

# 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*

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9<sup>TH</sup> Sitting

Thursday, 12<sup>TH</sup> April, 2012

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*Assembly convened at 1.10 p.m.*

*Prayers*

*[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]*

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER**

### **Thanking the Deputy Speaker**

**Mr. Speaker:** Good afternoon Hon. Members. There are a number of announcements.

Firstly, I would like to thank the Hon. Member Mrs. Deborah Jan Backer, Deputy Speaker, for presiding over the Assembly yesterday. From all reports, everything went better than when I am here. Thank you Mrs. Backer.

### **Training for Parliamentary Staff**

**Mr. Speaker:** The second announcement that I wish to make is that the Parliament of the United Kingdom, through the good offices of the British High Commission, Georgetown, has granted the National Assembly two spaces at an upcoming programme on parliamentary democracy for attached Clerks and senior officers. The programme is being conducted at the British High Commission from 23<sup>rd</sup> April to 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 2012 and the Assembly has suggested the names of two persons to represent it. I believe that it is worthy to note that the British Government is fully funding the participation of one candidate coming from this Assembly. I wish to take this

opportunity to thank both Her Majesty's Government and our own Government of Guyana for collaborating to realise a vision of a highly trained and motivated parliamentary staff. The names of those persons will be released later.

### **Publication and presentation of book by Rev. Dr. Kwame Gilbert**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thirdly, the Hon. Member Rev. Dr. Kwame Gilbert, has published a book, aptly entitled *Transformational Leadership*. I have been reading it and I recommend it highly. At 4.00 p.m., at the break, the Hon. Member will be presenting copies of his book to the parliamentary library and the press is invited to witness the event, and any other member may be present. I take the opportunity, as well, to encourage all Members of Parliament and staff, and all those with an interest in parliamentary democracy and governance issues, to share their writings with the library and I would love to facilitate formal or ceremonial handing over of such material.

### **Visit by the Students of Camilles Academy**

**Mr. Speaker:** Fourthly, we have with us, this afternoon, thirteen students of Camilles Academy, located at Soesdyke, and their teacher. Could they please stand as we recognise them and give them a good National Assembly courteous welcome? Thank you for coming.

### **Dress Code**

**Mr. Speaker:** Owing to many phone calls, emails and other entreaties that I have received from members of the public, I wish to remind Hon. Members that there is a dress code in effect. Also, Members are reminded that no food or drink is allowed in the Chamber, or is to be consumed in the Chamber. Only the water provided by the Assembly should be consumed. I have had recourse to Parliaments around the world and it is the same. However, if a Member has medicinal needs, or any other requirements, and wishes a dispensation, I will be more than willing to accommodate that Member.

### **Reading of Speech by Members of the National Assembly**

**Mr. Speaker:** Lastly, Members are being reminded, and again I have been approached by many members of the public, that reading of speech is unparliamentary, though you may refer to your notes, but we expect that you will, to the best of your ability, not read your speech.

The Clerk just reminded me that reading can be done with my permission. Permission ought to be sought. Thank you Mr. Isaacs.

**MOTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OR SITTINGS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND MOVED BY A MINISTER**

**SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO. 71 (2)**

WHEREAS Standing Order No. 71 (2) provides for five (5) days to be allotted for the debate on a motion for the approval of the Estimates of Revenues and Expenditure;

AND WHEREAS it is anticipated that the five days allotted by Standing Order No. 71 (2) would be inadequate for the debate on the motion for the approval of the 2012 Estimates of Revenues and Expenditures;

AND WHEREAS recognising that time was limited, the Government at a meeting of the Parliamentary Management Committee on March 28, 2012 proposed that the sitting commence at 10 a.m. and conclude at 10 p.m.;

AND WHEREAS the APNU proposed that the sittings commence at 1 p.m. and conclude at 10 p.m., and the said meeting of the Parliamentary Management Committee agreed to proceed with the APNU's proposition for the period of the general debate of Budget 2012;

AND WHEREAS in response to a request of the Opposition for a further extension of time to six (6) days instead of five (5), the Government agreed to propose that the debate be extended accordingly,

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That Standing Order No. 71 (2) be suspended to enable the debate on the motion for the approval of the Estimates of Revenues and Expenditures for the year 2012 to be extended to six (6) days.” *[Prime Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs]*

**Prime Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs [Mr. Hinds]:** This motion comes to this House with the support of all of the parties and it stands in my name. It is a simple motion

that “WHEREAS Standing Order No. 71 (2) provides for five (5) days to be allotted for the debate on a motion for the approval of the Estimates of Revenues and Expenditure;”

We had some discussions at the Parliamentary Management Committee. It was felt that five days would be inadequate. The Government had proposed that, maybe, we considered meeting from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. over five days but that was not convenient, and not supported by the other parties. There was a proposal from the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) to go from 1 p.m. to 10 p.m., which has been useful. Up to now we have not been going later than, maybe, 10.30 p.m. to 10.45 p.m., but there is still the need for an extra day and so the Government is proposing that we suspend Standing Order No. 71 (2) so as to allow for a sixth day during this debate. I so move and I expect that the other parties would support it.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Prime Minister, there is one small correction. The proposal for 1 p.m. was made by me, as Speaker, which the APNU agreed to.

**Ms. Ally:** I rise to second the motion, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** I believe that the motion is self-explanatory. Given the nature of the Tenth Parliament and the budget before us, it is that we go for six days as against five days.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

*Standing Order suspended.*

## **PUBLIC BUSINESS**

### **GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

#### **MOTION**

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

“WHEREAS the Constitution of Guyana requires that Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of Guyana for any financial year should be laid before the National Assembly;

AND WHEREAS the Constitution also provides that when the Estimates of Expenditure have been approved by the Assembly an Appropriation Bill shall be introduced in the Assembly providing for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet that expenditure;

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

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

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

*Assembly resumed budget debate.*

**Dr. Roopnarine:** Allow me, Mr. Speaker, before I begin my contribution to the Budget 2012 debate, to join with my honourable friend, Mrs. Indranie Chandarpal, in extending congratulations to the young women Members of Parliament, in particular Hon. Member Dr. Persaud, Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson and Hon. Member Ms. Marcello, who have enriched this honourable House with their fluency, grace and feeling. **[An Hon. Member:** What about the men? Why are you discriminating?] I am discriminating.

As I listened to the Hon. Minister that Friday afternoon, at the end of March, it occurred to me that he was not at his most energetic. I missed the flamboyance and the sheer physicality, not to mention the histrionics, of previous performances, as we saw most recently in his spirited, creative defence of Financial Papers Nos. 7 and 8. When I saw the Hon. Minister a few days later, more recently, in the course of a televised press conference with three of his colleague Ministers, it was in a kind of preemptive, anticipatory defence of Budget 2012, and I thought that he was more of himself – upbeat, exuberant, argumentative and combat-ready. He even set up

some straw men whom he proceeded to knock over with relish. Of course, he was, no doubt, that Friday, constrained, somewhat, by the podium from which, traditionally, the Minister of Finance delivers his budget. There could, of course, be any number of explanations for the subdued, almost mechanical manner of the Hon. Minister's delivery that day. It was only when I read and studied the budget speech in print, and set it alongside the 2011 budget speech, that I found what seemed, to me, to be the source of the unease. The answer is to be found in the ten paragraphs of the introduction that stands at the threshold of the document, paragraphs 1.2 to 1.11.

The first of the ten paragraphs, 1.2, after the ritual words of the opening sentence, opens with what is perhaps the most awkward sentence in the entire document and I quote:

“That this Budget comes to this Honourable House at an important juncture in our country's still youthful history must surely be an understatement of itself significant proportions.”

I had to read that several times to understand, not what it was saying, but why it was saying such a simple thing in such a convoluted way. Put more simply: The Tenth Parliament has come out of a historical conjuncture of great importance. This has been duly noted by His Excellency in his address to this honourable House and has attracted a small acreage of newsprint in the media. The assertions, however, of the two final sentences in the paragraph are not as incontestable. This is what he said:

“We sit in a Parliament that was elected just four months ago, by a process that reaffirmed our country's strong and rapidly maturing democracy and that displayed the continuing resolve of the Guyanese People to embrace democratic norms.”

Maturing, yes, but I do not know about rapidly. Swept forward by the rhetorical surge, he went on to say:

“We would all be justified in feeling pride and satisfaction at the smooth conduct of the 2011 general and regional elections, as yet another manifestation of the strength of our democratic institutions and the entrenchment of our democratic traditions.”

My honourable friend, it seems to me, was carried away, and over speaking. Besides, he must also know that he was making an assertion that was out of step with expressed opinion

emanating from the highest office in the land. I assume that the text of the budget speech has had Cabinet clearance. Are there two opposing views of the conduct of the 2011 Elections and the Cabinet? If this is so, and it is a sign of a new pluralism in that notoriously disciplined environment, it would be a healthy thing. The new political configuration is a “domestic novelty”, he told us. This most interesting paragraph has already attracted the attention of a number of Hon. Members, among them my honourable friend, Mr. Keith Scott and the Hon. Member Dr. Rev. Gilbert, who even managed to give it a scriptural cadence. It is worth rereading:

“The political configuration that emerged from the 2011 elections, whereby the Party in Government does not hold a clear legislative majority, is a domestic novelty even if similar situations have been experienced by other democracies the world over. This arrangement beckons our country into a new political epoch and heralds an opportunity for the nurturing of a new political culture. The prevailing dispensation will test and hopefully prove our resolve as a People, and within this House our respective will to serve as responsible representatives of a deserving People, to work together in service to the cause of national development.”

Let us admit at once that it has become something of a ritual over the years – a hollow ritual – this call for togetherness and partnership. In ten short paragraphs enjoining us to work together is repeated no less than three times, not that this is anything so new. Last year, it was even elevated to the grand guiding theme of the budget speech – *Together Building Guyana’s Tomorrow, Today*. Not unexpectedly, this drew several expressions of skepticism and “suck teeth” - I do not believe this is on the list of prohibited words, Mr. Speaker - from Hon. Members on this side of the House. The comment from the Hon. Member Mrs. Volda Lawrence was typical, and I quote:

“The truth is...”

Said the Hon. Member Mrs. Lawrence.

“...that together has never been a part of the PPP/C’s Government in action. We have a society that shows clear signs of division.”

The Hon. Member is reported in the *Hansard* as stating her party’s belief:

“Guyana’s economic viability can only be realised if every group, representative of all the segments of our Guyanese society, is involved in the decision making process and are beneficiaries of the economic gains. It is the only way that all Guyanese can claim ownership and, thereby, “Together”, truly Build Tomorrow’s Guyana Today.”

In the ensuing debate, my friend, the Hon. Minister Robert Persaud, dutifully intoned the mantra that Budget 2011:

“...offered an opportunity for all Guyanese, notwithstanding our political and other affiliations and allegiances, to work together...”

But it was the Hon. Minister Priya Manickchand - I am sorry that she is not here - in her own exhortation who spelt out clearly what the Government really meant by togetherness. The Hon. Member is recorded in the *Hansard* as follows:

“We do not want to leave anyone back in this process and we believe that with the collaboration of the best in Guyana, better can be done for all of our people. We invite most of the Members to come with us in this House, join our hands and help us to deliver service to our people, the Guyanese people; the people who voted for the PPP/C and the people who voted for the PNC/R – 1G, as well as the small number of persons who voted for the AFC. We are saying come with us and work with us so that we can secure Guyana’s tomorrow. We are also saying that if persons come to this House with rhetoric and they do not really want to work, the PPP/C will go it alone and deliver the services to the people of Guyana.”

I hope not. Nothing could be clearer. Working together was to be understood as endorsing the policies and programmes of the Government that were presumably written in stone, and dutifully falling in line, to work along with it to execute those policies and programmes. We are in the Hon. Minister’s debt for such a frank and guileless interpretation of togetherness. Of course, going it alone had been the option from October 1992 to October 2011 – the 19 years when the PPP/C enjoyed and exercised majority control of this honourable House. Togetherness then, as the Hon. Minister Manickchand made clear, was a take it or leave it invitation to the Opposition parties in this House. The Hon. Minister of Finance is canny enough to understand that the domestic novelty has ushered in a new dispensation where going it alone is no longer an easy or



even achievable option. Working together is no longer a ritual gesture of condescension and hospitality to well behaved guests. Instead, it heralds a new political epoch and an opportunity for nurturing a new political culture.

Allow me, Mr. Speaker, to assure my honourable friend that in the work of building a new political culture over the days, weeks, months and years to come, we, on this side of the House, will not be found wanting. It is a patriotic project that has been too long delayed and I daresay would have been even longer deferred were it not for the new configuration of this honourable House. What was once an aspiration, a desirable objective for which some of us have argued and pleaded in vain for many decades, is now a practical imperative. The Hon. Minister and party and Government, on whose behalf he speaks, understand this very well even if they continue to display, in too many instances, a stubborn refusal or inability to break with the old habits that were acquired over nineteen years of one-party rule. But break with them they must, if the talk of a new political culture is to be more than talk.

I agree wholeheartedly with the Hon. Minister when he speaks of the new dispensation testing and hopefully proving our resolve as a people. I trust that he will wholeheartedly agree with me when I say that it will test and prove the resolve of both sides of this honourable House. He is right to alert us all – those of us on this side and, no less, his colleagues on the other side – that as much as the current dispensation provides opportunities so it is fraught with formidable challenges. I give him and all of my honourable friends on the Government benches the fullest assurance that we, on this side, will seize the opportunities and rise to the challenges, however formidable.

As it is well known to all and sundry, near and far, APNU campaigned long and hard throughout the length and breadth of Guyana on a platform of a government of national unity. We are the last people, who need to be persuaded that there is no higher duty than combining our energies to heal the divisions that have plagued our people since the derailing by the colonial powers of our national democratic revolution in October of 1953.

The Hon. Minister, in fairness, did not go that far and I do not want to put words in his mouth, but I choose to believe that what he may be urging for the immediate and short-term, namely the

attitude towards Budget 2012, has a resonance for the long-term and the future of the national movement.

“Our quest,” he said, “...for lasting solutions would have to be dominated not by partisan agendas but by rational and meritocratic considerations, driven less by our impulsive instinct and more by our careful and deliberate judgment...”

For this commendable exhortation to have the effect, the Hon. Minister intended, there must be no deaf ears on either side of this House. The Hon. Minister must take the lead over the next few days and weeks to ensure that as he enjoins all of his “colleagues in this honourable House never to lose sight of the need for good sense and practical answers, guided always by that which is fair and just and with but one aim constantly in mind and that is to ensure the uninterrupted daily advancement of our beloved country.”

I am confident that we, on this side, intend to be so guided. Should our colleagues on the other side be similarly guided, we are in for the most constructive of budget debates that will not only ease your own burdens, Mr. Speaker, but, more importantly, will demonstrate the good sense and maturity of our political leadership and in the words of the Hon. Minister:

“The clearest signal of all must come from those of us in this honourable House whose legislative agenda will chart the course for our country, whose cohesiveness will set the tone for all else in our nation, and whose every decision must be consistent with and never deviate from keeping our country and the path to a brighter tomorrow for all.”

I have chosen to begin where I began, with my thoughts on the implications of the introduction to budget speech, because it sets out, at times tentatively, at times less reservedly, the political conditions necessary for the achievement of its aims. I regret to say that from all that we have been hearing these past two days, with one or two exceptions, those political conditions are yet to come into being. I am nevertheless hopeful, and I encourage my honourable friend, Mr. Nanda Gopaul, not to lose hope so soon, that all is not lost and that when we come to the consideration of the Estimates, in the Committee of Supply, we will all be guided by the thing that matters most and should matter most – the well being of our young people, our young men and women, of our hard pressed working people, of our public sector workers, of our sugar and bauxite

workers, of our farmers, of our teachers, of our nurses, of our office workers and of the most vulnerable among us.

I now wish to turn to some of the areas in the budget speech where I intend to share some of my observations with this honourable House. Let me begin with Chapter 4, “Other Institutional Reforms”, section H (e) – “Governance”, paragraphs 4.1 and 4.2 on page 59. In the organisation of the document this section immediately precedes Chapter 5 - “Targets for 2012.” Implicit in this strategic textual location is the implicit recognition that the targets that are being aimed at require, as a condition of their realisation, a particular governance environment. This makes it all the more disappointing to find, instead of a frank appraisal of the plethora of defects and deficiencies in our governance systems, appraisal of the Government’s success in:

“Enhancing the democratic governance of our society at all levels, political, economic and administrative.”

In the face of constant and consistent complaints from citizens and organisations that find themselves excluded and marginalised, we are told that:

“Inclusivity and participatory democracy remain entrenched in Guyana’s governance model.”

Tell that to the workers in trade unions who have lost the right to free collective bargaining; tell it to the bauxite workers who are being denied the right to belong to the trade union of their choice by an employer who is openly contemptuous of the laws of Guyana; tell it to the student, workers and staff of the University of Guyana who are clamouring for a council that will be representative of more than one political interest; tell it to the citizens of Linden who are objectively marginalised when they are excluded from the national community by being deprived of the right to freely chose a television channel other than the Government-controlled National Communications Network (NCN).

What is clear is that the Hon. Minister set great store by the model. In the final paragraph the word occurs three times in one sentence:

“As Guyanese, we should continue to be proud of the governance model which is a truly unique model in the Caribbean region and the government continues its commitment in

2012 to place emphasis on the consolidation of these gains, the evolving process of transformation and the sustainability of this model.”

The model is one thing. Truth to live and living experience is another. Last night I received a note from a brother that drew my attention to a line from Thomas Paine’s pamphlet of 1776, *Common Sense*. Thomas Paine was writing in the strife ridden period that ended the long night of monarchical tyranny and resonated far and wide, laying the foundation of the modern democratic state. Thomas Paine noted that:

“A long habit of not thinking a thing wrong gives a superficial appearance of being right.”

*1.40 p.m.*

The fact is that we, in this honorable House, since 1994, have acknowledged that all is not right with our governmental system. It was in 1994 when the first Parliamentary Standing Committee for Constitutional Reform was established under the very able chairmanship of former Attorney General, the honourable Bernard DeSantos. It was a misfortune that the work of this first Parliamentary Standing Committee for Constitutional Reform was over-taken by the 1997 Elections. [Ms. Teixeira: The People’s National Congress (PNC) did not want to be a part of it. You know that. The PNC did not want to be a part of it. It did not agree to the constitutional reform.] All I can remember, Mr. Speaker, is that, I myself, served very diligently on it. It was a misfortune that the work of the Parliamentary Standing Committee was overtaken by the 1997 Elections, although the party I represented on the Committee, the Working People’s Alliance, cautioned, at the time, against entering the 1997 Elections without putting in place what we called reconciliation mechanisms. I would be very happy to provide my honourable friend, Member of Parliament, Hon. Ms. Gail Teixeira with the documents of this period, although I know that she is very thorough in her own archiving. It was not for the first or the last time our warnings went unheeded.

The 1997 Elections came and went and the rest, as it is said, is history. In the course of the convulsions that followed the elections, the Hermanston Accord came into being, in January of 1998. By the middle of the year, the measures of the accord had not achieved the political calm that its architects intended. The ongoing tensions and confrontations led to direct discussions

between the leaders of the major political parties facilitated by the CARICOM Heads of Government at their meeting in St. Lucia, in July of that year. This encounter yielded the St. Lucia Agreement and it was not until February of 1999, one year later, that the central measure of the Hermanston Accord was put into operation, the Constitutional Reform Commission. I recall this part of our recent history for the benefit, especially, of the younger Members of this House. The Hon. Minister is right to say..., as he did in paragraph 1.5 of his introduction, that his use of the words, “uncharted waters,” to describe our present situation as one “uncontemplated by the architects of our extant Constitutional and legislative framework.” This is all the more reason why I find his description of our governance model as unique, somewhat complacent, although I am consoled by the Government’s commitment to the evolving process of transformation and the sustainability of this model. Although it is difficult to reconcile this commitment, to what the Minister called an “evolving process of transformation”, with the woeful inactivity of the Parliamentary Standing Committee for Constitutional Reform, throughout the Eighth and Ninth Parliaments, given the defects of the aberrations in our systems of governance, this should have been the busiest of Parliamentary Standing Committees, established on the recommendation of the Constitutional Reform Commission. In fact, it was the least active. We must ready ourselves, in this Tenth Parliament, to identify and remedy these defects. We are of the view, in APNU, that this House should move urgently to establish a new Constitutional Review Commission to democratise, widen and deepen the work of the Standing Committee.

Let us face it, in terms of our governing systems, what is truly unique in the Caribbean region, is that our Service Commissions - the Public Service Judicial, Police and Teaching Services - are less than the sturdily, constitutionally, protected and independent bodies that they were designed to be. To this list I would add the Audit Office, the Judiciary and the Guyana Elections Commission. How can these institutions enjoy full independence when they are reduced to budget agencies in violation of the explicit intent of the Constitution? Where pray is the Integrity Commission, the Ethnic Relations Commission, and beggaring belief, are we ever to establish the long sought after Procurement Commission? What of the Appellate Tribunals demanded by the Constitution? Nor is there a single word in this section on governance nor is there a single word of mention of the bedrock on which our representative democracy rests - the Local Government system. Let no more time be lost in the enactment of the legislation to complete the

reform of the system, so that we can ensure that the citizens of Guyana, in the villages and the towns, once more enjoy the right to elect their local representatives. I believe on this we have unanimous agreement in this House.

Nor should we fail to obey article 122 of the Constitution that states: “There shall be an Ombudsman for Guyana.” The Ombudsman, Mr. Speaker, is charged, as you know, with defending citizens against what the Constitution calls “sustained injustice in consequence of a fault of administration.” No Governmental authority is exempt - not the President, not the Ministers, no department or authority. No model can be satisfactory if it fails and fails to provide such a safeguard. Where else in the Caribbean region is there an acting Chief Justice, an acting Chancellor, and acting Auditor General? Where else in the Caribbean is there a Deeds Registry that has been without a confirmed Registrar of Deeds since 1992? This appointment was overlooked by four successive Ministers of Legal Affairs and I trust that my friend, the honourable Attorney General, is going to pay attention to the Deeds Registry. I should leave it to my colleague, the Hon. shadow Minister of Legal Affairs, to dilate further on the slum to which the Registrar of Deeds has been reduced.

I have not spoken of the domination of the state television and radio by the governing party, surely an anachronism in any modern society, a vestige of party paramountcy and control that belongs to a long discredited model that endures and is still being justified by some of the very people who fought long and hard against these things in the past.

There is no mention, within the section of governance, of another crucial institution that is crying out for reform - the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM). The matter of the reform of GECOM, including the secretariat, is on the agenda of the Inter-parliamentary Party Dialogue of which the Hon. Minister makes hopeful reference in paragraph 1.6 of the introduction. I also hope that all the parties in this House will honour the commitment they made by unanimously adopting the final report of the oversight committee of 2000 to complete the electoral system reform that was overtaken by the “Hermanston Elections” of March 2001, but which has languished in its *ad hoc* improvised form since then, governing the elections of 2006 and 2011.

For how long are we going to keep up the charade that the ten administrative regions are electoral constituencies? The citizens of Guyana, unlike the citizens anywhere else in the

anglophone Caribbean, do not enjoy close connectedness to a Member of Parliament that only constituency elections can bring. The Constitution permits us to demarcate and establish that most.....

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

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

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Dr. Roopnarine:** The Constitution permits us to demarcate and establish, at most, thirty-two geographic constituencies. In my own view it should have allowed many more, since no more than ten seats need to be reserved as top-up seats to correct disproportionalities that do arise from the first- past-the-post systems, but that is an argument for another place. In concluding these observations on our governance model, allow me to plead, as the Hon. Minister had pleaded in relation to Budget 2012, that all sides of this House will commit to the search for more perfect model, one which will point the way forward to the quality of governance that would provide the most enabling environment for our social and economic advancement.

I turn now to some of the specifics of the budget presentation. I turn first to agriculture. In Hon. Minister's Budget 2012 speech he told us that the "Guyana's sugar industry has the potential to achieve and sustain an annual production of 400,000 tons in the medium term." I do not know what my honourable friend's concept of the medium term is. Is it twenty-five years or thirty years? He also referred to value added products such as extra processed, refined and bagged sugars, which he forecast will achieve a profitable and competitive industry in the long run. I would return to this subject if I have the time later.

Only five lines lower, however, he said, "we are now in the position now to remain cautiously optimistic with respect to the industry." Optimism, cautious or incautiousness should be founded on reality, and the reality of the sugar industry, as we all agree, is harsh. Where are the indications, past or present, which can justify the optimism of any variety? In his 2011 presentation he told this honourable House, and the nation, that Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) would produce two hundred and ninety-eight thousand eight hundred and seventy-nine tons. In fact the industry produced two hundred and thirty-seven thousand tons, twenty-six

per cent short of his estimate. He told us that at Skeldon it would have achieved its full potential by the second crop of 2011; it did not, and, in fact, produced less sugar than the Albion, Blairmount and Rose Hall estates. The Minister must know that as recently, as 2004, the industry produced three hundred and twenty-five thousand one hundred and fifty-nine tons of sugar.

**Mr. Speaker:** Is there a phone near to you, Dr. Roopnarine? Is there a telephone or something...

**Dr. Roopnarine:** No.

**Mr. Speaker:** Something is causing a disturbance to your microphone? Is it a bug?

**Dr. Roopnarine:** Do you want to carry out a security check, Mr. Speaker?

**Mr. Speaker:** Proceed.

**Dr. Roopnarine:** In fact the industry produced not two hundred and ninety-eight thousand eight hundred and seventy-nine tons, but roughly two hundred and thirty-seven thousand tons, twenty-six per cent short of the estimate. He told us that Skeldon would achieve its full potential by the second crop of 2011; it did not. The Minister must know that as recently as of 2004 the industry produced three hundred and twenty-five thousand one hundred and twenty-five tons of sugar and it has been on a downward spiral since then, producing in 2011 two hundred and thirty-seven thousand tons, which is thirty-seven per cent less than 2004. So to be told in 2012 that the industry would produce 5.7 per cent more in 2012 than in 2011 is not compelling or is impressive, as it was designed to sound. All verifiable indications in the industry point not to recovery, but to continuing decline. Now that the ailing industry comes under the purview of the former Minister of Health, perhaps we will get the most scientific diagnosis of the ailment and the explanation of why the past and current prescriptions are not having the effect of restoring the patient to full and good health. No one wants the industry to fail, and the least that can be said is that the GuySuCo's Board of Director has shown no particular creativity in managing this ailing company that, for all the well known reasons, remains of properly enduring importance to this nation.

Given everything that we have heard on the crisis of the sugar industry and fully accepting that there is a matter of vital national interest, I wish to recommend that this House considers the establishment of a special select committee dedicated to a careful examination of the industry.



On rice, the Hon. Minister was extravagant in his praise of the Government for the wonderful job it is doing to assist the rice producers. It is a happy and welcomed fact that rice is faring well. The reasons may have less to do with the Government's efforts and more to do with the fact that demands for the commodity are rising due to rises in the price. We need to face up to the fact that there are huge gaps between the agricultural practices of the Guyana rice farmer and his counterpart in other countries. We need to acknowledge that the yield of the Guyana farmers is not on the middle scale much less the high scale production of fifty bags an acre. [Ms Ally: Is it fifty bags?] That is the high scale.

The other point I want to make is that there is little support, it seems, from the Ministry of Agriculture regarding new varieties or booklets updating the farmers on the result of fresh research on what is the best fertiliser regimes to use in different locales, since it is now established that certain areas along the coast require different fertiliser regimes. For example, certain areas may not require potassium or phosphate, while others do and in some areas there may be a need to apply more nitrogen. But this information has not apparently been trickling down to the farmers who are fertilising at the same level in Berbice as in Essequibo. National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI) is conspicuously silent on advising them on newer and better rice farming practices. I want to skip what I have to say on other crops for the moment. I will be very happy to pass the information to the Minister of Agriculture.

I want to go on to the mining because I think that there are particular dangers, but before I do let me touch on the environment. The budget does not provide a proper picture of the needs for effective management of the environment and our natural resources, which is supposedly the grand design of the new Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. There are no provisions identified for the management of waste generated by Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDC) and municipalities. How could the Hon. Minister, Mr. Irfaan Ali, speak on the development of tourism when no sums have been allocated for environmental improvement? Considerations should be given to having the funds generated by the taxes on plastic bottles be allocated by the municipalities and NDCs to manage the significant waste generation problem across the country. This can be a source of job creations in these areas.

Where are the funds for upgrading the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)? The Minister claimed the EPA can respond in the event, God forbid, of an oil spill. The EPA cannot

effectively manage the dust generation problem by BOSAI in Linden, yet the Minister claims it has the capacity to manage and respond to an oil spill. The EPA must be upgraded to reflect the realities of the proposed development in the natural resources sector. The EPA should be reconstituted based on the identification of the skills appropriate to its effective functioning. These should include experts in hydrodynamics and air quality assessments. In the event of an oil spill, where would the Government of Guyana obtain the data to conduct assessment of the spilt impacts? Does the Government of Guyana have the hydrologic and atmospheric data to do so?

The reorganisation of the EPA should extend to include the Environmental Assessment Board. This Board has no concept to the mineral resources sector and has created significant delays in countless projects. The Minister should identify persons capable of effectively serving on the environmental board to ensure that they can surely comply with the Act of 1996. The absence of effective oversight in the mining sector is evidenced by the collapse of a mine high wall at RUSAL operations. There are daily reports of ground collapse in small and medium scale mining operations. Where in this budget is the money to ensure the health and safety of the individuals working in the mining sector?

The Government of Guyana has committed itself energetically to the Amalia Falls Hydropower Project. Has an assessment been conducted of the generation of green house gases, including methane, from the reservoir during its operations? It will be useful for Members of this House to be informed how that will compare with the current green house gas emissions in Guyana. This project includes clearing significant forested areas for the facility service road, transmission line and reservoir. It is important to understand by how much this would reduce the CO<sub>2</sub> sequestrations ability of Guyana, and more importantly how this would impact on fund, supposedly to come from Norway, as part of the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) programme.

In addressing the mining sector, our manifesto, *A Good Life For All Guyanese*, APNU rated highly the importance of providing dedicated training courses and facilities for the gold mining, diamond and quarrying industries in collaboration with the technical institutes, miner's association and equipment suppliers. This remains an urgent and immediate need as this expanding sector will need a commensurate expansion of technical capacity. If we are not..., as the manganese operation is being forced to do, to be importing geologist, laboratory technicians

and other skilled workers all the way from Africa and other faraway places . We stressed the need to provide incentives for the establishment in the mining sector.

I want to mention that I have noted the enthusiasm with which the Hon. Prime Minister spoke of the expansion of the bauxite sector, and, as we know, RUSAL plays a large part in this expansion. I would not mention here RUSAL's atrocious labour practices and contempt for the labour laws of our country, matters of which my colleague, the shadow Ministry of Labour, will deal with. My concern is with RUSAL's chronic and recidivist failure around the world to honour its commitments and meet the targets it signs onto. Its recent expulsion from Guinea for failing to deliver on the extravagant targets it had contractually committed to is only the most recent of its catastrophes. The Hon. Prime Minister must, I am sure, be aware of these happenings, so we urge maximum caution in any reliance in RUSAL's projections and targets. I was happy to see BOSAI's abject public apology to the citizens of Linden for the rain of dust that they have been enduring. Let us ensure that this time round BOSAI's commitment to clean up its act is more serious than last one. Now that we have facilitated BOSAI's monopoly on calcine bauxite, Hon. Prime Minister, is it our intension to release Block 37 to it? We recommend that there should be no allocation of Block 37 until a viable plan is produced that includes a large alumina plant. My recommendation is that slippages in production should be brought to the attention of this House as they occur.

We must not leave our considerations of the mining sector without expressing our concerns over what appears to be the co-option of the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) by the new Minister of Natural Resources and Environment. It has come as unwelcome news that the Hon. Minister is now chairing the weekly management committee of the GGMC's Board. It would be regrettable if the institutional framework of the GGMC and improvements in its operations and procedures that led to the acquisition of International Organization for Standardization (ISO) skaters were to be dismantled. Are there such plans afoot? Will not putting the ISO on hold erode investors' confidence? We, in the APNU, have a particular concern that our small and medium scale miners will not continue to be disadvantaged by the use of exemptions in the law where the excuse of hard rock being used to take properties away from the small and medium scale miners. What we should be doing is facilitating the process of upward movement from small to medium to large scale and to stop putting obstacles in the way.

When will there be an updating of the 1997 policy document piloted very capably by the Hon. Prime Minister? What has been the outcome of the *ad hoc* committee headed by the Hon. Minister Mr. Robeson Benn on the LCDS and mining? We cannot leave this important sector on which so much of our future hinges without urging the Hon. Minister to accelerate the work of resolving the serious conflicts which are arising in the gold industry. We would have all seen the members of Women's Miners Association standing at the police barricades with their pickets, the day before yesterday, having come to alert us about the unfairness they are being subjected to when properties on which they have worked on for years have been caught in the expansion of Amerindian lands.

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

**Ms. Ally:** I move that the Hon. Member is given ten minutes to conclude his presentation.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** It is ten minute. Is it not five minutes?

**Dr. Roopnarine:** I promise you, Mr. Speaker, I do not need all of the ten minutes.

We all have seen, as I said, the members of the Women's Miners Association standing at the police barricades with their pickets, having come to alert us of the unfairness they are being subjected to when properties on which they have worked on for years are being caught on the expansion on Amerindian lands. This is a difficult situation that needs to be urgently resolved since it throws into conflicts the rights of two of our most deserving sets of citizens, our indigenous people and the women miners. We stand ready to assist the Hon. Minister in his efforts to arrive at measures to resolve the conflict of interests, and the conflict of rights. Such a resolution must arise out of meaningful consultations and the fullest participation of the women's association for miners and the indigenous communities.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, allow me to end on the note which the Minister of finance began, by quoting what I said, when I had the honour of speaking on behalf of the Working People's Alliance (WPA) in the 1997 budget debate. I said on that occasion.

“On the threshold of a new century, I ask that we learned deeply from the lessons of the last fifty years of division in our country and understand that we cannot go forward into the next century as divided as we are as a people. We put it forward in this Assembly that what we need is a season of generosity, not a season of suspicion. We need a season of forgiveness, not a season of blaming and carping. We need to come together. People in more serious circumstances, where blood does flow like a river, have managed to come together and deal with the problems of their own country. What is the matter with us?...”

This was in 1997.

“...I ask seriously that we take seriously the challenge being put forward in the budget. I see it as a challenge, a challenge to partnership. We take that in its most profound sense, an attempt to move our country towards a positive way, so that all of our people can look forward to the next century which hopes in their hearts. Look forward to releasing the enormous talents and energies that we still have remaining in Guyana, but a lot of which has been bottled up as a result of the lack of consensus and agreement amongst the political parties.”

This was on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January 1997. We know how the year ended. It is for us in this honourable House to decide when we move forward together in conditions of mutual respect and unite in our love of country or whether we continue to make our people the victims of our own failure to bring an end to political hostilities. In this new dispensation there must be no place for the white flag of surrender. As we go forward, let the spirit of compromise prevail. Let each side of this honourable House treat respectfully with the convictions and aspirations of the other side, especially when we most disagree. Let us find the accommodations where they can be found. No white flag of surrender, only the Golden Arrowhead flying bravely in the wind above the historic Tenth Parliament.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

2.10 p.m.

**Minister of Natural Resources and Environment [Mr. Robert Persaud]:** First of all, allow me to join in commending and congratulating the Hon. Minister of Finance, my colleague, for presenting to us yet a national budget which will certainly take our country and our people forward. Also, allow me to join others in congratulating and welcoming new Members, particularly, the young Members of Parliament, male and female... [Mrs. Backer: Thank you very much.] Well, youth is a state of mind too Mrs. Backer... in being part of, certainly, which all of us have termed, this historic Parliament.

The Budget 2012 has been framed, as all of us recognised, in uncertain and certainly new political circumstances, but also in very tough global financial situations. When we go through the national budget, as some of us have done and made presentations, we will see that there are certain underlying themes; that there are certain underlying or consistent thrusts of the budget and these include fulfillment of promises and programmes that the PPP/Civic administration would have made in successive elections and more recently for the 2011 Elections; also looking in terms of modernising, transforming, the traditional sectors of our economy; also creating new opportunities and opening, as it were, new economic growth poles in our society. Very importantly too, an important thrust of the Budget 2012, has been creating or developing and enhancing a society in which we see; is much more caring, much more compassionate and providing opportunities for all of our people. These elements stand out as part of Budget 2012.

I want to quote His Excellency, our President, Donald Ramotar who said, and a theme that was repeated when he came here to the National Assembly for the opening; that “development for us is an all encompassing process and while over the years significant progress has been made in deepening and entrenching an inclusive constitutional democracy, the PPP/C remains open to working with all stakeholders including political parties, civil society and labour.”

Certainly, in pursuant of that statement and that objective of His Excellency, the Budget 2012 was also framed within that context. Within this budget and the programmes and projects adumbrated here, give us, all of us here, and those outside who are also part of the national stakeholder, an opportunity to work together for us to deliver that better life for people and to create a more stable secure and just society.

Listening just now to the usual eloquent presentation of one of Guyana's renowned scholars and national debaters, Dr. Rupert Roopnarine, I am quite sure all of us would have been treated to that, what I consider, literally excursion into the national budget, particularly the dissecting of the Minister's opening remark. Certainly, there are some themes that the Hon. Member would have highlighted and we would have few disagreements in terms of his interpretation of some of what the Minister of Finance had said. But, it is always nice and it is always easy to come and paint this picture of togetherness and one's resolve and one's commitment. It is also dishonest too if we do not take into account the progress we have made, the efforts we have made and also the lack of commitment we have seen from some.

I say that, not that we have arrived in our quest to build and to shape and to fashion...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, were you imputing dishonesty? Or are you speaking rhetorically?

**Mr. R. Persaud:** It is rhetorically. Even if I impute, I am willing to apologise, but it is meant to be rhetorical.

If we look, in terms of constructing the society, I am sure all of us would agree that it is still a work in progress, but to create that impression that we have not made that considerable effort and made considerable achievement in this regard, I think it would be far from the reality. I think it would also do a disservice, not only to those in the PPP/C or the PPP/Civic Government, but all others, from other political parties and other stakeholders, who have participated in processes and who have been a part of, as I would have want to term, that national project.

Without not going back, let us look at some recent developments, and reference was made to the Inter-parliamentary Parties Dialogue process that is ongoing and the efforts to reach out. The Hon. Member pointed out in this discourse on governance, and the number of institutions which are not adequately functioning or yet to be composed, omitted some important facts in this regards and I wish to restate that just for the record. In fact from June 2011, His Excellency, the President, through the Head of the Presidential Secretariat, would have written to the Leader of the Opposition for the names to chair the Human Rights Commission, and also there was no response. More recently, His Excellency, the President, the current President, would have invited and met the Hon. Leader of the Opposition to look at all outstanding constitutional appointments with required consultations and interactions. These include the Chancellor and the Chief Justice,

and also looking in terms of the composition of the National Broadcasting Authority and the vacancy at GECOM, to date there has been no response from the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Also as part of the dialogue process that was taking place, the issue of GECOM reform was raised and that was also put on the agenda. It was anticipated that the political parties and those who have raised the issue and wanted it to be in the agenda, once it was agreed to by all, namely APNU and the AFC, were supposed to have provided submissions on the reform. That too is outstanding. So when we talk about ensuring and we build and we enhance the governance structure, when we want institutions to work, it requires participation; it requires involvement, as it is provided for in our Constitution.

I cite these examples because if we are going to talk about constructing and building a society of inclusiveness, of involvement of participation, we must be genuine and consistent. Not consistent in our speech, not consistent in lip services, but also consistent in actions, in delivering for what we want for our nation. As our President has committed publicly, and he has done so consistently over the period, he has made it absolutely clear that the PPP/Civic Government, and the PPP/Civic, remains open to suggestions, to ideas and to be involved in a dialogue mechanism, to be involved in processes that will see us deliver the type of society that we all yearn for, and certainly need.

I would not want to suggest that the Hon. Member was engaged in rewriting or in some way attempting to be a revisionist, in terms of our history, in looking back at some of the other events. Certainly, over the course of these few days, and I am quite sure other issues that he would ventilated on, in terms of what is being done, and the efforts that have being made in ensuring participation in inclusiveness, that these are strengthened, will be reiterated and emphasised by persons who will follow me.

Going back to the general thrust of the budget, and that is, in terms of creating opportunities and constructing that society we all yearn for, it is looking in terms of inspiring hope and creating in our country a sense of pride too. But we can only inspire hope and create that sense of pride if we provide our people with the opportunities that they need; if we continue to ensure that the traditional sectors of our economy and traditional activities - be it in agriculture; be it in bauxite and be it in forestry - continue, as it were, to record growth and also to be in a position in which



they can withstand internal as well as external dynamics. In achieving this goal, we also need to look at the new areas.

The Minister of Finance, in his presentation, pointed to these new growth areas and the significant amount of these new growth areas are taking place between the natural resources and the environment sector. I say so, Mr. Speaker, because take for instance, if you look at what is happening in the area of the extractive industry, we have seen that the gold industry has been doing very well. In fact, from 2006 to present, the entire mining sector has increased output by as much as forty-two per cent and in one year alone we have seen what gold production has risen considerably in this regard. Also we have seen what has been taken place in the area of bauxite, in terms of production, when in 1991, bauxite production was just around seven hundred and eighty thousand tons per annum. Last year bauxite production was above 1.8 million ton. This year it is set to be in excess of two million tons.

It is not only about gold and bauxite, we have seen the growth too in quarry due to construction activities and also what is taking place in sand mining, but we want to ensure that we make use of our other natural resources. There is other wealth that we possess. Take for instance what is taking place. Reference was made to manganese. Just yesterday the company Reunion Manganese announced that it was drilling with results to date and it was able to conduct diamond drilling in about five hundred and seventy-six holes and the majority of the drilling results, to date, have provided excellent correlation, in terms of its trench intersection, meaning that it has the deposits that it was forecasting. Certainly, the work that it is doing, the technical work that it is doing, will ensure not only would there be a manganese operation which was there in previous times, but it is one that is much larger and one that will have a mine life in excess of twenty years.

In terms of diversification, and looking at new areas, there are a lot of exploration activities which have started, in terms of uranium. Already the companies are showing some positive results in this regards. Just about a month ago we advertised and invited proposal for the exploration and also eventual development of rare earth deposits - be it in the Muri Mountain area, in the New River Triangle area, with Brazil, or also looking at some other areas where we believe there are considerable deposits. So we are looking, as the budget reflects, at new areas where we can create the type of opportunities.

Going back to the two main areas of activities within the two larger mining sectors, gold and bauxite, not only looking in terms of regular bauxite output, but also looking in terms of the diversification of products using our bauxite deposits... Starting very soon - the construction has started, feasibility study was presented, financing has been concluded in Linden - will be engaged in the construction of what is considered to be a very important ingredient in terms of oil sector, propane and mullites which will be new products that will be produced right here, and also it will allow the bauxite industry, particularly in Linden, to create new opportunities and new jobs. Also, right in Linden, the company will be constructing, and has already started work, on a new kiln that will allow the company to engage and to expand production in this regard.

I was taken aback by the fact that the Hon. Member who would, on the one hand, suggest that at Linden, perhaps our *Lindeners* feel, there is some level of marginalisation, to use his word, and he was making reference in terms of communication and broadcasting, but not across the board. In that thrust here, there is an effort to expand the industry - an industry in the bauxite sector in Linden in which in the 1980s and just about the turn of 1990s everyone thought that it would have been history. Here it is now the industry has been resuscitated, revitalised with hundreds of new jobs already created. The fact that he can suggest that we should not deal, with some level of urgency, the approval of the Block 37 area which has considerable deposits to facilitate that expansion to engage a new product, but also to make use of the market opportunities out there, given certain developments, which time will not permit me to expand on. To hold back that development, a delay in terms of issuing first, and we are about to issue the prospective licence for Block 37 and then subsequently the mining permit, would in fact tell close to six hundred *Lindeners*..., and deny six hundred *Lindeners* the possibility of early employment. I am quite sure that is not what the Hon. Member would want.

For one to be qualified for those areas, feasibility work will have to be done, the necessary environmental work will have to be carried out and the necessary safeguards and the assurances too of the company to ensure much as possible that maximum benefits are derived by the people of Guyana through those activities. It may not be immediately, in terms of a construction of an aluminum plant, but certainly looking at other interventions, hoping that we soon get to that point. So I do not want us, from this National Assembly, to tell investors and persons who are making considerable commitment, and the planned investment for Linden alone would be in

excess of US\$120 million over the next two years. Are we telling the investors that it is not possible? That investment too is linked to the Block 37, because if they do not have the deposit they will not need to invest in the mullite plant. They will not need to construct the new kiln plant to engage in these activities. So we have to be consistent; we have to be clear. If we want opportunities for our people, and particularly vulnerable communities, take for instance what Linden has been going through, we have to ensure that we support initiatives such as that.

Also within the bauxite sector too, Mr. Speaker, in the upper Berbice, we have seen the work done by the Bauxite Company Guyana Inc. (BCGI) which is owned by RUSAL. In 2010, it produced just about a million tons. Last year it produced 1.475 million tons. The projection this year, the conservative estimate, is 1.8 million alone with the possibility of going up to two million. Just two weeks ago, the company brought in US\$30 million worth of equipment. The only fleet of equipment of that type, which exists in this part of the world, it imported, so as to take care of that expansion. Again, we are in the process too of opening up new deposits to facilitate that expansion because the expansion is based and is driven by the existence of the deposits. We are at the final stage of opening up what is considered as the Kokerit deposit, so that the company can also engage in those activities and, there too, to the people of Region 10, living in the Upper Berbice area, providing another four hundred and fifty jobs over the next year, or there about.

We do not ignore any concerns that workers and other stakeholder would have. In fact, we have not been treating those lightly and we insist that the company adhere to the laws of our country, but, more so, ensure that it carries out and executes its corporate social responsibility in this regard. Those disputes which were referred to are matters... The Minister of Labour, himself, recently, would have taken a certain court course of action to deal with a matter and, as you know, the matter is currently in the court and I cannot say much more on that due to that fact. But to suggest that there was negligence, or we are only in this urge to have investors come and develop and not looking at the welfare of the communities or the workers, I think, is not true.

Turning, in terms, to gold mining, the Hon. Member and all of us are aware that mining and natural resources activities bring with them, not only the challenges of opportunities, but also they bring with them challenges in terms of social and economic issues that we have to confront. Also if we look at gold mining we can all boast. I wish to encourage the National Assembly that

we should salute and applaud the mining communities in our country for their perseverance. All of us know that when gold prices went down they were at the level of three hundred and forty-something, even when OMAI was in its peak, three hundred and fifty, it caused a lot of hardship. It was only two hundred and forty. It went all the way down and mining communities, and miners themselves, had to persevere. It is only over the past several years we have seen the resurgence in gold price and certainly creating those opportunities. But they have been able to mobilise, to rebound, to make the investments and certainly to turn around a sector as to today that is making considerable contribution to our wealth, so much so that last year that we saw gold mining and gold export proceed contributing in excess US\$510 million. We need to applaud that.

We will not be complacent on the challenges that are out there. We have to deal with the issues, the environmental issues. I will come to that in terms of how we will address that in a very holistic way. We have to deal with the issues in terms of the social issues. We also have to deal the matter in terms of human resources, ensuring the right technologies so that the miners themselves can get the best returns. They can improve recoveries, recoveries at the levels of thirty-five to forty-five per cent, when in fact there are technologies out there that can take it all the way to sixty and seventy-five per cent. We all know what that can mean, not only for the miner themselves, but also in terms of our natural environment, putting less pressure and reducing the demands for more areas. So there are these challenges that we have to deal with. We know about the many social issues. We have been working, engaging the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, and even the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), in dealing with those matters. So no one is oblivious to this reality as we move in this direction. This becomes much more urgent because we are also on the flows of some major investments and major developments in this regard. We know that the largest gold mine was OMAI Gold Mine and that mine produced, over a ten-year lifespan, about 3.4 million ounces.

Currently, there are two major gold mining projects where exploration work, prospecting work, has been completed. Just yesterday we were able to receive the final feasibility study of one of those. That is, the Guyana's Goldfield Inc. and this mine will in fact be much larger and the potential of it is close to 5.4 million ounces with a longer lifespan initially in this regard. There are also two other similar size gold mines which will be coming on stream. What that tells us is that there is an urgency in which we need to ensure that the necessary safeguards are there, at the

community level, but as well as the necessary safeguards are at the national level, so that the sector, the development and the growth of it, can be done in a way in which we are not afflicted by what is commonly referred to as “the resource curse” and the problems that could afflict resource rich country. That is the thrust in which we are moving. That is certainly the direction.

Again I am very happy that the Hon. Member has indicated his party’s willingness, in terms of us working together, in resolving these issues. These are not issues of a partisan nature; these are not issues in which we want to score political points; these are issues which are required to be resolved. Sometimes it requires the collective political will so that we can address the challenges so that the people of Guyana, the supporters of all political parties, and more particularly the mining communities and the immediate stakeholders, can enjoy the maximum benefits in this regards. Certainly, we welcome that type of outlook and approach.

In terms of the wider aspect of the development of natural resources and how do we deal with the challenges to the environment... The Hon. Member in his presentation suggested that perhaps the Minister of Finance’s budget was weak, in terms of strengthening and reinforcing and, perhaps, building the institutional as well as the policy framework for us to deal with the environmental challenges. I want to advise the Hon. Member that the creation of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, itself, is in fact a recognition of the PPP/Civic that we needed to ensure that there is better coordination, that there is better oversight and there is harmonisation in terms of policies within the natural resources sector and also in terms of the interface with the environmental sector. So that policy decision alone which was taken was a considerable step, a significant movement, in terms of dealing with that, as one can say, perceived weakness.

If we look in terms of the allocation, reference has made that there was none, or not much allocation made to in the area of environmental enhancement and solid waste, the budget speech itself points to two areas. There is in excess of \$600 million which has been allocated and provided for the Solid Waste Disposal Project. If we look in the wider area of solid waste too, there is another project that is being implemented by the Hon. Minister of Housing and Water which comes up to another excess \$500 million, which looks in terms of revamping the sewage system. So in terms of environmental enhancement, there are some provisions.

With specific reference to the EPA, we all know that it was created particularly in the context of the challenges that we face, more so in mining and in the new areas. Yes, the EPA will have to be strengthened. Yes, the EPA will have to be equipped and resourced to deal with some of these new areas. I would refer to not only to the expansion in the traditional activities which are taken place within the natural resources sector, but also there are some new areas. Take for instance, currently, there are two rigs which are carrying petroleum exploration activities in Guyana. It is the first time that there will be two rigs, at the same time...

2.40 p.m.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, before you tell us about those rigs, could you get some extra time moved by one of your colleagues, please?

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

*Question put, and agreed to*

**Mr. R. Persaud:** The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), certainly, will have to be equipped in terms of dealing with these challenges. However, what we have taken in this context, given our constraint, is that we have sought to have a much more integrated and a much more collaborative approach in dealing with those new challenges. And whilst, over time, building the right institution with the right capacity will take some time and resources, we are looking at innovative ways in which we can deal with these matters, but, more so, with a lot of emphasis on mitigation because we have to mitigate those environmental risks. That is why mining companies, be it gold, diamond, bauxite, quarry or petroleum exploration, have to go through a very tedious and comprehensive environmental impact assessment process. They have to provide also their disaster risk reduction plan and their disaster management plan. They also have to show the resources that they have and the capability to respond. And that is why if one goes to the Ogle International Airport, he or she will see helicopters there just waiting, and will also see other resources at other points. If one goes to CGX's location in Berbice, he or she will see that it is equipped to deal with the situation of emergency response, similarly, with other companies in this regard. So recognising the fact that the EPA will have to be advanced – and we know that –

the allocation that has been provided to the Ministry for the EPA will certainly look into improving its capacity and improving its capability in this regard.

Whilst we can talk about our thrust in advancing and developing a very vibrant and very competitive extractive industry, we also want to ensure that this industry not only satisfies, as is important, our national requirement but also ensures that it meets the best international standards and practices. And this is given much more focus and emphasis in the context of our Low Carbon Development Strategy, and, more particularly, the engagement that we have with the Kingdom of Norway where there are specific requirements. What that shows and provides to the international community is that here it is that a country with vast natural wealth can pursue its development, but at the same time can offer itself as a model in which we are able to preserve, enhance and ensure that our eco-systems are not compromised. That is the type of balance that we have been pursuing and that is the type of approach we will be taking in terms of the development of the natural resources sector and in terms of the management of the environment. And that is why we will continue to reach out to international bodies and international institutions. We have just started an engagement with the Commonwealth Secretariat to improve the institutional framework in terms of the overall management of the mining sector with a focus on the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC). We are in the process of engaging the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI) and a team will be visiting Guyana in another two weeks to commence negotiations. These are things that we are doing voluntarily because, at the end of the day, we want to ensure that not only our outreach to local stakeholders, as we have done, but also to reach out to competent international and multilateral agencies so that we get the best arrangement and the best system for the people of Guyana.

Our work in the area of climate change, our work in terms of developing a world class model in terms of talking about avoiding deforestation and in promoting our Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD)+ Initiative, work continues. In fact, it has been accelerated. And over the last year, we have seen considerable progress. We have been able to benefit from the two payments from the Kingdom of Norway which are in the Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund (GRIF) account and very soon my colleague Minister of Finance will be, in fact, initialling project documents, which have already been improved, which will see us

benefiting from these funds - the US\$70 million. So we are already at the point of making the people of Guyana enjoy benefits with specific projects.

There are other projects which will soon be going to the GRIF Steering Committee. Also, as we are meeting here, there is a representative, from the Government of Norway, in Guyana. That representative is here assessing the work we are doing. We are working into our third evaluation of our third tranche of another US\$40 million. And so far, all the work we have done has shown that we are able to maintain those commitments so that we can, whilst maximising our returns and benefits in terms of utilisation of natural resources, at the same time benefit from our ecosystems and services. Our work continues very aggressively in this regard.

In some other areas, in terms of wild life management, we will continue in terms of looking at updating our regulations and even bringing to this National Assembly, some important pieces of legislation. In terms of our national parks, there are lots of work that we will have to do. Certainly, we will be putting a lot of emphasis on this and just recently we concluded an arrangement with the Government of Germany whereby we have benefited already from a €4 million grant and another €5.4 million has been allocated and that has allowed us to create the first Protected Areas Commission, again not only satisfying a national commitment, but also ensuring that, internationally, we are able to fulfil our obligations.

Land management, too, is a very critical area and we know that it is not only across the Coast, but also the Hinterland. Reference was made to the dispute we have from time to time whereby activities would take place in areas which have to be identified for Amerindian land areas to be expanded, but also in areas that have been identified for titling. The Guyana Lands and Survey Commission has been provided with resources. And we also know through the REDD+ Initiative and the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Kingdom of Norway we will look in terms of resources, to enhance and accelerate that process of demarcation. Also on the Coast, too, the Guyana Lands and Survey Commission is working with the European Union (EU) in implementing a €3 million project to create a national integrated land management system. We are constantly seeking to modernise the system and have an institution that is responsive, an institution that is so resourced and developed that it ought not only to be in a responsive mode, but also to be in a position in which it can address issues where there are conflicts and so forth.



Looking at the 2012 Budget, we have made provisions in terms of addressing these very critical issues in terms of taking our country forward and we can all look forward to these initiatives bringing about a type of development and the type of returns that all of us would want. Going back to the thrust of the Budget, that is creating that environment for modernisation, for transformation, for new opportunities, creating that environment for care, compassion and opportunities, it also requires firm commitment by all of us in this National Assembly and not only firm commitment and our speech and statements here, too, but also that when we go out to our supporters and we go out to the communities that we are also constructive. If we are serious about development and if we say that we support particular initiatives, we must also ensure that the message in the work we do out there is consistent. Take for instance, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, perhaps, was in Fryish and the way in which he presented the Government tax measures suggested that it was bias and that it was only there to benefit a certain segment of the community, when, in fact, I have not heard a single Member of the Opposition, particularly of APNU, say that the Government's decision to increase the income tax threshold was a bad one. We did not hear anyone saying that the Government's decision not to introduce any new tax was a bad one or the other measures we have taken previously to reduce and to ease that tax burden on the Guyanese people were bad ones. Or take for instance Linden: just yesterday the Hon. Prime Minister referred to the issue of electricity and the plan to integrate Linden's electricity into the national system. And yet we know that there are certain elements that will go to the community... and even this morning there was a protest activity suggesting to the community that the Government has ended subsidies and support for the people of Linden when, in fact, even just yesterday, the Prime Minister reminded us that close to \$1.86 billion has been allocated to support electricity supply. Also in terms of going into the sugar industry and suggesting that the Government was not doing enough to help the sugar industry in this regard also does not reflect the type of rhetoric that we hear working together. If we want dialogue and to work together and, as it were, to create and construct that society, we must do that on the basis of facts; we must do that on the basis of truth. We must be honest and sincere in this regard. That is why I want to appeal to all Members that we... [Mrs. Backer: You cannot appeal. The Chief Justice said you cannot appeal.] The Attorney General... I want to urge all Members of the National Assembly that we have a golden opportunity before us. We have a situation that is pregnant with opportunities to bring our people together. We have an opportunity here for us to ensure that

especially for our young people... and I am very happy that we have many more young people than we have had in the previous Parliament amongst us. We have this golden opportunity to take our country to new heights, certainly to heights in which we can all look forward to a Guyana that we are proud of and one in which we can be very hopeful and confident for the future of all our people.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I wish to join my colleagues in commending the 2012 Budget to the National Assembly. [*Applause*]

**Mrs. Backer:** Thank you, thank you. I will sign autographs subsequent to my presentation. [**Mr. Nandlall:** Pink pantheress.] The pink panther. [**Mr. Nandlall:** Pantheress.] The pink pantheress. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to begin my two-hour conversation with the National Assembly on Budget 2012. Before I go to my remit, let me first congratulate, joining with other Hon. Members, all those young persons, new comers, so to speak... [**Mr. Greenidge:** You are gender neutral.] Yes, I am gender neutral. And also to welcome back old friends like Hon. Member Mr. Neendkumar. I am sorry, Sir. And the Hon. Member, Mr. Rohee.

I now turn immediately to my remit, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In examining the stated formulation policies of the Government in the 2012 Budget, we see some policies of this Government which, to an extent, mirror ours, as laid down in our 2011 Manifesto – *A Good Life for all Guyanese*. And I must commend our Manifesto as compulsory reading to everyone.

We believe that the overlap in our policies on the issue of foreign policy is good because we believe that on the issue of foreign policy, the only sensible way forward for Guyana is to have a national consensus on major policy frameworks and initiatives. I turn, firstly, to Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Given the territorial claims by both Venezuela and Suriname to parts of Guyana, Venezuela claiming 159, 500 square kilometres, approximately 5/8 of our land and Suriname claiming approximately 15,540 square kilometres, it is absolutely necessary that safeguarding our sovereignty and territorial integrity remain central to our foreign policy. It is worthwhile to restate that the issue of our territorial integrity predates Guyana's independence. And I am sure that Dr. Gopaul will be happy with me that I will move briefly to the past. I quote

from Tyrone Ferguson's Book, *To Survive Sensibly or to Court Heroic Death*. This is what he said about foreign policy at page 421:

“The performance in the area of foreign policy was indisputably outstanding. Shortly after the coalition government took power in December, 1964, it faced the severest of threats to its very survival of the nation. It confronted virtually simultaneously the double hazards of serious territorial threats from both Venezuela and Suriname. It is exceedingly difficult...”

He goes on to state:

“...to find another example of a post colonial nation in its infant days of nationhood, facing a more hazardous situation. In a real sense, this hard fact of pure survival forced Guyana's diplomatic leadership to have to devise an effective diplomacy to safeguard our nation. In Ramphal's view...

He says:

“...that context has a positive consequence for Guyana. As Ramphal puts it, we will be hardened by fire.”

A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) wishes to, again, unequivocally place before this House that on the issue of Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity, there is no APNU, AFC, PPP; there is one Guyana. We stand shoulder to shoulder with the Government, with the AFC and with all patriotic Guyanese in defence of all 214,970 square kilometres of this beloved nation of ours. That said, let me hasten to add that for A Partnership for National Unity, the most appropriate way for the Government to further concretise this unanimity is to have ongoing consultations and, in fact, the active involvement of the Parliamentary Opposition on issues of our sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Despite the unjustified territorial claims by both Venezuela and Suriname, we believe that the continued development of mutually respectful and beneficial relations with our neighbours must remain critical. As such, as we continue discussions with Suriname on the bridging of the Corentyne River, we trust that our Minister of Foreign Affairs will recall all the concessions that Guyana was constrained to make, *viz-a-viz* Suriname's demands before the commencement of

the ferry service between our two countries. We trust that presently in place at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are the necessary diplomatic skills to ensure that our priority falls part of the eventual Corentyne Bridge agreement.

A Partnership for National Unity recommends and history demands that our Guyana Defence Force, once again, attain a capacity that can enhance our diplomatic leverage and economic activities. Had the Guyana Defence Force that capacity in June, 2000, it would have been able to repel the unlawful attack by Surinamese gun boats on the CGX oil rig which was operating within our territorial water. This incapacity by our army then has resulted in oil exploration in that area being delayed by seven years. Had CGX been allowed uninterrupted exploration within our territorial waters, today we may have been an oil-producing nation rather than one poised to so do. I am glad that everybody is awake. Before leaving the issue of Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity, let me say that A Partnership for National Unity believes that the Government must, as a matter of high priority, deal decisively with the back track operations between Guyana and Suriname. This is a difficult thing to do but do it we must because by turning a Nelson's eye towards the operation, what this Government has in fact done is to erase a part of our Eastern border. That is what the Nelson's eye has done. We wish to remind this Government that the unhindered flow of our custom goods, undeclared gold, illegal drugs and guns, and illegal migrants going in and out, including Roger Khan, are as much a threat to our sovereignty and territorial integrity as Venezuela and Suriname on just claims. One cannot speak about territorial integrity and not seek to take some control of one's borders, particularly when in that case it can be done.

Venezuela recently – and it is reported in the Kaieteur News, my second newspaper of choice... Of course, Chronicle will be the fourth. On Saturday, 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2012, we see, *Venezuela deploys troops to Guyana border to combat drug trafficking*. And then in yesterday's newspaper, the Stabroek News, my favourite newspaper, *Heightened security at Suriname's borders*. It says here:

“Tighter security measures for the border with Guyana in the west are also well under way...”

What they are trying to do by enhancing their army presence on the border is to stop that illegal flow that I spoke about. And there was a very interesting lecture that was given by Professor Ivelaw Lloyd Griffith – I think we all know him – a distinguished son of the soil, at the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Eric William Memorial Lecture, entitled: Drugs and Crime without passports in the Caribbean... I repeat, Drugs and Crime without passports in the Caribbean: How Secure is Security, and How Sovereign is Sovereignty? That is a very interesting article and I will do a pictorial version for my friend Mr. Neendkumar.

*[Mr. Rohee entered the Chamber]*

I am glad Mr. Rohee is back because I am going to turn to him shortly.

The issue of the promotion of Trade and Investment is listed as a priority focus of the Government's foreign policy with the primary strategies being – and I am reading here from page 54:

“...the strengthening of bilateral relations with countries with whom we have had traditional ties and fostering new strategic alliances with some focus on enhancing economic and social links with our neighbours.”

My eloquent Member, Dr. Roopnarine, has already said that our Minister of Finance did not have that usual zest. It could be, like me that he is suffering from the aging process. But these were lofty words by the Minister. The question that immediately springs to mind is this: has our Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through our overseas missions and through its staff at Takuba Lodge, prepared for this task of leading trade and investment to Guyana?

It is an undeniable fact that when the PPP/C took office in October, 1992, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was staffed with highly qualified diplomats, both at our overseas missions and at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Headquarters. Indeed, Guyana's Foreign Service was the envy of our CARICOM Sister countries and those further afield. Guyana led and the rest of CARICOM followed. It was also an undeniable fact that one of the first tasks of the new PPP/C's Government in 1992 was to remove these well qualified and highly skilled High Commissioners and Ambassadors and other Senior Diplomats.

While it is not my intention to dwell on the past like Dr. Gopaul did yesterday, let me say that it is worthwhile to note that the removal by the PPP/Civic Administration of 69 staff, including High Commissioners, Ambassadors, within months of assuming office in 1992 resulted in the mere destruction of this most important Ministry. Indeed, only Ambassador Ronald Austin who was removed in 1993 and Rudy Insanally escaped the PPP/Civic's scourge. This beheading of the Ministry's staff was carried out by none other than my friend, the Hon. Mr. Clement Rohee, who went not around the world in 80 days, but from mission to mission in great haste and almost – as I sought to compare him – like the Queen of Hearts, and Alice in wonderland, and I have the book here for him. The Minister, like the Queen of Hearts and Alice in Wonderland, moved from mission to mission “Off with your head, off with your head! Who is this? Off with your head.” He did that to 69 people, but the Government was not satisfied with that. It was not satisfied with the Queen of Hearts. It did its *coup de grace*. And I want to give the English translation for Mr. Neendkumar. The French call it a *coup de grace* and the English dictionary defines it as thus: “a final blow or shot given to kill a wounded person or animal”. Not satisfied with sending the Hon. Member, Minister Rohee, around the diplomatic circle in 80 days, the Government's *coup de grace* was to appoint him... [Members gave a different pronunciation of *coup de grace*.] No, I have checked with the French people and you are wrong. The Government's *coup de grace* was to appoint Minister Rohee as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. We have taken years to recover from that *coup de grace* and, even as I speak, I am not sure that we have come out of that.

Let me get back to the preparedness of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Given the global economic rearrangement that has seen the emergence of the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and other emerging nations, A Partnership for National Unity believes that it is imperative that our missions in Brazil, the “B” in BRICS, and India, the “I”, be headed by our most accomplished and highly qualified diplomats who can take a lead role in encouraging trade and investment in Guyana.

3.10 p.m.

We note the appointment of High Commissioner, Professor David Dabydeen to China, and urge that in the implementation of our trade and investment agreements with China, shared values based on our laws are central to all agreements with that great country. We urge the Government

to immediately begin the process of establishing a mission in South Africa, the “S” in BRICS. Guyana, as we all know, already has tremendous good will with South Africa, given our unequivocal condemnation of apartheid on our solidarity then and still with the people of that country. The establishment of such a mission, namely the mission in South Africa, will advance not only trade and investment in that country, but will also enable Guyana to more easily develop economic and trading ties with other African countries, many of whom have fast growing economies.

While we are on the continent of South Africa, APNU wishes to place on record our congratulations to the new President of Malawi, Ms. Joyce Banda who now becomes the second woman to head a nation on the great continent of South America.

Still on the issue of the preparedness of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to lead the promotion of trade and investment, I invite the National Assembly to join me as I turn very briefly to the present staffing of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry, according to volume three of 2012... **[Neendkumar: You sound like Aubrey]** Yes, I sound a little “unsad” about what I am going to say. The Ministry has a total staff of 258 persons distributed as follows: Ministry Administration – 108, Foreign Relations – 131, Foreign Trade and international cooperation where we have given priority to – 19. So, out of a total of 258 persons, we have dedicated to this very critical area of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation 19 persons. Approximately, as Mr. Greenidge has advised me, 7.3% of the Ministry’s staff. The question is whether this is sufficient to adequately promote Guyana’s Trade and Industry, particularly when you take into account the fact that we do not have the best and brightest at all of our missions. I am calling no names.

We think that it is also worthwhile to note that staffing within the Foreign Trade and International Cooperation section has declined from 27 in 2009 to 19 this year. Of that princely sum of 19 persons, 42 are contracted workers, which means that they can leave at very short... **[Members: Forty two of nineteen?]** What am I saying? Significantly of the 19 persons 42% are contracted employees. They are good students Sir, they are listening. So, it is easy to declare, as our Minister of Finance did on page 54. I do not think I can properly imitate him; I have the height but not necessarily the “wit”, W-I-T Minister. He says at page 54 that the promotion of Trade and Industry is a priority focus of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These words, we

submit, will be rendered meaningless if no serious effort is taken to enhance and to expand the staff dedicated to Foreign Trade and International Cooperation.

I would like to turn to the United Nations. Given the critical importance of the United Nations, it is of paramount importance that Guyana has a highly qualified, highly skilled and experienced diplomat heading our United Nations mission. We are therefore happy with the appointment of Mr. George Talbot as Guyana's permanent representative to the United Nations. It is worthwhile to note that Mr. Talbot's appointment along with several others occurred "PLSE". With "PLSE" having nothing to do with the voters list, "PLSE" being "Post Luncheon's Sworn Evidence", which stated, and I quote, this is the "PLSE" sworn evidence, "The lack of African Guyanese as ambassadors was not due..."

**Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]:** Mr. Speaker if I may. It is well known that this matter is still receiving the attention of the Court.

**Mrs. Backer:** Sir, I am quoting from a newspaper.

**Mr. Speaker:** Are you quoting from a newspaper or verbatim records of the Court, Ms. Backer?

**Mrs. Backer:** No Sir, from a newspaper. I am quoting from a newspaper, I am well prepared as I always am, Stabroek News Friday 6<sup>th</sup> of January. Allow me to read from the papers now that I know that Mr. Nandlall...

**Mr. Speaker:** One second Mrs. Backer. I believe Hon. Attorney General, if it is a matter which has been reported in the public and has passed, she may comment, but do not dwell on it please though Mrs. Backer.

**Mrs. Backer:** No, of course not, Sir. I am just reading. I was going to pass on but I am going to read now. I am reading from the Stabroek News of Friday, 6<sup>th</sup> January:

"Many of the new appointees serve to debunk Head of the Presidential Secretariat, Dr. Luncheon, statement made in open court last year that the absence of African Guyanese as ambassadors of Guyana was not due to racism but to the fact that no Guyanese Africans are qualified to be ambassadors of Guyana."



That is the newspaper. I am saying that Mr. Talbot's appointment occurred post those statements. I congratulate, and I am sorry that she is not here to hear me because we always say that we do not congratulate our Ministers, the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs for the adroit way in which she deflected questions that were asked in January, of her, concerning that statement. The fact is that by not immediately denouncing Dr. Luncheon's inaccurate and reprehensible statements, the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and by extension all 32 people on that side of the House have to take responsibility for them. APNU denounces those most unfortunate statements then and we do... [Mr. R. Persaud: Quoted out of context.] Where did you come from? ... and we do so again.

Depending on where you sit I have taken a certain fondness, which some people say is strange, to Dr. Nanda Gopaul. I want to help him Sir, because he had a fixation about Dr. Clive Thomas who he quoted from 1980-something when he criticised the PNC, but he did not quote him between 1992 and now when he has been destroying the PPP. We understand, it is selective memory recall. I want to take him down memory lane a bit, but Dr. Gopaul, if you do not mind, I am slightly younger than you I suspect, I may be wrong. [Neendkumar: But you are looking old.] Yes, I know I look like you. I withdraw that, Sir.

Mr. Speaker with your leave, I would like to read from another lecture by Dr. Ivelaw Griffith, "Guyanese Strategic Culture Leaders Levering..." [Neendkumar: That is the man that you all threw out of the Party.] What is going on? Sir, this is what he says:

"The PPP did make changes though. A diplomatic one has been the increasing removal of Afro-Guyanese from key public sector, diplomatic and other positions and their replacement by East-Indians."

I am reading. I am not saying I agree; I am reading. We could discuss it.

"Top Afro-Guyanese bureaucrats generally have been viewed as PNC loyalists and unworthy and have been marginalised or victimised."

The following service has been affected dramatically prompting Dr. Mark Kirton's trurgent remark:

“Guyana’s diplomatic status in the global arena has been significantly reduced since the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been fossilised.”

That was Dr. Mark Kirton speaking on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2001 Dr. Gopaul. I am not going to go back to the 70s and 80s. We are glad that there seems to have been a change within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We congratulated you after you were hit on your head for years to understand that we will do better in foreign affairs if we work together. We wish to formally congratulate Mr. George Talbot, Mr. Michael Brotherson who has been appointed Consul General of Barbados, Mr. Keith George who is Guyana’s ambassador to Suriname, Mrs. Audrey Jardine-Waddell who is Guyana’s ambassador to UNASUR, Mrs. Sattie Sawh on her confirmation of Hon. Consul General to Toronto and Ms. Esther Griffith who is the Chief of Protocol. This was a good move in the right direction.

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

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

*Question put, and carried.*

**Mrs. Backer:** Thank you very much. This was a good move. We are also aware – I see Ms. Teixeira looking hoping that the clock would move quickly. [**Ms. Teixeira:** Are you telepathic?] I am. Sir, this Government has a way of equating the signing of agreements with the actual performance and achievement. It is a start, we accept that, but we have signed so many protocols but it is the honouring of them that is the problem. I would just like to refer to one convention that the Hon. Member who spoke before me termed “ruffing-up”. We all know that it was torture. We signed that, but we always tend to sign and observe in the breach. I do not have the time nor the energy, having come almost of age, to go through the list, but I would like to say that equating signing and actual performance is a dangerous thing.

I would like to quote from the Executive Summary on CARICOM which I am coming to next. This is what the executive summary said on the review of CARICOM, I want to borrow it. It says that “CARICOM’s tendency” and I would like to replace this here by “Government”, “The Government’s tendency to announce decisions over new initiatives as if full implementation was

imminent has resulted in the so called implementation deficit.” We are saying that as regards to the UN, not with relation to CARICOM, it is okay to sign. We signed the one on Human Rights yet Minister Rodrigues and my very good friend Ms. Teixeira went to the UN to defend and to justify why they could not do all that they should have done. The Hon. Minister Priya Manickchand, having signing certain agreements and the UN said things that we do not necessarily agree with either.

During her 26<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 Budget presentation my genuine Hon. friend, Hon. Minister Rodrigues-Birkett reminded the House that CARICOM members were awaiting a review of CARICOM institutions including the Secretariat, which the heads had requested. At the recently concluded 23<sup>rd</sup> Intercessional Meeting of the Conference of Heads held in Suriname during March, the Heads received and according the communiqué issued subsequent, they received and considered in depth the review which was contained in a 159 paged report entitled “Turning around CARICOM, Proposals to Reconstruct the Secretariat”. Having read the report, A Partnership for National Unity has concluded that if not in actual crises as stated in the report, CARICOM is near enough to the brink to cause us worry. With that said, we share the view held by all CARICOM Heads that CARICOM will survive and indeed must survive and be strengthened. We believe that can happen if our heads act on the report and the recommendations of the report.

CARICOM remains the regions flagship organisation and it is essential to the wellbeing of our people, the continued promotion of the economic and social integration of our people, the improvement of our standard of living to name a few. We have seen the communiqué issued and we agree and have noted that a five year strategic plan will be drawn up by CARICOM for consideration by the heads at the 33<sup>rd</sup> Meeting scheduled in July of this year in St. Lucia. This five year strategic plan is of critical importance not only for this Government but this entire nation and all the people of Guyana. We therefore look forward to meaningful consultation between the Government and the Parliamentary majority on this five year strategic plan prior to His Excellency Donald Ramotar proceeding to meet with the Heads in July 2012.

We need buy in on CARICOM major policies, and the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) is sufficient example. We have such a turnover of Governments now in CARICOM. We almost turned over and that will soon be turned over. I am not calling any names. The reality is that we

need buy in on important policy decisions. That is why the CCJ is so problematic, one Government would say yes and then the Government changes and when the Opposition becomes the Government the feel 'no' because there have not been a buy in. We are saying that for CARICOM to be stronger there has to be a buy-in. All major stakeholders must commit and must be involved in this five year strategic plan, if not it will take us nowhere.

We always here that PNC, APNU, AFC or whoever do not give recommendations, we just get up and criticise. I have tabulated some recommendations in a simple form so that my friend Mr. Neendkumar can understand. We need to enhance, as I have stated before, our army to the extent that it can once again attain the capacity to enhance our diplomatic leverage and economic activities. We need to establish formal engagement between the Government and Opposition on issues of sovereignty and territorial integrity with a view of obtaining actual national consensus. It is not just getting up and saying, "Yes, we believe these people are supporting us".

I would like to say what I mean by "Actual National Consensus". In her last year budget speech the Hon. Minister Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett said this, and she is speaking about the recognition of the state of Palestine as a free independent and sovereign state:

"This decision for Government marked a further confirmation of the longstanding and principle solidarity and support the country has given to the Palestinian people. I was pleased to see..."

I have skipped a bit:

"I was pleased to see that the Opposition PNC/R agreed with Government's decision to do this."

This is what the Hon. Member goes on to say, "I think that the AFC did so, but they said they wanted consultation", which I did not understand, because this has been our position from way back and it is the only natural thing to do. We are saying that when we talk about actual involvement we must sit around a table. We must not have a Minister saying, "I thought they concurred because that is the only thing to do". [Ms. Teixeira: inaudible] I do not think my Hon. Friend Ms. Teixeira is having her best day, Sir.

We need to regularise, as I have said before, the Guyana-Suriname crossing. We need to replace – I want to tread carefully here – inexperienced and unqualified ambassadors who are incapable of giving their best by those who are. We need to restore the principle of rotation of staff at our diplomatic missions away. The United Nations did a study on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and they lamented the fact that we, Guyana, had ambassadors so long in one posting – I read someone inelegantly referred to it as diplomatic fatigue. I believe that if some of our ambassadors and high commissioners are woken up in the middle of the night and asked what their country of citizenship is, some of them would automatically blurt out the United Kingdom or the United States of America. So long have they been there. We have to go back to rotating our staff abroad; it has been proven to be the best thing to do. Mr. Greenidge is troubling my documents, Sir.

We need to resuscitate the Foreign Service Institute under a new director. We need, with this new resuscitated Foreign Service Institute under a new director as I said, to invite visiting professors to come and give lectures. We need to invite Professor Ivelaw Griffith who I spoke about recently. We need to invite Professor Mark Kirton although after what he said in October 2011 he knows will probably be stuck from the record. We need to invite our own Leader of the Opposition, an expert in his own right on issues of territorial integrity and sovereignty. Does this Government has the strength of character to invite Guyanese of that calibre to come to the Foreign Service Institute and do guess lectures? We need to employ young and bright Guyanese who can form the backbone of our 21<sup>st</sup> century diplomats, for example the University of Guyana valedictorian who the Ministry of Foreign Affairs could not find accommodation for. I think that is the kindest way I could put it. We need to ensure the training of all Foreign Affairs staff to ensure that they can become more interdisciplinary with the emphasis we suggest, given the 19 staff only, being skewed towards trade and investment.

Our Manifesto is not perfect, but in our Manifesto, APNU's Manifesto 2011, which I have already commended and recommended for good reading. I do not know if the Hon. Dr. Gilbert will allow me perhaps after he has presented his book to present this Manifesto and also "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland to Mr. Rohee". Time does not permit me to go through all of our major policy frameworks, but I just want to mention two of them, to re-energise the regional integration process with the CARICOM Single Market and Economy, develop diplomatic

relations with strategically placed countries where possible, and where possible as part of a joint CARICOM mission, reorganising the constructive role of global civil society that continues to play a more and more significant part in international affairs.

As I conclude, let me say this. We believe that our recommendations along with those and the vision that the Government has, those that the Alliance for Change must have, and the recommendations of other stakeholders, we believe that if all these recommendations are taken together, impartially discussed and the best recommendations implemented, irrespective of where they come from, the end result would be a Foreign Affairs Ministry second to none and fully able to implement and fulfil the Ministry's mandate. It will be a Ministry with a highly qualified and highly specialised staff. It will be a Ministry of Foreign Affairs that can play a lead role in enhancing trade and investment with Guyana. In short, it will be a Ministry capable of being used as a major tool for development.

*3.40p.m.*

A Partnership For National Unity (APNU) has already entered the door of cooperation as Dr. Rupert Roopnarine has said. We invite the Members of the PPP/C and, of course, the Members of the Alliance for Change, and all Guyana, to join us in the room of cooperation so at the end of discussions we can have a foreign affairs policy that we can all be proud of.

With those few words, Sir, I thank you. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you Mrs. Backer for that style. It certainly was entertaining and lively.

Hon. Members it is 3.40 p.m. I am minded to be generous in calling the suspension now on the basis that we resume at 4.40p.m., or we can have the Hon. Minister start her presentation, but I am not minded to have her break her speech. Hon. Minister Sukhai is next and I am not minded to have her break in 10 minutes. If we do go ahead, I would have her present for half of an hour which would take us to 4.10 p.m. and then we break and she comes back in to finish. But I am not too keen on having her break after a few minutes of speaking. We are inquiring whether the meals are ready. I am trying to ensure that there is a flow. Hon. Minister, are you ready?

**Minister of Amerindian Affairs [Mrs. Sukhai]:** I prefer to speak after the break if you would allow me.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members we would take the suspension now. I am reminding Members that we do have a little presentation in the Library in a few minutes. I will also see the students of the visiting school later. I am inviting other Members of the Assembly to join us in the Library and the Chambers to meet the students.

I also wish to welcome our guest for today, Former Member of Parliament and female miner, a pioneer in her own right - long before there was protesting she was out there in the back dam - our beloved sister, is here with us this afternoon. I am told that the other guest was ill. I will give the announcement later, but we welcome our guest for this afternoon.

*Sitting suspended at 3.43 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 4.50 p.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members this session has resumed. I invite the Hon. Minister Mrs. Pauline Sukhai, Minister of Amerindian Affairs to address the Assembly.

**Mrs. Campbell-Sukhai:** Thank you Mr. Speaker.

I am very pleased to signal to this House the endorsement of the estimates and the Budget for 2012. I want to extend compliments, and endorse all the compliments that have already been bestowed, on Hon. Minister Ashni Singh and his team. The state of affairs of indigenous people in Guyana is one which we have seen advancing each year. If one had the chance to engage in discussion or dialogue, or even read some of the issues that the United Nations Forum on Indigenous People had to deal with, the indigenous people in Guyana would feel very proud of our advancement. This is not to say that the development of indigenous affairs or issues with respect to the development of Amerindians in this country is perfect. I believe every term that our Government, the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, has won and has been in office has indicated this to the nation. In fact, our manifesto always alludes to the fact that we have much more to do towards the advancement of Amerindian development in Guyana. In that manifesto we will even continue to point out the areas of focus which we would wish to deal with in each term. And again, so it was in the elections of 2011. Our manifesto carried a tall list of issues which we feel as a Party, and as the Government in office, we need to address. So in setting that pace, let us not forget or let that not cloud our minds, that over the last two decades

our Government, the People Progressive Party/Civic Government, has been able to make a very significant turn around and shed some of the marginalisation and plight bestowed on us since the days of colonisation, and even the dark days when Guyana was undemocratic. In fact, we must point out that, we as a country, as a nation, have been preserving our fledgling democracy for the last two decades. It is for this period that I want to establish that a significant level of attention, a significant level of achievement, a significant level of development, has occurred. Therefore, while we do not pat our backs, or we do not beat our drums, we would wish not to have our minds clouded that nothing was done.

Yesterday the Hon. Sydney Allicock made his presentation. I believe that my impression of the Hon. Member prior to becoming a Member of Parliament was that he had a very stable level of thinking or he was independent in terms of thinking. Yesterday he raised a number of issues which I believe needs to be addressed. In fact, the Hon. Member made a call for the amendment of the Amerindian Act. I wish to say that the Amerindian Act of 2006 has been noted for the recognition of Amerindian land rights through full and absolute collective title, constitutionally guaranteed against any taking by the state as well as for giving statutory recognition to the intricate cultural and spiritual relationship of Amerindians with land. If this law or the part that dealt with titling of lands to Amerindians was so flawed how can we then explain the responsiveness of the members of the villages and their and leaders, in seeking to submit their requests for titling? If this legislation was so flawed why would 41 communities submit independently, after their own discussion, for extensions? I believe that in the past the Hon. Member would have understood the process, but suddenly he is denying, living in denial, that the Act offers a very good, an excellent, process for the titling of lands to Amerindians. I believe those who crafted the law, who spent more than three to four years consulting on the ground, the leaders who contributed to the formulation of this modern piece of legislation, would have been staring at each other in awe, if they were together, thinking about their work how their own is now denying that they are capable of formulating and putting into law the type of process which they believe in. I think it is an injustice to those leaders who spent enough time dealing with this.

I also want to raise a few other issues which the Hon. Member dealt with yesterday. He also said that in St. Ignatius they are worried about the land being allocated to outsiders or to others. I wish to say to this Hon. House that that is not the information of the Ministry neither has St.



Ignatius, when I scan the list of 41 villages, submitted any application to date for extension. Therefore, while he is a Member of Parliament and probably has a constituency in Region 9, he needs to connect with the people so he would be ably advised as to the village position. And, therefore, his information on St. Ignatius issues with respect to extension to land is what is flawed. He needs to go now and request whether they will in the future be submitting an application. If they were so concerned about the lands being given away then it would only be natural for them to advance an application. Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund (GRIF).

The Hon. Member went on to talk about the issue with respect to the Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund. He stated that he would like to see the accountability and management of that Fund done properly. The Hon. Member's words, of course, sounded exactly like the release which was put in the press sometime in March, 2010. Maybe he was quoting, or maybe he read the Amerindian People's Association (APA) letter and the release, the public statement, which was made to the media in March, 2008 and 2010, and also the letter which the APA sent to the Norwegian Agency for Development and Cooperation sometime in March, 2010. We agreed to ask to manage the funds. I wish to say that the last National Toshaos Council meeting held in Georgetown just last year, provided an overall approval for the use of the funds that were committed to assisting Amerindian development, and to fund critical and priority projects which were contained or were part of their community development plans. Of the 170 leaders who attended that Conference 166 of them signed the resolution asking the Governments, which is the Kingdom of Norway and the Government of Guyana, to expedite the disbursement of these funds. What I want to say is that we cannot be shifting on Amerindian development because we are on some side now. We have to be able to leave that behind and put our people first. We have to put our people first. Many of us wave the flag and many of us say that we are very proud that we are the first people, and here it is one of our own is renegeing and shifting on our own development.

This brings me to the fact that when the Hon. Member last spoke in the National Assembly, when we were discussing Financial Paper No. 7, he was able to abstain, and I felt very happy. What was he abstaining on? He was abstaining from the votes on the objection and the disapproval of the allocation for hinterland roads. I would therefore wish to recommend to my colleague, friend, and the Hon. Member on that side, that you cannot renege. On hinterland roads

you showed clearly that you could stand up, be your independent thinker, and vote for or abstain in support of our people.

I also want to say that drawing from the conclusion of all that he said... [Mrs. Backer: Who is he?] ...sorry, all the Hon. Member said, when he spoke about the indigenous people and their lands, I want to say that the Member must exercise great care that he does not send the wrong signal to the public of a disconnect with the Amerindian population and the rest of our nation. In Guyana today there is no need to insight, or any intent to swap out, or swoop up, state lands away from others who have equal and legitimate rights to land in this country. I drew this conclusion as he raised objection to the award of house lots, in the Tabatinga Lethem Housing Scheme, to others whom he referred to as coastlanders. I wish to remind the Hon. Member that Guyana comprises an ethnically diverse population, and no one should insinuate or advocate covertly or openly any form of discrimination against our Guyanese brothers and sisters.

The Government's struggle for the release of the GRIF funds – and I want to raise this point here - has been marred by both internal and external agitators. Recalling the letter sent the Norwegian Development Agency, I believe the intent was to sabotage the disbursement of funds to Guyana. Funds committed to pursuing a low carbon economy, and from which Amerindians stand to benefit with regards to funding of projects identified by them. This is the extent to which detractors of indigenous development will go to stymie much needed developmental support necessary to make a difference in the economic development, the creation of employment and the increased income for our people. It begs the question: Is the opposition adverse to Amerindians receiving higher levels of development? I ask this question since I also heard from the other side the Hon. Member Marcello making mention of a similar comment. The Hon. Member noted that Amerindian development financing should come from income earned from within and not from handouts from foreign countries. Her position noted that outsiders, coastlanders again, are plundering the wealth that rightfully belongs to the people of the hinterland. I suspect that she was referring to the mostly... [Ms Wade: The Hon. Member.]

The Hon Member I suspect was referring to Amerindians whose population is an estimated 90% in the hinterland. Therefore, I wish to say the following fact must be presented: that Amerindian Village Councils have the authority under the Amerindian Act to provide permission to any miner who has lawful permission from Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) to

mine. What currently obtains too in the villages is that the village council average tribute rate ranges from 10% to 15%, coupled with conditions that support community development and provisions of employment and services by the miners operating within their village. It would be wise if the proceeds collected by village councils are invested in projects which will benefit the residents. The Ministry of Amerindian Affairs has to constantly address the complaints by the members of the communities that are engaged in mining, and provide authority and permission for miners to work in their land. They should be frugal and also be able to wisely spend those funds.

I also wish to make the point that the Hon. House must know that GGMC is mandated under the Amerindian Act of 2006 to pay over or transfer 20% of the royalties collected from mining occurring in Amerindian titled areas. Last month the GGMC transferred to the Amerindian Development Fund (ADF) a total of \$49,081,382. This being done has again meant another plus, for support, for increasing the benefits from the mining sector which will be supporting village development.

With respect to her call not to use, as she called it, foreign country handouts, to drive Amerindian development, I can only relate the fact of the anxiety of the many village councils and members who are awaiting the disbursement of the GRIF funds. Mr. Speaker, not forgetting that the funds are not handouts but are lawfully earned by Guyana under the stewardship of the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, I, therefore, take umbrage that it is being referred to as financial handouts from foreign countries.

While the wait for the release from the GRIF funds has been long, it is most welcoming as the budget mentions that the GRIF funds will provide support to the socio-economic development of Amerindian communities through the implementation of their community development projects. The villages and communities, I am sure, are happy, as to date a total of 166 communities have submitted their community development plans. Out of those the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs has identified priority projects and has already conducted the financial and environmental assessment on the proposals, including examining the organisational and management structures they are proposing.

I must also say that the concept paper and proposal has been published late in the last week of March, 2012, for the comments of stakeholders. Thus, I wish to say the process is already revealing that there is a transparent process involved for projects that will be funded by the GRIF fund.

The Ministry of Amerindian Affairs is looking forward to lending our support in the execution of the wave of investment to the villages in the realisation of their priority projects and enterprises that will serve as the catalyst in advancing the transformation of the Amerindian village economies.

I now want to mention the role of the National Toshias Council as lending meaningful and complementary support to the village councils and to the work of the Ministry. I mention this to demonstrate the partnership which has unfolded in supporting the growth of the village in the areas of governance, administration and accountability; and to also put to rest the criticism emanating out of the media that the entity is political. I wish to say that they are only implementing the functions that are mandated to them under the law.

With respect to the Presidential Grant Programme Investments, I wish to say that this programme provides significant financial resources which contribute to the increased levels of assets owned by the villages, and also assist in capacity building of village councils and village members to manage small social productive and economic initiatives. The service has improved the economic infrastructure in villages through the implementation and management of many projects. The commitment for the 2010-2011 amounted to \$353.6 million going to a total number of communities amounting to 187. These are not handouts and therefore when one examines the level of investments and financial support which the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government has been making available to the villages I believe it is significant. I would wish to say that we should not deny the level of capacity that is emerging from the villages with respect to the successes in the presidential grant funding. Of course, you would find cases where there might be some failure, but the majority of these projects are successful. The Government of Guyana last year also included 28 additional settlements and satellites who for the first time will be receiving their grants. If one wants to hear what the grants are spent on with respect to the sectors I do not have the time to read the long list of 121 communities which have already uplifted their grants. I wish to say that the grants are utilised in relation to agriculture 43 projects,

30 in transportation services, 32 in village commerce, and 14 in eco-tourism initiatives. Thus far approximately 300 permanent jobs and 250 temporary jobs are expected to be created; some are already in progress and these include shop keepers, boat captains, drivers, guest house attendants and project managers. Over and above all the job opportunities and income is expected to be generated from these projects over the years.

Turning again to another opportunity which allows for the economic advancement of communities, I wish to draw to your attention the successful execution by the Santa Rosa Village Council of the Moruca Credit Scheme and Development Trust.

*5.16 p.m.*

Earlier, they had some hiccups in relations to the fact that they had issues with collections, but they have corrected that. They have just appointed a new board of trustees and the revision of the Scheme's policies were completed. To date they have issued 46 loans to small entrepreneurs, totalling \$4,370 000 for the financing of micro and medium commercial enterprises in the sub region.

These investments and support, which are provided to villages, will set the pace for catalysing the transformation of their economic activities from subsistence to a much more expansive one, whereby income and employment are expected to be generated.

Mainstreaming environment into the national development planning also involves, establishing links between poverty and the environment. Climate change issues, abatement and adaptation remain high on the agenda of village councils, which now seeks to extend economic activities beyond subsistence cultivation. At the Ministry level, a good example is manifested in the support to the most vulnerable groups to combat the effects of climate change. Towards this end, 2676 beneficiaries, who were severely affected in the last flash floods of Region 9, were provided with monetary assistance. The total expenditure for this initiative amounted to \$54,500, 000 in cash relief and \$9,500,000 for the re-tooling of local farmers with equipment, implements, machineries, storage, containers and seeds for replanting after the floods. I speak here only of the Ministry of Amerindian intervention in this disaster, which was experienced, but there was a collaborative effort. The Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Public Works, the

Regions and the Regional Administrations were all collaborating on it and all provided support, including the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM).

This is a good example of our Government responding to our people in times of disaster and while there were a lot of furore about this, for example, payments made to the victims of the floods during the campaign period. I have had my say in the media, but I believe sometimes when we take for granted Government's support to the indigenous people, we must stop using it in a way which reflects poorly on our Amerindian brothers and sisters. Over the last three years, the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government had made almost \$110 million in supporting the National Hinterland Secure Livelihood Programme and these projects are implemented...

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

**Mr. Hinds:** Mr. Speaker, I propose that the Hon. Minister be give another fifteen minutes to continue her presentation.

*Question put, and carried.*

**Mrs. Campbell-Sukhai:** Thank you Mr. Speaker. If there is one investment that the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government has made over the last three years, which offers prospect for supporting sustainable livelihood options for villagers and Amerindians, it would be the National Hinterland Secure Livelihood Programme, implemented by fifteen villages in the Mabaruma sub-region. In 2011, this programme received a budget of \$25 million, which supported the establishment of processing plants and equipment to advance the processing of value-added products. The pilot programme is a model for establishing similar business enterprises in connection with the Government's Low Carbon Development Strategy. With seven enterprises in agriculture and aquaculture production, 238 direct beneficiaries are already earning from the ventures. Income is likely to increase, as the yield in pineapples, cassava and ginger matures and is marketed.

The National Hinterland Secure Livelihood Programme did not proceed without hiccups. Like any project, plans and implementation strategy had to be re-examined, local farmers had to be continuously exposed to capacity building sessions and one of the enterprise had to be resuscitated, while one had a late start up.

An offshoot of these sustainability efforts has been the revitalisation of the bee keeping project that had been tremendously affected by the increment weather during the past year; as such we had to hire apiary consultants who had to facilitate the building of 62 new hives and the villagers have committed to complete 250 hives. Presently, the bee-keepers had been taught to extract honey from the hives, breeding of the queens, pest management, packaging and bottling of the honey.

In a similar vein, we facilitated the engagement of a cosmetics scientist from the USA for the creation of more marketable value added products from the crab-wood seed. The villagers have been taught to manufacture these projects based on a newly acquired technology. They are refining the production of soap and crab-oil, and also venturing, very soon, into the production of shampoos.

In Arukamai, ginger farming has multiplied and has been expanded to 30 acres. With promising yields, the cassava producers from Yarikita have commenced trial of producing value added products using their newly acquired machinery. The pineapple farmers have started selling their products locally as the yield, or the initial yield, is still sporadic. The crab processing group has produced more than 500 pounds of frozen crabs since its start up, but, for half of the year.

With respect to the hassar rearing project, the pond was completed in August last year and in September of last year, 3000 hassar fingerlings or hassar fries were placed into the ponds. However, as soon as the specialist term came to an end, the management of the project was affected by the poor management of the village council and the association established to take the project forward.

Contrary to reports that there were no hassars to be found in the ponds, our Community Development Office (CDO) and the aboriginal interns from Canada verified on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012 that there were hassars in the ponds. The specialist has provided advice to the primary stakeholders over and over that hassar is a species of fish which are bottom dwellers and will not surface in any regularity. The media have over milled this story in their attempt to discredit the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs and the Minister, whose pronouncements made to the press was based on the advice of the specialist. *Stabroek News* indiscriminately attempted to engage a response without due regards to the facts of the matter.

The Tobago village capacity is constantly being supported as they are still adapting following their resettlement and coping with the management of projects remains a challenge for them. The ownership of projects under the National Hinterland Secure Livelihood Programme remains largely with the villages and the village council, including the associations that are involved in this programme.

I do not intend to be irresponsible, what I intend to do is to continue to support and to build the capacity of the leaders and the members of the Tobago Village, to empower them and not to support or to advocate dependency.

Overall, the National Hinterland Secure Livelihood Programme is slowly transforming the village economies in Region 1, with the hiring of additional specialists in the future. We expect that this programme will stand as a model for the other regions in due time.

Let us look at some of the expanding infrastructure taking place in the Hinterland. Whilst the entrepreneurial initiatives in the villages are taking place, the current focus and development of economic infrastructure, such as water, electricity and transportation will obviously be improved and it will better facilitate the competitiveness of products coming from areas within the Hinterland.

In terms of market access, the effects of village entrepreneurship can snowball tremendous poverty alleviation as it foments income generation, thereby providing the impetus for exchange, which is the blood of a progressive economy.

The road construction and rehabilitation in the Hinterland has been a process in development that the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government has endeavoured to continuously undertake.

The \$2 billion Hinterland Road Programme for upgrading the main roads network will see central connections being improved and expanded. Already, at this present time as we are deliberating and debating here in the National Assembly, the time to get from Lethem to Karasabai is now reduced by half the time. Initially, it took three hours or more to get to Karasabai from Lethem, now it takes one and a half hours to get there. In addition to that, the linkage that has been created is the fact that mini-buses are now plying the route and the cost for travel by the residents of Karasabai has been drastically reduced. It cost less than \$6000.00



return to Karasabai from Lethem, when in the past or the not so long ago past it cost \$60 000.00 hire one-way.

I will also wish to draw to your attention the Moruka Sub-Region Road Construction Programme. Over the year, 80 miles of road was constructed in the Moruka sub-region, 52 miles are in progress currently and maintenance works on some of the roads have already seen 4 miles being addressed. Let us look at the results, Santa Rosa, an Amerindian Village, in less than two years have seen the entry of no less than 60 vehicles of all types and models, ranging from cars to pick-up trucks, lorries, tractors and the luxury SUVs. This improvement in the road network is benefitting all residents, including school children. Alternative modes of travel now exist or are available. Village councils are investing in vehicles, providing transportation services to residents and the entrepreneurial potential have had direct benefits from the expanded road network. Therefore, yesterday when I was listening to the Hon. Member, Mr. Allicock, when he spoke about transportation needs in Lethem for school children, I wish to let the Hon. Member know that with the better roads, better improved roads, I believe that entrepreneurship must begin to take hold; that we must not advocate dependency. I want to demonstrate this by saying, Mocomoco, Tapakuma, Warimure, Kaburi, Wallaba, just to name a few communities, have invested in mini-buses and pick-up trucks so that they will be able to provide the much needed transportation for their residents.

This is what we are aiming for in the villages, sustainability, independence and entrepreneurship of our people, so that the question will not be asked later in the future, why are Amerindians not getting into commerce and business? Likewise yesterday a question was asked in this House, why do Amerindians not have the opportunities to be doctors, lawyers and accountants, etc? The environment created by the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government is throwing up the opportunities not only in commerce, business and tourism, but also at the educational level.

I want to touch a little bit on the solar electrification of the Hinterland communities, which is executed by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). The Ministry of Amerindian Affairs has stood solidly behind OPM Hinterland Electricity Unit (HEU). I listened to an assertion made in this House that there is discrimination in the distribution of the solar panels. I wish to close the case. I wish to say that the programme means that every single household will receive a 65 watts solar unit. Therefore, the village council, who on receipt of the bulk is responsible for the

distribution, not only are they responsible for the distribution, but local technicians have been trained so that they will not discriminate in terms of who to install for. With this, I believe we have to cleanse our political minds, because if we do not build trust it very much affects Amerindians development.

Capital expenditure - the capital investment in 2011 amounted to the total of \$272 million in support to build material capacity in various villages. From guesthouses transportation to farms equipment implement, this year we will see capital expenditure of \$213,600,000 covering similar expenditures, in keeping with the mandate of the Ministry to improve living conditions and open up the possibilities for socio-economic growth of the villages.

Land titling and demarcation – again this is a manifesto promise even before 1992 and we are very proud as a Government to say that we have made such significant strides in this area over the years. Therefore, we will be working persistently with the partner institution, which is responsible for the disbursement of funds, to fund the land titling and demarcation programme, we intend that within the next three years, we will complete titling, demarcation and also continue to address the submissions of extensions. We intend to title 13 villages. We will also be looking at 19 demarcations and 41 village extensions. I must say that the land titling and demarcation project...

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

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

*Question put, and carried.*

**Mrs. Campbell-Sukhai:** Mr. Speaker, least it be said that equal access to education is not available, I wish to say that this is one of the pillars or the main strategy of the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, to widen the reach to Hinterland students; new secondary schools in Sandcreek will be completed soon.

I have listened again to the colleagues on the other side or the Hon. Members on the other side who spoke yesterday. They mentioned that there were some issues dealing with the lack of support for students from Region 8, who were being denied or who did not have the opportunity

to attend skilled training and technical institutions. I wish to say that this indeed is not so, the education support, which this Government has provided to the Hinterland students and youths, is magnificent and cannot be compared to any opportunities that existed before.

For 2011, Maikwak produced one scholarship student and there are five scholarships awarded to Region 8 to attend technical institutions. In addition to this, there are many other opportunities with respect to indigenous youths applying for scholarships under the PSM (Public Service Ministry) and also applying for entry into the boarding and lodging and free tuition at the Kuru Kuru College, not forgetting the BIT training programme, GNITC and other areas where these scholarships are available.

I will now wish to deal a little bit, very briefly, with issues to do with health, since this was also raised in Dr. George Norton's presentation. He did not relate, speak or represent Amerindians, so I just briefly want to say that there has been an expansive upgrading of the building's or health infrastructure across the Hinterland. Likewise, the Government also provides a very highly subsidised referral system for Hinterland residents who have to receive treatment in Georgetown.

Likewise, the Amerindian hostel has accommodated 1281 persons, mostly patients, receiving attention at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. Expenses for accommodations, dietary and transportation return, including drugs and the physician, are all paid for by our Government.

Another issue which we have worked on and I believe is significant in the lives of Amerindians is in supporting the Ministry of Home Affairs and Guyana Registration Office (GRO) in ensuring that every Amerindian adult resident, including children, receive their birth certificates.

Today, we can speak of all the changes, but my time is limited. I want to mention one aspect dealing with the policy and governance, with respect to Amerindian villages. Our Government has continuously made efforts to improve the level of governance in Amerindian communities and to empower Amerindians throughout Guyana with the establishment of village rules. Under the law, villages have to produce their village rules and we have been encouraging villages to produce those rules. So far, there is already four such rules that have already been provided with legal review and will be sent to be gazetted. An additional nine village rules have been submitted for legal review and therefore, again I believe the villages and the village councils are indeed moving apace with respect to the growth and development of their capacities.

Our outreach – a matter was raised yesterday with respect to consultation, involvement and participation of the indigenous people in national programmes, policies and even the construct of this budget. I wish to say that the National Touthoa’s Council meeting is one of the broadest forum at which consultation takes place. Guyana is one of the only countries whereby Indigenous Leaders are allowed to interact with the entire Cabinet, including His Excellency. That is one forum from which we use as a platform to hear from our leaders, what their visions are, what their needs are and how much more can this Government support. In addition to that, we have Ministerial teams outreach, in our outreach we have taken on the task to allow village council members to make their intervention. They are the prime key participants in the meeting. I or anyone else, who is participating in the activities, limit ourselves with respect to our presentation.

I wish to say that Amerindians development poised to take off to achieve greater levels of development, I wish to admit that there is still a long way to go, to proudly say that Amerindians are no longer vulnerable, we have leap frog to greater heights by providing services to all Amerindian villages throughout; strengthening village economies, developing of our human resource, enhancing our infrastructure and investing in our people through a collective effort in improving social welfare, health, education and through respecting and reserving Amerindian heritage and protecting Amerindian peoples’ rights.

As a member of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government, I appeal to the Opposition to join forces in ensuring that Amerindian development will continue to be improved and I am confident that working together as one people, one nation and one destiny; I am stealing this from the Hon. Prime Minister, “Lead by His Excellency, President Donald Ramotar, together we will solidly be able to support the furtherance of Amerindian development”. While that is so, it is a very popular slogan which the Hon. Prime Minister uses in his speech and I think it is very relevant, not forgetting that it was the Hon. Member, Minister Benn’s father who coined that slogan. Therefore, again, “One people, One nation, One destiny”.

The Ministry of Amerindian Affairs supports the passage of the 2012 budget and gives its full support to the Ministry of Finance team. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you Hon. Minister. I invite the Hon. Member, Ms. Jennifer Wade, Region 5 representative and Member of Parliament to address the Assembly.

**Ms. Wade:** Thank you Sir. Tabled before this National Assembly is the 2012 budget, it is before us for debate and passage, thereafter, authorising the Government to expend these sums in the various sections. The budgeted amount for 2012 is \$192.8 billion and many are of the view that with this increase expenditure, things will improve somewhat.

*5.46 p.m.*

We all know that every year's budget has been bigger than the previous year, yet there has not been any significant improvement in the standard of living of our citizens.

The purpose and function of any Government is to sustain the welfare and wellbeing of its entire people – rich or poor, young or old. As such, the budget is not a statement to be taken in isolation. It is part of a design to bring greater happiness and comfort to the greatest number of our citizens. The emphasis and objective are, and must always be, the happiness of our people.

Prior to this budget we embarked on a series of consultations with several stakeholders in society to solicit their views on issues regarded as important in their lives and what they needed, what their concerns were and how they felt that these issues should be address. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all these patriotic citizens who took the time to participate in these consultations which aids my presentation here today. What is of great concern is the fact that many of those persons and groups claim that they have also spoken to Members of the Government and expressed the same issues to them. As such, I am disappointed for I know that these issues were not addressed in the 2012 Budget document.

I recall that during the debate on the 2011 Budget, I spoke about some critical problems affecting the people of my constituency, in general and I would like to list a few. I spoke about:

Crime

Lack of proper care and facilities

A regular supply of drinking water in certain areas

Lack of electricity

Bad roads

High prices for food items

Failure to deal in a sensible manner with agriculture

Poor drainage and flooding

Lack of roads to farmlands

Real unemployment

These were some of the matters which required urgent attention but the Government ignored the needs of the people of my constituency.

Budget 2012 is before us under the theme “Remaining on Course, United in Purpose and Prosperity for All”. It is my sincere hope that on this occasion promises will be fulfilled enabling Guyanese to breathe a sigh of relief. In Section 14, page 20, the Minister made mention of Government’s support in improved drainage and irrigation and expansion of capital infrastructure causing the industry to deliver another record performance in 2011. He went on to say that the total acreage under cultivation per crop is now at its highest ever. Nobody will dispute this but what I want to say is that much more could have been boasted about if this Government had lent a listening ear. We need, as Members of this National Assembly, to listen to the people; listen to the farmers, listen to the things that are affecting them. Give them the opportunity to make the recommendations, Hon. Minister, as to how their concerns can be addressed.

Let me give you an example: During the rainy season I visited some areas and one of those was Stratcampbell, Mahaicony. The farmers there took me to an area called the Basket Canal. This canal carries a one-door sluice instead of a four-door sluice. As a result of this inadequate drainage system, the farmers’ losses were heavy. These same farmers led a delegation to the Ministry of Agriculture under the watch of Hon. Mr. Robert Persaud and a set of promises were made to them. To date, as I speak, the situation remains the same; nothing has been done. The

point that I am making is, the Government could have been boasting about higher yield if they had only taken heed about what is going on in my constituency.

Attention must be paid, Hon. Minister, to the Abary River. This river must be desilted regularly. During the rainy season some farmers in my constituency received assistance from MMA-ADA (Mahaica-Mahaicony Abary Agricultural Development Authority). They risked their lives doing manual cleaning of canals, pumping water to save their crops, while others watched their millions perish; especially those south of the main canal. The entire region was affected by the flood. Cattle farmers, rice farmers, poultry farmers, cash crop farmers, along with other residents all suffered.

The question is: Why is the Government bent on releasing the water from the East Demerara Water Conservancy (EDWC) via the Maduni sluice without putting proper systems in place for farmers in Region 5? This has been happening since 2005 and it continues to happen.

Agriculture is our business and we are looking forward to achieving an appropriate level of food security through a sustainable approach in addressing the obstacles faced by farmers and stakeholders. One cannot say to farmers “grow more food” and at harvest time there is nothing to reap. No relieve from the Government can compensate farmers for the millions that they have lost. The Hon. Minister visited the area; he knows.

Rice farmers understand what is happening in the industry but they are also aware that the measures being implemented are of little consolation. After they had heeded Government’s call to produce and increase productivity they invested in machinery and other equipment and they became very vulnerable in terms of receiving an adequate return on their investment and that is worrying.

This Government must tell farmers why an Agricultural Development Bank is not provided even though several requests were made by small farmers. These farmers are challenged by timely and affordable land preparation services.

The Government needs to tell the farmers why the Government cannot reduce the cost of agriculture inputs such as, chemicals, fertilisers, bags and fuel. At this rate, how can one work for prosperity for all.

The farmers are saying that there must be a comprehensive drainage plan to address flooding.

## **HOUSING AND WATER**

Let me turn to some critical issues in my Region. The Region 5 Administration has been repairing the houses every year, wasting taxpayers' money. This is also because they fail to have the houses occupied although there are officers in need of accommodation. On the other hand, the police houses at Fort Wellington and Blairmont, houses in the MMA-ADA compound, are all in a deplorable state and no effort is being made to renovate them.

In No. 22 Bel Air there is a squatting area and residents have been clamoring for years to get the area regularised in order to receive electricity and pure water supply but to no avail, but yet squatters at Blairmont and Bath Settlement who started squatting long after these people at No. 22 Bel Air are enjoying electricity and pure water supply; taking into consideration page 45 of the budget, \$1.8 billion that was spent in the water sector – Facilitating and Construction, Upgrading, Distribution and Transmission.

I am speaking about the poor and less fortunate who cannot afford to pay for the connection. Will they still continue to beg for the basic source of life? For years now Ithaca and Burma have serious problems with the quality of water they receive. These residents have to purchase water for drinking and cooking purposes. These residents are drawing their own conclusions.

There is always the problem of unreliable electricity in my constituency. Power outages affect the flow of water for long periods. It is time that generators are placed at these pumping stations to bring relief to residents; especially the ones who cannot afford to buy tanks to store water.

## **YOUTH SPORT AND CULTURE**

They are only turning their attention to youth, sports and culture. The interest of our young people should be the priority of any Government. The budget declares that all things are beautiful; billions are being spent and yet problems still remain.

Guyana needs a competitive business environment to create jobs for young people – jobs for the jobless. Government needs to establish a pathway to create healthy lifestyles for our promising youths. All youth organisations need to benefit from an improved youth, sports and culture



system. Youths need a platform for drama in my Region because they have talent – music, arts and the care for those with special needs. Upgrading and developing all sports facilities throughout my Region. I do hope that the \$160 million that has been allocated for upgrading of sport grounds, countrywide, mentioned on page 49 in the Budget, Region 5 will benefit from this.

The President visited Region 5 and promised the residents of No. 8, No. 9, Third Street, Western Half Ithaca, Calcuta Cross Street – these are all cross streets. I am speaking about 2006, this is 2012. The Hon. Prime Minister and Dr. Anthony are aware of these promises. I would like to know how these families would benefit from the One Laptop per Family. Is this a way of saying to them that they are not qualified? This is disappointing. In this day and age, this information technology age, some citizens are still using lamps in my constituency; they cannot enjoy the benefit of a simple television. The youths are asking questions and I hope that this time around something will be done, Hon. Prime Minister, so that these people could at least enjoy electricity which is important.

The \$6 billion transferred to Guyana Power and Light by the Government: I want to know if this will assist the cross streets. These residents have to pay \$238,000 per person – poor people – to access one lantern pole in order to give them light in the cross street. I do hope that this amount will assist them. The Government needs to show some concern and bring some relief to these poor families.

The street light continuation is very important, Hon. Member, Mr. Benn. With all of the ills that are facing our society in the Region... [Mr. Benn: I will light you up this year.] Thank you. Urgent attention needs to be given to these areas: Burma, Perth, Chester to Washington, Profit to Recess – I am speaking about the main roads.

### **SEA AND RIVER DEFENSE**

Region 5 needs a proper seawall structure. The residents of Profit, No. 37, Kingelly, Brahan, Ross and Yoville are very fearful as the sea continues to create breaches. There is need for urgent corrective measures. It is unsafe and frightening. I want to invite the Hon. Minister to visit my Region and see the situation as it is. Some of the very officers who report to him are not accurate

in their reporting. I want to advise the Hon. Member to speak to Mr. Winston Whyte, who lives in No. 37 Village, and he will tell you what you need to know, Hon. Member.

It is also important to lend a listening ear. In 2012 the sum of \$2.9 billion is budgeted for the continued protection of our sea and river defense; stated on page 35. I hope that the critical emergency works that will be done in Region 5 will be done by experts this time and not local laymen.

The disposal of solid waste in a safe and efficient manner is supposed to be everybody's business by ensuring that the health and wellbeing of our nation is preserved. It should be noted that all environmental issues should be given equal treatment and emphasis must be placed in the regions to bring an end to the kind of indiscriminate dumping of garbage, especially in the business communities – Rosignol and Bush Lot.

Region 5 is of the view that it should be consulted before works are carried out in its communities. While the Government boasts about accomplishment of roads and bridges, I want to highlight the poor quality of work being done for large sums of money. In some areas the quality of work is highly questionable. The Government needs to stop the discrimination. It is causing serious problems in my constituency. If chipseal and bitumen are being used in Novar the same must be used in Calcutta and Catherine; let us have a levelled playing field. We need proper roads and streets. I hope that these dams in No. 28, Litchfield, Catherine, Lovely Lass, Golden Grove, Bush Lot, Belladrum, even the MMA compound... The street next to the Coco Cabana... Hon. Minister Jennifer Westford could bear me out because when they did campaigning during that time they received some Belladrum treatment; that is the BT (Belladrum Treatment).

## **VULNERABLE GROUPS**

The emphasis and objective must be the happiness of our people, especially when the Government says "prosperity for all". That being so, the question is: Who determines what will make our people happy? Mr. Speaker, I spoke about this in this Hon. House before. I referred to the public assistance recipients and the attitude of some board members, Hon. Minister responsible, and the male officer in the Region. It is appalling to witness what the single women

and persons living with HIV/AIDS are going through, what they have to endure when they approach the entity for assistance, hence the reluctance of most of them to seek the needed help.

The Minister responsible needs to address these social issues:

In Guyana today there are women who are going through life forlorn. We need to face reality. These officers need to visit these poverty stricken communities before jumping to conclusions. In this day and age in my constituency there are families living in mud houses; there are families living with thatched roofs. It really hurts when the poor and the needy in society are not receiving the needed assistance. I think that the time has come that this must be stopped.

Judging from the last review I am sure that we will have no ends of school dropouts because of economic reasons. Workers can no longer survive on the meagre wages due to high cost of living and poverty is on the increase in my constituency. There are parents who cannot afford to send their children to school; the Hon. Member Mrs. Volda Lawrence visited, she can tell you. Some of them say that their children go to school only two days per week because of meals, books, bridge crossing and bus fares. Care is given not spoken, Mr. Speaker.

The distribution of pension books leaves much to be desired, especially in the application process. The length of time it takes to process is too long – no proper record system. Very often persons have to reapply...

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

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

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Ms. Wade:** Thank you, Sir. The unavailability of cash at the post office every month needs urgent attention. Every month poor people, feeble people suffer; coming and going only to hear “come back this week”, “come back next week” to receive the little pittance afforded to them.

The workload is heavy on the probation and social service officers in the region because of the increase of child abuse, domestic violence, suicide attempts and rape. I say that the officer is doing a great job but there is need for more staff.

In the health sector in my region there is a simple problem. There is dire need for a generator with a throw-over switch. When there is a power outage a staff member is called from his home to turn on a generator and very often the hospital is left in darkness until he arrives. This is not good enough. There is also a shortage of nursing staff – attention needs to be given in this area. There is a hostel in the hospital compound and it is being used as a diabetic foot clinic and our nurses have nowhere to stay. Hon. Minister, please take note.

In conclusion, I stand here as guardian of my people's rights in the constituency of Region 5. It is said that those who do not learn from their mistakes of history are condemned to repeat them. Whatever we say on the opposition side is always irrelevant on the Government side no matter how one's recommendations are important. We argued in vain over the 9<sup>th</sup> Parliament. I think that this time around someone needs to listen to someone.

We were on the election campaign 5 months ago. The Government's side visited communities and received some village treatment simply because the people's business was forgotten – they did not deliver. Mr. Speaker, the purpose of a budget is to improve the quality of life for all, not a few. The treasury is not one's personal bank account for which they do not have to account to the people of Guyana. Guyanese have a right to know how their money is spent and also have a right to have an input in how it is spent. It is time to be honest with the nation.

The Minister pointed out in his presentation that this budget is the biggest ever, meaning everything is bright and beautiful. I am saying that, on this side of the House, the APNU, our priority is the wellbeing of all the people of Guyana. We say "a good life for all". We are committed to ensure that all Guyanese are treated with respect. Before this Hon. House are the issues of my Region which need urgent answers. I call on the government to create a levelled playing field and a pleasant atmosphere where all are treated equally regardless of their political persuasion.

It is my hope that at the end of this debate the Government will remember the budget theme "Remaining on Course, United in Purpose, Prosperity for All". I say that the people of Region 5 await their prosperity. You have listened to their problems and their cries. We will hold you to the task by reminding you of the words taken from Proverbs, Chapter 3, Verses 27 and 28, "Do not withhold good from those who deserve it when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your

neighbour “come back later, I will give you tomorrow” when you have it with you today” – the words of the Lord. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

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

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I offer congratulations in absentia to the Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, and his budget team for rising above the challenges of today’s political climate, to prepare and present to this National Assembly a budget that offers opportunities for a continuation of the development process in our country.

This process was started by the PPP and I have no apologies for that statement. This process begun with the PPP/C and has been sustained... **[Ms. Ally: What process?]** ...I am talking about the development process. Development, my friends, is a process. It is not something that happens over night and if the Hon. Member, Ms. Jennifer Wade could only understand that, then she could appreciate why it is that one cannot always have delivered to them projects that you may want, needs that you may want satisfied, at the time when you want them.

Mr. Speaker, some from the other side are prejudiced and they hold uninformed views. It is always about what is missing. They can see nothing progressive coming out of these budgets but, my friend, somebody needs to explain to me why it is that, in keeping with economic indicators – and I am talking about universally accepted economic indicators – Guyana has been doing well. The budget, like all the other budgets we have presented to this House, takes cognizance of the fact that resources are very strictly limited and try as we may we will never be able to satisfy all of the wants of the people at the same time; we need to try to accept this.

The budget has been, for us, a tool which we have effectively and efficiently utilised over the years. We have consistently and we have persistently pursued a policy of development which offers opportunities for all of us. You have to come onboard; you cannot stay on the sideline.

We need to realise that the commitments about which I speak come out of our manifestos which come from the people; they come from our poverty reduction strategy, which came out of consultations with the people; they come out of our millennium development goals, which came out of consultations with the people. The budget is always about consultation. I know that they, on the other side of the House, believe that consultation is limited to a couple of weeks before

the budget jumping around the place and meeting with people and bringing to this House whatever they hear in rum shops and on the roadside, but our budget process starts from the time one has ended – the other one begins. Our consultation is a continuous process that spreads over a long period and reaches out to the people. So, if you wanted your utopian plans that you took to the people at election time to be part of this budget “No, Sir. No, Madam?”. It must come out of consultation with the people and that is what this budget is about.

The budget process is guided by the principle of equal opportunity and uplifting for all, and by our focus on continuing to work to remove poverty. My good friend, Hon. Dr. Roopnarine, who has departed but I am sure he will be back, [Ms. Ally: No, he has not departed.] described... Mr. Speaker, I hope I will get back my two minutes. He described the Budget Presentation as a performance but the only performance is coming from the economy. Dr. Ashni Singh is conducting the economy; that is what you are seeing. My friends, this is the conductor who has been conducting the economy and that is why the performance has been *par excellence*.

6.16 p.m.

I said earlier on that I find it hard to understand that an economy which has been doing so well, people are saying that we are not moving forward; we have not been doing anything. Listen to me. Budget allocation in 2006 was \$102.9 billion. I think that they know numerals. In 2012, it is \$192. 8 billion – a 47 per cent increase. [Ms. Ally: What does that mean?] I will tell you that. Take time. Look at it again. Real growth in 2006 was 4.7 per cent; real growth in 2011 was 5.4 per cent, at a time when the economies of CARICOM countries were struggling to achieve even a one per cent growth. At a time when many economies in Europe and North America were experiencing difficulties, Guyana recorded growth, and yet, you are telling me that the policies and the programmes that we have are not working. You are not working; your heads are not working.

Inflation, a period of constantly rising prices: In 2006, it was 4.5 per cent; in 2011, it was 3.3 per cent and in 2012, the projection is 4.6 per cent. Is it not signs of improvement? The truth hurts. When all of this is looked at...I do not want to go into all of this. But, my friends, the point is simply this: that these indicators are showing, for those who have eyes to see, that the economy of this country has been improving. These impressive gains and successes can only be attributed

to and explained by the plans, the policies, the programmes and the projects of this Government. I want to look at some of those programmes.

The modernisation of the traditional sectors of our economy...Some of our speakers dealt with it, but I think it is so important that it could not be overly emphasised. The sugar and rice industries which continue to be important mainstays of our economy...Dr. Roopnarine, while conceding that progress has been made in rice - substantial progress at that – said that it was due to factors outside of the Government. I was disappointed in that statement because we all know that the performance in rice was due to a number of factors, some of which the Hon. Minister Dr. Leslie Ramsammy mentioned. It was due to more cultivation; it was due to the fact that yields were been able to acquire that could withstand natural factors and it was due to the fact that a lot of resources have been put into drainage and irrigation, and so this is very important for us. In addition, my friends, in the case of rice, this sector is poised for major expansion and, therefore, our continued focus on improving drainage and irrigation is a very important and timely position.

The sugar industry...I have to touch on it. As you can see, my friends, local government is about what happens in all of the communities, in all ten of the Regions of this country. The sugar industry which employs about twenty thousand persons...Therefore Government's continued efforts to transform this industry and ensure it achieves financial viability and profitability must be seen as critical. The sugar industry, as the rice industry, has been responsible, in large measure, for where we are today and we must not be so unkind; we must not be so ungrateful. As one economist said, sugar is too critical to fail. I support that and, therefore, I and thousands of Guyanese support the programme to help sugar. Even if it means a subsidy of \$4 billion, we must support it.

The Agricultural Diversification Programme, let me speak a bit on this. Investors' growing interest in our minerals, especially our gold, our manganese...I know that the Hon. Member Mr. Allen will support me when I say that the joy of the people, not only in Region 1, but across Guyana...That Reunion Manganese Inc., has been able to employ over three hundred persons in the manganese industry and it is anticipated that one of the largest manganese mines in the Region would be developed and the bottom line is that over one thousand persons will get jobs.

**[Mrs. Backer: Tell us about the elephants.]** Part of what we have been doing, my dear, has to do with focusing on the social services. I want to deal a bit with that, because when we talk

about local government we talk about what happens, as I said earlier on, in all ten regions. We have been, the PPP/C Government, since we came to office in October 1992, focusing, in large measure, on revitalising, reinvigorating the social services which you left run-down.

Education is one of those areas. Given the important role of an educated and a well trained population for future development and for poverty reduction, and given, also, Government's concern that the kind of education being delivered is relevant, useful, applicable and anticipatory of the country's future needs, the education sector remains for us a priority and that is why friends...Look at the budgetary allocations. In 2006, it was \$3.1 billion. But look, in 2011, it was \$23.4 billion – an eight hundred per cent increase in five years. In 2012, it is \$26.5 billion. What does it mean? What does it mean for all of us? It means, in terms of improvement in the infrastructure – building more schools, extending existing schools, rehabilitating schools – a better environment is prepared for the teachers to teach and for the students to learn. That is what it means; that is what it translates into. Any investment in education is money well spent. Never mind the money spent, it is the benefits that we get - the returns on the investment, the ROI. That is what is important for us.

Do you know what? What are the indicators? That is the question often asked. We spend all of this money and what do we get in return? I would like to address one Region for now; I am coming to the others. In Region 1, for example, in 2010 the number of children attending schools – nursery, primary and secondary – was nine thousand eight hundred and fifty-four. **[Mrs. Lawrence: What is the source?]** I will make this document available if you need it. In 2011, it rose to ten thousand three hundred and thirteen. These are indicators.

Teaching staff: In 2010, nursery – forty-five, primary - two hundred and ninety-three, secondary - seventy-one, a total of four hundred and nine. Do you know what the figures were for 2011? It was nursery - forty-seven, primary - three hundred and twelve, secondary eighty-three, a total of four hundred and forty-two. I want to go further than that. Trained teachers: In 2010, it was one hundred and thirty-one - fifteen for the nursery level, seventy-one for primary and forty-five for secondary. **[Ms. Wade: Where are they?]** Do not run too fast, you will fall. In 2011, for the nursery level it was nineteen; for the primary level it was one hundred twenty and the secondary level it was forty-nine. It is a total of one hundred eighty-eight.



Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examination performance: In 2010, it was 46.4 per cent and in 2011 it was 48.6 per cent. My friends, I use these figures as a sample to show you that as a result of the investment in education we have had improvements - enrolment, attendance and the quality of teachers. If we use Region 1 as an example, friends, a lot of the senior positions that were previously held by people from the urban areas are now being satisfied by people from the very Region. What has been happening in Region 1 is happening all over the Hinterland. In some Regions, it is in larger measures than in other Regions. The extent to which our people become more educated, they are able to shoulder greater responsibilities, at a higher level, and to that extent, we can entrust, as the Hon. Member Dr. Roopnarine would like to see happen, more responsibilities upon them, even at the level of the Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs) and Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs), and we can have a greater satisfaction, no doubt.

I want to deal a bit with health and then go, specifically, to the issue of local government. In 2007, the budget allocation for the health sector was \$10.6 billion. In 2011, it was \$11.5 billion and in 2012, it is \$16.9 billion. People expect that when these sectors are invested in, the returns will be immediate, and many of us are guilty of conveying that to the people - misleading them. When they heard that \$16.9 billion is in the budget for health, they expect tomorrow to see a new hospital going up; they expect to see tomorrow two or three ambulances being bought, if that is a need; they expect all of these things to happen, but there is order. There is order in delivering these good and services. I want to say this: My focus this evening is on Regions 1, 7, 8, 9 and 10. Those of you who have worked in the Hinterland region...I am not talking about passing through; I am not talking about relying on the views of one or two persons. Those who have experienced the Hinterland would know that over the years a number of health care providers have been trained - health workers, medex, pharmacists and dentex. In fact, more than that, we have been taking a position that our approach to health care must be one which takes us to the people. Gone are the days when we sat in the hospital - I cannot even say that we sat in the health huts because there were none - and expect the sick to come to us always. That is the whole idea behind the health worker training programme; that is the whole idea behind the medex training programme; that is the whole idea behind dentex training programme - behind all of those training programmes. We believe that an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure. If we educate our people, the chances are that we will reduce the level of illnesses.

What do we have today? There is a reduction in child and maternal mortality. That is a fact. That is an established fact! It is not just the Hon. Member Mr. Whittaker saying that. There is the reduction in the prevalence in diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS. I want to touch a bit on malaria. The Hon. Members shared with us last evening that there has been an increase in the cases of malaria and this is due, in large measure, to mining activities. My friends, what I am about to say is based on experience. **[Mrs. Backer: Have you ever had malaria?]** I have had it several times, my dear. The problem with malaria and its treatment is that our miners are very mobile and the result of that is very often they are not compliant. It is not for the want of available human resources; it is not for the want of available medicine to treat them, but it is due to the fact that our miners, in their quest for wealth, often put their health second to the wealth. These are considerations...but we are working to deal with that and that is why we have been working with miners in small groups, training them to do testing, helping them to do testing. We are training the miners to do that so that within the very mining areas, themselves, these things can be dealt with.

Friends, we are not saying that with all of this investment, everything is right. We are not saying that. Development is not only measured in terms of what is achieved. The depths have to be looked from where we started and when we take into account the fact that we took over from you, over there, a very much run-down economy, a state of disrepair, we can understand the situation.

I now want to look at what I call the reinvigoration of local government. Earlier on, the Hon. Member Dr. Roopnarine described our regional elections as a political charade. I sincerely hope that I heard him right.

**Dr. Roopnarine:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to assure the Hon. Member that he did not hear me right.

**Mr. Whittaker:** The Hon. Member expressed the view that a lot of what is done centrally should, indeed and in fact, be handled at the level of the Region. That is exactly what he said. **[Mr. Nandlall: I heard him said that.]** You have heard him. My friends, we cannot act outside of the existing legislation. The legislation – Chapter 28:01, 28:02, Chapter 12 of 1980 – was developed by the PNC and it has to be that it wanted to put a leash on the local government

bodies. It has to be that the PNC which was blessed with the services of a lot of legal luminaries, such as Mr. Shahabudeen, Mr. Ramphal and others... and, therefore, I find it difficult... [Mr. B. Williams: You are talking about the past.] That is why I used the past tense. I use the word “were” – “you were” blessed... to understand and appreciate that you did not factor in the kind of changes in the legislation that you want to see happen today. We would like to see that happen and we have been taking steps to ensure that that happens. But you, all of what you are asking for today, Sir, is not covered by the existing legislation, and we have to start by understanding that. Listen to me. [Mrs. Backer: Why are you shouting?] I am not shouting. This is my normal voice. As a teacher, that is my normal voice. We view the holding of Local Government Elections as integral to improving the quality of service that we deliver in the communities. We do hold that. My friends, while we wait on you, to use a colloquial term, *pallavaring*... [Ms. Ally: Just as how you are *pampasetting*.] *Pampasetting* is a synonym for *pallavaring*. While we wait on you, we, at the level of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, have been taking steps to empower, to build capacity at the level of our Ministry, at the level of our local government bodies so that they can be able to understand and appreciate...not only them, the people who we serve must be able to understand.

Hear what happens. When we take the necessary steps, you become angry. We are of the view that many of our officers within the local government staff are not performing, or are underperforming, and when we take steps to relocate them with the expectancy that, perhaps, there would be some renewed enthusiasm, some renewed vigour...While we take steps to train them...

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

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

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Mr. Whittaker:** While we take steps to replete the number of councillors in those NDCs where those numbers have become depleted, and the legislation that you prepared does allow us to do that, and while in some instances we are forced to replace the NDCs with Interim Management Committees (IMCs) which, again, the legislation allows us to do, you are annoyed. But friends,

these are merely interim measures that we are taking to bring some improvement, to bring some order, to what happens in those communities.

Over the past five years...Let me give some information. I do not want you all to go on the street corners and in the rum shops to get this.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member Mr. Whittaker, address your comments to the Chair and avoid getting into discourses with other Members.

**Mr. Whittaker:** Mr. Speaker, I seek your protection here, Sir.

**Mr. Speaker:** If you would address your comments to the Chair you will proceed fine, but if you make it into a personal discourse with Members of the other side you will run into trouble.

**Mr. Whittaker:** Over the past five years, what has happened is that the amount of support has been increasing that is given to the RDCs. The RDCs are not legislatively rated bodies; they cannot receive wage and so we have to. If you wanted them to go that way you should have amended the legislation since you had the authority to do it. Now we are going to be doing it, but we need your support. In 2011, we made available to Regions 1, 7, 8, 9 and 10 a total of \$476,721,000. This is capital releases. This is moneys to do new programmes. In 2012, that amount has increased, that is after one year, to \$860,000,041. Why do we do this? We do this because we want to make more resources available to the RDCs, but the Hon. Members need to understand that it cannot be that all of the Regions will get the same allocations. It just cannot be! Resource allocations are dependent on a number of factors. Among these are what is available. What is available is a key factor. Two, it is your ability to utilise what is made available to you. I cannot give you ten dollars this year, you return four dollars and tomorrow you want twenty dollars. What kind of economics is that? What will I be doing with the taxpayers' money? Many of the RDCs that you all are talking about have demonstrated incompetence in their inability to deal with these issues.

Resource allocations to the Regions are based on what is available and based, of course, on the needs as expressed in the budgets that they submit. It is the RDCs that reach out. Perhaps, it is not happening in Region 10, I do not know. Perhaps it is not happening in some of the Regions, but I can tell you that it happens in Regions 1; I can tell you it happen in Region 9, and it

happens in Regions 2 and 3. You have to help make it happen. [Mrs. Backer: Oh Norman, is that you?] Yes, my dear. My name is Mr. Truth. People have a difficulty in understanding this and one of their problems is that they are not good listeners; they do not listen. Mr. Speaker, they have to be listening. We make allocations to the Regions through the RDCs; we make allocation through the Regions through the municipalities, through the NDCs and also the sector Ministries also make a substantial input in terms of programmes.

Look, for example, at Region 10. I want to deal with Region 10. In 2011, Region 10 RDC got \$188.3 million. In 2012, it got \$221.8 million... *[Interruption from Members of the Opposition.]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, could you allow the Minister to complete his presentation? We have eight more Members to complete their presentations tonight.

6.46 p.m.

**Mr. Whittaker:** But listen to me, quite outside of that, the Linden municipality has \$10 million subvention that it is being unable to receive. Do you know why the Linden municipality has been unable to receive its \$10 million subvention? Because it has been unable to prepare a simple budget to reach out to the people and present to the Ministry. Of course, there is also the Kwakwani Neighbourhood Democratic Council which received \$3 million, but outside of that, there are several other things we need to know. At the level of the sector Ministry, Ministry of Public Works, a lot of the road works are going to be done through it. Solar lighting at Wiruni, at Kimbia, at Hururu, but what happens is that some people believe that Region 10 is Linden. Region 10 is not Linden. We have to reach out; we have to reach out to other communities. What happens to Wikki and Kalkuni? What happens to Ituni? What happens to Kwakwani? We have to reach out to all these areas. And so our friends, I want to come off of Linden, but before I do that I want to deal with this matter of electricity tariff. As you know, the truth hurts.

The PPP and the PPP/C have reached out over time to assist the people of Linden. This issue of electricity subsidy for Linden can be construed, in my view, as a move in favour of Linden. For while, Government was providing an electricity subsidy in Linden, Guyanese in many other parts of the country were paying a tariff that is about ten times higher than that paid by *Linden*ers. It was inevitable that with rising fuel prices, the low electricity tariff charged to consumers in Linden would have to be adjusted in time with the national rate. What makes them feel that they

could go on all the time with this subsidy? We could not continue to perennially subsidise the cost of electricity at Linden. What is so hard at that level? They still are getting the 1.8 kWh. Let me remind the Member that when the bauxite industry...Government bailed it out for years. You know why, to keep the jobs of the Linden employees. We pumped huge subsidies into the bauxite industry to save guard jobs. Remember the PNC administration had brought the Australian group called Minproc to close the industry, but we kept it alive; we kept it alive to keep the jobs of the people of Linden and Kwakwani. We have been subsidising the electricity cost for those two communities from time in memorial. I want to make this final statement on Linden. On a *per capita* basis, *Linden*ers receive more assistance from the PPP/C Government than many other communities.

I want to bring it to conclusion. We of the PPP/C have never said that the path towards realising a modern Guyana was an easy one. We have never said that. We are aware that along the route there are some hard choices and decisions which have to be made. But indeed the PPP/C stands ready, as we have always been, to meet and to rise above the challenges along the road. Our record of achievement is there for all those who have eyes to see, but some people see only what want to see. The plans, the policies, the programmes, the projects that we have developed have worked for us. If they worked for us, why scrap those things that work? Let us improve on them, why scrap them?

I am aware of those who scheme daily, like those over there, to thwart the genuine efforts of the Government, to transform the social and economic landscape of our country into one that opens continuously windows of opportunities for all. They have little to offer and less to add. Their diatribe and criticisms are not matched by ideas and proposals of anyone. We must see their pronouncements and diatribes for what they are - mere distractions and attempts to take away from us, and the Guyanese people, our success story.

The Budget 2012 allows us as a Government, as a nation, to remain on course, on an irreversible path to more progress. This budget is about our country's future and by extension that of its people. Let us unitedly support this Budget 2012 for it allows us to remain on course towards achieving prosperity for all of us. I salute you Dr. Ashni and the PPP. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, we will take the suspension now and will resume at twenty- five minutes after seven o' clock. Thank you.

*Sitting suspended at 6.53 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 7.29 p.m.*

**Mr. Sharma:** Mr. Speaker, please allow me to congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance for an excellent budget presentation, as he is known for. I would also like to congratulate the staff of the Ministry of Finance and the staff of the Ministries, Departments and Regions who compiled the budget. Nevertheless, the views that will be expressed by me are the reflection of the views of the people of Guyana I represent. As we are the people's representatives and, therefore, I am obligated to represent their concerns.

After the almost three-hour presentation by the Hon. Minister of Finance Dr. Ashni Singh, on Friday, 30th March, 2012, last, the length of the presentation and the assertions that the \$192.8 billion budget is the largest ever, being that that was a 25.1 per cent increase over Budget 2010, gave the erroneous impression that these facts alone make the budget an excellent one. Several times over, the people of Guyana have heard from the Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, of the largest budget ever. What did this mean for the people of Guyana? Did the Government use this largeness to pay the workers a decent living wage or a public assistance increase that is truly meaningful, alternatively, to ensure that old-age pension levels are adequate? Did these largest budgets deal with our most important problem of unemployment and underemployment, energy prices and reliability, flight of skills and, most of all, the tax burden, in particular VAT? Therefore, the people want to know whether this budget offers them a better quality of life and guarantees better quality of services. Whilst most Guyanese use these and other relevant indicators to determine the excellence of a budget, it is the view of many Guyanese that the budget is a disappointment. It is not going to significantly transform the people lives because of the absence of programmes to address the poor and vulnerable including persons with disabilities. The budget pays no attention to the plight of the poor people because there is no development of the human potential and that is the only way this country is going to be transformed. Further, it is the view that the Government's responsibility is to put in place policies that will give the poor and vulnerable people hope and the skills to build their capacity

and, therefore, must give priority to projects that increase the level of the income and the creation of permanent jobs.

A preliminary assessment of Budget 2012 will reveal that while there are a few goodies, such as the increase of the income tax threshold, and the increase in pension and public assistance for the citizens, there are all illusions as no real attempt has been made to reduce the burdensome Value Added Tax, or attempt to give any substantial increase in the minimum wages to enable the worker to cope with the rising cost of living. In effect, the \$600 increase in pensions, whilst welcome, will mean for the pensioner only a loaf of bread and quarter pound of cheese, and for the \$400 increase in public assistance, will mean for the recipients a loaf of bread and a piece of cheese. This increase cannot even buy one packet of the 400 g full cream milk powder that makes three litres of milk. The harsh truth is that we still pay a monthly pension that cannot even buy one week supply of nutritious food.

The Hon. Minister needs to explain that why, after giving an increase on old-age pension and public assistance, the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security allocation in the Budget 2012 is less than what was allocated in Budget 2011. See page 199 of the *Estimates of Public Sector Current and Capital Revenue and Expenditure*, Volume 1. Similarly, the increase of the income tax threshold is of no relevance to the thousands of workers categorised as labourers and security guards, office assistants, cleaners, handymen, drivers, clerks and many other workers in the public service and private sector whose gross pay is less than \$40,000 per month after the much talk about eight per cent increase in wages and salaries in 2011. Budget 2012 appears to be more of a political management tool. It is a camouflage of figures intended to dazzle and bemuse. It is one designed to bail out Government corporations plagued by inefficiency and mismanagement.

Further, the budget appears to provide, for handing an identified group of contractors, both locally and internationally, large contracts without safeguards on corruption. Mr. Speaker, there was nothing mentioned in the budget about the long awaited Procurement Commission to ensure that contracts to the value of billions of taxpayer dollars are awarded transparently and not siphoned off to handpicked contractors through a flawed tendering process that is currently opened to manipulation, such as the bungled US\$15.4 million or \$3 billion Guyana currency contract which was handed to Synergy Holding Inc. to build the road to Amalia Falls



Hydropower Project. This road was not built as how it was supposed to be done and the money which was paid was over US\$8 million. It is now in the court. Now new contracts are being issued to complete this same road. This road which leads to the project which is said to be the flagship of this Government, which the Hon. Minister mentioned. Apparently this ship will not be sailing soon.

Perhaps the greatest travesty of Budget 2012 is the most obvious, blatant abandonment of consultation as part of the preparatory process for it as was agreed upon by the His Excellency, the President, Donald Ramotar. This cannot go unnoticed and must be condemned especially in the context of this new dispensation in which the Joint Opposition Political Parties (JOPP) in the National Assembly represents the majority in this legislature of the Tenth Parliament of Guyana. The Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, declared the theme of this Budget 2012 as *Remaining on Course, United in Purpose, Prosperity for All* and I concur with it. In fact, it is the views of many Guyanese that Guyana's economic viability can only be realised if every group and representative of all the segments of our Guyanese society is involved in the decision making process and are beneficiaries of the economic gains. It is the only way that all Guyanese can claim ownership and thereby *Remaining on Course, United in Purpose, Prosperity for All*.

Value Added Tax: The plight of workers in this country has been compounded by the Government's intransigence and non-consideration of the rate of VAT. Please bear with me, Mr. Speaker, as I seek to set the background on this very important matter. Guyana had undertaken a major reform of its taxation system. Guyana adopted a VAT Act in 2005. The new tax, which took effect on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2007, at a general rate of sixteen per cent, replaced the consumption tax, service tax, hotel accommodation tax, entertainment tax, purchase tax and telephone tax. A relatively large number of goods are zero-rated under the VAT. The Government indicates that it continues a policy of favouring local manufacturers previously provided with a waiver to the consumption tax. The Government noted that the amount of revenue forgone is likely to be minimal. In addition, imports of raw materials are zero-rated if they are used in the production of goods subsequently exported by a taxable person who exports at least forty per cent of the products.

Guyana also enacted the Excise Tax legislation in 2005 and introduced Excise Tax on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2007. The Excise Tax was going to be levied on so-called sin and luxury goods,

therefore, the tax of these goods VAT plus Excise Tax would result in pre-VAT levels of revenue being collected and the collection of VAT plus Excise Tax would be revenue neutral. Throughout the debate on the VAT Bill in 2005, in the honourable House, the Government Minister emphasised the revenue neutrality of the tax. The honorable House was assured that the solemn intention of the Government was to collect the same amount of money as would be foregone by the taxes that would be scrapped. The Government commissioned an impact assessment study in which a Special Select Committee on VAT and the Excise Tax had the benefit of and it was clearly stated, in that Report, that at the point in which the Report was compiled in 2005, the Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, declared, "... yield a tax that was to be replaced by VAT and Excise Tax for \$16.4 billion and therefore represented a revenue neutrality in 2005."

It is a deliberate judgement, the Government used the combined figure of \$24.8 billion as projected revenue from the VAT and Excise Tax, no doubt building into those figures the projected growth in imports which would also, in the previous regime, have attracted consumption taxes and some of the other taxes that were in place. Therefore \$24.8 billion represents revenue neutrality in 2007 which represent a 51.22 per cent or \$8.4 billion increase over the 2005 figure of \$16.4 billion. Further, the VAT collections in 2007 were \$37.7 billion which represents a positive revenue yield of approximately 123.8 per cent or \$20.3 billion over the 2005 period. A point to note is that in 2000, VAT collected represented 27.6 per cent of total tax revenue. However, interestingly, since this fact was declared the Government avoided talking about the VAT yield, but even more significantly the words "revenue neutrality" suddenly disappeared from its vocabulary. In the Hon. Minister of Finance Dr. Ashni Singh's budget speech, 2008, on page 12, he stated, and I quote:"The Value Added and Excise Tax yielded collections of \$36.7 billion. The increased collections are reflection of the significant increase in imports realised during the year".

In budget debate, 2011, it was significant that the Hon. Minister never spoke of revenue neutrality nor did he concede that there was a positive revenue yield. These terms were studiously avoided even after it was identified that the increase from 2005 was more than 123.8 per cent or \$20.38 billion. I challenge the Hon. Minister to prove to this National Assembly that the increases in VAT, then and now, represent and are bore out of an increase in imports. I want

to suggest that in naming this budget under the theme “*Remaining on Course*” I would not like the Government to remain on this course.

The Hon. Minister should come clean because he know that there continues to be a significant windfall, not only because the figure so indicates, but because the Government finds it easy to hand out \$10 billion bailout - \$4 billion to GuySuCo and \$6 billion to Guyana Power and Light (GPL). The VAT plus Excise Tax, undoubtedly, contributed positively in the increase expenditure as we see on various activities in the budget, and maybe, there are all deserving items of expenditure. But that is not the point. The Guyanese people, at the minimum, deserve a full explanation, and which is long overdue. These windfall in VAT should have trickle down to the poor in the form of substantial wages and salary increases whereby there is larger percentage increase allocated to the lower level of the salary scales, bands 1 to 6 and bands TS 1 to 9 in the teaching service, and smaller increases allocated to the higher level of the salary scale, for example, bands 7 to 14 in the public service and bands TS 10 to 19 in the teaching service. This would in no way negatively affect the collection of VAT since money in the hands of the poor would mean increase spending as against money in the hand of the rich which would mean increase savings and overseas vacation trips, not benefiting positively the collection of VAT.

Maybe, the Hon. Minister may see it fit to ultimately reduce the VAT from sixteen per cent to fourteen per cent in the first instance and to deal with the informal economy which deviates taxes. It must be pointed out that the budget submitted by the Hon. Minister of Finance may not include all of the requirements of section 15 (i) of the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act and, therefore, a failure to comply with the requirements of the law. It is stipulated, that, and I quote:

“estimates of all statutory expenditures, for the past relevant years, the current fiscal, year, the next ensuing fiscal year and the next following three fiscal years;”

This is not an option that the Minister has if he is to comply with the law. Further, it is a requirement under what is supposed to be a hallmark legislation guiding us in the area of fiscal management and accountability. Section 15 (j) states that:

“estimates of expenditures for investment by each budget agency for the next ensuing fiscal year and the next following three fiscal years;”

The Hon. Minister, in his respond, may say that these are the requirement of each budget agency submission to the Ministry of Finance, but not a requirement for the Ministry of Finance. Why burden the budget agencies to submit this information and not simply include this information for the benefit of this honourable House? When the Government treats the representatives of the people here, in this National Assembly, with such contempt and when it fails to comply with the law, ought we not to be surprised that respect for and compliant with the law within this body politics of our society is steadily diminishing? Further, up to the year 2005, Volume 1 of the *Estimates of the Public Sector Current and Capital Revenue and Expenditure* included, in respect of staffing details for each agency, the number of authorised positions alongside the number of positions filled. In addition, Volume 1 of the *Estimates of the Public Sector Current and Capital Revenue and Expenditure* includes, in respect of Appendix Q, a list of pensionable post under Ministries, Departments, Regions, the number of authorised positions alongside the salary scale. It must be noted that in 2006 the column showing the number of authorised positions was mysteriously dropped without any explanation whatsoever, and this situation has repeated itself in the Estimates throughout the tenure of the Hon. Minister Dr. Ashni Singh. Although this is a concern to which the Hon. Minister was alerted in the past, nothing was done to rectify this anomaly to date. The question that arises is why...

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

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

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Mr. Sharma:** The question that arises is why has there been no explanation to the people's representatives here? And what is the harm, or mischief, if the authorised position shown expects to show the level of vacancies in the budget agencies, which is being now occupied by contracted employees?

In concluding, whilst the Budget 2012 does not indicate any increase in the wages and salaries of public servants... However perusal of Volume 1 of the *Estimates of the Public Sector Current and Capital Revenue and Expenditure*, page 44, Agency: 03 Ministry of Finance, Programme: 031 - Ministry Administration, under line item 6141 – “Revision of Wages and Salary”, a sum of \$3.742 billion was budgeted which would indicate that the Ministry of Finance has set aside

sufficient funds to pay a possible five per cent increase in wages and salaries across the board, so yet there is hope for the people. Thank you. [*Applause*]

**Minister of Health [Dr. Ramsaran]:** Mr. Speaker, thank you for this opportunity of allowing me to take part in this debate on the budget as presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh. I would like to first of all thank his team of technical persons from the Ministry of Finance who took part in this exercise. Let me hasten to remind us here, and in the wider public, and I am doing this because I have realised what has happened during the debate, that we do not seem to know how our systems work.

This budget preparation started, not last week, or two weeks ago, or even this year. The budget cycle starts, as Minister Whittaker said, practically immediately after we would have kicked into the use of this budget. Many technical persons from across the country, in the Ministries and Regions, were engaged in this process of preparing the budget, starting from as early as August of last year. That is why I take time out to congratulate them for their hard work. Many times we fail to recognise the contributions of those not seen. So while I congratulate Minister Dr. Ashni Singh, I am certain the he would agree with me that his team has done a wonderful job - the director of budget and her team and the Regional Executive Officers and their teams. As you would realise, from discussing this budget, or even the initial perusal that you would have had of it so far, the Regions too would have had to be considered because of the very political system. I want to congratulate this team for being able to present such a budget which attempts, in very difficult conditions, to, as it were, spread the marmite equally around.

*7.55 p.m.*

This budget is presented at a time, as the Minister of Finance and other speakers said, when Guyana finds itself in particularly difficult times internationally. Those of us who heads Ministries or those of you who know some of those difficulties would know or recall that currently, for example, foreign funding for certain flagship programmes in various Ministries, such as the Ministry of Health, is under threat of contraction. So here again the hard work of this team in preparing this budget is valued. I would like to point out too that as I looked at it I was able to tease out certain bits and pieces of information which impressed me as to the thought that went into it to see that indeed Guyana would be getting the best bang for the dollar invested.

That indeed is the key words of modernisation, consolidation and decentralisation; that indeed is that they were given teeth and meaning.

In these hard times, as the various speakers, starting from the Hon. Minister Mr. Irfaan Ali, pointed out, in these difficult times, internationally, when, for example, Guyana is on the crux of getting more and more foreign investment, direct investment, while at the same time our CARICOM neighbours are having things difficult. If I recall well the workforce, or sections of the workforce in some of those territories had to take voluntary reduction in their pay packages so as to retain jobs. We are doing well but this is a fragile time. While that is happening, the Ministry of Health has not done too badly. As a matter of fact, we have done particularly well in this period of challenges. I would like, first of all, before we get into the various items and various criticisms, and suggestions, brought up by those on the Opposition and some of the observations made by those on this side of the bench, to point out that the Ministry of Health has achieved some things that might go unnoticed and which at this early stage of my discussion I would like to mention. [Ms. Ally: I hope you will thank Dr. Ramsammy.] Of course, Dr. Ramsammy is special. There is continuity. This is a Government of continuity. So if, my dear, you may be quiet, you will hear and learn.

I would like to point out, for example, the hundred per cent passes among our midwives classes for this year at the New Amsterdam and Georgetown schools. We will discuss the meaning of this. We will discuss the meaning of consolidating and expanding on what we have achieved - more midwives. I have, for example, where they come from - the widespread of where they come from, the geographical spread. It is too much to read, Mr. Minister, but I can, even without the benefit of my spectacle, identify here: Henrietta village, Essequibo, one person, there, Soesdyke, Endeavour, Leguan, Kurukuru, Matthews Ridge, Saint Denys Mission, and so on and so forth. This is where these successful midwifery students come from, two schools. They are going back to those communities to serve, to make motherhood safe.

This administration is not unmindful of some of the legitimate criticisms that it has had to endure. Some of them have been incurred because of poor management at the level of certain local health facilities. But let me say this: that the maternal mortality, for example, is not as we would want it but there was recent talk of the death coming out of Linden. That is unacceptable, but let me tell you this that happened early this year. For the entire last year, there was not a

single death at Linden, not a maternal death. Congratulations. At the same time, for the previous year, there was one, and when the investigation was done, right up to the level of the Cabinet, one of the factors, which was found in that lost, in 2010, was insufficient storage of blood, or stocks of blood at the Linden Hospital Complex. That has been changed. Now, the supplies of the blood at the Linden Hospital Complex have improved, resulting in no deaths last year among our expectant mothers. We want to congratulate them for that. In the meantime, every single maternal death will be treated almost as a national concern, which it is. So far, the new dispensation demands that the officers responsible report on every maternal death to the Cabinet. That is the concerns we have.

My friends, I would like to say this budget, while it calls upon us to remain on course, has one purpose, while at the same time ensuring prosperity for all, we have also noted certain very significant gains, and should I say consolidation of gains made over the past five years, and should I say decades.

Our vaccination programme, Mr. Minister of Finance, has benefited from your expanded allocations. I want to congratulate you for that foresight. For example, the head of this programme, or exactly the wider Maternal and Child Health programme, a very hard working public health practitioner, Dr. Woolford, again, for the third time within a short space of years, gained for Guyana accolades, this time awarded in Barbados, for having the consistent signal achievement of over ninety per cent coverage for all our children for the preventable childhood diseases. That is investment in health. Now it is intangible as my honourable friend, Mr. Norman Whittaker said, but it will be seen as they grow up, having a healthy carefree childhood and then grow into an adolescent, do well at their exams and become productive able-bodied educated citizens.

I would tell the Assembly this. We are expanding the spectre of these vaccinations. I will like to tell the Assembly this, further: Many international agencies have recognised that in other countries where they do not have such a robust programme there is the crisis of expanding deaths among children. For example, it is noted that the diarrhoeal deaths or deaths from diarrhoeal diseases are hitting hard on certain countries, even with more robust economies than Guyana. The introduction of vaccines such as the Rotavirus has helped Guyana to avoid that negative experience.

More recently, we have even gone further to ensure that our young women will grow into healthy productive women. Our young girls are now having the possibility of receiving the vaccines against the virus, the Human Papillomavirus (HPV). In Guyana it is noted that cervical cancer is among the leading causes of cancerous deaths or cancer deaths among women. We have embarked on that enlightened approach. Already it would have been seen in the newspaper... Recently there was a good photograph, and there was an interview from one of my good public practitioners, Nurse Henry, telling us about the good things of that vaccine. I am happy to say that the roll out is in progress and it has been well supported by our technical support organisations, for example, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). I would like to thank PAHO particularly and the leadership of it in this country for assisting in, the weeks in advance, the actual inoculation of these young children, and with education process.

I would like to thank the Minister of Finance for his continuous support in allowing us to expand the health infrastructure that is laying the foundation for the turnaround. In the recent past, as I was saying here, at this forum, and at various other fora, we have been able to invest in the first wave of health infrastructure - Diamond, Leonora, Suddie, Mahaicony, Mabaruma and Lethem. Those are hospitals. Then there is the special eye centre or eye hospital at Port Mourant. But then again, Mr. Speaker, if you were to look a little more in-depth at this budget you would note that there is a special provision for the specialty surgical hospital which will be built not too far from the University of Guyana, just a few minutes out of the city, some \$672 million. This will be the flagship infrastructural investment for the second wave of infrastructural improvement in the health sector in Guyana. In other words, consolidating on what we have. This of course, comes from a joint effort between the Government of Guyana with a line of credit from India. Of course, I heard the enlighten intervention from the Hon. Member Mrs. Backer when she made some extensive reference to the Brazil, Russia, India, China (BRIC) countries, emphasising here that South Africa is now added to them and that adds on the "S" and makes it "BRICS". She called, rightly so, for the administration to ensure that Guyana has the diplomatic wherewithal to be able to forge links with, what I might call, the non-traditional diplomatic or the non-traditional countries. Before it was the "ABC" countries - America, Britain and Canada.

Now I would like to make a quick intervention here on the specialty hospital because it is going to be key and critical. I have noticed, for example, that many people I met on my walkabout,



during the Christmas season and then, recently, during the holidays of this year, are saying that they might know... or might even have gone overseas for treatment, but when that would have been done it is a cost to the administration. It is not sustainable, if I may say through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Hon. Moses Nagamootoo. So the administration has decided to go this way and I would like to recognise the easy way in which the Indian Government supported this initiative. Of course, we must give *Jack his jacket*; this was one of the visionary programmes of our immediate former President, Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo.

I would like to clear up a few misconceptions. There were a lot of noises. Some of those noises were ill-advised and uncalled for surrounding the initial stages of the preparation for this hospital. I deliberately avoided engaging, so as to avoid making the noises more resonating. In other words, I was leaving empty barrels in their corner. They have fallen silent. Now, so far I would like to point out that the land preparation has started and I would like to say this, and I am proud to say, that a small contracting firm, Guyanese firm, has won the bid to start the site preparation. I want to classify it as site preparation and not land preparation. Why? That description of land preparation has led one of my erstwhile colleagues to be flipping a little piece of paper and showing some heaps of bush which were cleared from the land, in one of the very initial stages of that preparation, and coming to tell the National Assembly that the Government spent \$29 million to clear a little of bushes. Now I want to tell the Assembly this... Here, again, I heard the Hon. Member, former Minister of Finance embarrassing himself, again, by not understanding that the money we came here asking for as a supplemental was not for design and study, but it was for what we say here.

So I would like to, through you, Mr. Speaker, inform the House and the nation that works have started. They have been hampered by the recent rains and, more so, by the recent over tapping which flooded certain sections. But so far we have been able to work with the contracting firm. The contracting firm, of course, is the Bovell Construction Services. I notice that it is a fairly a small but a growing Guyanese company. I have never heard of it before and it was interested to me to look at what were its structures. And what have I discovered? I discovered this, Mr. Speaker, that it is headed by Mr. Godfrey Bovell, Managing Director; Roxanne Bovell, Director, eighteen years experience, Lennox Lee, Manager, Tessa Crandon, Finance Manager, Desmond McLloyd, Manager, Travis Kilkenny, Project Manager, John Cush, Project Manager,

Melville Fernandes, Project Manager, William Halls, Surveyor; Mr. Manning, Construction Manager, Mr. Shultz, electrical installation; Brian Adams, road construction. I am told that all of them are Guyanese and that this company is now located in Albouystown. This project is definitely... I see the Hon. Member Mr. Nagamootoo continues to wave his little photograph. It was probably the very first day of clearing the bush. Probably the youngsters, or the young people, from the Ministry of Finance are amused because they have been associated with the projects.

As of the 15<sup>th</sup> of March, it was reported, that was even before those pictures were taken, that the Hon. Member Mr. Nagamootoo was bantering about some ten per cent of the preparation of the site had been done. This preparation includes the construction of fences, the digging and constructing of drains, internal and external, sturdy bridges, and so on, and so forth. So I would like to inform, through you, again, Mr. Speaker, that it is not becoming to impart misinformation on the nation using this forum without knowing or unwilling to make oneself knowledgeable of the facts that, of course, those pictures are misrepresented of it.

What I would like to point out too, is this... I am spending some time on this because this is a national project and it brings out something bigger. We were able to, for example, in the recent past, with the assistance of Cuba, to build five hospitals. Those hospitals were then manned by Cubans. I have said at this forum - I used to sit over there; many times, I have said it on television, at public meetings - that those facilities were being manned by twenty-five to forty Cubans. I never heard a murmur - not from citizens nor Mayor, not from boy or boss - that the Cubans were going to colonise Guyana. But lo and behold, one of the BRICS countries, which we have been encouraged to forge diplomatic relations with, gave us money to build a state-of-the-art hospital and what happens. A certain Mayor suddenly resurrected and in a very unabashed racist fashion queried why should Indians come and build the hospital. That is in the newspaper. What an unfortunate development is. [*Interruption from Members of the Opposition.*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, you...

**Dr. Ramsaran:** I did not say which mayor. I said a certain mayor.

**Mr. Speaker:** There are only seven mayors in Guyana.

**Dr. Ramsaran:** I did not say in Guyana.

**Mr. Speaker:** Dr. Ramsaran, I am saying that there are a number of fixed mayors in this country and if you are going to make a statement like that you are impugning all. You either withdraw it or you are impugning our mayors as being racist or you must have something to support your statement with, but if not, I will ask that it be withdrawn and stricken from the record.

**Dr. Ramsaran:** Mr. Speaker, if you can allow me. I am saying that the Cubans were not accused of colonising Guyana, and there forty and fifty of them in five hospitals. That is the point I want to make. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Dr. Ramsaran, I have heard you and I am saying that the statement impugns the character of all the mayors of Guyana, and unless you can have something there, in written form, to say that any particular mayor made a statement I am asking you to withdraw it and I am striking it from the record.

**Dr. Ramsaran:** Okay. Thank you Mr. Speaker. For your guidance, you are the Speaker, also lawyer, I bow to your wider knowledge. I withdraw it and I will say it in this way: It can be interpreted to have a strong element of bigotry. That is my choice of words. I want this to get out to the public, and not only there. There are my erstwhile colleagues who are fighting down that hospital. I am going to choose my words carefully now. This could be misconstrued by our friends as being anti-India. I chose my words carefully, and we are speaking about BRICS. So here it is Cuba. They dance merengue and we love them. They speak Spanish and we love them; but the Indians who are very close to our culture, here one man woke up and started to poke unfortunate comments. This was an unfortunate lapse in judgement; all was it. These are the things we have to confront and the same people who are listening to me, those ones who want to move forward, take note. So I am happy that Mr. Bovell, having won the contract, is now working with the Ministry to get things going.

Now, what I would like to go on to say is this: These investments in this infrastructure will go hand in hand with the other investments that we have soon to be rolled out, coming out from this budget. Training is essential. Training of technical staff to man those and other health facilities is crucial. In other words, we have to have infrastructure with human resource development - a merger, a good mix. I would like to note that there is some \$387 million more in this budget for

training, and that is expanding and consolidating, colleagues, on what we have. Sometimes soon, approximately two hundred and fifty Guyanese medical students will be available to the local health sector to man some of those hospitals which were we built but did not have adequate staff; to man some of those hospitals which are now predominantly manned by foreign specialist; to be able to prepare themselves for when the new specialty hospital, within the next three years, comes on stream, and, of course, that will be a training and research hospital. There will be the play dough to create your national cadre so that soon, shortly, within the next few years, the need to send Guyanese patients, much to their discomfort and much to the expense of the taxpayers, overseas might be over. So friends, we are consolidating and at the same time, it might seem contradictory, expanding, because while we are consolidating on the infrastructure we are expanding in the skills mix. This is why I want to reflect on a comment made by one of my colleagues, over on the other side, I do not recall exactly who, but it was one of them who was making more sense than noise. So I reflected on that. That person seemed to say this: that the Region, or a particular region, was getting a small amount of money, I think it was \$1.8 million, for health services or rather purchase of drugs. I want to, again, spend some time to explain how the system works, because it is unfortunate...

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

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

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Dr. Ramsaran:** I want to point to the Regions that a significant portion, the overwhelming portion, of their medical supplies are bought centrally and sent to them. Why that is done? It is for the economy of scales. If we were to allow each Region to try to purchase on an international market a few hundreds of thousands of dollars of drugs it will be swamped; it will not be able to be done. The Ministry of Health purchases those drugs and, of course, managing inventory is a difficult task. So I heard some legitimate comments coming from the benches of the Opposition. Drugs do expire. I would like to call our attention to analyse certain recent news items which were prompted by the report from the Auditor General.

It is reported, and correctly so, that several million dollars worth of drugs might have expired. I want to point out, Mr. Speaker, and you, of course, as a lawyer, will follow me in the nitty-gritty of what I am saying. The Auditor General pointed out the fact; he did not go into the details. [Mrs. Backer: Fired him.] No. The man does a good job. What his report does not tell is over what period. Some of these drugs have been expired and stored for many years. So, if, as he said, and correctly so, some \$40 million of drugs was expired, compare it with the inventory that we hold and this comes out to be a small percentage. Further to that, colleagues, members of the media, through you, Mr. Speaker, let us realise that this has been an accumulation of five, six or seven years and then divide that sum by that number and you will see what I am speaking about. This is not a satisfactory situation. We need to be able to dispose of those quicker. We need to empower; we need to staff better the department, that is, the Food and Drug Department, which takes care of that. But I hope, Mr. Speaker, with your permission, I will repeat, that the full explanation is understood.

Further to that... and that is why I am happy that the Minister of Finance has put such confidence in the health sector, given us such resources, in spite of the fact that the naysayers continue to bring to us half-baked misleading information. For example, let us speak about the health waste management hydro-claves supply system in Georgetown Hospital.

*8.25 p.m.*

Recently we had a situation in one of the newspapers where oranges were being compared to apples and we were being asked to make a conclusion out of that. [Mrs. Backer: inaudible.]

Through you, Mr. Speaker, I am enjoying the rabble-rousing of the Hon. Member. Leave her alone.

There is a table in this newspaper which alleges to list the component parts of this piece of machinery. I would like to point out to you that several significant parts are not there. The compactor, the machine, and the special biohazard removal, disposal or waste truck are not listed here. I will rest that. Further, the said newspaper purports to show a shed and it said that this shed is overpriced. This shed had to be built. I would like to call on Members of the honourable profession- lawyers- to look into the details and not the fluff. That is my point and what I would like to say is that the right analysis of this shows not a shed, but a construction that had to be

placed on certain foundations. There will be machinery here which will vibrate. So there are provisions in the cost of this project which go beyond this mere shed.

I am happy that you have been able to indulge me in spite of the fact that I might have transgressed in my passion to bring over certain points. I am happy that you have been able to allow me to bring to your attention the half-baked approach to informing the Guyanese people.

I would like to tell you this: this piece of machinery is powered, in part, by steam. That steam is generated in the Laundry of the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. The steam has to be conducted to this shed. That is a significant part of infrastructure which will not be replicated in what is a picture of a shed. Let us move on.

I would like to bring to your attention that there have been significant moves to address a certain concern which was reflected in the speech of the Minister of Finance. He hinted, and I did not fully agree with him - it is the only part of his speech that I have a little doubt about - that Guyana might not be able to achieve the Millennium Development Goal regarding maternal mortality. I too am anxious because this is a serious matter to such an extent that the Cabinet analyses every single maternal death. However, there have been certain new developments, Mr. Minister of Finance. Recently, noting that there was a threat to the achievement of this Millennium Development Goal, we have partnered with certain reputable universities, professors and Good Samaritan groups.

I want to call to your attention another significant achievement of the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation in ensuring safe motherhood and safe infancy. A few weeks ago, a very well trained, well qualified Guyanese doctor assisted us – and I hope I am right if I call his name: Dr. Narindra Singh – in equipping a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) with all of ten incubators and equipment. That, through you Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Finance, will or should put your heart at ease that Guyana is well on the way to achieving that Millennium Development Goal by 2015, not only safe motherhood but reduction in under-five mortality. We emphasise this because an analysis of our deaths- our losses under five- shows that a significant portion is due to deaths among premature babies or babies who need special care which hitherto was limited in Guyana. I would like to thank the goodly gentleman for this contribution and, at the same time, I would like to note that the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the

same agency that is helping us pilot the introduction of the Human papillomavirus (*HPV*) vaccine, has also been able to help us craft a special curriculum for training the specialists, Guyanese young specialists, in the special techniques and knowledge competencies needed to function and operate in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.

The Ministry of Health does not work in isolation. It works hand in hand with several other Ministries. And in this regard, I will like to say that our very good work in the area of cataract reduction trumps. As a matter of fact, I was almost tempted to declare cataract a disease that is about to go extinct in Guyana, hard to find it. As a matter of fact, before this programme started, certain private practitioners would have charged someone \$250,000 for one side. Now they cannot get business and they are vexed. They cannot get business because Port Mourant Hospital is working. Not only that, we are reaching out. Let me give you an example. We went to Leguan seven or eight days ago. Today, the cataract patients from Leguan have just finished their cataract surgeries, nine or ten of them at the Port Mourant Hospital totally free. The minibus picked them up at Parika and took them to Berbice. These are the things that our media... They crossed our famous Berbice Bridge, another infrastructural improvement by the PPP/C Government. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, allow the Minister to continue his presentation.

**Dr. Ramsarran:** Mr. Speaker, let me tell you about Centre Square as an example of the caring Government and how we are using it to bring more services to the communities. Centre Square is located in the heart of our commercial area and we, from time to time, park a massive, sometimes more than one, dental buses and we do work there. We sometimes partner with Laparkan. I want to particularly thank the Head of Laparkan, Mr. Bhagwandin, for initiating this cooperation. And do you know what we did only within January to February? We screened 240 people. Three minibuses already in Port Mourant - seeing better! That is progress! That is bringing services to the community. If you want to go and buy furniture at Fogarty's, drop by and get your eyes tested and find out if you have to go to Port Mourant. Within a week you will be on a bus. That is how we are using your moneys. Not only that! No wonder that we have certain people disconcerted. The market is contracting!

I started to speak about our inter-agency, inter-ministry cooperation and then I deviated slightly to speak on cataract. However, they are one in the same thing because many of these older folks are also pensioners. So although the pension is a little “*toops*”, they also have other support from \$250,000 for a cataract operation to getting all two sides for free! That is the PPP/Civic. So Mr. Minister of Finance, through you Mr. Speaker, I do hope that when we come again for more and more moneys... [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, you need to allow the Minister to continue his presentation. Allow him to finish please. Let us show some respect for him.

**Dr. Ramsarran:** Let me repeat the salient point that got the Members of the Opposition upset. The salient point is that the PPP/C is achieving free cataract operations for the population and that is causing disconcertment in the private sector, some of them. That is the point I was making and they started to make hallabaloo.

The inter-agency cooperation that the Ministry of Health achieves, many older folks - and those are the people who tend to have cataract - also have other needs and the Ministry of Health works very closely with the Ministry of Human services. Some persons might not need to have cataract surgery. They might need, for example, to have spectacles. The Ministry of Health facilitates that. A small subsidised fee might be asked so that we can maintain our partnership with another very effective and efficient Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). The NGO is called Eye Care Guyana. It is doing a wonderful job in this country. And here I hope I will be allowed to mention another name – Mr. Charles Vandyke – quiet man, efficient, gets his job done. So we are partnering with that agency and we have been able to, by testing the eyes of the older folk, especially, or anybody, we are able to refer them to spectacles. Unfortunately, our partnership encourages the recipients to pay a small fee... [**Member:** \$9,000.] No. It is \$10,000 - which they have been freely doing. Apparently some of the Members of the Opposition have benefitted from this service. I seem they know the price of the spectacle. What I want to point out too... [**Mrs. Backer:** What is wrong with that?] It is very good. I am happy for that.

The government also encourages young doctors to upgrade themselves with the systems of this NGO. We have been able to secure scholarships to train graduate doctors, that is, young



Guyanese who were trained in Cuba to further their studies to become, not a graduate doctor alone, but an eye specialist! We have dispatched overseas, so far, five of them, and these opportunities are not limited to members of the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation's staff. That is why, unfortunately, the Hon. Dr. Norton might not have known about that. So far, all of the beneficiaries have been bright young women. They are starting to come back. I know I should be wrapping up. The Government is not only using the resources given to create infrastructure but, at the same time, to create training opportunities and put them there to work alongside the foreign specialists, gain from them and then, hopefully, replace them. So that is the bigger game plan.

I notice some good suggestions coming from the Opposition. Some of their comments were unfortunate, for example what I regard as the unfortunate pronouncements on the new surgical hospital but we will let that pass. There are others which we will take note of. I have not brought the newspaper with me, but I did see a headline which says – and I can be corrected – *APNU supports abortions*. That is a positive thing we need to look at. These are the things we need to engage in because these are bipartisan issues that need to be treated specially, sensitively and so on. So we will be looking at those issues since we seem to have, right across the aisle and right across whatever divide exists- some commonality. Of course, the religious communities have a strong impact on our thinking as a nation. We will have to look at those. I would like to remind you that there is a special board dealing with medical termination of pregnancies. It is a sensitive issue. I can tell you this because I know for a fact that many of the operators at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, although they do not deliver these services there, do it at other hospitals. I say no more on that.

Modernisation, consolidation and decentralisation have been some of the key words that the Minister of Finance used in his section on health. And, of course, you will see them in other sections and other social sectors. We have modernised. We have started and we have continued the modernisation of the health sector. We have created a network of primary health care facilities. We have also brought more services to these facilities. I refer to the HPV vaccine. But as any specialist will tell you...

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

**Mr. Hinds:** Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given ten minutes to conclude his presentation. Thank you very much.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Dr. Ramsarran:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am saying that we have been able to use this large influx of young nurses. Let me remind you that we are also continuing to graduate significant numbers of medics. We have been able to give them more skills. We have been paying particular attention to an evidence-based approach to delivery of services. We have discovered, as I said, that cervical cancer is the number one cause of cancer deaths among our women and we have acted, quietly, on that. Certainly, services, for example the visual inspection with acetic acid (VIA) services, and all the women in this room should have a special interest in this and, more particularly, women of an indigenous origin because a certain study done by one Ms. Yvette Ervin, when she did her degree, showed that Amerindian women are more susceptible to having cervical cancer. So we, as part of our effort to push indigenous health, in our efforts to establish safe womanhood and motherhood, established the VIA programme and so far we have been able to help a significant number of women by a very cheap method of intervention in the fight against cervical cancer.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank you for your indulgence, especially on those occasions when in my enthusiasm to make a point, I transgressed. I would like to thank you for those indulgences and those corrections. At the same time, I cannot leave without referring to the lost decade of the 1980s when my Hon. friend, Mr. Greenidge, Hon. Member of this National Assembly, was the then Minister of Finance. Many of these indicators that I showed you would have seemed like a fantasy in those days. Such has been the change. We will continue as an Administration to consolidate on the gains over this decade of achievement while, of course, trying to repair some of the lingering influences of that lost decade.

I would like to join with my colleagues in saying that we will resolutely remain on course because, as I have shown you, that course has brought benefit to the Guyanese people right across the border. Incidentally, the largest ever number of Amerindian doctors will be coming back soon from Cuba. That is empowerment. On that very positive note, I would like to reaffirm that we will resolutely stay on course; we will continue in a unified purpose and, of course, we

will continue spreading the prosperity to all, wherever they are in Guyana. Thank you.  
[Applause]

**Mrs. Garrido-Lowe:** Mr. Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to address the Members of this esteemed House.

I rise, today, in this Hon. House only by the grace of God. I say this because it is nothing but the truth and I thank him for it.

Like many other sisters who are being verbally, emotionally, mentally and physically abused everyday in Guyana and many murdered, I too have suffered the trauma of verbal and emotional abuse and barely escaped from physical abuse had it not been for the media and my supporters. This I had to endure, publicly, with no one else coming to my defence, and for what reason? Because I, a mere woman, dared to speak my mind to a then Minister of this Government – this Government that prides itself in caring for our women, introducing the campaign *Stamp It Out*. This Government, my Government, our Government, whether we voted for it or not, could not haul in its own Minister and ask him to stop the abuse, stop the violence against this woman standing here today. This Government has failed me! How on earth do you expect to stamp out violence against women when you carry on merrily without batting an eye lid with violence against women as if it were a sport right at the highest level of this country.

Then, there is the case of Henry Greene. Even if sex, in the end, was consented to, he had no right whatsoever to use his position of authority as a bargaining tool for sexual favours. Henry Greene ought to be dismissed, but instead he is still being kept around in his position. Why the double standards? If it were an ordinary man who was accused of the same thing as Henry Greene, he would have already been in jail and probably gotten beaten up too. Violence against women and sexual harassment must be stamped out at the very top before it could ever be stamped out at the bottom. You are leaders and you have to lead by example so do not only talk the talk but walk the walk; cut out the double standards. The nation is watching and has given you another chance to lead and it is waiting for you to lead honestly and fairly. And to make sure that you do just that, they have given us on this side the authority to speak on their behalf; they have given us the majority!

I must congratulate the Hon. Minister, Ms. Manickchand, for at least standing up and publicly saying that Henry Greene has to go, never mind she was silent about my situation.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, as a principle, this House should not be using people's names who are not here and who do not have the right to reply. I really believe that we are talking about the Budget. The Hon. Member has a right to raise many of these issues, but whether they are the subject of the Budget is another issue. This matter is a matter I think, maybe, for the Member to bring an issue to the Parliament on a proper form. This is not an issue right now on the Budget no matter how strongly she feels or many Members of this House on both sides feel. This is not an issue for the Budget right now.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I believe that under the rubric of vulnerable groups including women and children, the Member is in order to speak to social issues. But in so far as referring to persons by names, I would ask that she moves on. In terms of the social needs and the social programmes of this Government, any Member is within order to speak to them.

Proceed.

**Mrs. Garrido-Lowe:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, congratulations to you and your team on the presentation of this Budget. Indeed it is an overwhelming undertaking. I must mention, however, that contrary to what the Hon. Minister of Finance announced, this Budget is not such a people friendly budget. And why is this not so? It is because Value Added Tax (VAT) has not been reduced. It is because old age pension has gone up only by \$600 and social assistance by a mere \$400. The Hon. Member, Ms. Baveghems, said yesterday, "To become a pensioner is a frightening experience," and I believe her.

Cost of living is so high that your own children who would otherwise be happy to take care of you when you reach the retirement age cannot do so properly simply because they too are struggling to make ends meet. I do not doubt that there were positive changes since this government were and are at the helm - of course, there were, and the figures touted that make our country look good economically, are good too. But our poor and vulnerable cannot eat those attractive figures. Our single women, for instance, have to be very innovative in order to feed, clothe and house their children as we heard from the Hon. Member yesterday. And I believe her because I was a single parent too.

8.55 p.m.

Food security is very important to children. When mothers cannot find food to put in their children's lunch kits, it is a dreadful, helpless and lost feeling. I think that a father who loves his children would feel the same way. That is why the AFC, knowing the plight of single parents, stated in our action plan that single parents would be given \$2000 per child per month until the child attains the age of 18 years.

I must commend again, the Hon. Minister Manickchand for her Women of Worth (WOW) programme, but it has to be distributed equally and fairly across all 10 regions. It is my hope that this budget will make sure that this happens.

I would like to touch on so many other concerns of women but time does not permit, except to say that I expect that the Ministry of Social Services be implementing strong programmes to empower women with life skills, build their self esteem and confidence, build more shelters to assist them should the need arise, set up hotlines so that they can call any time of the day or night to get assistance, set up literacy programmes for them so that they will be able to assist their children at home in their lessons.

Equally as important, are the concerns of my blood brothers and sisters of whom I will now address - the First People of this nation, the Indigenous People of Guyana, after hundreds of years are still being discriminated against, and although they are not totally neglected, they still are being neglected.

The traditional lands of my people where they have hunted for food and waters where they have fished for centuries are now disappearing from their reach. Pieces of lands are being demarcated and given to them with hefty slices chopped off from their original residential boundaries. So their residential quarters and their villages are now being made even smaller.

Many villages complain of this and these are: Kwebana, Santa Cruz and Chinese Landing. They are further told that they can apply for extensions but lo and behold before some Toshaos could apply for extensions, non-residents have already taken up residence right next to them, squatting on the villages' original residential quarters as in the case of Kwebana.

Remarks like, "Amerindians have plenty land already and what do they want to do with more?" are frequently heard.

The first peoples of this nation lived throughout the centuries, by farming, fishing and hunting, moving their farms to somewhere else to allow the previous farm land to replenish itself again; hunting and killing only what is needed for food and a little to sell; fishing, catching only what they need for food and a little to sell to buy some basic household needs. They cut trees only when it is necessary, making sure that smaller plants are not destroyed.

The first people of this nation have been preserving this forest for centuries and because of us Guyana's pristine forest, as the advertisement says, has now become an income earner for Guyana, another gift from the first people of this nation who are the real champions of this earth. It is only right therefore that the bulk of the income from the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) programme should go towards the development of Amerindian Communities and establishing an Educational Fund for those who wish to further their education at the University of Guyana or at a University abroad.

The Hinterland, the home of my people, is considered the richest part of this country; gold, diamond and lumber are extracted from there, yet unto today, my people remain the poorest in this nation while the extractors of all this wealth are naturally very wealthy. While my people do not envy the wealth of others, I feel it is only right for these extractors of our wealth to put something back into the communities nearby. They can help to build proper houses for my people; they can put down wells in communities so that my people can have potable water since it is due to the careless mining practices of some miners which are now polluting the river water that is normally used for cooking and drinking.

I paid a visit to Chinese Landing about two months ago and was horrified to see the condition of the water that my people have to wash, cook and even drink when there is no rain water to be had. They told me that this is caused by miners mining way up the Barama with no regard for the survival of my people. Even the fishes are contaminated but my people have to eat and so they eat the suspect fishes. Miners who pollute these waters should think about investing in fish ponds for villages along the river so that our people can eat fish

free from contamination. This Government must make sure that proper mining practices are being adhered to.

Another irksome situation, and I consider it pure “eye-pass”, is the negative labelling of my people by persons representing the government. If the Government comes up with a project of theirs to be piloted in Indigenous Communities they normally say that they will involve the Indigenous Communities in the decision-making process before it is implemented and they do set out to do just that, but with what attitude? With an attitude that it is an already a decided deal and the visits are just for spreading the word and if the villagers do not understand they are free to ask questions. However, if they dare to ask questions that send the message that they do not agree entirely with a project, then they are branded as the opposition and are made to feel like outcasts, even in their own villages.

I am compelled to say to all of my Indigenous brothers and sisters to chase them out of your village. Do not entertain them if they make you feel like that in your own home.

It is also wrong for the Government to politicise Village Council Elections. Let my people feel free to elect the best of them to represent them without meddling and creating fear in their minds. I am asking the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs and their staff to cut this nonsense and start engaging our people in a positive way so that they can feel the care that this Government claim to have for them.

Furthermore, do not insult them by telling them that if they are not on your party's side they will continue to eat cassava and pepper pot. So what if they continue to eat cassava and pepper pot, it is an Indigenous delicacy. I myself enjoyed some only a week ago.

The Amerindian Act needs to be reviewed as was stated by my brother, the Hon. Mr. Sydney Allicock, yesterday and I fully agree with him.

About a week ago I visited four villages in the Moruca sub-region and had some very enlightening meetings with the residents; this I will proceed to share with this Hon. House. First of all, the Kumaka/Kwebanna road is a sore point for the residents of both Santa Rosa and Kwebanna. The road is being graded as we speak and according the Regional Chairman, Mr. Paul Pierre, major repairs were done to the road in 2010. I was told by residents that these

major repairs were done to the tune of approximately \$70 million but the Hon. Minister of Public Works would know better. Repairs were done last year also and are continuing this year, but these roads only last until the rains fall again.

Santa Rosa is a fast developing community with buses, cars, pick-up and other vehicles plying the route. Kwebanna also has its share of vehicles. It is time that the Kumaka/Kwebanna Road is upgraded into an all-weather road. When the weather is dry and boats can no longer pass comfortably through the 99 turns in the Baramani River, all villages from up the Barama and Waini Rivers dock at Kwebanna and use the Kumaka/Kwebanna Road to get out to Charity. The vast mining community also uses the road to travel out to Georgetown. The farming community will also benefit from this road since it would be easier to transport their produce to the nearest point, either at the Kwebanna end or the Kumaka end - that is providing that this Government finds market for our people's produce. They are willing and ready to farm on a large scale basis. They are not a lazy people. If monies are not allocated in this budget for the upgrading of the Kumaka/Kwebanna Road then this government must certainly seek to do so in next year's budget.

Employment in the villages of Santa Rosa, Kwebanna, Santa Cruz and Warapoka are next to zero except for teachers, nurses, medexes and a few other jobs attached to the Regional Administration. Students graduating from the Santa Rosa Secondary School have nothing to do. The young men head straight to the mines as my sister the Hon. Eula Marcello mentioned yesterday. And not all mothers feel comfortable when their young sons go to work in the bush since malaria and HIV are the dreaded diseases with crime adding a frightening dimension to the risks involved with working in the mines. Alcohol and drug abuse also take their toll. The girls literally have no way of earning an income.

It is my hope, Hon. Minister Ashni Singh that you have provided monies in this budget for projects where our young men and women in Region 1, and other Hinterland Villages throughout this country who are suffering from the same fate can earn a decent wage.

The Kumaka District Hospital does not provide either dengue or typhoid tests, but rather only malaria and diabetes tests are available. Dengue is rampant in both Santa Rosa and Kwebanna Villages and I suspect in other neighbouring villages. The district hospital roof is



leaking and it has gotten worse since President Ramotar's visit when he was campaigning and promised repairs before election.

The hospital is also badly in need of another boat and engine. When one is on outreach there is no boat around for emergencies. Education also does field trips so it is no use depending on their boat. The only alternative the community has is hiring a private boat.

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

**Mr. Ramjattan:** Mr. Speaker I move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude.

*Question put, and carried.*

**Mrs. Garrido-Lowe:** The hospital's vehicle has not been working for two years.

The Kwebanna Health Centre needs a bigger sink in delivery room, a trolley to move instruments, storage room for drugs, a Kitchen, nets, sheets, cupboards in two rooms; the vaccine fridge is down since last September and affects Kwebanna, Santa Cruz, Wicarabe and Warapoka; a larger vaccine fridge is needed.

At the Santa Cruz Health Centre the solar panels are not working and emergency cases like deliveries have to be done sometimes using a torch light. There is no transportation for the health hut.

It is my view that a vocational/technical institute should be established at Kwebanna village so that young people can be trained with skills.

Our Indigenous people are natural sports men and women - natural athletes. Whenever a National team is chosen we would like to see that the team that represents Guyana truly reflects a national team which includes our indigenous athletes. Whatever it takes, our Indigenous athletes must be fairly represented on National teams.

The people of Region 9 also have some serious concerns. The roads are in extremely poor condition. Millions of dollars are continually being spent on dry season roads. There are

shortages of drugs for complaints such as diabetes, hypertension and heart. Folks of Region 9 are asking, when will the X-ray Unit become fully operable?

Doctors who staff Lethem and Aishalton hospitals have recently graduated from Cuba. They are working without senior supervision. My people in Region 9 are asking, who is there to insure that their performances are monitored?

In terms of Agriculture and the Grow More Food campaign, why are extension officers not employed to serve cluster villages where they can do relevant field work such as advising farmers in use of fertilisers, pesticides and planting distances of crops such as corn, black eye peas, et cetera? Only one Agricultural Officer has to service the villages of Region 9. Every year students graduate from Guyana School of Agriculture (GSA), where are they being sent to? These extension officers are persons who need to be out in the fields with the farmers, rain or shine.

In all schools in Region 9 and I gather in other Hinterland Regions, teachers need more supervision and support from the education authorities. Literacy programmes in all interior schools need to be thoroughly supervised by Regional Education Authorities.

Also in Region 9, there are no employment opportunities for our young people leaving school and there is an urgent need for vocational centres there also.

Marijuana consumption and cultivation are on the increase in villages. Law officers need to deal with this problem in a more systematic way.

The cost of milk in the hinterland needs to be subsidised so that families can afford to buy milk at a more reasonable price. Milk is currently \$700 in the Lethem stores and outside of Lethem, between \$800 and \$900 a pound. There is much evidence of malnutrition among babies due to the lack of milk.

The recent increase for old age pension will have no relief whatsoever for senior citizens of the interior who do not have other forms of income, having been subsistence farmers all their working lives and also with cost of living in the interior ever rising.

These are but a few concerns of my people which I hope the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh had considered when he was crafting this 2012 budget.

Thank you Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you Hon. Member and thank you for bringing those to our attention. I now invite the Hon. Joseph Hamilton to address the Assembly.

**Mr. Hamilton:** Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. Let me say how thankful I am to once again be in the Parliament of Guyana to speak to the Guyanese people about the development programmes executed in the Ministry of Health by the PPP/C Government.

Before I go into my presentation proper, I would just like to firstly highlight a couple of things stated by the Hon. Member Vanessa Kissoon, specifically speaking to the Linden Hospital. I am glad that Ms. Kissoon is a young woman and a young representative in the Parliament, she is very exuberant and enthusiastic and that is good, but exuberance and enthusiasm without knowledge could be very dangerous and fatal.

There are two matters. Firstly, when Ms. Kissoon spoke she was unclear and was apparently not informed that the Linden Hospital Complex, for the last three years, has been run and managed by a board of directors primary who are Lindeners led by one, Mr. Backer. That is the first point. The record needs to be made clear, because people might think that the Ministry of Health is responsible for the day to day management of the Linden Hospital Complex. Since 2010 there was a board of directors. Presently the Board of Directors tenure has been extended until the end of April. I have spoken to the other MP from Linden, the Hon. Mr. Morian, and I have suggested to him that he can, and Ms. Kissoon also, can offer names of person who they think are suitable to be in the composition of the new board to be established in the month of May.

The second point is that the Hon. Member Ms. Kissoon spoke to the issue that you note was in the papers not so long ago about the management of solid waste and sharps at the Linden hospital. What must be noted is that on the day of the budget presentation I came to the National Assembly and presented the report of the technical specialist to the two Members of Parliament of Linden, which highlighted that the deficiency of the furnace at Linden

which came about by what they indicated in the dated report of Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 2012. These were there findings, poor operation practices and supervision, the procedure of removing insulator ash at the beginning of the burn cycle was not being followed, that is the first point. The second point is that there was no structured maintenance of the facility. Thirdly, there were no schedule inspections of the facility. The forth point is that there was lack of oversight of the operation, and fifthly staff had no personal protective equipment.

When Ms. Kissoon spoke about this matter she had this report in her hand. I would want to believe that either she did not read the report or she was incapable of diverting from the presentation she had already prepared and to speak to the issue of the technical specialist speaking about this matter.

Just three weeks ago the Ministry of Health held its annual Regional Health Officers (RHO) two day conference. The RHO of the Region 10, the CEO acting of Region 10 and the REO of Region 10 were all present for the two day conference. At that presentation the Georgetown Hospital Complex indicated to all the participating Regions that we have in the Georgetown Hospital Complex compound a biohazard truck that we are willing, if there is a difficulty with any hospital in any Region, to make the biohazard truck available to those centres to remove any biohazard waste that was in any Region to be taken to the Hydroclave.

I need to make the point that the running of the Linden Hospital Complex has been placed in the hands of a Board of Directors for the last three years, which comprises of persons who are primarily from Region 10.

The Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson asked two legitimate questions, one on the HIV/AIDS programme. I would like to say that just this morning the HIV/AIDS Secretariat, National Aids Programme Secretariat (NAPS), had a conference at Grand Coastal where they were reviewing the five-year plan of HIV/AIDS. They have determined, after that review, the report will be presented and they are at the moment seeking to put in place a new plan running from 2013 to 2020, that is a nine year plan to deal with the issue of HIV/AIDS in Guyana.

Ms. Ferguson secondly spoke to the issue of the tuberculosis (TB) programme. That report can be made available. The manager of the TB programme, Dr. Mohanlal, and any technical person in the Ministry of Health is available to engage with any Member of Parliament to be able to discuss any matter of concern of the two programmes. The two comments and questions from Hon. Member Ferguson were very timely and important.

Hon. Member Allcock from Region 9 spoke to the issue of the Lethem Hospital. The Hon. Member must know that his comments are noted. Some of the issues he has raised, we are aware that there are some management issues that exist at the Lethem Hospital. The Member Marcello from Region 8 raised issues of the Mahdia hospital and again that is noted, and we are aware that there are some management issues at the Mahdia Hospital that we are paying attention to at the moment.

Hon. Member Dr. George Norton was supposed to be the point man on health from the Opposition. He spoke for at least one hour. You would believe that a man who has spent 25 years, as he said, in the health service only spoke about one square mile of health. In his half hour presentation the only thing he spoke about is the Georgetown Hospital. Guyana is 83,000 square miles Hon. Member Dr. George Norton. Guyana is not just one square mile. Whilst the Hon. Member was speaking I was taken back. I was wondering whether the Hon. Member George Norton... [Dr. Norton: Doctor the Honourable...] ...whether Doctor the Honourable Member George Norton... I was wondering whether the Hon. Member who says he has spent 25 years in the medical profession was aware of where the CC Nicholson hospital is, whether it was in Nabaclis, Golden Grove or Victoria.

I am trying to make the point that the point man on health has a limited understanding of the health strategy of the Ministry of Health. That is the point I am seeking to make, because all he did speak all the time about was the Georgetown hospital and its deficiency.

*9.25 p.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Allow Mr. Hamilton to make his presentation, please.

**Mr. Hamilton:** Here is Dr. Norton, twenty-five years in the medical profession, at least fourteen years a Member of Parliament, and the Hon. Member comes to the National Assembly and cries,

and cries, and cries. He brought all his tears here as if the National Assembly is...  
[**Opposition Member:** What is the point?] The point is that apparently Dr. George Norton is unaware that there are 365 health facilities in this country. He only spoke to one. It means he has no understanding about the strategy. There are 129 health centres, 209 health huts, 17 district hospitals, and 9 regional hospitals, yet Dr. Norton spent one hour speaking just to one square mile, somewhere up the road in Georgetown, while he was speaking on health and health delivery in Guyana.

Today, as we speak, all the health centres on the coastland, through the length and breadth of this country, have at least one resident doctor or there is a doctor that visits at least once a week. That is a great accomplishment. There are 81 doctors of all specialties to man the health centres and facilities throughout the coastland of Guyana.

The other issue is that in the hinterland in Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9. Five years ago when anyone spoke about an Amerindian doctor the only name that came up for mention was Dr. George Norton. Today, we have moved far beyond that; there are many other names that can be mentioned; thanks to the PPP/C administration. If we go to Annai there is an Amerindian doctor; if we go to Moruca there is an Amerindian doctor. Five years ago the man that had the privilege only from the Amerindian community to be called a doctor in the Cooperative Republic of Guyana was one Dr. George Norton. [*Interruption*] Today that has changed, thanks to the administration of the PPP/C Government.

The other point is that the Ministry of Health has 98 medics and of those, 25 are of Amerindian heritage. 170 of the health professionals in Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9 are of Amerindian descent. When you go to those regions you will see that the health practitioners in the hospitals and health centres closely resemble the population of those communities. So whether it is the coastland or the hinterland, there is a balanced and even development as regards health delivery and health service in this country.

I spent nearly one week in Region 9. In the far reaches of Aishalton there is daily dental care, a practice which was unheard of. In the North and South Pakaraimas there are also daily dental services.

The Minister of Finance in his presentation on page 42, paragraph 4.79 when he spoke to health... [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members there is a noise and I cannot hear the Hon. Member speak. Let us be quiet please.

**Mr. Hamilton:** The Hon. Minister of Finance, Ashni Singh said at page 42, paragraph 4.79:

“Mr. Speaker, our Government remains steadfast in pursuing its vision of continued modernisation of the health care system...”

The Hon. Minister Dr. Bheri Ramsaran spoke of the modernisation.

“...while placing emphasis on equitable access to high quality and consumer friendly health services. In pursuit of the National Health Strategy 2008-2012, Government’s attention is focused on further decentralisation and expansion of health services. Towards the realisation of this vision and strategy, Government expended (in 2011) \$14.5 billion.”

So all and sundry, through the length and breadth of Guyana, can receive equal access to health services in this country.

There is a silent health problem that exists as many people in health care do not pay specific attention to health care with regard to differently able or disabled persons. It was unheard of that one can travel into a hinterland community, to the far reaches of the South Rupununi and find in a hospital, a physiotherapist, an audiologist or a speech therapist; in the far reaches of North or South Pakaraimas, Lethem, Mabaruma, Mahaicony, Fort Wellington, and the West Demerara Regional Hospitals commenced new services in audiology in 2011. Rehab services, physiotherapy services, occupational and speech therapy services were conducted in 2011 at Moruca, Charity, Wakenaam, Mahdia, and Kamarang Hospitals.

The Hon. Member George Norton spoke a lot about the Georgetown Public Hospital, but he did not state that in 2011 there was the commencement of the state of the art rehabilitation facility of the Georgetown Public Hospital on the ground floor of a new inpatient facility, which offers services whether it be speech therapy or audiology. I have gone there and seen young families

taking their children who have speech and hearing difficulties. Dr. Norton failed to speak to those matters.

The other intervention coming out of the regional health services is the moneys expended yearly on medical evacuations (Medevacs), bringing people who have medical problems out of the interior. In 2011 the Government expended \$15,136,568 bringing citizens out of the far reaches...

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

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

*Question put, and carried.*

**Mr. Hamilton:** Secondly, 105 patients were medevac out of the interior in 2011; 107 medevacs at nearly 15 million. To complement this programme the Ministry purchased an ambulance which will be utilised specifically to collect medevac patients at the airport when they arrive. The point is whether one lives in Region 1 or Region 10 today, one could access medical health that could not be accessed decades ago. One could access ECG or the intervention of blood tests. For such things in the past all of us had to go to the Georgetown Hospital or a private hospital. Today, if one lives in Diamond one can access those facilities at the Diamond Hospital. This is the decentralised programme the Minister spoke about.

Recognising the success of all of these programmes that the Ministry of Health was able to attain, and the services given daily to the people of Guyana, in all ten regions, the Minister indicated on page 43, paragraph 4.83:

“Mr. Speaker, in 2012, Government has allocated over \$16.9 billion to continue the modernisation of the sector and to consolidate on the gains made over the past decade. Government will continue to place emphasis on decentralizing (Hon. Dr. George Norton) services, strengthening public-private collaboration in a continued effort to reduce chronic non-communicable diseases, improve the quality of care and access to health services, and strengthen the health system.”



This is guided by the Mission Statement of the Ministry of Health. The Mission Statement of the Ministry states it is to improve the physical, social, and mental health status of all Guyanese, by ensuring that health services are accessible, acceptable, affordable, timely and appropriate as possible, given available resources, and enhancing the effectiveness of health personnel through continuing education, training and management systems. All the yapping cannot change the fact that the health system in this country has been modernised and, most of all, all Guyanese can now access health care whether they live in Region 1, Region, 7, Region 8, Region 9, Region 10, or on the coastland. That is the undisputable fact.

Therefore, I would like to commend Dr. Ashni Singh for presenting this budget to the nation, and to ask that all of us give our commitment to supporting the budget estimate. Thank you.  
[Applause]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you Hon. Member. Hon. Members it is now 9.40 p.m. and before I ask Member Ms. Selman to speak, Hon. Prime Minister maybe you would like to move a motion.

**Mr. Hinds:** Mr. Speaker I would like to move suspension of Standing Order No. 11 to allow us to continue and conclude on the list of Members who have been submitted to speak today.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

*Standing Order suspended.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, we have five more speakers because we were unable to stick to the time allotted on both sides. We will finish the list tonight, so I am asking for some discipline. Let us allow Members to complete and we will get out of here quickly.

The Hon. Member Ms. Selman may now address the Assembly.

**Ms. Selman:** I rise to make my contribution to the 2012 Budget debate under the theme “*Remaining on Course, United in Purpose, Prosperity for All*”. This theme is consistent with most of the previous budget presentations by the Hon. Dr Ashni Singh, the PPP/C’s 2011 Elections Manifesto, and the President’s inaugural address to the Parliament. But the theme of the budget means nothing when one examines the actual performance after the budget presentation.

For example, let us look at the recurring theme “Remaining on Course”. What course is the Minister speaking about? The thesaurus dictionary defines “remaining on course” as preserving or enduring to completion. In effect it means that the PPP/C Government has no intention of providing any relief to the impoverished and rising army of the poor in Guyana. Hence, we see no reduction in the value-added tax, no increase in wages and salaries, no reinstatement of the subvention at the Critchlow Labour College, no equity in the awarding of contracts, and no substantial increase in old age pension and public assistance. “Remaining on Course” clearly suggests that we continue as before, changing nothing. It also suggests the continued violation of both the spirit and letter of several constitutional provisions including Article 13 of our Constitution which addresses the issue of consultation.

The theme also refers to “United in Purpose”. Again I ask the question united in what purpose? **[Interruption]** I am not a pig. “United in Purpose” suggests a readiness on the part of the Government to engage the stakeholders, including political parties, in meaningful consultation, but the Government’s record in terms engaging in of meaningful and consultative discourse is dismal. The Government has missed so many opportunities of having a united approach. This could be cited in the negotiations for the speakership for this Tenth Parliament, and the tripartite discussions that should have seen the preparation of a national budget that reflected the involvement of all three parliamentary parties. Sadly, consensus was never achieved.

What does the Minister mean by “Prosperity for All”? “Prosperity for All” suggests the equitable distribution of our nation’s resources among all Guyanese. Indeed, page 3 of the budget states, and I quote:

“Our vision is one of a Guyana that is a land of opportunity and prosperity, where every citizen can realise their personal and professional aspirations...”

Regrettably any sane Guyanese would know that what we have seen in Guyana is the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. Unfortunately, to be in the former category one has to be somehow associated with the PPP/C Party.

The Minister throughout his budget speech referred to the PPP/C’s vision of developments. A careful analysis shows that this budget failed to outline any vision. Projects in themselves are not a reflection of developments they have to be a part of a coherent national development strategy

which produces a better life for people. The people must see themselves as the beneficiaries of those projects and are therefore motivated to work in the interest of the developments of Guyana. One would have expected that a concomitant of such pronouncements would have been the inclusion of measures in the budget that will contribute to the holistic development of Guyana, including the efficiency of companies, increased productivity of workers, incentive to workers, included but not exclusive, the reduction of the rates of the value added tax and the complete reform of the tax system.

The Minister of Finance boasts of this being the biggest budget ever. On page 64 of the budget speech the Minister states:

“...the size of the Budget 2012 is \$192 billion, Guyana’s largest budget ever, and it is fully financed without the introduction of any new taxes.”

Despite this announcement, however, our pensioners certainly fail to see the opportunity and prosperity that they would enjoy as a result of the increase on their pensions. The single parents are disappointed with the \$400 added on to the public assistance, and residents are still upset that there is no reduction of the value added tax.

Against this grandiose announcement, I wish to urge the Minister to increase the pension to at least \$10,000 per month, and the public assistance to \$6,000 per month.

On page 3 paragraph 1.8 of the budget speech the Minister of Finance painted a picture of Guyana as a place where more of our people choose to remain to make a rewarding living, where more of our Diaspora find it worthwhile to return whether for gainful employment or restful retirement, where investors prefer to do business. Indeed, he paints Guyana as a beautiful place, and I quote:

“...where productive activity continues to grow and where productivity and competitiveness improve steadily...”

However, the Minister must be aware that the World Economic Forum’s Global Competiveness Report 2007-2008 sites crime and theft as top complaints by businesses operating in these countries, especially the latter. The glaring process carries across the many Caribbean states reflecting the lack of standardisation of custom practices and making it costly and time

consuming for carriers to upload and offload at regional ports. If the Minister is really serious in having productive activity and competitiveness improve, as he states, these issues have to be addressed but we have heard nothing of it in the budget.

The Minister in his speech also referred us to the President's inaugural address. According to that address reported in the Hansard of 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2012 page 92, the President states:

“This Tenth Parliament could go down in history as being the one that can see us firmly on the highway to peace, prosperity and progress.”

I wish to endorse those sentiments and to say that we can only be on such a highway if we, in this Parliament, are prepared to review the impact of policies and projects outlined in this budget, and through meaningful consultation make the necessary adjustments that will result in the policies and projects being endorsed by all. In this context I, therefore, call on the PPP/C Government to review the impact of the value added tax with the aim of reducing it to at least 10%, to review some of the programmes outlined in Budget 2012, especially those that speak to the equitable distribution of resources, the vulnerable within our society, the poor and the elderly, so that all of us can live in a Guyana that is characterised by peace, progress, and prosperity, and one that sees the realisation of local democracy.

I wish to turn my attention to infrastructural development with specific emphasis on Region 4-East Bank Demerara.

*[Ms. Shadick in the Chair at 9.43 p.m.]*

In the areas of infrastructural development Government has been “Remaining on Course” but it surely has not resulted in prosperity for the communities. Additionally, they have remained on course by failing to consult with regional democratic officials. Such consultations, if they had taken place, would have enabled a more coherent approach to the development of projects on the East Bank of Demerara. A Partnership for National Unity supports the construction and rehabilitation of roads. We believe, however, that these must be premised on consultation and recommendations of the Region. Most of all there must be proper planning to ensure that roads take account of present and future development within the area. The Government in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank proposes to spend US\$139.729

million to construct roads. The Government, however, failed to consult with the officials of Region 4 to identify the roads that should be constructed. The officials were merely informed of the roads to be constructed. The Government has identify twelve roads to be constructed in the Grove area but no allocation has been provided for any roads in Caneville or Samantha Point areas where the roads are in a more deplorable state than any other section in Grove. There is obvious need for a consultative approach to determine where roads are to be built so that the residents can understand why some roads are done and others ignored.

Page 32 of the budget speaks about modernising and transforming our economy to meet the challenges. It states:

“Mr. Speaker... our physical infrastructure plays an extremely pivotal role.”

In addition it says:

“...preliminary works on the widening of the East Bank Demerara Four Lane Highway from Providence to Diamond and the upgrade of the Cheddi Jagan International Airport access road are ongoing.

While the residents of the East Bank Demerara welcome the construction of such a highway many are complaining about the hardships they experience daily as they travel to and from work. The issue I would like to raise is whether productivity in the country would not be increased by engaging in night construction. In view of the increasing population, the number of registered vehicles on the roads, and the establishment of new housing scheme at Eccles, Diamond, Herstelling and Providence, if there was consultation and proper forward planning the Government may have conceptualised the construction of the East Bank of Demerara Four-Lane Highway before the establishment of the Diamond Housing Scheme. It should also be noted that the East Bank of Demerara Highway is the only access to our hinterland, including the road to Brazil. The impact, therefore, on economic activity, if they are bottlenecks during the construction or repair of this highway, should be obvious. There is clearly a need for new and more innovative and forward thinking road construction programmes. Night time road works will minimise the impact on the travelling public and community since the traffic congestion results in a reduction in the productivity of workers and schoolchildren since many arrive late for work and school. Taxi drivers and mini bus drivers are operating at a loss since they have to

spend more time caught in traffic and burn excessive fuel. I wish to recommend therefore that the need for night work should be assessed for all such projects. I am strongly recommending night work for the East Bank Demerara Four Lane Highway.

I am aware of the cost implication of such works. But there would be need for additional allocations in those contracts so as to cover workers' allowances and other costs associated with night works.

In connection with health on page 42 paragraph 4.79 it states:

“In pursuit of the National Health Strategy 2008-2012 Government's attention is focused on further decentralization...”

This is commendable since decentralisation is important, as alluded to by many speakers. Unfortunately, this does not reflect the actual situation since the health centres throughout the East Bank of Demerara are badly neglected. For example, at the Health Centre at Herstelling there are six rooms, probably smaller than the size of a 15-seater mini bus; there is also inadequate staffing; there is no patient care assistant, no nursing assistant; one midwife; one doctor; one pharmacy assistant no medic; no clinic attendant; members of staff are forced to work through their lunch hour as babies are vaccinated, weighed and measured; the midwife has to do the work of the assistant pharmacist since there is no assistance at the health centre.

9.55 p.m.

The question is whether four persons can run a health centre efficiently and provide the necessary services in light of the number of patients that frequent that health centre; approximately 76 -80 persons on a daily basis.

*[Mr. Speaker resumed the Chair at 9.56 p.m.]*

The issue of drugs shortages prevails, there is the unavailability of an ambulance or easy access to one, nurses are forced to take their patients to the Diamond Diagnostic Centre in crisis situations, at the own expense sometimes and they are not reimbursed. Promises which were made by the Minister of Health have not been fulfilled, for example, two years ago the staff at the Herstelling Health Centre requested that a patients' waiting area be constructed, to date this

has not materialised. The result is that persons awaiting treatment have to stand in the compound and they are drenched when it rains, that is true. The Minister of Health is aware of this, yet nothing has been done.

A dressing room was constructed in 2011, but to date the staff is unable to use the room since they are still awaiting an autoclave and sterilisers. What is worst is that the roof of the dressing room is leaking and this has destroyed the ceiling. This is yet another demonstration of the substandard work that is so prevalent all over Guyana. I hope therefore that with billions the Minister said will be spent in the health sector, the residents of the East Bank of Demerara will have these and other problems they experience addressed.

I wish to turn my attention to foreign affairs. Foreign policy is directly related to the realisation of our domestic goals. APNU (A Partnership for National Unity) recognises that participation in international and regional organisations such as the UN, OAS, UNASUR, the Commonwealth, and Caricom plays a pivotal role with regard to small states in Guyana. We believe that the Government must have policies and programmes in place at the domestic level that will ensure that Guyana derives the maximum benefits from such association. Page 55, paragraph 1.428 states that,

“Under Guyana’s Chairmanship of UNASUR, which ended in October 2011 key accomplishments included the formal application to the United Nations for observer status and the signature of the additional protocol to the Constitutive Treaty on the commitment to democracy as well as the establishment of working groups on food security, the fight against hunger and malnutrition...”

This is indeed laudable, but we in Guyana know that the mere signing of conventions and protocols have had no effect on the Government observing the convention that they subscribe to. In fact, we have seen the Government failing to subscribe to the rule of law and failure to even observe Guyana’s Constitutional provisions. A notable example is the failure to establish the public procurement commission. The above treaty I just referred to speaks of commitment to democracy. Where have the Government shown this commitment to democracy? We have recently seen the arbitrary transfer of NDCs overseers by the Minister of Local Government

without consultation with the democratic elected bodies. This is the kind of commitment where the Government feels comfortable signing treaties and observing them in the breach.

A Partnership for National Unity recommends that the Government commits itself to democracy as the Government has committed itself to the above Treaty. This commitment should be reflected in the manner in which the Local Government Legislation is amended to reflect the recommendations of the task force on Local Government Reform.

An issue that the Minister of Foreign Affairs should address is the future of the establishment of many regional bodies in South America, Latin America and the Caribbean. How will the relationship evolve? The Minister of Foreign Affairs in a recent address to plenary recession of the 41<sup>st</sup> OAS General Secretary – El Salvador, said that,- no regional strategy to boost citizens’ safety could succeed unless it has the reduction of trafficking in illicit drugs as its principle elements.

APNU recognises the destabilising impact that such activity can have on the nation or region and proposes that the Government, if they are serious about the Minister of Foreign Affairs speech they should seek to acquire adequate insured patrol vessels to suppress illegal fishing, gun running and funds for long range maritime surveillance patrol. In the absence of such domestic actions, speeches to these international bodies appear as mere sounding of brass and twinkling of symbols.

Guyanese diaspora and the importance of remittances – at page 55 of the budget presentation, the Minister refers to our diaspora as vast source of expertise and inward investments, a natural market for our indigenous products and an important vehicle through which to influence international opinion,

“...an integral contributor to the achievement of our national development goals. Efforts will be strengthened through a more structured approach in maintaining a suitable engagement with our diaspora communities around the world.”

If the Minister is serious about this objective, then he needs to create the enabling environments in Guyana to maximise...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you time is up.



**Ms. Ally:** Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Ms. Selman:** Thank you Mr. Speaker. If the Minister is serious about this objective, then he needs to create the enabling environments in Guyana to maximise on such source of investments. Perhaps the Minister needs to review and discuss with the financial institutions of Guyana on how they can provide a better service for the remitters and their beneficiaries. It is essential for there to be a remittances and diaspora unit in Guyana, as is done in many Latin American and some Caribbean countries. This unit should be responsible for engaging the diaspora in discussions on viable development reform strategy, along with monitoring assurance in migration and re-migrating activities.

The authorities should also implement some of the policies adopted in other developing countries, for example in Egypt, the Government provided matching funds for remittance back projects, while the Government of Mexico matched every dollar sent by migrant groups with \$3 of local Government funds to pay for infrastructure projects.

In concluding, it should be obvious that the laudable theme of the budget itself gives no hope to Guyana since it promises them a continuation of the same old approach. I therefore wish to recommend to the Hon. Minister that he should resolve, not to remain on course, but to change the course and adopt an approach that will see all Guyanese on board and in support of this budget. Change the course from arrogance and non-consultation to meaningful consultation. Change the course by ensuring higher pay for workers including old age pension, public assistance and the reduction of the Value Added Tax. Change the course to ensure that what we say in speeches at international organisations is put into practice in Guyana.

Finally, since I am from the East Bank Demerara, I want the Minister to change course to ensure that we have a more intelligent approach to the rehabilitation and construction of the East Bank Demerara four lane highway, to ensure that we have greater productivity. Thank you very much.  
*[Applause]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you Hon. Member. Hon. Member Mr. Lumumba.

**Mr. Lumumba:** Mr. Speaker, I want to use this opportunity to congratulate you on being Speaker of the House, I had not a chance to do it formally. I would also like to use this opportunity to congratulate Mr. David Granger, the Opposition Leader, also Dr. Rupert Roopnarine, a friend of mine, who have seen eye to eye with me politically for a number of years.

I would like to start my presentation by appealing to the leadership of APNU and the leadership of AFC on a particular issue. I think it is a sad day when I sit in this Parliament and hear a Member of Parliament say, “My people”. I thought “My people” are Guyanese.

[**Mrs. Backer:** What does the APNU have to do with that?] Let me finish, because one person who talked about my people, was a Member of Parliament from APNU and one was from AFC. I am just saying, I am not being critical, I am just saying we have to be careful that we do not move this country down to balkanisation, we have to be careful. I do not want to hear that we found oil in Berbice and the East Indians in Berbice have to say my oil. We have to be concerned that about 60% of the miners and small claim holders, in certain areas of Guyana, are Afro-Guyanese and we have to careful when and how we talk because there can be misinterpretations. All I am saying is that all of us must be more sensitive. We understand that there might be some problems, there might be some perceptions, but we have to work towards it as Guyanese and not based on ethnicity.

I hope my presentation today will help to provide clarity for the other side of the House and also help to facilitate the support for this budget, as presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, who has once again presented the way forward for our nation which came from a dreadful and terrible past.

This budget and the budget of the last ten years must be seen as the continuation of a policy that is geared towards development. We must not see a budget as something to do on a particular year; it must be a continuous process towards development, for example, this budget deals with the continued process of expanding the economy, putting in place infrastructure that would have facilitated such development, improve the critical social elements of society, such as, education, by building and repairing schools with great emphasis in rural and Amerindian communities.

Health – which emphasis on health centres, modernisation and improvements of hospitals and expanding services to rural and Amerindian communities and preparing for a modern international hospital that can accommodate local citizens that require specialist treatment, in particular, those overseas based Guyanese who plan to return to their native land. We are emphasising acceleration of medical care by facilitating the training of over 600 doctors.

Security – emphasis on a better trained police force, modernisation of the related facilities, maintenance and repair of existing facilities, construction of small, but effective community based police stations to target problems in small and isolated communities. The introduction of special cameras in areas plagued by criminals.

Controlling inflation – expansion of the agriculture food chain, that salary increases can remain an effective tool in a fight against poverty. Salary increase only makes sense if the prices of goods and services remain constant and affordable.

Creating opportunities – each adult citizen can have his or her own home in conjunction with the continuation of our networking with financial institutions, so that the majority of our people can have affordable loans in a quest to become homeowners. Housing in particular is a story to be told.

We have also created an atmosphere that is investment friendly so that foreign investors can feel free to bring billions of dollars to our shores with the understanding and belief that their investments will be guaranteed and protected and that the infrastructure put in place by the Government will be the nexus between their profitability and our national development.

Our achievements are rare and must be compared and judged by the path that was placed before the Government when the PPP/C came into power. Development is not instant coffee, it has to grow. We came into power when no investor or developer other than Jim Jones saw Guyana as a place of hope and prosperity. [Mrs. Backer: What about GT&T and Omai?] I forgot that, I am human, I cannot remember everything. I accept that amendment, not for the budget though.

We came into power when the overwhelming majority of Guyanese abandoned the Burnham's controlled State. We came into power when illiteracy was rampant, when salaries were slave like and teachers had to seek greener pastures abroad. We came into power when hospitals lacked

medicines and doctors and when nurses migrated by hundreds. We came into power when electricity for households was graced by the act of God. We came into power when there was no potable water, when school children and the elderly had to drag drums of water for miles. We came into power when the interest rate was 36%, thanks to the ex-Minister Carl Greenidge...

**[Interruption]** Mr. Speaker, can you please protect me I am fragile in this building?

**Mr. Speaker:** Allow the Member to speak. Mr. Lumumba is one who does not heckle; rarely do you hear his voice. If there is a clarification to the facts, a Member has a right to rise, but allow him to give his opinion.

**Mr. Lumumba:** Thank you for your protection. Mr. Speaker, this is of particular interest to you, we came into power when my good friend and neighbour, MP Deborah Backer, had to consider the “*blacka*” as the only source of water for a decent bath... **[Interruption]**

**Mrs. Backer:** Mr. Speaker, I know he is not serious, but the fact is that the Hon. Member joined the PNC before I was a Member and then he grass hopped over to the GGG and then he hopped further...

**Mr. Lumumba:** She is out of order Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Alright thank you.

**Mr. Lumumba:** Mr. Speaker, we came into power when 94% of revenue earned by Government went to cover international debt. We came into power when Guyana was a desert.

The Hon. Minister, Ashni Singh, has a serious flaw in his presentation, he did not spend enough time to emphasise the road we came from and you must amend your presentation to emphasise the road we came from. He did not deal with the “why”. A budget reflects the historical development of a country. Our budget is a reflection of the struggle from the dark days to the bright days. Once the Opposition accepts the truth and we accept that is how we started, we can then jointly understand the genesis of this budget and now we can together agree on this budget.

You cannot find the nation that has moved forward towards development, in particular, in the area of tourism that lacked a modern airport; you cannot name one. You cannot name a modern society, a developing society with major plans that depends on one or two major hotels. Several

members of the Private Sector and tourism stalwarts, such as, Captain Gouveia and Mr. Stephenson have called for more hotels, including the Marriot. The AFC has decided that Guyana must stay backwards for narrow political reasons.

Should APNU or the PNC and those of us who understand economic development believe that the late Forbes Burnham was crazy when he aggressively pursued hydro dam at Mazaruni...

**Mrs. Backer:** Do not say that. How are you going to say that?

**Mr. Lumumba:** Mr. Speaker, obviously she does not understand English.

**Mrs. Backer:** Mr. Speaker, how could you call a former Head of State, who cannot defend himself, crazy.

**Mr. Lumumba:** I did not call him crazy, I was just... [*Interruption*]

**Mrs. Backer:** You just said that.

**Mr. Speaker:** Let me clarify. What the Hon. Member said, is that would we have called the President crazy for the hydro-power. So he is in order. Proceed Mr. Lumumba. I think we are a bit tired.

**Mr. Lumumba:** Mr. Speaker, even the late Forbes Burnham, with his political backwardness, understood the need for hydro-power and cheap energy. We cannot name a modern society that moved forward and became economically sound that depended on generators to power a nation.

Let me briefly point out some of the advantages of hydro-power because this is a big discussion in Guyana today; big opposition for APNU; big opposition from AFC. [**Ms. Ally:** APNU.] APNU or PNC, it is the same thing, why are we getting confused.

Advances of hydro-power – once a dam is constructed electricity can be produced at a constant rate. Dams are designed to last many decades and so can contribute to the generation of electricity for many years, even decades. The lakes that form behind the dams can be used for water sports and pleasure activities. Other dams become tourist attraction. The lake's water can be used for irrigation purposes and I can go on and on.

A visit to the Pacific Northwest of the United States and Canada would show the economics for many communities which were driven by hydro-power. Hydro-power –relatively cheap power and what impact they had on small communities. Any sound economist, any serious politician would know that hydro-power can become the key element of small industries. Hydro-power has always served as a catalyst to development and will save our nation millions of US dollars, which can be then used to increase the old age pension and salaries. In essence we can only increase salaries and pension from savings or new sources of revenue.

It is the Government's intention to remove all aspects of Guyana from a backward era. Why would my colleagues on the Opposition be against this? Is it because they do not care about the poor who cannot pay for specialist medical attention? The objective here is to improve the quality of life for our people, by providing facilities that can remedy heart and kidney diseases. Should we not put in place a modern medical support mechanism? Let the Opposition vote against health improvement, we are proposing a modern facility because it is a step in the right direction. I am talking about the modern hospital that we have planned.

What kind of person would be critical of a four lane highway on the East Coast and the East Bank of Demerara? Is the Opposition saying that we must not plan for the future and should Guyanese who have automobiles parked and walk long distances and fetch their children on their backs? We recognise the difficulties with the implementation of some of these projects. You name a country that is implementing major and complex projects without difficulties. The PNC, APNU and AFC can gloat because they had nothing in thirty years. You cannot make mistakes if you have a history of nothing; doing nothing. How can you make a mistake if you never did anything?

The PPP/C Government did not come to power with a waiting list of contractors or engineers or a list of experience project coordinators. Where were they? They were in St. Lucia, Canada, Trinidad, Jamaica and Barbados, but not in Guyana. We had to start from zero. Certainly MP, Dr. Rupert Roopnarine knows this, he has pronounced on this on several occasions in the past. How many of my friends and colleagues, including his colleagues, were run out of Guyana. “Ow” after you attack the PNC of helping oppress them, they all ran out of this country.

When we came into power, we had three major contractors, namely, Brian Tiwari, Courtney Benn and Lloyd Rose. Where is the beef, where were the contractors, where were the technical people? If we had imported dozens of contractors, this Opposition would call us anti-national. In every situation, medical, water, education, security, banking, we had to build capacity, we had to start over again. The process of building capacity must allow for error, it must allow for some degree of waste. We are still an underdeveloped country; we are still scrambling for skills and experienced personnel. Come on APNU and AFC give us a break. Are you attacking us for trying?

Do you understand the amount of disasters that can be pointed to towards developing countries, including the United States from a bridge collapsing in Nebraska, failure of the soil protection in Louisiana or do you want to go to France or Brazil where dams and airports collapse or should we go back to the United States and look at the space craft that exploded and led to the death of astronauts? You can only avoid mishaps if you stand still and Guyana will not stand still under the PPP. Guyana stood still under the PNC. China had several transit mishaps, but China is still going forward. The Opposition wants us to stay backwards and we will reject that.

We are attempting to modernise a society that was laid waste by an ancient emperor name Burnham; that was laid waste by the PNC. But are they going to continue to oppose us for trying? The proof is in the pudding; the proof is in the things you have done for society.

Let us stop for a moment and look at water, the commodity that was scarce under the PNC. This is an example of our performance of as a Government. Water, water everywhere. Comrade Backer no longer has to bathe in the “*blacka*”. Jump up again. [Mrs. Backer: You are so absurd.] You are still my friend and I still love you.

The Opposition must behave in a responsible manner. The Opposition cannot grandstand and play pity politics. The Opposition must participate in a process that is development oriented or they will be left on the side lines of development. History records them as Doctor. No; like my friend James Bond.

The Opposition is not the police; the Opposition should not behave like the watchman. If someone thieves, lock them up. They must behave like the understand economics and development, they cannot take an immature racist position. Linden cannot have a different

electricity bill from the rest of Guyana. Are they different from the people in Georgetown? Are the people in Linden different from the people in Enmore? Are the people in Linden different from the people in Bartica and Blairmonth? This debate must be based on class it cannot be based on ethnicity. Dr. Roopnarine you were a man of the people, you must know that the debate has to be based on class. As an old Marxist you should know better.

**Mr. Speaker:** Alright keep your calm, take it easy.

**Mr. Lumumba:** Mr. Speaker, if Linden can get lower electricity rates, so must the farmers at Buxton and the sugar workers of Blairmonth. One race, one people and one destiny, shades of Burnham... I will teach you a couple of things tonight. The history of the PPP budget has shown that it is not discrimination oriented. We have divided the pie; the pie is not very large. You can go to all the regions; we have met social service obligations in the areas of water, housing, education and roads. List the villages and all you will see is positive changes; all you can see is development. We are all humans.

His Excellency, President Ramotar and the Hon. Minister Singh, they are all humans and they believe in dialogue. Julius Caesar, Winston Churchill, John Kennedy, Bill Clinton, all these great men participated in dialogue.

The Opposition must make their case. Our President is active in the budget...

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

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

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Mr. Lumumba:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the debate must not be vicious. It must not be war mongering, it must not be theatre as presented by MP Moses Nagamootoo; it must be real. The Opposition must analyse our policy and if they are sound or unsound, the Government should be put to the task for discussions. We do not have a problem with discussions; we do not have a problem with talking; we do not have a problem with dialogue. If there are flaws, you point it



out; we do not think there are any, but if you think there are point them out to us through dialogue.

This discourse must be scientific and intellectual. It must not be based on Bourda Market oriented brawls. We were elected to serve and manage this nation. The PPP/C was elected to serve and manage this nation and that we will do; that we must do. The Opposition must allow us to. I am not suggesting that the Opposition must blindly follow us, but they must be logical and sound in order for us to move towards a united Parliament. The election is over; people want roads, highways, more and better water systems. People want improved educational systems. People want a better health centre, more jobs. The Guyanese people are tired of empty rhetoric from the Opposition.

*10.25 p.m.*

We have located the catalyst of job creation, in particular, in the areas of mining, petroleum, telecommunications and business services. We believe, like President Obama, that major infrastructural projects will drive the economy and create jobs.

We are on a correct economic political path. The debate must focus on solid economic policy. Mr. Greenidge, the architect of economic demise of Guyana from the PNC must prove to this nation that he has been rehabilitated and he can only show that he has been rehabilitated by joining with the PPP/C so that we could work together and continue with economic growth and culture migration of Guyanese. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Speaker:** I thank you, Hon. Member. At least we have had some levity put back into this session this evening.

**Mr. T. Williams:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, it is my maiden speech. I want to, first of all, thank the 35,000 plus supporters that voted for the AFC (Alliance For Change) and that have placed confidence in us, these MPs (Members of Parliament), to represent their interests in the best way we can. **[Ms. Manickchand: 6%]** Yes, I know that it is 6%. I also would like to congratulate all of the new Members of this Hon. House as they too stand here to represent the interest of their parties. I must also offer congratulations to the Hon. Finance Minister for

presenting this document; a document I believe he is hoping the Opposition at the end of the debate would be able to agree with, standing with the PPP to pass this document.

I learned not so long ago a story of a gentleman who, late in his life, decided to go back to attend school to get an education that bypassed him. To make the story short, because of time, this gentleman went to an English class and he came into contact with parts of speech. His assignment was to go home and learn the word “nouns”. He did not learn about the word “noun”; he learned “a door”. When he returned to school the next day the teacher asked him “Give me a noun.” He said “A door.” She said “Brilliant. Give me another noun.” He said “Another door.” She was startled and she said “More nouns.” He said “More doors.” Hence I believe that, largely, this budget offers for the Guyanese people more of the same.

I do believe that in Guyana today there exist developments. I do believe that things have changed and transformed over the years and I would like to give credit to the Government. I forgot to say that before I started speaking I rose with a contracted headache which I believe came from excess entertainment via interaction; however, I will stand to say what I have to say.

We see roads, bridges, schools, school feeding programmes and a lot more have been done under this Government but we also see large sums of the Guyanese money being presented for contracts; such contracts delivered, as have been happening over the years, where the Guyanese people have been asking for standard work, for quality work, for responsible work. I was elected to help the Guyanese people to charter a better course and ensure that this Government believes value for money.

If this budget is allowed to pass in this current form there is less hope for our farmers, mothers, youths, miners, the workers and the unemployed.

### **INCREASE OF PENSION**

I have \$20 and at the same time I have two mints and I did not eat them earlier because I realised that had I eaten these two mints I would have been eating what the Finance Minister is offering our pensioner daily and that is the increase of \$600 per month – \$20 per day. If it was an oversight we in the AFC stand ready to forgive him and work with him for an adjustable acceptable increase as was proposed – like \$10,000. If our noble colleague, the Minister of

Finance, is saying that \$20 is enough in 2012, as a daily increase in pensions then I say that he is a very brave man.

## **DISAGREEMENT WITH MONETARY ALLOCATIONS**

The PPP cannot afford to subsidise Linden to the tune of \$2.9 billion for electricity but they could have afforded to give \$600 million to one man who never built a pavement. He was going to build a complex road in our pristine forest. We do not see an increase to \$10,000 for the pensioners but we repeatedly hear that there is a controversial past president pension of \$3 million plus allowances for a gardener, researchers and more. We hear about \$300 million being allocated for procuring computers and this was given to a barbershop. Under this trend the PPP has spent more money and projected more money but who gets more of the Guyanese money.

## **EDUCATION**

In 2008, and I quote the Hon. Minister as saying “our new education strategic plan, 2008 to 2012, is being finalised and will focus on literacy and numeracy programmes, universal secondary education, teacher training school health nutrition and HIV/AIDS, science and technology and the creation of a labour force with the skills that match the needs of our development agenda.” The Minister was allowed by the PPP since then to spend some \$85 billion of Guyanese money on the education plan 2008 to 2011 but to what effect.

We look at the pass rates from grades 1 to 3 at CSEC (Caribbean Examinations Council) from 2008 to now 70% of our students are failing mathematics under the PPP. In 2008 we had 31.4% passes; in 2009 we had 31.1%; in 2010 it was 34.5%; in 2011 it was 30.4%. I say that this is not value for money and it is a shame.

In this 2012 Budget they are said to continue this broken model of building more schools when the teachers need the tools to do a better job. Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, teachers need better teaching aids. They need more text books, better salaries – may I add. As to the students: they need better support from the system; especially those children in failing families, but did you see any billions to council and to offer better study environments in the communities so that children can do their homework and blossom to the best that they can be. Where are the billions spent?

We all know the play book: “spend plenty and do little for the people”. So, they spent \$85 billion on education in four years and did very little by producing what we can simply call more functional illiterates in four years. I ask again, “Where did this money go?”

We look at UG (University of Guyana) and there is a more demoralising story. I heard the Hon. Member, Dr. Persaud, yesterday speaking as a proud graduate from the University of Guyana. I share her sentiment as I too am a proud graduate of the University, but I am far from being proud of what this university has become under this Government. Under the PPP/C the University of Guyana has operated like an abortion machine, which keeps producing and disposing of the products so regularly. Nowhere else in the Caribbean does a recognised university suffer from such a shortage of quality lecturers. Hence, this delay in the graduation of many and causes the slowing down of their professional pursuit for a better life. Hon. Member, Dr. Persaud, you would have been to the university a long time ago but I do not know if you can recall the dangers of asbestos when the university doors had to be closed. You apparently were not there when we had to interrupt one class to accommodate another. One is sitting in a class room at the university and one turns around only to see another lecturer appear with a number of students saying “We were supposed to be here.” I have had the experience of having various lecturers being called in just to finish one course because they left the university for various reasons, yet this Government has been promising year after year to better and enhance what we have. I was sitting in the GWLT (George Walcott Lecture Theater) many days when it rained and one had to play musical chairs with one’s furniture just to not get wet – you and your books. That is not a university to be proud of but one that we should be ashamed of and work together to develop and invest in our young people.

In this budget the PPP are spending some US\$750 per university student every year; if one were to compare that with the UWI (University of the West Indies) Mona Campus in Jamaica, they spent US\$1,500 per student. For Barbados and Trinidad the figures are even higher. Even in Suriname the Government spends more on a university student. I say “shame” on this performance and the regard that we have been seeing for education under this Government. The University of Guyana has, no doubt, been a political playfield and has caused the suffering of many of our students; it is like “starve and feed”.

## **INFRASTRUCTURAL WORK TO LINK COMMUNITIES AND COUNTRIES**

In 2008 the PPP promised to complete the feasibility study of a paved Linden to Lethem road. Four years later that project is still being analysed. We do not know why the government is taking those promises so lightly. Building a transportation link, even if it is a rail, will fulfil our national ambition to better connect and unit the coast lands with the hinterland under the banner “One People, One National, One Destiny”. What is really of concern is, in 2010, President Lula came to our shores and promised this Government his full support to build the Lethem to Linden road. What did the PPP do with this promise from one of the world’s most powerful and emerging nation? They sent the Hon. Kellawan Lall to Brazil as our premier ambassador. Yes, they continue to send untrained diplomats.

While we were playing musical chairs, Suriname, in 2010, signed an agreement to go and actively seek out some \$6 billion from the private sector and friendly governments to fast tract the construction of a deepwater harbour and railway from the coast of Brazil, among eight prestigious projects to fulfil that nation’s national agenda.

The Hon. Minister alluded to how his Government spent some \$8.7 billion on roads in 2011 and planned to increase this by 25%. I dare the Hon. Minister to find out from the Guyanese public if they believe that they got 25% quality increase in the roads provided.

## **YOUTHS**

I now turn my attention to youths. I believe that the fairness of this budget will be determined by how much our youths are catered for. As a young man I would like to say to the Hon. Minister that the easiest way to motivate me to support this budget is to do something to enhance the lives of Guyanese youths. I would not want the Hon. Minister to lose that opportunity. According to the IDB (International Development Bank), in Guyana youth employment is more than two and a half times higher than unemployment amount adults. 30% of our youths who want to work are currently “kicking bricks” thanks to the Hon. Members. They have been in power for 20 years and have done very little for our young people.

What is even more startling, according to the IDB, is the employment rate among young women who want to work is a heartbreaking 47%. Right now there are 21,957 young people walking the streets of Guyana “kicking brick” thanks to their Government. Of that amount, about 14,600 are

women; I say that this is a shame. No wonder that 89% of Guyanese graduating from the university seek to get out of their beloved country.

I cannot support this budget unless it does the following for youths in Guyana:

Put funds in this budget to equip secondary schools with computer labs. It is better to spend \$400 million on 500 young people than \$600 million on one man, Mr. Motilall. It is next to impossible for me to support this budget unless Government offers a successful youth empowerment grant for young people who have demonstrated a business idea to start their own business – I must say that the Finance Minister has mentioned something to that effect. I expect that the state will support these youths in areas such as marketing their products and services, managing their money and writing up their business plan to seek further financing from banks. It is better to spend \$100 million on 1,000 youths than \$900 million on one man.

#### **WHAT IS NEEDED TO ENSURE SUPPORT OF THE BUDGET**

I cannot support this budget unless this Government brings back regional mechanical workshops to create thousands of new jobs for young apprentices at the RDC (Regional Democratic Council) level. It is better to spend \$100 million on 1,000 young people than \$168 million on one man to build a hotel which after will be sold for a profit.

I cannot support this budget unless there is a pool of funds set aside to help talented young athletes with cost-of-living support. For example, \$40,000 per month for 12 months will cost the Government only \$24 million...

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

**Mr. Ramjattan:** Could I propose five minutes more for the Hon. Member?

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Mr. T. Williams:** I cannot support this budget unless faith-based organisations which are engaged in moral revival projects receive a state grant of at least \$2 million each year to help youths to reintegrate into mainstream society. I, quickly, have one example of the Hauraruni Girls Home. This was founded since 1982 and it has been contributing to the successful care of the lives of young women. The Hon. Minister of Social Services spoke yesterday and said that

we were spending about \$18,000 per month on our children in homes; they have a budget of US\$2,600 a month and it is on record that the Government of Guyana only gave this honourable home US\$500 per year. It is a shame.

## **REGIONAL ISSUES**

I want to go quickly to some regional aspects. We ask that the Berbice River Ferry be restored so that families along the Berbice River would be able to transport their produce and develop their lives within their communities. We are happy for the two roll-on roll-off ferries in the Essequibo River but Berbice River Ferry served a number of villages.

I also want to suggest that we pave the road from Linden to Kwakwani. The Hon. Minister spoke about the millions of US Dollars that were invested in heavy duty machinery and the long-term plan of developing regional resources. If we can proudly say, in this Hon. House, that Region 10 is receiving so much money and investment, then I believe that it is honourable that this Government pilots that road for the residents of Linden to Kwakwani.

I want to speak quickly about Region 2: the villages of Onderneeming and Sand Pit where thousands of residents live without potable water. They swim in a pool that does not run and is only filled by the rain. I call it the “Death Pool”.

Although there was the development spoken about at the Suddie Hospital in Essequibo – for which I commend the Hon. Minister – the medical garbage from the Suddie Hospital is dumped right next to the houses in Redville. It is right here (in a picture). This is going on until today. The children of the residents would pick up the needles and fight with them.

Right there is the Adventure Nursery School which is supported by two black tanks. The entire community needs water. A picture tells a thousand words and this is a picture of the village and the residents have to live by the black tanks. We call it the “Black Tank Villa”. There is more; there is a well there that does not work – it is non-functional – which is called Isaacs’ Well. It is a “white elephant”, they need water. There is more. The roads that were built there just a few months ago are in a very deplorable state.

I want to speak quickly about Bartica before I close. Since 2009 the residents are still awaiting township. Garbage is still a main problem in that community to the extent that the garbage

removal machinery that was taken there by this Government broke down before it reached Bartica and it had to be pulled off of the ferry. It is still parked in the Regional Workshop. The residents are thankful for a functioning theatre but they need a resident surgeon in that community. I also want to point out that it is commendable that the government is building the Community Centre at Bartica but, of course, they need recreational facilities in the Four Mile Scheme and the Agatash Area. The residents of Middle Mazaruni are calling for a new secondary school and a new dormitory since the ones there are overcrowded. We will be very happy and supportive of the ventures of this Government to remedy and meet the needs of the people of this country.

I want to say that I did not say all that I had to say but, most importantly, the AFC is in this Parliament to work with this Government and the Rest of the Opposition to ensure that the people of Guyana indeed get a better deal. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Member.

**Mr. Morian:** Mr. Speaker, I give God thanks and praise for this opportunity so that I could be here to make my presentation in this 2012 Budget, but it would be remiss of me if I do not correct some presentations that were made out of context.

First of all I wish to bring to this Hon. House comments made by the Hon. Mr. Hamilton concerning Region 10, Linden, where, at the hospital, Lindeners are working. Let me put this into context. These members of the board were not elected or selected by the leaders of Region 10; they were elected by the Government, hence, they hold themselves aloof from the residents. I have in my hand here a petition that was signed by 50 workers of the Mackenzie Hospital seeking to be a part of the very board the Hon. Member Mr. Hamilton spoke about.

A number of Hon. Members, in their presentations, spoke as though agriculture was a misnomer before 1992. I wish to make a presentation here and to supply the evidence that these pronouncements are just conjectures or, basically, they are anachronistic currently. “Agriculture sector loan, 1991 to 1995, funding by the IDB, total disbursement US\$41 million...” and it spoke to the sector goal of improving production and competitiveness of agriculture – “Exhibit A”. I speak to Agriculture Hybrid Programme, Loan 839SFGY, that spoke to the rehabilitation of both the sugar and rice subsectors. Here I have that GUYSUOCO received 153 tractors from this



programme, 107 motor cycles, pumps, ditchers, harrows, Perkins engines, irrigators and I could go on and on. Hence, to say that before 1992 agriculture was a misnomer is misleading and truly out of order.

10.55 p.m.

I wish to bring to the attention of this honourable House a matter that is engaged, or is engaging, the residents of Region 10 to a level where tension is rising. One needs to note that the average speaker on the Government side spoke somewhat on the impending rise in electricity tariff in Region 10. We need to look at the legend that has brought Region 10 to where it is as it relates to electricity generation.

The Government of Guyana approached a company by the name of Texas-Ohio Energy and it went into a lease purchase arrangement, contrary to all of the agreements it has made with the residents of Region 10. But, more than that, this arrangement never embraced or had any dialogue with residents or their elected leaders. Within a short time the Texas-Ohio Energy folded. I wish to read here the report of the arbitration that the Government went into with Texas-Ohio Energy and it will point to a situation that has brought electrical generation in Region 10 to where it is right now. Report of American Arbitration Association hearings held in Washington during the period 29<sup>th</sup> March to 9<sup>th</sup> April, 2004 - *The Government of Guyana vs Texas-Ohio Energy. The Government and LINMINE claims against Texas Ohio Energy* - and it summarises as follows: - This will tell us that Texas-Ohio Energy, with support from the Government of Guyana, destroyed electrical generation in Region 10. This is part of the deal that has brought us to where we are - failure to use new materials in the rehabilitation of power facility in breach of article 11.2; failure to keep the power generation facilities in good order, repair and condition to supply continuous, safe and reliable source of electricity and to operate user best practices of North America.

Texas-Ohio Energy falsely represented and warranted that it had financial and technical capacity to rehabilitate, operate and maintain the Linden power generation - a clear point here that the Government of Guyana did not do a thorough due diligence on this company. Texas-Ohio Energy misrepresented that a \$5million loan from Republic Bank Ltd. would have been exclusively used to fund the rehabilitation of the plant. The question is asked here: What has

happened to the funds that the Government has claimed during that arbitration? I wish to state the sums - US\$998 million for loss of bauxite sales. It is a clear case that because of the folding of Texas-Ohio Energy, the bauxite company suffered. I need to submit to this honourable House that during that period blackouts were widespread in Region 10 to the extent that small businesses also folded. This is the Government's arbitration case which was before the courts in the United States of America.

"US\$1.2 million for failure to apply insurance proceeds to repair or rebuild the plant." After the plant folded, Texas-Ohio Energy got insurance benefit which should have come to Guyana. The Government of Guyana claimed that. The question is asked: Where are these moneys that are needed? I guess the Hon. Member Mr. Samuel Hinds is well aware of these businesses that I am talking about here.

"US\$2 million for loss of the power plant." It was the loss of the entire power plant. This is part of the legend that has been omitted while the Government proceeds to bring this huge sum in Region 10. One needs to note that at no time, except in war or when there is galloping inflation, there is a three-digit increase in anything. There is not a three-digit increase in prices unless there is galloping inflation or there is a war going on

I wish to continue. The Government of Guyana then moved in a deal with OMAI Inc. to produce electricity in Region 10. They were using generator sets. An agreement was made with OMAI Inc., the Government and the leaders of Region 10 that they would cease using the more costly bunker C fuel and they would change over within twelve months to a lower fuel cost for Region 10. This was never changed. [An Hon. Member: ...inaudible] I made a mistake, Mr. Speaker. I can correct myself. They were using a heavier, costlier fuel. They never changed that. Then we moved to BOSAI. It continues in the same vein Is it right for us to be asked to shoulder the entire cost of this operation when it was by the Government's intervention that the whole electrical generation system in Region 10 folded? [Mr. Neendkumar: Are you a pastor?] I think I enjoy some protection with this being my maiden speech, Sir. When I speak again, I guess you could comment. These are facts.

Under Programme: 802 Public Works, "Roads": This regional administration requested \$173 million towards roads and received \$40 million or twenty-nine per cent of its request. One needs

to take into context that all of the programmes in Region 10... We are working towards creating jobs because currently twenty-five per cent of the working population in Region 10 is unemployed. This excludes young people who will be leaving the school system in 2012.

One needs to look at the socio-economic environment in Region 10 in context of this impending increase that swings like the sword of Damocles over the heads of residents in this Region. Let us look at the socio-economic foundation that is operating in Region 10. Under Public Works, "Education Buildings", the regional administration requested \$79,920,000. This was to do works in the Kwakwani and Berbice River. The construction of buildings for teachers and nurses, what is important here is that it received a mere \$44 million. One needs to note that with these works in the Berbice River we would use these works to empower our indigenous population through force account or by those indigenous persons providing the material for these houses. My question here is: What have the indigenous people done to the rest of Guyana, especially the Government? While we attempt to promote inclusivity and we are saying, "One people, One Nation, One Destiny," it is difficult to comprehend that a Government which purports itself to be so caring and loving will want to take bread from indigenous people in the Berbice River.

The regional administration and the people of Region 10 waited anxiously for Budget 2012 because we thought, given all of the pontification by the Government and all of the speeches, that by now we would have been enjoying a good environment of communication and information. But, despite the many applications made by residents of Region 10 to establish private television stations, we are still saddled with one station in Region 10. Our focus in Region 10, when we look at setting up new television stations, we are looking at job creation, we are looking at the establishment of small businesses, especially to provide equipment and new technology needed for the promotion of communication in Region 10. It is a shame. One does not come to a budget debate with a view of not supporting the budget. I do not think that any responsible person in Guyana would come to this honourable House not to support a budget. But it is difficult to support the entire budget with some of the elements which are contained in this budget. How would one from Region 10 support a budget that does not speak to communication? How does one from Region 10 support a budget which speaks to one television station and is being bombarded with some crazy things 24-7? The environment which is being created by the Government, in Region 10, seems to be an organised programme of underdevelopment.

Development is not just about buildings and roads. The Hon. Minister, and his team, who has fashioned this budget will support me on the fact that development speaks to sustainable livelihood. There cannot be sustainable livelihood when people are unemployed and there is a television station that does not speak to the needs of the people in Region 10. One of the Hon. Members on the Government side alluded to Linden Economic Advancement Programme (LEAP) in one's presentation. Linden Economic Advancement Fund (LEAF), the loan part of the LEAP, made a number of loans available to residents in Region 10. Some received first tranche, some second tranche and the programme stopped. The Government, in discussion with residents and their elected leaders, had promised to supply funding to the now Linden Economic Network (LEN) programme. We perused the budget and there is the word "LEN" but there are a number of noughts or zeros which follow it. We need to put this into the context of what it has done to small businesses. All those businesses which had received part loans have already folded for want of parts 2, 3, 4 of the loan. Hence, it is difficult for us to truly say that this budget speaks to development in Region 10. What we are experiencing here, Mr. Speaker...and a lot of numbers have been thrown up. One of the things I have learned in the course of Statistics 101 is that numerical data must be supplied, or must be supported, by a legend. We await the legend that speaks to development in Region 10.

Again, we searched the budget as it relates to development between Brazil, Lethem and Region 10. Let us put this in proper context. About three years ago, Brazilian Service of Support for Micro and Small Businesses (SEABRAE), the umbrella body for businesses in Brazil, paid a visit to Region 10 and held discussions with elected officials. The need was for a fast track initiative because the Brazilians were mindful of shipping forty thousand tons of fertiliser as to be involved in agriculture in Brazil. This was not the entire package. It was a continuous programme in which a deep water harbour was to be established in Region 10, and storage facilities. The programme was so imminent that a local company built bond and developed storage facilities. We, for our part in Region 10, cognizant of the job spin-offs that would have been accrued to the residents of Region 10, moved with alacrity to do our part for this project. We were called to work on fifty bridges between Linden and Lethem. We approached the Ministry of Public Works and we approached the Hon. Prime Minister who lent support and even encouraged us to increase the tonnage of the bridges. All of the specifications for the bridges are complete. Three years have passed. That is why the Hon. Member just spoke that Suriname,

recognising that we were waffling on this huge investment, is moving with speed to build a comparative facility there. One needs to understand, when one looks at this huge project, over five hundred direct jobs, spin-off businesses - restaurants, gas stations, servicing ...

It is difficult to agree with the Government's proposal in this budget in its entirety. I submit that the Hon. Minister of Finance did make some very good proposals in the budget, but one needs to be objective, especially when one comes from Region 10, and to be aware that poverty is widespread in Region 10. Over the past decade, as we continued to look at various budget presentations, we failed to see initiatives that will stimulate growth, jobs and investment in Region 10. It is with these words, I will say that when I left Linden yesterday morning, I was surrounded by a milling throng of people who sought answers. "Mr. Parliamentarian, you are going to Parliament, you need to say something and come back with something."

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

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

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Mr. Morian:** Mr. Speaker, residents await, anxiously, the outcome of this budget debate. I should extrapolate, at this point, in saying that I have had discussions with members of the APNU; I have had discussion with members of the AFC; I have had discussion with the members of the PPP/C, who are ordinary citizens, and you need to understand this that residents do not trust us when they look at the television and see what is coming out of these debates. We need to rise against political tribalism and we need to work conscientiously to see development in Guyana, but more pointedly, I find it difficult to support this current budget in its present form. The Hon. Member, my brother, Dr. Rev. Gilbert spoke passionately, and I believe that he is very sincere, that we should move to embrace a more inclusive framework, drop the politics and work for the development of Guyana.

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

**Mr. Jafarally:** I feel honoured and very humbled to be given an opportunity to represent the people of Berbice, Region 6, in this noble House. I want to thank the leadership of the People's

Progressive Party/Civic for giving me this opportunity to be one of the two Members of Parliament representing Berbice, the other being my colleague, Hon. Minister Mr. Robert Persaud, a Berbician as myself. I want to thank the Hon. Member Ms. Gail Teixeira, our party's Chief Whip, for the guidance and information she has been providing to me to enable me to discharge my responsibility.

I rise to join with my colleagues and the people of Region 6 to lend support and congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance and his technical team for the 2012 national budget as presented by him. This budget shows our Government's concern for our people's welfare and interest. This budget has been crafted against the background of challenges existing in the global and domestic theatres. It seeks growth within the stable macroeconomic environment and will see the nation attaining greater heights, with our people enjoying a better standard of living. It is for this reason that the budget is being presented under the theme, *Remaining on Course, United in Purpose, Prosperity for All*.

I recall the removal of the earlier PPP Government by foreign intervention and their local lackeys. I recall the Hon. Member Dr. Rupert Roopnarine, when he was then a member with the probably dead or now defunct WPA, and the Hon. Member Mr. Moses Nagamootoo, when he was on the side of the people of this country, parading around this country telling us about those difficult periods in the history of our country - when the rights of the Guyanese people were trampled upon; when basic food items were denied to the Guyanese people; when freedom of movement was curtailed. I recall when the father of this nation, another leader of the PPP, wanted to visit the interior and it was so difficult to get permission in those days. I recall when the report of the Auditor General was not presented in this noble House. I recall when the Hon. Member Dr. Roopnarine and the Hon. Member Mr. Nagamootoo were reminding us about the constant rigging of elections in that period. I even recall that the Hon. Member Dr. Roopnarine and the Hon. Member Mr. Nagamootoo reminding us that we needed to have a cage to cage the dictatorship of the day but I wonder... Today, we see the Hon. Member Dr. Rupert Roopnarine and the Hon. Member Moses Nagamootoo are on the side of the very people who needed to be caged. I wonder if the people of Guyana would not need two cages at this point in time.

**Mr. Nagamootoo:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order.

**Mr. Speaker:** Mr. Nagamootoo, go ahead.

**Mr. Nagamootoo:** Your Honour, thank you for recognising me. The speaker, obviously, is trying to impute a dishonourable motive on Members who are elected to this House for exercising their democratic choice to be where they are in this National Assembly and to try to fashion whatever he is saying, not in terms of... but a misrepresentation of what I have said here. I have said in this National Assembly, and I am rising on Standing Order 40, that I have made my contribution to fight for a right order and that is undisputable. What the Hon. Member is trying to do is misrepresent a position that I have articulated in this House.

**Mr. Speaker:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Nagamootoo. Your point is taken. Go ahead, Mr. Jafarally. I will listen out keenly.

**Mr. Jafarally:** I have noticed that the Hon. Member. Dr. Ramayya is not present. But sitting here in the National Assembly and listening to the Hon. Member last evening, I recalled a favourite comedy show on a local channel in Berbice.

Mr. Speaker, I hope you will give me an opportunity to respond to some of the statements made by the Hon. Member despite him not being present here. While it was difficult to comprehend what he wanted to say at times, I recognised that he was talking about the education sector in Region 6 - the infrastructure falling apart, education delivery and children not performing. I want to say very clearly that it was the PPP/C Government which created an environment that is conducive to teaching and learning in this country.

What are the facts? In 2011, two thousand two hundred and thirty-three students wrote the National Grade Six Assessment Examination. Mr. Speaker, 93.1 per cent of those students attained secondary schools in Region 6. Further, twenty-one per cent of the 93.1 per cent attained senior secondary schools such as Queens College, Bishop's High and New Amsterdam Multilateral School. At the CSEC examination, out of the one thousand five hundred and seventy-three students who wrote the examination in 2011, seventy per cent of those students passed with Grades I to III. What is most notable is that out of that seventy per cent six per cent was above the national average in Guyana. That is progress. One of the top students who gained fifteen passes, with distinction, came from Region 6.

The University of Guyana, Tain Campus, which was established by the PPP/C Government, just as it established the University of Guyana, at Turkeyen... In 2011, one hundred and seventy-four students graduated from the Faculties of Agriculture, Education and Humanities, Natural Sciences and Social Sciences. Mr. Speaker, the present enrolment for the academic year 2011/2012 is seven hundred and eleven students, an eighty per cent increase over 2010. This is the kind of environment that the Government is creating for our young people to unlock their potential. This reflects a commitment of the one thousand five hundred teachers in Region 6 and it is an indication that our education delivery in Region 6 is meeting the quality imperative of the underlying theme of the National Education Strategic Plan.

All of our secondary schools in Region 6 are equipped with computer laboratories, recognition of the importance of communication and information technology. But, further than that, the process has been started at the primary level and more than twenty primary schools in Berbice, at places such as Krapa, Manchester, Eversham, Corriverton and New Amsterdam, are all equipped with computer laboratories. Recognising the importance of communication and information technology and the need to prepare our next generation for the participation and access of the evolving information superhighway, we have to ensure that we start our computer literacy programme at the very tender age, and that is what this Government has been doing.

*11.25 p.m.*

The Hon. Member Dr. Ramayya, as I said, we could not clearly understand what he was saying, whether he was criticising the One Laptop Per Family project or whether he was supporting it. I recall, at that very show, Dr. Ramayya and other Members of the AFC were telling Berbicians that they should not apply for the computer because they would have to work, providing community service, before they received the computer. Today, Berbicians have started receiving their one laptop in areas such as Liverpool, Eversham, Manchester, Lancaster, Port Mourant, Canje, Corriverton. Hundreds of residents, ordinary people, have received their computers.

The Hon. Member Dr. Ramayya spoke about the rice industry and that this Government is not doing enough for the rice industry. I recall, sometime last month, when the Minister of Finance brought Financial Paper No. 7 and he was seeking money for the Manarabisi pump at Black Bush Polder, as I looked at my colleagues of the AFC, they hesitated, they were looking for



guidance from their friends in the APNU, before they voted, while the APNU abstained, and after much hesitance, they voted for that sum for the people of Black Bush Polder.

Further, when the Hon. Minister, during his budget presentation, was speaking of the provision of \$6 billion towards GPL, I recall the words “bail out” were coming from the Hon. Member Moses Nagamootoo and the Hon. Member Dr. Ramayya. Are not rice farmers going to benefit from this provision? Are not rice farmers going to receive low tariff from this provision? What is the reality of the rice industry in Region 6? Never in the history of rice cultivation, in Region 6, has so many acres been under cultivation. Areas which were abandoned because of lack of drainage and irrigation services by the previous administration, areas such as Sandvoort, now have five hundred acres under cultivation. Speculation and New Forest, one thousand five hundred acres under cultivation, Barrow, on the East Bank of Berbice, five hundred acres under cultivation, Whim, fifty-two front lands, more than ten thousand under cultivation and Black Bush Polder, more than seventeen thousand acres under cultivation. Every square inch of land available for agriculture, and the production of rice, has been fully utilised.

In the area of cash crop cultivation, we are proud of our farmers in Berbice. Go any morning to the La Penitence Market or Bourda Market, truck loads of produce would be seen coming from Berbice. More than ten thousand acres are under cultivation. We have made tremendous input into the agricultural sector in Region 6. Our cattle production has increased tremendously because Government has been providing assistance in terms of pasture. The Kokerit savannah has been the latest. Hundreds of acres have been given to the farmers of Region 6.

The Hon. Member spoke about roads and the quality of roads and substandard works, and he went on. It is important to note that two of the councillors of the Regional Democratic Council (RDC) were AFC members and they sat on the works committee and were inspecting roads. So they were apart. The regional administration of Region 6, as the Government of Guyana, has a zero tolerance on corruption and substandard works. In Region 6, in 2011, we were able to rehabilitate more than one hundred and fifty community roads. In New Amsterdam, in the areas of Stanleytown, Tucber, Smythfield, Angoys Avenue, more than twenty-nine roads were done under the PPP/C Government. At a time when we are accused of discrimination and marginalisation, the municipality of New Amsterdam is controlled by the PNC. Like the

colleagues in this House, the New Amsterdam municipality has never produced a financial statement to the citizens of New Amsterdam for the past fifteen years.

Angoys Avenue, which is part of the township in New Amsterdam, it was this Government's intervention that today, as my colleague, Hon. Member Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo mentioned, there is a brand new health centre. Under the Ministry of Housing and Water, a \$22 million water programme was expended at Angoys Avenue. [Ms. Ally: What about Glasgow and Edinburg?] I am coming to that. We are a caring Government and we listen to the concerns of the people of this country and we listen to the concerns of the residents of Glasgow, East Bank Berbice. Provision has been made under the Ministry of Public Works to have that road be fixed after the budget. That would no longer be a hunting ground or a hustling ground for my colleagues in the AFC.

In Rose Hall town, there are nineteen community roads which have been developed - in the area of Swamp Section, Williamsburg and central Rose Hall. In Corriverton, there are twenty-two roads, in areas such as Little India, Little Africa, Rampur and central Corriverton. In every single community across Region 6 community roads have been developed. My Hon. colleague, Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo, spoke of the massive road development in the Black Bush Polder area, East Canje and West Canje, from New Amsterdam right unto Sandvoort. So when the hon. Member Dr. Ramayya..., and perhaps he was not around then, or probably too busy with the comedy show.

In the area of housing, in Regions 6, there was the distribution of over ten thousand house lots to ordinary Guyanese men and women. Today, we see a sense of belonging and pride, a sense of hope in the lives of young men and women who were able to acquire their own homes under the PPP/C Government. Farmers, teachers, public servants, sugar workers and market vendors were able to acquire their own homes under the PPP/C Government. This Government is not just merely giving a house lot to the applicants, this Government is working with the financial institution to provide adequate loans at very low interest rate so that our ordinary men and women of this country can build their own homes.

**Mr. Speaker:** Time is up Hon. Member.

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

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Mr. Jafarally:** In the sugar industry... and this has been a pet subject on the comedy show, on Saturday evenings. Perhaps my colleagues in the AFC have been taking our sugar workers for granted, but our sugar workers are intelligent people and many of them who were misguided have now openly expressed their regret of ever casting that vote for the AFC. They have seen the utterance; they have seen the connection and they have recognised that it was a mistake. I dare the AFC to vote against this budget and let us go for elections. The sugar industry will never disappear under the PPP/C Government. I want to make it pellucidly clear that under the PPP/C Government we will not get rid of the sugar industry nor even privatised it because it is very important to this country.

In conclusion, I wish to refer to part of the Budget 2012 presentation by the Hon. Minister of Finance, and I quote:

“The prevailing dispensation will test and hopefully prove our resolve as a People, and within this House our respective will to serve as responsible representatives of a deserving People, to work together in the service to the cause of national development.”

As I said at the start of my presentation, the Budget 2012 is about the people of Guyana, in which our Government represents. We have the opportunity to improve the quality of lives of the people of this country. I now recommend this budget to all the Members of this noble House and looks forward to the year ahead for its implementation. Thank you. [*Applause*]

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you Hon. Members. That concludes our business. I now invite the Hon. Prime Minister to move a motion for the adjournment.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, we are adjourned until tomorrow, Friday, 13<sup>th</sup> April, at 1.00 p.m.

*Assembly adjourned accordingly at 11.37 p.m.*