making it ten. If one were to peruse the records of this Hon. House, one would see vast volumes of public documents tabled - whether it be loan agreements, audited accounts, annual reports, other documentations; whether it be sector strategies; whether it be documents and testimonies presented for the Standing Sectoral Committees of the Parliament. Vast volumes of documentations have been placed before this Hon. House, have been placed in the parliamentary library, have been placed in the hands of the parliamentarians and, by extension, have been placed in the public domain because we are a Government committed to openness and transparency.

Mr. Speaker, it is easy to speak glibly about accountability when you are a former Minister of Finance who never tabled audited accounts in relation to your tenure. The fact of the matter is that if one were to catalogue the volumes of the documentation tabled by this Government, not only in the Ninth Parliament, but the predecessor Parliaments, I will say without, fear of

exception, that there has never been a time in this country's history when more information has been placed in the public domain by an incumbent Government.

In fact, even today in answer to the questions asked... Many of us had the privilege of serving in the Ninth Parliament, and I am proud to have served in a Government which at the end of the Ninth Parliament did not have a single Opposition question remaining unanswered. Every single question asked by the Opposition was answered. In fact, today we had on the Order Paper a long list of questions and there were prompt and detailed answers supplied by this Government. I see right now mountains of documentations standing in front of Members of this House, documentations tabled by this Government because we have nothing to hide. There is no question that we cannot answer; there is no information that we are unwilling to provide - vast volumes of information. I urge my colleagues on that side of the House, and in particular the Opposition's chief spokesperson on finance, who I would expect to know better, for a closer embrace of the fact rather than a flight to reckless and fanciful distortions.

The same can be said of the Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge's account of economic performance. There is no doubt whatsoever that the period of Mr. Greenidge's tenure from 1983 to 1992...

Mr. Speaker: Dr. Singh, I think the point has been made. I am urging you, it is five minutes to nine o' clock and there is a Bill, to speak to the motion.

Dr. Singh: I am happy to hear you say, Mr. Speaker, ...

Mr. Speaker: It is five minutes to nine o'clock and we have a Bill coming after this and I am urging you to speak to the motion.

Dr. Singh: I am happy, Mr. Speaker, to hear you say that you share my view that the point has been made. I thank you very much for that confirmation.

Let me say this, that as one peruses the address by His Excellency the President one sees an address that is grounded in the realities of our time. We live today in an external environment that is extremely challenging; that is increasingly unpredictable; that is hostile even as we operate in a world where commodity prices fluctuate sometimes randomly, or what might appear to be randomly. We see the price of primary commodities we export sometimes moving by as much as US\$50, US\$60 per ounce, in the case of gold, in a single day. We see the price of oil,

which we import, moving sometimes by US\$10, US\$15, US\$20 per day. This is the external environment in which we operate and, as would be expected of a responsible leader of a responsible Government, His Excellency the President situated his address within the challenging external environment.

It is to the credit of this administration, notwithstanding the increasingly challenging external environment, that the Guyanese economy has recorded uninterrupted positive growth since 2006. I hasten to add, lest we be mistaken, that is... [*Interruption*] I hasten to add that whilst the Government might be acknowledged as having created the policy environment and might be acknowledged as having established a framework that is conducive to growth, to private investment, to household saving, the fact of the matter is that the growth that we have achieved from 2006 to now is not only to the credit of this Government. It is also to the credit of the private sector which has responded so favourably and so strongly to the environment that we have created.

Every day there is news of large businesses and investments expanding in Guyana. Today there are four or five companies working in the natural resources sector. There are about three of them in gold, one in manganese, one in oil. In fact, I saw the distinguished Leader of the Opposition paid a visit to the manganese operation not so long ago. If one were to take just these four or five companies, there will be international investment capital totalling in excess of two billion Canadian dollars because they are all listed on the Canadian stock exchange. These four or five companies together have market capitalisation of more than two billion Canadian dollars. I hear one of my colleagues on that side of the House asking, and laughing as if it is a joke, about “what that means for the poor people?” Well I will say to him what it means. For the jobs that have been created in the Northwest, an entire community will be resuscitated and revived. For the thousands of young and not so young Guyanese who will be now be in work - for the engineers, for the laboratory technicians, for the information technology officers, for the administrators for the manual labourers - those are the people who will be benefiting from these investments. You may find it easy to laugh and dismiss their interest, but this Government will never dismiss the interest of a Guyanese person who is going to be in work.

For the vast increase in this country's export proceeds, for the multiplier effects that will arise, the goods and services, whether it be food, whether it be transportation services, whether it be

logistics, everyday, today, stories are heard of companies which are finding new business opportunities because of these large scale investments arising and being made in Guyana today. These are international companies responding to the positive business environment created by this People Progressive Party/Civic Government. But the story of Guyana's development under the PPP is not only about large international investors; it is also about the dozens ...It is in fact the story of the hundreds of medium and thousands of small scale businesses which are being set up every day. Every day, in every community, a new business is being established. Every year the credit to the private sector is seen to grow by double digits. That is the story of persons going to the bank and borrowing to invest their own business. So, the story of growth in the Guyanese economy is not only about a policy created by Government, but it is also the story of the businesses and the entrepreneurs that are investing and saving every day and they deserve the credit too. The story of the growth in the Guyana's economy is the story of the households which have been saving from their income.

The one hundred thousand Guyanese families that now own a plot of land, the sixty thousands of them who take their income, save a few thousand dollars every month, go to the bank or the New Building Society, borrow some money, build a home, create three or four jobs, generate millions of dollars of business opportunities, they are contributing to the growth that we have achieved in the Guyanese economy. Each and every Guyanese citizen who goes to work in the morning, each and every Guyanese citizen who saves a few dollars from his or her income to build a home or to extend his or her home, each and every one of those Guyanese persons is to be saluted for his or her contribution to the growth and resilience of the Guyanese economy. This is the story of the People Progressive Party in Government. This growth is not an accidental achievement. I see some of my friends on that side of the House are getting agitated. I understand that the truth hurts them. I see them getting agitated, and I know the more they get agitated, the more I know that I am telling them a truth that they do not like to hear.

I make this point really to say that the fact that the Guyanese economy has remained robust and resilient under the People Progressive Party/Civic is a fact that we are happy to publicly say that it has been achieved by the hard work and the efforts of the Guyanese people.

The President speech appropriately situated the policies of this Government within the framework of this global context. He argued that we are committed, as a Government, to

maintaining and preserving the macro-economic stability that we have achieved. Gone are the days when the exchange rate will move from four Guyana dollars to one US dollar, to ten Guyana dollars to one US dollar, to thirty-three Guyana dollars to one US dollar, to one hundred Guyana dollars to one US dollar. I see Mr. Greenidge is smiling with recognition when I speak of four Guyana dollars to one US dollar, to ten Guyana dollars to one US dollar, to thirty-three Guyana dollars to one US dollar, to one hundred Guyana dollars to one US dollar. In fact, his is a smile of nostalgia. Gone are the days when the exchange rate will move from four Guyana dollars to one US dollars, to ten Guyana dollars to one US dollar, to thirty-three Guyana dollars to one US dollar, to one hundred Guyana dollars to one US dollar in the space of eighteen months. Gone are the days when the Guyanese people will wait on a budget presentation with fear and trepidation. [Mr. B. Williams: Dr. Singh... [inaudible]] That is stability. Gone are the days when the annual budget presentation is awaited with fear and trepidation. Gone are the days when people would have hoarded food items and kerosene - hoarded and hid food items and kerosene oil - because they did not know what would be banned when the annual budget was read. Happily, those days are consigned to the dustbins of history. Notwithstanding that Mr. Greenidge is still around.

The commitment of President Ramotar's Government is that the stability and strength that we have achieved will be protected and defended at all cost; and we have no apology to offer for want. More than anything else investors and householders want to know that that value of their assets and savings will not be eroded tomorrow and today they know that is the case under the People's Progressive Party. They want to know that their money in the bank will retain its value; they want to know that their savings are intact; they want to know that if they are saving to buy an asset for their home they do not have to worry that tomorrow when they go to the shop it would not be there. So, ours is a commitment to protect and defend the macro-economic stability that we have achieved - the signal macro-economic stability and growth that we have achieved.

We outlined an agenda for transforming the Guyanese economy. We speak of new and emerging sectors. If I may identify a single sector as an example, ten years ago not a single Guyanese person was employed directly in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector. Ten years ago! I am not speaking about twenty years ago. Ten years ago there was no information and communications technology. Ten years ago an information and communications

technology sector did not exist in Guyana and no person was employed directly in that sector. Today there are more than five companies which are creating jobs directly in the ICT sector, employing more than three thousand Guyanese persons. I have had the privilege of visiting - these are companies that provide what is called business process outsourcing; some people call them call centres - operations on the East Coast of Demerara, at Beterverwagting. I have had the privilege of visiting their operations in Diamond. I have had the privilege of visiting one company's operation in Linden. If I may speak of my visit in Linden, just about two or three months ago, I was extremely pleased to go into a room and to see one hundred and twenty-five young *Lindeners* working in a highly computerised environment, using high technology to communicate with clients at the other side of the world. That is the story of new and emerging sectors; that is the story of jobs being created and there are three thousand such jobs which have been created in this country just over the last few years.

What is more is that this is a sector that is poised to create another fifteen thousand such jobs in the space of the next five years. One heard question asked about wage levels. The fact of the matter, in 1990 the minimum wage of Guyana, the public sector minimum wage in Guyana, was US\$18 per month, today, Mr. Speaker, it is in excess of US\$180 per month, more than tenfold in US dollars terms. That is not to say that we believe that our work is done. In fact, we are committed to ensuring that this progress continues. We are committed to ensuring that all these things, which have been moving in the right direction, will continue to move in the right direction. We are committed to ensuring that this progress will continue. We are committed to ensuring that jobs will be created; that incomes will be generated; that access to social services will be improved. Our intention is that each and every Guyanese family must ultimately be able to own their own homes. They must have access to productive employment. They must have access to good social services.

9.13 p.m.

They must be able to enter the modern world. We have spoken about universal access to Information and Communications Technology – the One Laptop Per Family Programme – bringing a laptop into every home. This is our commitment: to ensure that progress continues at a macro level- at the individual household level and at the individual citizen level.

Today, more Guyanese citizens have access to hospitals and schools. Today, new hospitals have been constructed in every county of our country. Today, more Guyanese own their own homes than ever before. Today, 10,000 motor cars are registered every year. That is progress and development! It is progress that 10,000 Guyanese families own a new motor car every year. There was a time when the licence series used to take about ten years to be completed. Mr. Greenidge would recall the days of series PAA and PBB. They used to take about ten years to be completed. Today, we complete a ten thousand car series in one year. I know that the People's Progressive Party is immensely populous and that the PPP numbers are going quickly. In the space of mere two or three months, over 4,000 cars are driving around with PPP number plates.

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

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

Mr. Speaker: There has been a request for a continuation, but I am ordering you for a conclusion.

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker I note your admonition in relation to time and I assure you that it is my intention to confine myself to brevity.

President Ramotar... [**Mrs. Backer:** By next week you will drop down.] I can see that the facts are getting to you. [*Interruption*] May I urge some on that side of the House to take a page out of the book of their distinguished Leader of the Opposition and demonstrate some decorum? I know that the truth hurts and so I can see the agitation, commotion and excitement that I am causing.

His Excellency the President was clear. He said:

“Given the context in which we have to manage our economy, it calls for prudence and good management.”

It is easy to make light of some of these gains, but the fact of the matter is - and I said this at another forum just about two weeks ago - many Guyanese families, twenty years ago, were

struggling to put food on their tables. **[Member:** They are still struggling.] They are struggling but I will tell you what they are struggling for. Today, they are struggling to pay the mortgage on their homes. Today, they are struggling to pay the instalment on their motor cars. Today, they are struggling to pay the instalment on their motor bikes. Today, they are struggling to pay the instalment for the fridge, television and microwave they have bought for their homes. Today, they are struggling to make sure that all of their children get a university education. So the fact of the matter is that the struggle for human betterment will never be over. Today we struggle to own a home; tomorrow we will struggle to own a better home. Today we struggle to own a motor car; tomorrow we will struggle to own a second motor car for our children to drive. Today we will struggle to pay our hire purchase payments for a refrigerator in our home; tomorrow we will struggle to pay the hire purchase payments on a dishwasher or a washing machine. So the struggle for human betterment is one that is continuous. The fact of the matter though is that many of the Guyanese families that were struggling to put food on their tables when Mr. Greenidge was the Minister of Finance, today their struggle is very different. Today they own their own homes. Today they own their motor cars or motor cycles. Today they own television sets. Today they have two cellular phones. In those days, if one wanted to make a telephone call, he or she had to book it and wait for two weeks before the telephone call. Many of us are old enough to remember the days when one had to book a telephone call and wait for it to come true. Many of us remember the days when we used to have to line up outside at the Bank of Guyana in the rain, waiting for a window to be available to make a telephone call. Today, the average Guyanese low-income family has two cellular phones. Today, they do not want an ordinary cell phone; they want a Blackberry. They want a smart phone that can read the internet. That is progress! That is development! That is access to services! That is the People's Progressive Party in Government for you! Today, 400,000 Guyanese families and subscribers own a cellular phone. That is access to services. So it is easy for those on that side of the House to be dismissive, but everywhere that we look there are clear and stark indicators of progress made in this country. And so the commitment of President Donald Ramotar and the People's Progressive Party is to continue the striking progress that has been made in this country over the recent years. And we will do so based on a disciplined policy stance. We will do so based on prudent and responsible management – the President said it in his speech. We will do this on the

basis of sound management. We will do this on the basis of maintaining an environment...
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Please allow the Minister to conclude.

Dr. Singh: We will do this by maintaining an environment that is attractive to investors. And I will say this: investor optimism in Guyana... [**Member:** Crooked investors.] I hear a Member on that side speak of crooked investors. I am glad that he has disclosed the attitude of the People's National Congress and their partners in A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) towards investors. Let me say that investors are watching and listening to you. They know which administration they can trust and which one they cannot.

It is no accident that under the People's National Congress no investors wanted to come to Guyana. It is no accident that today investors are lining up to come to the shores of Guyana. It is no accident that some of the largest companies of the world want to enter the Guyanese market, whether it is in infrastructure, natural resources, or technology. Some of the largest firms, many medium sized firms, firms from Asia, North America, and Europe are coming to Guyana. Such is the confidence in the People's Progressive Party. Some of the largest conglomerates of the Caribbean are saying that Guyana holds the brightest promise in the Region. And I am not surprised, but I am disappointed that a party that brands itself as A Partnership for National Unity finds it so easy to say, "Crooked investors." The investors are watching and listening. Investor optimism is higher in Guyana today than it has ever been in our country's history! More investors are confident in Guyana and more than they have ever been before, not by accident but because they see in the People's progressive Party/Civic Government, a responsible government; a government that can be trusted; a government whose policies are predictable; a government whose stewardship of the economy has been commendable and, indeed, even if I say so myself, has been exemplary. Such is the confidence in Guyana today.

Mr. Speaker, I would happily continue for the rest of this evening but for my deference to your earlier admonition, despite the political posturing of those on the other side of the House, the inescapable fact is that Guyana has been moving in the right direction under the People's Progressive Party. The inescapable fact is that much has been achieved. The inescapable fact is that the policy framework that has been outlined by President Ramotar is a vision and framework

that will take this country to even greater and previously unseen heights. As I conclude, I am pleased to stand here this evening and say that the policies, objectives and initiatives outlined in President Ramotar's speech are most worthy and commendable. They merit endorsement and is embraced by all Guyanese. I would like to think that those on the other side of the House, despite the fact that they might feel that they have to be critical because they think that it is there job and despite the fact that they feel they have to oppose because they are called the Opposition, I would hope that they would see the good sense in standing up and being bold to say that there is much in President Ramotar's speech that we agree with, and that we are happy to endorse it. I urge my colleagues on that side of the House this evening to ensure that the motion moved by the Hon. Prime Minister is passed by this House, unanimously, when it is put. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Greenidge, I will afford you with two minutes as I did with the Hon. Member, Minister Rohee, to clarify.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I listened with great attention to the presentation which, first of all, related to the question of the audited accounts. What I want to say to you is that I took office in 1983. In 1983, the last set of audited accounts laid was 1975. The audited accounts were in arrears for a specific reason and that is problems of trying to bring the balance of the external treasuries to establish a balance. So what was done was that the audits were done in batches. In other words, in 1984, the audited accounts for 1975 to 1977 were brought at one time. What I am trying to explain is that the audited accounts were done in batches because one needed to use a starting balance in order to get them done. The point is that by the time I demitted office, the last audit accounts presented were done in 1991 for the year 1985. The first point is that I was in office in 1983. It is, therefore, not accurate to say no accounts were presented during my period in office.

The second thing is because the audited accounts were done in batches. I have the correspondence with me form Mr. Goolsarran himself in which it was recommended that the last batch for the remaining period be done up to 1991. And, as I explained to you, Mr. Speaker, the accounts for that period have subsequently not been processed, but it is not that they were not audited. That is the point.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that that is a satisfactory explanation.

Leader of the Opposition [Brigadier (Ret'd) Granger]: Thank you Mr. Speaker. The Ceremonial Opening of Parliament should be much more than a spectacular event. It should be an opportunity to review the previous session of Parliament and should be an opportunity to present an outline of the priorities, the policies and the programmes and, particularly, the proposed legislation for the new session. The text of the President's Address to this Hon. House, although much shorter than some of the presentations this evening, should be a comprehensive document, one that is carefully prepared by the entire Cabinet. It should embrace, in a serious way, the intentions of these 20 Hon. Ministers of the Cabinet. It should embrace the policies of the 15 or so Ministries which have been created since the 3rd December, 2012. It should inform the nation about the policies which it can expect during the course of the Tenth Parliament. It is a serious document. It is a serious exercise. It is not an exercise in frivolity.

The President's address on this occasion was not that comprehensive document which the population expected. It was not what this Hon. House deserves. It was delivered during a month, the month of February, where we were actually witnessing our annual floods, floods that ravaged six coastal regions. It was delivered when pirates were actually terrorising 15 fishing boats off the Pomeroon. It was delivered when shots were being fired at angry Black Bush Polder farmers who were protesting against the conditions in that community. The President's address was delivered when sugar and bauxite workers were restless and when the University of Guyana students, staff and workers were striking against the administration in protest against unbearable conditions at Turkeyen. The President's speech was actually delivered when the sea defences at Wakenaam were collapsing. It was actually delivered when parents at Aishalton were writing the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs to protest against the shortage of teachers, the shortage of food and the shortage of water at the Aishalton Secondary School in February, 2012. This was the time when His Excellency the President was delivering his Address and this is the context within which this Hon. House must examine the relevance of his presentation. These are the real difficulties which confront our ordinary people in this country today. In addition to those that I mentioned, there were deficiencies in the criminal justice system that we know about, deficiencies in the national health system, deficiencies in the education system, deficiencies in the local government system and other areas of government responsibility which we need not explore further than they have been explored already this evening. These deficiencies continue to demotivate our public servants, our nurses, our teachers, particularly our

Science teachers. They continue to demoralise the public, in general. To these we must add the burdensome cost of living to the bulk of the population, the loathsome growth of unemployment, particularly of our young school leavers, the destitution of the poor, the homeless and the street children.

This Hon. House had hoped that the President's Address would have attempted to explain the Administration's responses to these pressing, everyday problems. This House wanted to be informed about the legislative agenda of the Administration, a legislative agenda that would introduce measures that would improve the quality of life of our people. In nearly 4,000 words, however, the Address managed to ignore the major elements of public life in Guyana today. Those issues, which were touched ever so lightly, demanded much more deliberate attention than was offered.

Foreign affairs, for example, especially our relations with our neighbours, the Caribbean and the Continent, would be hampered unless there are major changes in our missions and their staff. Will the present corps of Ambassadors and High Commissioners be retained to pioneer economic diplomacy that this country needs? Will the Ambassador to Brazil blaze the trail towards the continental destiny of this country? Will he be the point man in opening Guyana to the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR)?

Economic development would be advanced only after a serious appraisal of the manner in which labour relations, especially with the unions in the public sector and in traditional sectors - sugar and bauxite - are conducted. Unless these labour relations are managed much more prudently, our economy will continue to stagger. The regulatory environment for the important gold and diamond mining, and timber industries must be strengthened. Hinterland infrastructure, real roads, real bridges and aerodromes must be improved to attract world-class investors. This House wants to know what legislation will be introduced to make these things possible.

Education reform is a top priority. The large number of dropouts from our primary and secondary schools, the turmoil at the University of Guyana and the flight of qualified Science teachers all demand urgent attention. Where in the Address did we see a plan for this country to create the scientific élite which will guide our mining, our agriculture and our engineering development?

Public security, particularly the performance of our main law enforcement agency, the Guyana Police Force, has been a perennial problem. Banditry and piracy have become household words, but where in the Address have we seen a plan to address these issues? It is a fact that narco-trafficking has pumped violence in this country. I have just been given a report, the International Narcotics Control Strategy Report from the United States, the annual report to Congress, which reads:

“Guyana’s political and judicial infrastructure has been impacted by narco-influence and its economy has become increasingly affected by drug money.”

And it goes on. The Administration has abandoned three counter narcotic strategies during its 19 years but, yet, the Address made no mention of a new plan to suppress this insidious trade.

National unity, above all, cannot be built by airy calls for consensus, for compromise and for the quest for common ground. There must be an institutional framework that must be erected to really build cooperation and that will build inclusionary democracy that our Constitution calls for at the national, regional and neighbourhood levels if we are to move forward.

The voices of the trade unions and civil society must be heard during the course of the Tenth Parliament. The will of the majority must be respected. Our workers, our women, our youth, our children and our minorities must not be ignored in the policies of this Parliament. Ten weeks are a long time in politics. It took ten weeks from the inauguration for the President to arrive at this National Assembly to deliver his feature Address – ten weeks. The President’s address, however, despite the length of time it took him to arrive here, made short work of the serious issues affecting the ordinary people of this country. The experiences of the past 20 years, the exigencies of current events and the expectations of the electorate should have exerted the greater influence on the preparation of the Government’s policy adumbrated in the President’s Address to this Tenth Parliament.

9.43 p.m.

In the response to the address, just minutes after it was delivered on the 10th of February, an invitation was offered for the President to return to this Hon. House to forge a dialogue between the Executive and Legislative branches. The five weeks that have elapsed since then provided the

opportunity for all of us to have a deeper reflection of the address to the Nation, the address to this Parliament, but still they confirm the need for that invitation to His Excellency to return here.

The President's Address did not promulgate the policies, the plans and the programme that this country needs at this time to move forward; it did not point to the way to solve the major problems confronting the Guyanese people. It is for this reason that A Partnership for National Unity cannot support the motion to approve the President's Address. I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Hinds (replying): Mr. Speaker, we have had a long and full debate on the motion that I have presented. Somewhat as to have been expected, there have been some very peculiar views. It will not help any for me to seek to rebut one by one the points made by the Opposition. The only thing that I will allow myself to say is to let us look at where Guyana was nineteen years ago, and let us look at where Guyana is today. Let us take account of the tenfold increase in real numbers in economic matters reflected in the great growth of motor cars on the streets, new buildings, and new levels of services being offered in education and in health.

Yes, we accept that there are issues in our society. Yes, we accept that there is much more to do, but we maintain that over these 19 years and in particular since 2005, we have had in Guyana a period of steady progress which many institutions attest to. So, I would ask that as we go to the vote, that we all will reflect in a total way and would find in their hearts that they ought to support this motion. I beg you to put the motion.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members after a very long and interesting, sometimes exiting and even hilarious debate – I saw some Members laughing – I will now put the motion.

Motion put and carried.

Mr. Speaker: We have one outstanding matter. It is quarter to ten. Hon. Prime Minister I do not know whether you wish to...

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker I beg to move that Standing Order No. 10 be suspended to allow us to complete the work on the Order Paper for today.

Motion Carried.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. I trust that we can get through this expeditiously. I call on the Hon. Minister to proceed as we see for the second reading of the Local Authorities (Elections) (Amendment) Bill 2012 – Bill No. 2 of 2012, published on the 2nd of February 2012.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES (ELECTIONS) (AMENDMENT) BILL 2012 – BILL NO. 2 OF 2012

Minister of Local Government and Regional Development [Mr. G. Persaud]: Mr. Speaker, I am humbly requesting that the Local Authorities (Elections) (Amendment) Bill 2012 – Bill No. 2 of 2012 which is standing in my name be read a second time. In so doing I wish to state that I will not take up much of the House’s time in presenting this Bill. I am of the view that we in this House will have no problem in passing this amendment.

Local Government Elections could not take place during the year 2011 because of the Constitutional requirement of holding General and Regional Elections. Consequently, the dissolution of the House in September 2011 to facilitate the holding of the said election prevented this amendment from being presented to the House in the last quarter of 2011. Notwithstanding this delay, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic remains committed to aggressively pursuing the holding of Local Government Elections in order to produce a more effective local administration, with a replenishment of the leadership of the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils and Municipalities under the new Local Government System. This new mix of Proportional Representation and the First Past the Post electoral system was approved by this National Assembly in 2010 and is in accordance with the Constitutional provisions. The ruling party would like to restate the importance of Local Government Elections as is stated in the PPP/C’s manifesto, “Working together for a better tomorrow”, and I quote:

“...ensure that within one year of the 2011 General Elections, that local Government Elections are held to bring much need reinvigoration into Local Government entities”.

This, Hon. Members, is a true reflection of the PPP/C’s desire to empower the ordinary people of Guyana and to enhance the promotion of grass root democracy further. I believe that this entire House would like these elections to be held as soon as possible. Thus, I am soliciting the support of the Hon. Members of the APNU and the Alliance For Change (AFC) of this House to firstly support this Bill to extend the life of the present Local Government Bodies and secondly, to

support the conclusion of the pending matters in relation to Post Elections Local Government Systems.

I wish to say that once again, the House is called upon for various reasons to postpone Local Government Elections. This therefore is a rudimentary issue with which this House must address. At the present, the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils and Municipalities are functioning. I therefore do not hesitate on calling on this House to support this amendment. I thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Bulkan and his maiden speech.

Mr. Bulkan: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Colleagues and Hon. Members, I rise on behalf of the APNU in relation to the Bill. The Hon. Member, Mr. Ganga Persaud, the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development has indeed suggested that we on this side of the House will have no problem in supporting the motion which seeks the postponement, yet again, of Local Government Elections.

I note the Hon. Minister says that the Government remains aggressively committed to seeing that these elections are held as soon as possible, and as he says, under the new Local Government System. I note however, that the Hon. Minister speaks only of changes to the electoral system that seeks to introduce a mix of Proportion Representation (PR), but does not address the more fundamental reforms that have been identified as necessary. Yes, whilst it is true, as the Minister has identified, that all sides are committed to seeing that these long delayed elections are held as soon as possible, it needs to be established and made abundantly clear that fundamental reform of the system of Local Government is a priority and a prerequisite before these elections can be held. I note that the Minister also alluded to the situations that currently obtain with regards to the non-functioning of some NDCs and some Municipalities.

I believe most Members of this House will be aware that this postponement that is being sought for the holding to the Local Government Elections is being done for the umpteenth time. Local Government Elections, as I believe is well known, were last held in 1994; that is some seventeen years ago. Previous Speakers in the previous Parliament and there have been many on this very issue, have referred to this debate and on this topic as an annual pilgrimage. While tonight it seems that the baton, so to speak, has been passed to me, I hope it will be for the last time.

Whatever be the reason for the non-holding of these elections on both sides of this House, in fact all sides of this House, do have their own reasons and versions. The fact remains that as a result of this the system is not functioning as it should. It is totally unfair to expect persons who were elected seventeen years ago to have the same enthusiasm and drive. Many are not simply around for one reason or another. Finger pointing and blame casting will not do. It is time for the Government to step away from the obvious fear they have of citizens electing their own leaders to manage community affairs in accordance with a principle that has already been identified, and arising from a bipartisan, thorough and extensive process. Subsequent to the last Local Government Elections in 1994, the consensus emerging out of debates in this Assembly was that there was need for Local Government reform and for the system to be overhauled and for new life to be injected.

Following Constitutional Amendments, a taskforce was agreed and established by the then President, His Excellency Bharrat Jagdeo and the then Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Desmond Hoyte. The mandate of this taskforce was to recommend legislation to give substance to those Constitutional Amendments. It is therefore important for us and the Guyanese people to understand that reform of the system is a Constitutional requirement, it is not a favour that we are begging of the Government; the Constitution dictates this. The objective is to work towards the creation of a system that offers an efficient way to deliver common services to citizens, among these being drainage, maintenance and enhancement to public spaces and playgrounds, garbage disposal, enforcement of building codes and standards et cetera. It is recognised that a proper and well functioning system of Local Government, and we are speaking here of levels below the RDCs, where officials are elected to perform tasks and functions identified by residents, at periodic and democratic elections is the best way to go about delivering such services. This is not the role of the Central Government.

The reforms proposed are not some concoction of the Opposition to prise power out of the hands of Central Government. What is being proposed is not a system that will be unique to Guyana, but on the contrary, one that is designed to bring our country in line with what obtains in successful societies or international best practices.

I will be very brief in touching on some key examples of international best practices. In this regard, I know that Hon. Member, Minister Clement Rohee, had suggested earlier that we cast

our eyes beyond the shores of Guyana. Many if not most Members of this House will be familiar with what obtains in the United States of America (USA), where they have a Federal Government, that whilst responsible for national security, foreign relations, for overseeing and coordinating national policies such as managing the economy et cetera, that there is a system, an extensive system in fact for State and Municipal Government- one that is extensive and elaborate where considerable power is devolved and the authority of lower tiers of Government- as I said such as State's regional and local county et cetera is not only considerable, but fully independent. This authority extends to areas such as taxation, law enforcement including judicial matters, education, public works et cetera.

Each State in the USA has its own Courts, Judges, Police, Public officials et cetera. I imagine what I said there would not be news to any Member of this House as indeed the majority of Guyanese have ties and links to the USA and hence are aware that when you purchase anything in America a sales tax is added, which is used as one of the means of garnering revenue to fund the State Government. Most of us here would know that in the USA, each State issues their own driver's license and as alluded, operates their own Police services, Courts et cetera. There are as well lower tiers of authority extending to towns, cities, counties and such like.

In Canada it is not much different and where considerable devolution of power exists. Some may wish to say that America and Canada are large countries and therefore we cannot use them as an appropriate model. To any such suggestion my response will be that while indeed they are both large, they are developed and successful societies and indeed there are many large societies that are not similarly so developed or advanced; the point being is that their model or formula that is responsible for their success.

I will take a country that has more or less the similar land mass as ours. I refer to the United Kingdom (UK) which has an area of 94,000 square miles, plus or minus a few which makes it roughly about ten percent larger than Guyana. The UK comprises of four countries, England, Northern Island, Scotland and Wales. Within the UK, there are three devolved national administrations with capitals and their own Parliaments in Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh. It is no secret that the UK is a member of the G7 and is also member of the United Nations (UN) Security Council and possesses nuclear weapons. There were the world's first industrialised country and at the height of their power in 1922 the British Empire encompassed almost a

quarter of the world's entire land surface. The point that I am making is that autonomy and effective local Government is not something new that is being sought to be introduced here in Guyana, it is practised in successful societies internationally.

The Joint Task Force to which I have already referred began its work in May/June of 2001. The task force was made up of four members appointed by the Government, three from the Opposition and supported by other resource personnel. It held thirty one consultations in all of the geographic and Administrative Regions of our country. This task force focused on five main areas; firstly "What is a pertinent system", "The Autonomy of Local Government bodies", thirdly "The operation of Local Government bodies", "Local Government electoral systems" and finally, "General Reform of the system. The report was submitted some eighteen months later, in December 2003. It tells us therefore that the work of the taskforce was extensive.

It is apposite to note that the general terms of reference of that task force was the implementing of provisions of Local Government legislation and for it to be within twelve months and that Local Government Elections should be held as speedily as possible thereafter, and in particular to monitor and guide the drafting, passing and implementation of legislation to give, and I emphasise, greater autonomy to local government bodies, including the establishment of the Local Government Commission and also, the formulation and implementation of objective criteria for the purpose of allocation of resources to and the garnering of resources by local democratic organs.

The task force used as their guide, the Articles of the Constitution relating to local democracy and local democratic organs, these being Article 71 to Article 78. For Article 71 through 74, there are either no proposals or minor ones, as they were explicit and comprehensive enough. Article 75 which demands that local democratic organs be autonomous, the proposals are as follows, that such autonomy be looked at vis-à-vis the functions of the proposed Local Government Commission and that the role of Central Government should be restricted to one of policy formulation. Secondly, the establishment of standards for the delivery of services, the undertaking of infrastructural works, that the revenue base of the various authorities should be expanded and that NDCs and municipalities should retain their rating authority. They, i.e. the local authorities, should be allowed to expend within their budgetary provisions without having to refer to or to defer to other levels of Government. The task force proposed that the proposed

Local Government Commission would exercise an oversight and supervisory role. It said that the legislation is to provide for consultation with lower authority to ensure such authority be able to influence matters pertaining to programmes and projects within the local areas.

With regard to expansion of the revenue base, specific suggestions were proposed for consideration. We can see that the intent was clear, it is about autonomy and devolution, moving away from centralisation. For Article 77 which has to do with the allocation of resources to and the garnering of resources by local democratic organs, the proposals are as follows, on “Allocation of Resources” agreement is principle and was reached in regard to the formula and a working group was appointed to formulate objective criteria. The criteria for fiscal transfers were based on a basic premise, this being the functions identified to be performed by the various local democratic organs. Once the above was established, the taskforce proposed that Central Government would be in a position to determine how much resources are committed to each tier. The allocated funds would have to be subdivided taking into account specific considerations, for example, population size, infrastructure to be maintained, services to be rendered, revenue base institutional capacity, special circumstances such as levels of poverty, history of capacity realisation et cetera. On the garnering of resources, it said that Local Government bodies should be empowered to impose rates and taxes on property, i.e. by the NDCs and once collected by the NDCs to be shared with the lower tiers, for example village councils, community councils et cetera, and that village and community councils should be empowered to approach donor agencies to seek resources required for the development or enhancement of their respective localities such as waste disposal, economic projects et cetera.

The objective speaks clearly to autonomy and devolution not for the Minister to interfere and manipulate in a partisan manner in the functioning of lower tiers of Local Government as is currently happening.

Article 78 of the Constitution deals with the need for a body independent of Central Government, it says:

“Parliament shall establish a Local Government Commission having wide ranging authority which it outlines.”

The proposals regarding the Local Government Commission were that its powers would be substantial and nationwide in scope. It would be empowered to monitor the activities of local government organs and these encompass the gamut. What it envisaged and proposed, it says, is system that leads to and allows for, I quote:

“Greater autonomy and devolution of power”

It proposes that such appointments which are currently scrutinised by the RDC and which are subject to ministerial or RDC approval will no longer be so scrutinised or subjected. It also allows for a Local Government Organ to be empowered to dismiss any staff member after due process has been observed. In other words, no micro management, each tier of the system must be allowed to function without undue interference from above. I believe that the late Dr. Jagan would have been proud to usher into being a system such as the one proposed by the taskforce, as he was a true democrat.

The particular composition of the commission was identified as were the skills that are to be resident in it and on the all important question of its funding, it says:

“The commission will prepare its own annual budget and for that to be funded by the consolidated fund”

Article 78 (b) deals with the electoral system in respect of local democratic organs below the RDC and states that such electoral system,

“Shall provide for the involvement and representation of such individuals and voluntary groups in addition to political parties and accountability to the electors”

The proposal from the task force is for the geographical and population size to determine the quantity of councillors but that no council must have less than six councillors. In keeping with the democratic principle, it says that councillors must be elected on the basis of one man/one vote and nominees/candidates must be resident in the constituency.

10.13 p.m.

On that vital need for accountability it states that it will be mandatory for the proper recording of decisions to enable the constituency or the community to be comprehensively informed on the

performance of any councillor, this will inform and facilitate whatever action is necessary including the recall of councillors.

In conclusion, the report acknowledges that the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development presented a number of proposed changes to the Local Government Act. The members of the task force expressed the hope that their efforts not to go to waste and that its proposal will see the light of day in the form of speedy implementation. That report, as I said, was submitted in December 2003, which means that more than eight years have gone by and the objective remain unrealised.

It is legitimate therefore to ask the question, why this is so? I have already alluded to this, but will go further to state that recrimination will get us no where other than a dead end. Courage has to be summoned to achieve the consensus that is needed to advance national, not partisan interest. I repeat, consensus has to be found. We would do well, both sides of this August Assembly, to recognise that while we are talking, let us not forget that more than one decade has gone by since the joint task force was established, the people are looking and paying keen attention and are asking themselves this very question, which is, why cannot their national leaders put aside their partisan positions and act in the national interest. They are paying rapt attention because it is they who have to live with steadily deteriorating conditions arising from the inability to elect councillors to manage and administer community affairs and interest.

There is a saying in Detroit, Detroit being the headquarters of the American automobile industry, that says, "You lead, follow, or get out of the way". Perhaps this is exactly what our citizens are thinking and moreover asking, why is it they are the ones who have to suffer as a result of the failure of leaders to act responsibly? Why must they be the ones to have to live with the neglect, decay, etc, that is symptomatic of this broken system? The clogged drains, the flooding, which many speakers have alluded to, parapets not maintained, overgrown playgrounds, no place for children to play and it goes on.

We on this side of the House say that the posturing has to stop and consensus has to be reached because the elections of 28th November 2011 imposes such an obligation on this Assembly. The people have spoken and their message is that they want a different formula. They have said that the winner must not take all; they want to see a system where there are checks and balances. Yes,

they have chosen a Government, but they have also determined that such a Government will not have unlimited powers as has obtained for far too long, hence, the minority status of the current Government in this legislature.

The people have said to the AFC and to us, APNU, please be our watch dogs and protect our interest. We therefore have a duty and we intend to discharge that duty faithfully and may I add relentlessly.

Just recently, when the people in Mahaicony and environs were flooded out, yet again, one farmer was reported in the *Stabroek News* and in lamenting their plight exclaimed, “We only hope now is Parliament.” That quote was in *Stabroek News* of February 5th of this year and the name of the farmer was identified as Mr. Deolall. I say this to make the point that the citizens of this country are attuned and they want to see consensus, they would like to see this broken system repaired.

The answer to what the Minister’s predecessor, the Hon. Kellewan Lall, former Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, described as a system, “Under severe pressure and in crisis.” It is not the installation of IMCs as the Government is wont to do and has done on occasions, that is the undemocratic way, nor is it or can be intervention and interference on the part of the Ministry in the affairs of the NDCs and preventing their functioning as is happening now with the transfers of overseers in Region 4, in a unilateral, arbitrary and highhanded manner. That is also undemocratic. No, the answer however is not just the holding of elections, first the reforms which I have said have been mandated by constitutional amendments and which have been agreed to by all partners and all parties, have to come into force.

Previous speakers from the Government side have committed themselves to ensuring that Local Government Reform becomes a reality. I would like to quote once more the Hon. Kellewan Lall, in the 2009 debate he ended his presentation by saying, “I want to conclude by saying that we are firmly committed to having Local Government elections under a reformed system. We made that commitment with Mr. Hoyte and we are going to stick with it.”

The transcripts on this issue are voluminous and I believe I have said enough, but in closing, I would like to recall a few words of previous speakers from our side. In the 2008 presentation to this House, on December 29th, 2008, the then Opposition Leader, the Hon. Robert Corbin, had

this to say, “It is the resistance to the Constitutional Reforms, which have been mandated that is the root cause of the prolonged delay...

Mr. Speaker: Your time is up Hon. Member. I do not know how much time...

Mr. Bulkhan: Less than five minutes.

Mr. Speaker: Two minutes to conclude.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Motion carried.

Mr. Bulkhan: Mr. Speaker, the then Opposition Leader ended his presentation with some words of caution and this is what he said, “I want to advise the Government to forget the idea of avoiding Local Government Reform, it cannot happen in this country”. Secondly, my colleague here in the front bench, Hon. Member, Mr. Basil Williams, whom in the last of his many contributions on this issue, on 2nd December, 2010, said, “We are here again on this annual pilgrimage for the postponing of Local Government elections. We are constrained to support the proposed amendment. We will have to accede to the postponement.” While both the above positions are still valid, and I am restating them as part of my presentation, I will add that in the case of the latter, my hope is that it will be for the last time.

I beg of Hon. Members on the opposite side, please stop the posturing, the people are watching us as I have said, they expect and deserve better. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Members, I do not think I will be entertaining extensions, so please let us try and wrap it up.

Minister in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development [Mr. Whittaker]:

Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. Hon. Members, the PPP and the PPP/C Government have always viewed Local Government Reform and the need to have Local Government elections, as

important not only for development, but also important for the renewal of grassroots democracy in our country.

We want to hold Local Government elections. We want to hold Local Government elections today; tonight. We want to hold Local Government elections so that we can bring much needed reinvigoration into the Local Government bodies and by extension the very communities which fall within the NDCs. For my friends, these elections would necessarily facilitate and accelerate the transformation and modernisation of local communities by, among other things, empowering the citizens to participate in the decision-making process.

We of the PPP/C have nothing to gain by postponing these elections. We have never feared facing the electorate. In fact, in every one of our manifestos since 1992 to present we have highlighted the need for the acceleration of the reform process and the holding of elections. For us, Local Government forms an integral part of our democracy and we have always been in the forefront of the fight for democracy in this country. That is why we have been agitating for these elections, Hon. Member. That is why we keep bringing the legislation to the Assembly and that is why we have been continuously calling on the Opposition, haranguing them, to work with us to move the process on and we will continue to do so. We will not abdicate that responsibility that we have to the Guyanese people.

Legislations

The Guyanese public is not unaware of the political machinations of the Opposition. As they have said it is to stymie and to prolong the process. Albeit, the Guyanese people understand that while we have made tremendous progress as a nation, much of what affects our daily lives falls under the jurisdiction of Local Government. There is much that we can do and have been doing to address these matters, but my friends we have made progress, thanks to our determine efforts to move the process forward we have made progress. Important areas identified for reform have been addressed and the Hon. Member mentions them, the electoral system, fiscal transfers, in other words there has been consensus on some core Local Government Reform legislation. The Hon. Member refers to the introduction of constituency based Local Government elections; this is captured in the Local Authorities (Elections) (Amendment) Bill, which seeks to set the legal framework for the holding of Local Government elections under a reformed Local Government

system - it is not that we have not made progress; it is not that we have not been working - and which allows for greater collaboration among and between political parties and civil groups. This will see elections being held in accordance with a mixed system, as the Hon. Member referred to.

The Local Government Commission Bill published in June 2009, this is another area on which there have been tremendous movement. The Local Government Amendment Bill which seeks to upgrade and amend the legislature relative to NDC's and the Municipal and District Councils Amendment Bill which seeks to do a similar thing for the municipalities.

My friends, the other area of Local Government on which we have made much progress has been in the Fiscal Transfers Act and in passing, the Hon. Member spoke of this. This is an objective system for fiscal transfers and revenue gathering, which uses an objective set of criteria in a formula to determine what each Local Government body gets from Government each year. In other words, this Act seeks to give more autonomy to local democratic organs and to enhance their ability to sustain themselves financially. The emphasis here is more on revenue collection, in other words, it is performance oriented. Local Government organs, my friends, will continue to be financed primarily by their own efforts with some subvention from Government, but using some objective variable determinacy. Meanwhile, Guyanese would again recall that the balance of legislation were at the conclusion of the 9th Parliament, at the level of the Select Committee and may I remind this House that the PPP and the PPP/C have not placed any impediment or encumbrance in the way of the Opposition then and now to prevent them from participating in the Select Committee process.

Local Government Elections

The implications of not having Local Government elections over a number of years are well known and in fact, it is evidence as we traverse the streets of our country, especially our city, daily. But it must be acknowledged that our Government has taken a series of measures to bring improvement to the lives of our people in the local communities even as we continue to open the door to the Opposition to join with us in advancing the Local Government legislative reform process. It does not appear that you want to; it appears that you prefer to stay on the sideline to ridicule and criticise. But friends, we of the PPP will continue to work to find a way not to allow

your lack of participation from preventing us from moving on with this important matter of Local Government Reform and the holding of Local Government elections.

Another of the implications of not having the elections over a number of years is that we have had to in some instances, invite Public Servants to be part of the depleted Councils and to enhance the work of the Councils. It not that we are sitting on waiting until you are pleased to come onboard so that we can accelerate the reform process; we have been doing this and the existing legislation allows us to do this. To create IMCs (Interim Management Committees) in some instances of mismanaged councils that are dissolved. The objective here, and the Linden Municipality provides an example, has been to enhance accountability and transparency to improve the efficiency in the operation of these bodies.

Holding of Annual Internal Elections

The holding of annual internal elections is provided for in the legislation. That is, elections for Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Chairman and Deputy Chairman. Added to that is the fact that we have been reaching out to the NDCs, we have been reaching out to the municipalities and we have been having interactions with these bodies and with the residents that fall within the jurisdiction on development issues. Also, informing them and sensitising them on the reforms. The whole idea is, we of our own accord that are tasked with oversight responsibilities – that is at the level of the Ministry – of guiding these Local Government bodies whilst we seek to accelerate the reform process that will lead to elections, we have been reaching out to the NDCs, reaching out to the municipalities, helping and guiding them, so that they can deliver better quality services to the people.

Rotation of Staff

Rotation of some staff, allowed for in the legislation, is one of the measures by which we seek to have more efficiency and indeed the rotation has allowed us to see in some instances incompetence; in other instances some level of financial improprieties, etc, so that the desired

results... It is not that we have been rotating staff outside of their Region, they have been rotated to the very next NDC in most instances and as I said it is allowed for.

These are only a few of the measures the PPP through the Government have taken to bring expansion. This is not about interfering, this is about guiding; this is about providing training; this is about exposure; this is not about interfering in the internal affairs. As we seek to bring about improvement in the quality of service that is delivered. May I add, not only do we reach out to these local bodies, but in many instances we receive them when they come to us, because we have a mandate to guide them and to assist them, so that they can perform at a better level?

It is not as if the absence of the completion of Local Government Reform and the consequential failure to have Local Government elections on the reformed electoral system has halted progress in the municipalities and the NDCs. They continue to receive their revenues and we continue to advise them on ways and means by which they can increase the collectibles; to advise them on ways on how they can engage the people who must have a say in what is done and also, on how they can record them.

Even at the level of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development we have moved to augment our staff, we have moved to build greater capacity among our staff so that we can help the municipalities, help the NDCs to better deliver the services that they are elected to deliver.

Training Programme

In addition, our plan training program, which will targets over 140 persons, drawn from the NDCs and municipalities and which will see these persons trained as appraisers to undertake valuation in the NDCs and in the municipalities, offer opportunities for increase rates and taxes to accrue to these bodies. When we add to this, the handing over of several more housing schemes which will result in several NDCs and municipalities receiving additional revenues, which they would be able to use to extend the services that they provide; these are some of the improvements that we talk about.

We at the Ministry, in keeping with our mandate, continue to support, we do not dictate to the NDCs, their efforts; we guide them. The budgets which they submit are based on interfacing, it is

based on discussions with the persons within their municipalities and within their NDCs. Individually, in groups, in large numbers and we guide them. We continue to support the NDCs and the municipalities; this is quite apart from the subvention that we make available to them and the rates and taxes they collect, the market fees and the tolls they collect. Money budgeted under the RDCs (Regional Democratic Councils) are also for projects within some of these very Local Government bodies and Central Government programmes. Even before the Fiscal Transfers Bill would have been passed, already we at the level of Government have been assisting the NDCs and putting measures in place, which has seen in many instances their revenue base expanded. Not only rates and taxes, as I have said, tolls, market fees, rental facilities for the parking of vehicles, this is the kind of support we have been giving them in the interim.

We of the PPP and the PPP/C will continue to put the people's interest first and to work to have these legislative reforms completed with the involvement of civil society and to have Local Government elections held. In this regard, the tripartite arrangement initiated by President Donald Ramotar is very pertinent, very relevant, and important as it provides a forum for discussing and advancing the Local Government agenda. We need to come onboard; an invitation to come onboard and be part of that tripartite agenda.

Meanwhile, sadly, we are unable to hold elections, but we stand ready to move the process further. Where do you stand Mr. Opposition? Where do you stand Mdm. Opposition or where do you sit? The Guyanese people are watching you as they continue to endure. You owe it to them to behave responsibly. We have been behaving responsibly, we have been helping them.

10.43 p.m.

We have been helping them to expand their revenue, to provide better service to the people, even as we try to cajole and encourage you to come with us so that we can finish the legislation and have the elections.

I implore you, on behalf of the Guyanese people, support the request contained in this Motion for a postponement of the elections, but that is only part of it. I want you to resolve to work with us. Work with us so that we complete the reform and we do not have to come here again as the Hon. Member requested. I want to help you to fulfill that request so that we do not have to come here to seek another postponement.

Mr. Speaker, I support this motion 101% and I ask you to give it 102% support. Thank you.
[Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member.

Mr. Ramjattan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me just indicate that the wonderful history, well-researched, by Mr. Ronald Bulkan must go down as one of the better presentations on this matter and I want both sides to congratulate him. It was a timely reminder as to the entire history of the process and it also reminded me of a couple of things I had in my memory, fading quickly, and he brought it out.

I also want to state this: we must have those Bills brought back as early as possible in this mutant Parliament and we start the process of negotiating and consensually agreeing on the reforms because the Alliance For Change would like to see the new Elections for Local Government held under a new legislative arrangement, under a new regime. I rather suspect that this new dispensation and the consensualism that we all strive for you are going to get, Mr. Whittaker. We are going to get that very quickly but we must also now make the commitment and the promise that we will have the elections at least at the end of this year because it must be held this time. We just cannot come another year and plead for another adjournment, so because of the necessitous circumstances we have to support the Bill, that there be a further delay, but let this be the last delay. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. Hamilton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When I was asked to speak on this Bill I sought to go to the library here to look at the arguments over the last five years for this simple piece of legislation. What I noted was that there were long discussions and arguments similar to what I have heard this evening. The fact of the matter is, the Hon. Minister, in my view, has brought a simple piece of legislation here, as indicated, very straight forward, in his presentation that it is his wish that we work together to address the outstanding issues.

Whilst I compliment the Hon. Member, Mr. Bulkan, for giving us the historical perspective in his maiden presentation to the National Assembly, what he did not do is seek to recommend, where we should go from here.

The Minister in his presentation stated, and I concur with Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, that the issue now is for us, together, on all sides, get back, not to the drawing board because as I understand it, most of the drawings and drafting have already been completed. The issue is how to negotiate what is written somewhere. That is the issue.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Bulkan, in his presentation, alluded to the issue of IMC and I heard a lot of heckling whilst Hon. Member, Minister Whittaker was speaking about IMC. What this Assembly must note is whilst the Opposition – more so the PNC-R/APNU – continues to harp on this issue on IMC the people must note that when the former Leader of the PNC-R had a personal fight with the then Mayor of the Linden municipality he saw it fit to join hands pleading with the then Minister of Local Government, Mr. Collymore to disband that council and establish and interim management committee. At the Linden municipality it was a...

Mr. B. Williams: Point of Order, Standing Order 40... Mr. Speaker, I just wish to let the Hon. House know that the Hon. Member, Mr. Hamilton, has just made an erroneous statement. It is not only speculative but it shows to me a complete lack of knowledge of what has been happening while he was in the wilderness, and there was no such thing as the Former Leader of the Opposition or the present Leader of the PNC requesting the Government to interfere in the affairs of the Linden Town Council. I ask him to withdraw that immediately

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker is the Hon. Member elucidating or was it a Point of Order? I am lost on what he was really making because it was really his opinion, but is fact.

Mr. Speaker: The Point of Order that he sought was to clarify.

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker, the antics of the Hon. Member, Mr. Williams, is just antics. If he would go back to historical record, if he is capable, he would note that at the time of the disbandment of the Linden municipality Joseph Hamilton was a Central Executive Member of the People's National Congress. Therefore, the fact that he stands in this House to suggest... You should follow all of the reports and if the then Leader of the Opposition was here he would have concurred with what I am saying, which is the agreement to disband the Linden municipality that was controlled by the People's National Congress – Reform was an agreement with the then Opposition Leader and Minister Collymore. That is the fact of the matter.

Mr. B. Williams: Apparently the Hon. Member... I am standing on Standing Order 40 Subsection 1. I am not going to address you on this issue anymore. It appears that the Hon. Member, Mr. Hamilton, does not appreciate that my request to him is unless he could produce the evidence to you that there was an agreement between the Hon. Leader of the PNC and the Government he must withdraw the remark.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Hamilton, let me say this, I am aware that the Linden Town Council was dissolved; I am aware that there was some discussion – I do not know whether it translated into an agreement but certainly there was an awareness on the part of the Opposition that this was happening before it happened and it happened, but I ask you to move on because, indeed, unless you can have proof as to an agreement, which lends itself to some form of connivance or collusion, I think you would be out of order. Certainly there was some discussion taking place; I recall that. You are correct, but unless you can substantiate an “agreement to” I think we would have to move forward.

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker, I had already moved on. It was the Hon. Member Mr. Williams that was stopping me from moving on. I had already moved on from Linden. I am back in Georgetown.

That fact is, as indicated by the previous speakers from the Government, the Government is ready and willing to hold the Local Government Elections. One would note that in the last two to three weeks the Guyana Elections Commission have already put themselves in readiness. One would see advertisements for temporary staff and they have started their work. Of course the elections will happen, as I understand it, when the parties here sit together and negotiate the issues that are burning issues. My recollection tells me that when two Bills were to come to the Assembly, at that time, the People’s National Congress-Reform determined that, because all five bills were not coming they would not continue to participate in the process. That is in the Hansard and the report coming from Minister Kellewan Lall to the National Assembly about what transpired at the level of the Select Committee.

I will urge that we resuscitate the Select Committee to deal with the outstanding matters. I will urge that we urgently seek to sit down several days and negotiate these matters. I will urge that all of us seek to ensure, as indicated by the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, that this be the final

time we come to the National Assembly to ask for an amendment to postpone the holding of Local Government Elections. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. B. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I am loath to speak on this issue having spoken on it for years now but I need to clear the record in relation to the contentions of the Hon. Minister, Mr. Whittaker. He has contended that there has been consensus; we have made much progress on the Fiscal Transfers Act, etc. The fact of the matter is that is totally untrue. That is the fact of the matter.

Let me say, at this point in time that the PPP/C Government has been the greatest impediment to progress in local democratic reform in this country. For eight years they dilated the proceedings of the joint task force; four years they stayed away from that task force and whenever we seemed to have been moving forward they took us two steps backward in the normal *Bolshevik Mode* that they practice. Eventually when the pressure came to the fore and they had to do something about it they created another problem and the Former President unilaterally scuttled the work of the taskforce and said that he was transferring the Bills to Parliament to a Select Committee. Unilaterally! It was a bipartisan Committee, a bipartisan taskforce. He was supposed to act in conjunction with the Leader of the Opposition.

When we came to the Select Committee in the last Parliament, the Ninth Parliament, we came with these Bills: the Local Authorities Election Amendment Bill, the Fiscal Transfers Bill, the Local Government Commission Bill, the Local Government Amendment Bill and the Municipal and District Council Amendment Bill – five Bills. At all material times in the taskforce we had agreed that we would bring all of the Bills to Parliament as a package. The last President did not do that. What happened was they purported to come with the Local Authorities Election Bill, which really is a bill to reform the electoral system, which purports to create a hybrid system for the next Local Government Election; where there will be 50% PR and 50% first past the post.

The present situation is they also scuttled the work in the Select Committee, forcing the AFC and the PNC-R delegations, at the time, to withdraw from the Committee. As we presently stand, with all the utterances about progress that they wish to make, after our withdrawal all they did was pass two Bills; those two Bills were the Local Government Commission Bill and the Local Authorities Elections Amendment Bill, trying to convey to the Guyanese people that they were

interested in putting the election system in place to run off the next election but what is the present situation? The only Bill that was assent to by the President was the Local Government Commission Bill and they completely blanked the Local Authorities Elections Amendment Bill. In other words one cannot have any election unless that Bill is passed in this Parliament and accented to. It has to now come to this new Parliament and go back through the process, so they are genuine about their commitment to empowering the Guyanese people because that is the whole underlying philosophy of local democracy and local government reform – to empower the Guyanese people in the communities in which they live. They do not want that. They want to continue to have the Minister riding roughshod over the Guyanese people in the community.

They like the emaciated status of these Committees because they want, when it suites them, to implement IMCs in the areas that they never had a vote in. If you check them, when they want to create IMCs they do not restore the IMCs in a proportion in which the persons who had contested the 1994 alone but they pack those IMCs with their PPP cronies. They do not want to move. They want to continue riding roughshod over the City Council to give out all of the contracts from the Ministry and city fathers are bypassed. That is what they want to do. Then they have this Minister now – the Hon. ‘Fledgling’ Minister – I understand that his name is Mr. Whittaker, the Hon. Member, riding roughshod over the overseers. That is why they are in the minority. They do not know how to handle power. Even though it appears that the Minister has power to transfer overseers this is what the situation is: the law, Mr. Speaker, as you will well know and you are well conversant with, even though they have that power to transfer an overseer that power has to be exercised judiciously and what we call in terms of ‘*Westbury Reasonableness*’. You cannot tell people to, over night, “Move out. Pack up an’ go long yuh way!” after 17 years of living somewhere. That is why they are in the minority. Even their own overseers have rejected them.

The reason they lost the last election, really... We are going to come to that. **[Mr. Neendkumar: We lost the last election?]** Well you did not win it. The reason was... They were hiding behind large rallies because they could not go into the communities to face the people, because the people do not want them to come to them. They never did anything for the people. In other words, APNU was on the ground. Having known that that is why they lost they want to go on the ground now. They believe that they could start going on the ground now by starting to deal with

the overseers; moving around the overseers. Then the move the overseers telling them “Y’all do not increase no tax here for nobody, yuh know.”

You are not in any position to contest any election in this country. You are battered and tired. Don not get fooled by any snap election or anything you see in the papers because you will be more badly beaten this time. We are not afraid of you and your snap election and that nonsense. You are not ready for that so you better stay where you are.

Mr. Speaker, I try to keep awake at this late hour of the evening. Let me say this, this Parliament has to finally perfect this system. The Government does not have the political will to do it; we will do it. So we have to ensure that we get these Bills and bring them back to the Parliament and whether they want to partake... They are not going to be allowed to dilate in this Select Committee because they do not have the majority.

You decide what you want to do. We have to pass all of the Bills and I will tell you this: the whole idea of the Local Government Commission is to really reduce the Minister’s power in the Local Government System. The Minister interferes in everything. That is why we want to transfer most of that power to the Commission. This is what they did in that Commission with the Commission Act: They have made provision for the President to appoint the entire Commission because the President, in a commission of six, appoints three in his own deliberate judgment, two after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition and one the Minister appointed. In other words it is a “69”. We are going to change this. We are going to put a proper Commission in place so that we can go forward with the local democracy.

They stymied the whole process for Fiscal Transfers. They have absolutely no intension of seeding that kind of financial control to the people in their communities. Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, it took us about seven years to get them to talk about increasing the subvention to the NDCs. Across the board they are allocating \$3 million to 65 NDCs irrespective of the size of the NDC, the population of the NDC, the resources of the NDC; just a blanket \$3 million across the board. It appears to me that the PPP likes this \$3 million figure. Does it ring a bell to you, Mr. Speaker – \$3 million for a whole NDC? They cannot do anything with it and then \$3 million as pension for somebody. They like this “\$3 million thing”. So if a man can get \$3 million as pension how could \$3 million satisfy the requirements of an NDC? How could it? They keep

stymieing our discussions. No matter what we try to do to increase it they stymie it and then on the garnering side they finally agree that we could do certain money raising and certain financial increasing revenue measures – we could adopt certain measures. Do you know what they did at the end of the day? We could raise all of these things, we could do all of these things but with the concurrence of the Minister. So it is the same way we are and we have to change that because we want genuine local democracy for the Guyanese people.

At the end of the day I am respectfully submitting that the PPP/C Government is totally disinterested in moving the local democracy forward. We on this side of the House are resolved that power must go the Guyanese people in the communities in which they live. I am recommending that we will not allow them to come every year and continue to postpone the elections. This must be the final year. We want the Local Government Elections this year because we do not only want to beat you at the top; we want to beat you at the bottom too. That is what we want to do. So, this is the only occasion that we are going to say “okay, allow them to pass this time but they have good warning that we are not going to allow that to happen again.” If we are going to postpone the election it has to be because of general elections.

Otherwise to that the Local Government Act was passed, the Fiscal Transfers Act was passed and the Local Authority Elections Amendment Act must pass. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
[Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Williams.

Mr. Nadir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First let me offer my congratulations to the Hon. Member, Mr. Bulkan, on his maiden presentation and while we listened attentively, because he just arrived on the scene, he has a lot of shortcomings in terms of how the history has been written, a lot of short comings, but he did have a very steady presentation and we on this side commend the Hon. Member... *[Interruption by Members of the Opposition]*

Mr. Speaker: It is after 11.00 p.m., could we allow the Hon. Member to complete his presentation?

Mr. Nadir: We really like his enthusiasm of wanting to move the process forward. I will advise the Hon. Member that moving the process forward has to start among the Members on that side

which he sits. He has to get them to the table... [Mrs. Backer: Who is "He"?] I did mention "Hon. Member"...and he has to get them to move this process forward.

11.13 p.m.

I, like many of the Members who have seen this seventeen-year period to hold Local Government Elections, have had to go through this ritual, this pilgrimage, as the last speaker, the Hon. Member Mr. Williams, said. But why we are here is because of the actions of the other side – the People's National Congress Reform and then the People's National Congress Reform – 1 Guyana. Now, I hope with the new dispensation, A Partnership for National Unity (APNU), it will move the process forward.

Let us go back a bit in the history. The one person in this country who, perhaps, can sit, eye to eye, with the experts on local government on this side name is Mr. Vincent Alexander. He used to sit at the front here. The process of the task force, Hon. Member Mr. Bulkan, was moving forward. Why? Mr. Alexander not only has the academics, but the experience in local government reform. When he started to make decisions in the task force in the interest of the country and the reform, which went counter to the Leader of the People's National Congress, the party withdrew him from the task force and replaced him, with whom? It was the Hon. Member Mr. Basil Williams, who sits opposite me. So there was that going to for and fro. We had an experience just now when the Hon. Member got up under Standing Order 48 on a Point of Order. He just pulls things out of the air. I know he does not do that in court, and this National Assembly deserves as much as he gives his paying clients, in terms of his representation of the people – as much as! [An Hon. Member: Are you sure you want to say that?] Yes! I heard that he is a good lawyer and he works for his money, but Standing Order 48 has nothing to do with the issue for which he stood, and Standing Order 40 (1)....

Mr. Speaker: Are you rising on a Point of Order, Mr. Williams?

Mr. B. Williams: It is on the Point of Order which I stood up for earlier, on Standing Order 40 (a).

Mr. Nadir: ...has no subsection one.

Mr. B. Williams: It is because he is sitting at the back. When he was sitting in the front benches...

Mr. Nadir: Mr. Speaker, he said Standing Order 48.

Mr. Speaker: I cannot allow you all to have this path. Are you rising on a Point of Order, Mr. Williams?

Mr. B. Williams: I am on a Point of Order.

Mr. Speaker: If it is on a Point of Order...please sit.

Mr. Nadir: You have to sit when the Speaker is talking.

Mr. Speaker: What is the Point of Order?

Mr. B. Williams: The Standing Order that I relied on was Standing Order 40 (a), and because his hearing is apparently impaired, he is saying it is Standing Order 48. I cannot do anything about that, but I will ask him to withdraw his remarks.

Mr. Speaker: You rose on a point to elucidation, but let us proceed.

Mr. Nadir: The Hon. Member stands here, every time we have this Bill, and he paints this story that it is the Government that does not want local government reform. So in the last Parliament we said, "Let us put the Bills in a Special Select Committee." That Committee was nominated. We sat time after time. The Hon. Member, in the corridor, said to me, "If you all are so interested, bring it and what we do not like we will object to. Bring it he said why wait?", and so we went into a Special Select Committee. When we were about to bring the report – if the attendance of the people who are now calling for speedy introduction and local government reforms now is checked - ... Check the representation they brought. When, in June, we said, "Yes. We are going to bring it here," and the first report was tabled, we had the call. The National Assembly does not work on these discussions alone. It works on consultations. We had a call from the Leader of the People's National Congress asking for us, once again, to re-engage – after we have done all that work in Special Select Committee. I am telling you from first-hand experience, because I was there. The Hon. Member who spoke before me cannot speak from first-hand experience because he was hardly there. He was hardly there.

So we went into the recess in August, 2010 and as we re-emerged from that we entered into this new... But we are prepared, as the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan said, to bring those Bills back right away and let us move forward with them, because we are confident that, while this National Assembly has a particular makeup, further elections will see who is responsible and who has the nation's interest at heart first, and we can see, and we will see, massive reversals.

I stand in support of the Hon. Minister for the postponement of these elections and I join with every other Member who said let us get the reform re-tabled and finish with the expedition. It is not that on one hand expedition is called for and when ready to reach to make a decision, "not yet" is said. We call them the "not yetters" and the "yes butters". So let us move forward, put them here and have them so that we can see Local Government Elections be held under this new system of reform which the five Bills addressed.

Before I sit, I want to deal with one issue. We are hearing the issue of the Local Government Commission will produce a budget that will be funded by the Consolidated Fund. That is what the first speaker, the Hon. Member Mr. Bulkan, said that the task force said. It is not that easy always to translate proposals to funding. Mr. Speaker, you have been in a particular reform commission and you know the kind of work which had to be done to get those into law. So the Members, on the other side, criticise the fact that a Member from the Ministry of Finance should be on this Commission. We hear the Parliament Office wants to do its own budget and send it on. We hear this Commission wants to do that. In the end, we better do not have a Minister of Finance, because people will be taxed out of the country, because there has to be a responsible way of spending the limited dollars that we collect. So there has to be, in that arrangement, some mechanism for the vetting and consultations for budget, as goes on now. We have to be careful.

These are where some of the inertia exists so that progress cannot be as swift as we want. If what I am hearing here tonight is an indication that we really want these Bills to be passed as soon as possible and go to Local Government Elections, this side of the House, the Government side, your right hand side ..., and there are only two sides, the Government side and the Opposition side. There are not three sides as far as I know.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. G. Persaud (replying): I wish to commend and thank all the Hon. Members who would have spoken on the Bill, and I wish to point out a few bits based on comments that were made.

One, I am certain that the Hon. Member Mr. Bulkan is very much cognizant of the legal framework in which local government operates in Guyana in comparison to federal systems operating in the wider world.

The Hon. Member Mr. Basil Williams stated that His Excellency the then President Bharrat Jagdeo intervened in the work of the task force. I wish to remind the Hon. Member that both of us were members of that task force and both of us were present at the last meeting of that task force where a decision was taken that we were at a deadlock stage and it could not have proceeded further with its work. A decision was taken to inform the then Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Robert Corbin, and the then President, His Excellency Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, of the decision and that was the end of the task force. Nobody hijacked anything. **[Mr. B. Williams: You have forgotten.]** As I said, we were there.

I also wish to state that the Hon. Member Mr. Basil Williams stated that it is the Government side that has brought slothfulness into the process of treating with the Bills through the Ninth Parliament. At the Special Select Committee which was dealing with the Fiscal Transfer Bill, many times, and consecutively, Opposition Members absented themselves. They withdrew their attendance from the Committee. So, how now...? I am happy to hear that the Hon. Members echoing their eagerness to move through the process. I have heard it here in the Chamber so it is not hearsay. That is indeed very heartening to us on the Government side and I think it is good for Guyana.

I wish to share one more bit with us. Guyana, in 2010, was preparing for Local Government Elections. That was in 2010. There was a meeting between the then President, His Excellency Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, and the then Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Robert Corbin when it was decided that all the reform draft legislation should be approved by the House and then we can proceed with Local Government Elections. It must be noted that the Guyana Elections Commission was in high preparedness for Local Government Elections 2010, to the extent that claims and objections were done to facilitate those elections. So the willingness and the readiness

of the Government side, in terms of moving towards the holding of Local Government Elections, cannot be disputed and cannot be questioned accurately.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much, once again, for your patience during the debate on this Bill so far and I thank all Members who would have spoken. I urge that we now accept the amendment as proposed in Bill No. 2. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, do you wish to ask that the Bill be read?

Mr. G. Persaud: Yes Mr. Speaker. I wish to move that the Bill be read for the second time.

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Hinds: I rise to move that the House be adjourned to a date to be fixed when, more than likely, the budget will be read.

Ms. Ally: I rise to move an amendment to the motion moved by the Hon. Prime Minister. We have business of this National Assembly to deal with. As a matter of fact, there are motions which will mature on the 19th March, 2012 and I want to propose an amendment that the House be adjourned to Wednesday, 21st March, 2012 so that those motions can be discussed.

Mr. B. Williams: If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker, I beg to second that motion to amend.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, there is a motion on the floor for the House to be adjourned to a date certain, that is, the 21st of March. Wednesday next it is, which is an Opposition Member's day, I believe.

Question put, and agreed to.

Motion carried.

Mr. Speaker: The House is adjourned to Wednesday, 21st March, 2012.

Adjourned accordingly at 11.31 p.m.