

Official Report

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

114TH Sitting

Thursday, 18TH February, 2010

The Assembly convened at 2.14 p.m.

Prayers

[Mdm. Deputy Speaker in Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

“Kaieteur News’ Choice of Word”

Mdm. Speaker: Hon Members, I have two short announcements. One concerns the press.

I have been approached by two MPs about the choice of words used by Kaieteur News to describe our little incident here last night at the National Assembly. They referred to it as a *brawl*. I just checked the dictionary meaning of *brawl* and it says it is a noisy argument, or a noisy fight. So I personally think it is an unfortunate word but I do not think it is inapplicable.

Return of The Speaker to the House

The second issue: I wish to inform the House that, I have been informed that The Speaker will resume his Official seat in this House today at 5.30 p.m.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

BUDGET SPEECH 2010 - MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2010.

“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 the Revenue and Expenditure of Guyana for the financial year 2010 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 2010-02-08;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2010, of a total sum of one hundred and twenty-five billion, five and sixty-eight million, five hundred and seventy-three thousand dollars (\$125,568,573,000), excluding seventeen billion, two hundred and seven million, and twenty-six thousand dollars (\$17,207,026,000) which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in the under mentioned 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.

Mrs. Backer: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, here we are again in this calendrical exercise entitled: “The National Debate on our Budget”. I propose to briefly review Guyana’s public safety in 2009; see whether the \$14.9 million budgeted for our security sector in 2010 will enhanced this

security; and lastly share some recommendations of the P.N.C.R.-1G with this National Assembly. Even as I share my recommendations we are very conscious of the fact that nothing we say is ever taken on board. But we will continue to give our recommendations to the National Assembly.

Fire: Let me start with the less controversial areas of our security sector. The capacity of our Fire Service was enhanced in the last year. This is commendable. Several water tenders and equipment, and the upgrade and construction of some fire stations took place. During 2009 several fires engulfed homes and business places. And while the response of the fire service in the main seemed to have improved, their fire-fighting capacity continues to be hamstrung by the inadequate supply of water. Year after year, fires after fires, our citizens are reminded that the elementary issue of who bore responsibility for our fire hydrants remain outstanding. We have three recommendations in the area of fire.

One is to resolve as a matter of urgency the issue of legal responsibility of the fire hydrants. The Hon. Member Minister Rohee, whenever he speaks, will regale us with all the legislation that was passed in his sector. Why could we not have simply legislation, if necessary, to resolve this long-standing issue. We need to remember, water tenders are good, buildings are good but a constant pressure of water is the fire fighter's primary source. The primary fire-fighting equipment of any fire service is a steady supply of proper water pressure.

We also need, and I do not think anybody would argue with this; to strengthen the investigative capacity of the Guyana Fire Service. On this issue it may be appropriate to thank, well, that may be the wrong word, but pay recognition to some very considerate arsonists – if you can juxtapose those two words. Because whenever there are certain fires they are very reasonable and leave behind certain channa bombs around the place. Knowing that the investigative capacity of the fire service is low they seek to help the Fire Service by leaving unexploded *CHANNA* bombs. Of course, this also helps the Government because they can then propagandise certain fires and this tends to coincide with when fires are at ministries. The most recent one being, of course, the one at the Ministry of Health; but more on the Ministry of Health and the Minister of Health a bit later.

A stable electricity supply is also very critical because many fires are caused by electrical surges and other electrical malfunctioning. So we recommend those three main things for our Fire Service.

The Prison Service: Our main prison continues to be severely overpopulated. And the Guyana Prison Service, throughout Guyana, and indeed all our disciplined services continue to be understaffed. These two stubborn facts, overpopulation and under-staffing, were highlighted in an interim report of the Guyana Prison Service, which was partially released in mid November of last year. We have said repeatedly that overcrowding carries with it serious health and security implications.

Sunday, the seventh of this month, prisoners of the capital section protested about the absence of water. If one believes the report from the newspapers 180 prisoners for two toilets. Or put another way two toilets for 180 prisoners. You may have a stronger stomach than I do. So, I would invite you to do the maths to see how many prisoners per toilet. When that is compounded by no water for several days, health and security, if not threatened, is overwhelmed. We have constant outbreaks of smallpox, tuberculosis and measles. The issue of security came painfully to the fore with the murder in the Georgetown prisons on the fifth of this month of two prison inmates. We remain unimpressed with the excuse given by the Minister of Home Affairs as to why Mr. Blackman was in the dormitory with other prisoners rather than at the psychiatric hospital in New Amsterdam or in a separate cell.

When the officials from the Guyana Prison Service appeared before the Disciplined Forces Commission they told us very frankly that the Georgetown Prison was built for 560 - some experts in fact say it was built for lower than that - but at the middle of last year they housed 1080 prisoners, while the Mazaruni Prison built for 299 then only housed 184. We repeat our call as a matter of urgency for the introduction of modern community service legislation, which we sought by way of a motion sometime ago to get the Government to commit to, in terms of time frame. They did say in principle that they agreed but they were unwilling to commit to a time-frame. We want to call on them to commit to a timeframe here today or whenever the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs speaks.

In Canada and Finland which have among the lowest crime rates in the world, it is formerly required that sentencing should be automatically converted into other penalties for first offenders, unless it is shown that this should not happen. So they start on the premise that first offenders should not be in prison. Of course that does not include things like the capital offenses.

We also need to enhance our prison security at Mazaruni so that we can maximise the use of the prison space there. But we need to secure it better before we can send our more serious criminals there.

The report, which I referred to earlier about the prison, shows clearly that there is a high level of repeat offenders. We as a nation need to sit back and understand the implications of that, because the average prisoner in the prison system only spends between two to four years. That is the average. So they are going to be back out very shortly, whether we like it or not. As such, the Government has to conceptualise and operationalise a rehabilitation scheme that begins, not a little before the prisoner comes out, but as the prisoner goes in, because they will be out as I said in two to four years. We need to have a concept that rationalises how we are going to reintegrate, or in some cases integrate them into our society. Many of our prisoners are there because we have never integrated them into our society in the first place.

Traffic: The traffic figures remain fairly stable. They have gone up slightly from 113 to 116. What is very revealing is that according to the Hon. Minister of Health - I do not have the paper, but I'm sure he would agree with me - road accidents during road traffic week last year was listed as the seventh leading cause of death in Guyana. Almost all traffic fatalities can be avoided. So I would think that that is something each of us need to play our part to bring down - the seventh leading cause of death in Guyana is road traffic fatalities. Our Traffic Chief in December last year told the nation, that speeding and drunk driving remained his Department's main concern. This is the third year that the P.N.C.R. formally recommend the installation of mechanical devices, they are called '*governors*' in some parts of the world, which will control the speed all of the vehicles used for transporting members of the public can go at.

We also recommend introducing rigid tests for drivers that operate vehicles for public transportation. In the same way that food handlers have to pass a medical, I think every year or

every other year, we advocate that drivers for the public must have health checks, eye tests and must also have a refresher courses, or in some cases courses, as to how to drive properly.

We also recommend that a survey be carried out into the usage of our roads in Georgetown and other towns to assess the traffic situation and to see that the roads should probably be made one way, thereby alleviating not only traffic congestion, but accidents, although most of them may be minor accidents. A lot of accidents take place on narrow roads, which we can make one way.

We need to put rigid controls so that people are not allowed to buy license. The horrific road fatality in Lethem, I think three people died, the driver of that minibus was 20 years old although there is a five-year requirement of driving before one can get a minibus license. So I did the maths and said he was 15 when he got it, but then it was revealed that he did not have it at all. He was driving from Georgetown to Lethem, and I doubt if that was his first trip.

The P.N.C.R. recently called for special attention to be paid to the Linden/Soesdyke Highway. Unfortunately, on Valentine's Day this year, 19-year-old Tomika Henville's life was snuffed out. Again, fast driving, most probably coupled with alcohol.

Page 64 of the budget states: the number of serious crimes reported have fallen every year from 2005 to 2009, a 30% decrease. That is commendable. However we want to caution that a reduction in the reported figure is as much a sign in the reduction of crime as a sign that the population may have lost so much faith in the Police Force that they do not bother to report crimes when they happen.

Domestic Violence: I want to turn to the more contentious but particularity heinous crime under the rubric of; *domestic violence*. This crime and public health issue continues to plague our society. We note that this crime and public health issue continues at a shocking level. In June of 2009, in half of the year, the police revealed that they had received 2488 reports on domestic violence; 694 cases were made out and 530 persons were warned. The police insist that they have zero tolerance. In fact, even Minister Rohee said: "look, I am not too sure about that" because he chided them recently that they may not have been as proactive as they ought to. But we have to accept that this process of domestic violence and all practising lawyers and other people once you read the paper will know that there is unwillingness by many victims to prosecute these matters to the end.

I want to just briefly refer to Stabroek News of 4th February, 2010. This is what it says: “Woman’s Foot Almost Severed by Boyfriend. This is what she said, “I finally finish with him”. Toward the end “I will not beg the police to leave him alone this time”. So it took an almost severing of her leg for a woman to say I will not ask the police... this particular crime has lots of social implications so of course it is not as simple... I am just using that to support the police that at times they are met with this frustrating thing. Domestic violence knows no boundaries. Perpetrators are everywhere. In fact perpetrators may be here. Recently the Commissioner of Police himself accepted on the news and in the newspapers that his Crime Chief had been involved in an incident of domestic violence and he had spoken to both parties in his capacity as a “father figure”. So the emphasis is on *father* not on *figure*. The point is, this is a crime that is everywhere and it is a serious crime. What about the domestic violence perpetrated against our children? Up to today there were allegations of children being molested. It is a very, very serious thing.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, before I go to the issue of drugs let me briefly share this. In April of last year the P.N.C. urged a review of our domestic violence policy. There is a policy, there is a willingness; we are not saying there is not a willingness. But we, meaning the Guyanese citizens, are obviously doing something wrong because it continues, and apparently unabated.

At the 34th Annual Regional C.P.A. conference held in Georgetown, the Region as a whole, of course Guyana was represented, agreed that the illicit drug trade remains the toughest public safety challenge in the region. We noted the heavy economic loss associated with this crime. I want, with his permission, to quote from the Minister. Stabroek News 15th July, page 21;

“Meanwhile Rohee said: ‘...the challenges to security in the region are complex but agreed that the drug trade is the greatest threat to public safety in the region’”.

So the Government is on board with this. That said, no one, least of all the P.N.C.R., can understand why the Government continues to obviously accept that drugs is a problem. We see inconsistencies. They let their own baby, the National Drug Strategy Master Plan die quietly without any ceremony after four years. Something must be wrong. They, the Government, have a strange way of dealing with drugs and it usually takes the way of going to police annual conferences and sermonising them about this and that but when it comes to actual proper drug

interdiction and dealing with drugs we see an unwillingness. Is it not a shame that all major drug arrests and people imprisoned have all been done ex-Guyana? We catch the little lady with the wig, the little lady with the corset, a little black cake but the pink suitcase, the pepper sauce and the drugs in lumber are all ex-Guyana.

Torture and Criminality within our Joint Forces: The P.N.C.R. has for years, warned the Government that unless systematic and genuine efforts are made to re-orient members of the Guyana Police Force, theirs is not a 'force' but a 'service'. We warned them that if they did not do it, this question of police brutality would explode. Though such actions always were and continues to be done by a small group, this aura of brutality envelops the entire Disciplined Forces. And that, of course, is the tragedy. Because there are decent men and women, the majority of them are decent, but they are consumed by this over-arching eagle called: *brutality*. Who can forget the 30th September, that grotesque front page of the Kaieteur of the burnt pelvic area of a 14 year old citizen of Guyana, allegedly at the hands of serving members of our Force? The P.P.P./C. will argue but we condemned it. The Government will argue but we condemned it. We believe that the administration by their previous deafening silence, and indeed support for roughing up by our armed services, must bear some responsibility for this travesty. Who knows if the Kaieteur News had not gotten that picture -however they got it I do not care, but I'm glad they got it - what would have been swept under the table or what sanitised version of events would have been dished out, shared out to the Guyana population. Remember the Guyana Police Force has an instinctive reaction and that is what we need to change. We need to change their instincts. We need to change the Government's instinct. The Government's instinct must not be let us 'cover up'. The Government instinct must be, let us fundamentally change how we view public security so that the instinct would be 'let us be frank and fair and let the hammer fall where it falls'. That is not to give Minister Benn any leeway. Remember, the initial response of the Commissioner of Police was: how did Kaieteur News get this picture? Whereas he should have been knocking at the door of Kaieteur News and saying: thank you for the picture! That is what he should have done.

As if that were not enough Dr. Mahindra Chand, who saw the young boy, there is no doubt about that, the medical Council recommended his suspension. And this is what Minister Ramsammy said, he was reportedly quoted in Kaieteur News of Valentine's Day as saying that: "the doctor

had two options". He started off by saying he was damned if he did and damned if he did not. Damned seemed to be a favourite word of the Hon. Minister. As he saw it the doctor had two options. One was to walk away and not treat the teen, and the other was to treat the teen with his head covered. I do not believe that. But that is what he said. Those two were not options. The only course the doctor had was to say can I see who I am treating. Could you de-bag the person? That, Hon. Minister Ramsammy, is the only option. But again, instinctively, the Government want to cover up. Next year I am going to enter the calypso competition and that is the theme 'cover up', 'leh we cover up', 'we could cover up'.

The state did not want to be out done, of course, by the police. The Simels trial was in a nutshell a bomb; a bomb that exploded; a nuclear bomb almost. This is what Simels said, it is reported in Saturday 5th December Stabroek News. This is his sworn testimony in essence, 'Simels later took the stand and testified that Khan had received government assistance to have the intercept equipment and guns to fight the Buxton gang known as the Taliban. He also said, and this is on his sworn testimony, it was not contradicted. "That Ramsammy authorised the purchase of the intercept equipment used by Khan. While Government denied any involvement in the purchase, the co- Director of the UK firm, Smith Myers testified that the cellular intercept used by Khan had been sold to the Government of Guyana. He also said he had met Ramsammy and the Minister of Home Affairs at Home and other officials during his visit here.

2.44 p.m.

That is what Simels said. This is the letter that was put into evidence in the United States,

"Dear Nancy", this is not unfortunately Bere Anansi, on the 24th October 2002, re Acquiring the Service of Cell Phone Interceptor Graphic Integrator. Guyana is in the throes of one of the worst crime situations the nation has ever faced. We are interested in acquiring your service for a short period so that we can enhance our intelligence. Our representatives have been in touch with you.

I have spoken directly to you and this letter on my cabinet portfolio letterhead is confirmation that this initiative has Government's support. Thank you

Yours Truly,

Leslie Ramsammy,
Minister of Health,
Government of Guyana.”

What is ironic about this is, despite all this sworn evidence, certified copies of which the P.N.C.R. has, the A.F.C. has, and I am sure G.A.P./R.O.A.R has, and every concerned citizen has, nothing has happened to Dr. Ramsammy.

His Excellency President Jagdeo and other Ministers of the Government have said that they are not...

Ms. Teixeira: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, under Standing Order 41.6 I believe that the Hon. Member is imputing improper and offensive matters in relation to a Member of this Parliament. I believe the Member is out of order. Thank you.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, Standing Orders number 41, the same one as last night, Rule 41, sub Standing Order 6 says,

“For reason of benefit of the House, no member shall impute improper motive to any member of the assembly.”

8, which is the one that was called into question last evening, says:

“The conduct of the President or any other person performing the function of President, Members of the Assembly and Judges of the Supreme Court ... shall not be raised except upon a substantive motion moved for the purpose.”

I think this is border line Mdm. Backer and I think you should desist from continuing to malign the Ministers. Reading from the document is one thing...

Mrs. Backer: I was not reading from the document Madam I was reading from the Dossier.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: You have two minutes more of your time.

Mrs. Backer: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, this Dossier is not liked by the Government. The reality is this Dossier is all over the world thanks to technology. I want to share one last thing about the

Dossier. This should not offend. In fact this should amuse. The Hon. Member Gail Teixeira denounced the Dossier in a fiery speech. She passionately declared that she is never going to forgive the crafters of the Dossier for as long as she may live because, and I quote:

“In the Dossier Minister Satydeo Sawh and his family are not included in those who were killed, but the concern of the Dossier is about the two men who killed him. I am saying it publicly here, ‘I will never, ever as long as I live going to forgive whoever wrote that document...’”

Well Mdm. Deputy Speaker, the number 376 must haunt Minister Teixeira for as long as she shall live. Because number 376 is not a prison number, it is the number 376 Satydeo Sawh and in brackets ‘late Minister of Agriculture’. After all she did a grave disservice to a Member that all the Members and I, were very fond of. So I hope... *[Interruption]* ...she does not like the Dossier, she sees it in the nights with wings, all over her.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Time Hon. Member.

Mr. Carberry: Mdm. Deputy Speaker above this din I am sure you cannot hear me.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: I can hear you Mr. Carberry.

Mr. Carberry: Could you give the speaker 5 minutes to conclude her presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. Backer: Thank you very much. Mdm. Deputy Speaker, we have already made certain recommendations, but I want to share before I sit a few others. The most important one is that we embrace what we call the “Dotting Principal of Regional Planning” for our security services. This planning has also been embraced by CARICOM, in no less a person of the Assistant Secretary General of CARICOM, Dr. Edward Green at the 24th Annual Conference of Caribbean Commissioners. The Dotting Principle says we are not a force. We are not fighting a war against our citizens. We are here to serve them. The whole concept put forward by Assistant Secretary General, Green of CARICOM, he said that:

“Our fight requires a new approach bi-partnership between the police, stakeholders, private sector, civil society, schools and youth movements. There should also be an

alliance between the police and our research centres which provide analysis of trends and guidelines.”

He called on the ACCP to embrace the call by the Vice Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, a Guyanese, for the establishment of centre of excellence for crime and violence to be involved in research and training.

We were recommending an entire shift away from brute force to social integration, and it is not soft policing, it is 21st Century policing. We also recommend National Service. We have said so ad nauseam. We must enhance our Marine capacity of both the Police and the G.D.F. It is agreed that drugs is our worst crime. Where do drugs come from, particularly cocaine? They come from outside. Yet you look at the budget, the usual pedantic things; more vehicles, they are important. What about enhancement of our marine wing and our air core if we are serious about fighting drugs? When are we going to replace the security sector reform action plan that was deliberately scuttled we say, unapologetically, by this Government? This Government is not interested in real fundamental reform, as the British say, they want modernisation but they do not want holistic security policy reform. And that is what we need. So as I sit, I say, yes, we have made strides, but we have to sit as an Assembly, we have to sit as a country and speak about holistic security reform that begins internally and is externalised and not just a simply modernisation of the force. I thank you Mdm. Deputy Speaker. [Applause]

Minister of Transport and Hydraulics [Mr. Benn]: Thank you Mdm. Deputy Speaker. Hon. Members I rise to join with my colleagues in congratulating the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh on an excellent and well presented Budget again in the year 2010 for our nation. In fact the Hon. Member Ashni has gotten quite expert at this. We want to congratulate him also because he seems to have had found time for other things, in the father of a new baby.

I would like also to welcome the two new Members to the Assembly and I hope that our excursions over the past few days including today will not deter them from arriving at the best presentations which they can make and do in service of their country.

The efforts that are being made by the Government in terms of developing our country have particularly to be viewed in the international context. I would like to talk about this a bit, because it seems to me that some Members on the Opposition want to avoid the issue of context. Where

we have been able to have four years of continued growth, a stable economy, a stable currency, steady improving health and social sector performance and improvements in our infrastructure when the International landscape is littered with economies which are distressed and some of them practically wrecked. We could talk about Greece, Iceland, and the great United States. We could talk about all those countries which have had to put in place stimulus packages. But it appears that whatever we attempt to do here gets general indiscriminate, widely inaccurate criticism without paying any attention to the issue of the International context in which we live with respect for some of our important products. Particularly say for Bauxite. If we make any comparison for bauxite, we are aware that the bauxite alumina industry in Jamaica has been practically shut down. We have managed in Guyana to continue to maintain and to sustain that industry in spite of that International context. It is a credit to the people in the industry, as it is credit to the efforts of the Government.

Again, we have to pay attention to this issue of context and try to avoid carrying on with the scare-mongering and the fear-mongering that goes on. We recently had issues with fear-mongering with respect to the Government's position on the Low Carbon Development Strategy, with respect to the mining industry. The fears were being whipped out, that this Government will attempt to shut down a national industry which was bringing in over US\$345 million in national income, and allow the miners, the people, and those who are associated to suffer. In spite of all the assurance at Bartica, in the press, on the television, the fear was whipped up. Last week we arrived at the National Convention Centre and people said that they were misled. People also said from the floor that most of the people wearing yellow were yellower than the shirts and the jerseys they were wearing.

It is unfortunate that this scenario plays out again and again. When we have a consultative democracy, when we have the bipartisan type of relationships that we have, finally and ultimately everything that we do must be directed towards developing the country in a rational and responsible manner.

It is unfortunate that too many people on the Opposition benches - though some people were less strident than they were last year - seek to impute vicious irrational motives to the action of the Government.

In spite of all of this, we see steady progress in Guyana year after year. I think the Hon. Member Mr. Murray said he was hearing of edifices being built. Mr. Williams said he was hearing of things being done. But he does not know or hear of these things. If they cannot see, if they cannot hear, maybe they cannot feel, may be they are dead. Any person in Guyana with all the criticisms, difficulties of development, with all the difficulties of doing things and having failures and challenges any and almost every person out there in Guyana would agree with us on this side of the House that there has been steady and irrevocable progress in this country over the last years.

I would like to thank the Hon. Member Mrs. Backer for an eloquent presentation. But again I was disturbed by the suggestion that a Government Ministry was burnt down and that channa bombs were left there. So maybe the dumb investigating people could find out how the bombing was done.

Yesterday, we had to rush down to the National Cultural Centre where the competition for the school children's junior mash competition was going on. There was a little accident, a small fire. The children had to be rushed out of the building and taken care of by their chaperones and teachers, to make sure nothing befell them. The anxiety we all had in getting there to make sure that the children were safe and sound... **[Interjection: What is the relevance?]** What is relevant is that the Police, the Fire Service and Ministers; The Minister of Education, Minister Anthony and I were also there. Everyone came to show great concern, in a country, where we always have these anxieties, with large public buildings. Buildings which relate to the social Services Sector, for the provision of health and education in our country. To suggest that the burning down of these buildings, I think her words were "friendly arsonist" or something to that effect, that these acts are something to joke about. These acts are not something to joke about. It calls for a great deal of taxpayer's expenditure and effort to rebuild these buildings, and we cannot continue to build anew. We cannot continue to work on rebuilding anew in our country. I want to call again on certain Members of the Opposition to stop playing with matches.

We went through a time when there was slow fire and more fire and buildings being burnt. We wondered why the police got bad, as they suggested. I want to say here again in this House that we have fires too. But, our fires are celestial. Our fires relate to the progress and development of

the Guyanese people. Our fires are celestial fires. Despite all the efforts at turning back progress and development in this country by the P.P.P./Civic, we will not be stopped.

I pointed out that we have an International context in which we have been operating and the theme of the Budget is apt for or the efforts... we have been making in our Ministry and will continue to do for the year 2010, the theme of Consolidating Transforming and Sustaining.

In terms of the mandate of my Ministry for the year 2009, in the areas of roads and bridges, air and river transportation, sea and river defence. In this presentation I will indicate the holistic approach to the infrastructural programme we have had in 2009 and for 2010. In respect of our efforts this year, we are budgeting an expenditure of \$10,832,501,000. This is slightly below the voted provision for 2009 which was \$11,404,925,159, which related to our expenditure which was a 93% achievement of our work programme in the year 2009. Our assignment this year in terms of monetary allocations represents a decrease of 12%. In some ways this in itself is not a bad thing, because I think we are being challenged by the Ministry of Finance to do more with less based on the optimisation routines and efforts we have ongoing in the Ministry.

In terms of operating divisions, if I speak of bridges and roads, and speak particularly of the Demerara Harbour Bridge, we have had an acceptable level of service ability in 2009. We have had the facilitation of easy movements of goods and services between the East and West Bank of the Demerara River. Some \$747 million was provided by the Central Government in 2009 and with the fabrication of 2000 deck plates which took the bulk of the provision of utilising \$593 million. We have a completion date on this contract which has seen a vast improvement with the quality and serviceability of the bridge.

We have had a total amount of traffic crossing the bridge of 2,348,000 vehicles. I might point out that minibuses particularly represented the second highest number of 452,000 vehicles, while private hire cars were almost one million vehicles crossing the bridge. 95% of the westbound traffic transiting the Demerara Harbour Bridge returns eastbound. Traffic volume over the bridge has increased by an average of 16% in 2009 over 2008.

You may be aware Hon. Members and Mdm. Deputy Speaker, that a two-day operation has been successfully implemented, which allows for eastbound traffic to utilise both lanes on the bridge.

This is to facilitate a rapid exit in the morning hours, which is allowing for a rapid discharge of the early morning traffic into Georgetown, particularly for people going to work and school.

Issues relating to the changing of connecting post, sheaves, bois, wire ropes and the rehabilitation of pontoons were addressed in 2009. In terms of revenue of the bridge operations, the total revenue was \$417,589,589 with an expenditure of \$396,654,929 yielding a surplus of \$20,934,000. In terms of 2010, the acquisition of wire rope, sheaves and shackles would be addressed to further improvements with respect to the bridge.

An innovation which we hope to be putting in place this new year at the Demerara Harbour Bridge is cameras and a system to allow for people not to have to hand in the ticket on the western end, so as to allow the traffic to move in a faster manner.

In relation to work service activities, we have had the merger of the sea and river defence division with the work services group in 2008. But the full integration was only realised in 2009. In 2009 the activities continued on foreign funded road projects or nationally funded miscellaneous roads, urban roads and bridge maintenance works, force account road works, hinterland roads in collaboration with the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission, sea and river defences, donor and nationally funded programmes, and the extension of the Ogle Airstrip runway, and the extension of the Cheddi Jagan International Airport runway and many other miscellaneous assignments.

Some of the achievements in 2009 related to the Transportation Infrastructure Rehabilitation Programme launched in 2009. Contracts were awarded for the construction of 26 culverts and bridges from Timehri to Rossignol at a cost of US\$6.9 million. The project also includes the rehabilitation to the Abary Bridge. By the end of the year works on the Abary Bridge were 75% completed and mobilisation was in progress for other culverts and bridges.

A sum of \$890 million has been provided in 2010, and the completion of this transport infrastructure rehabilitation project is scheduled for August of this year. Three national contractors are currently executing works on this project. Some of this work is going on at the East Bank Demerara at the moment. I need to stress the appearance of our national contractors, the enabling, the empowering, the enhancing, of our capacity in heavy duty construction works in the country by way of our national contractors replacing a situation where we had an almost

100% contracted work being done by overseas contracting firms. So this is a big plus, a signal achievement with respect to the work of the Ministry over the last 2 years.

In respect to road safety, work continues in implementing projects aimed at reducing accidents and fatalities at various locations on the national roads. We had a budget of \$205 million in 2009 and the actual expenditure was \$200 million. A sum of \$172.2 million has been provided in 2010 for continuation of this project. It may be noted by some Hon. Members that we have erected lighting on the East Bank Demerara, West Bank Demerara, West Coast of Demerara, East Bank Berbice and at Anna Regina on the Essequibo. I know the Hon. Member from Linden, Ms. Vanessa Kissoon was demanding of the Government that the people, in fact she said “the people of Linden demand that lights be strung along the highway from Soesdyke to Linden.

3.14 p.m.

But, the fact of the matter is, it is not normal for highways which are not heavily inhabited to be strung along with lights. Our programme relates to putting lights where the populations are and based on engineering analysis where people are being struck down by vehicles moving along the highway. The only places where this may occur sometime in the future, is where you have people coming out of minibuses or cars and places where you have populations of people, which would justify the lighting.

Our... **[Mr. Norton:** What about the long stretch of the West Coast without lights?]
Yes, I can answer that too. On the West Coast Berbice (W.C.B.), there is a long area between the bridge and coming on the No. 7 Village where there is a gap in relation to lighting on that road. What did in fact happen was by the time that programme got off the ground; the costing related to running the lights to cover that area was not enough. The material expense got higher and we are hoping to address that problem this year. Unfortunately some people want to say, or suggest, that the reason this area was left out is because it is a deliberate ethnic gap. I would like to point out that all sections of the population in the area are affected.

In respect of encroachment of the reserves, we have made a tremendous effort towards clearing up the road reserves and this has had a lot of discussion and recrimination, too, on all sides in relation to this matter. I want to say that we are mandated to continue this work this year and, in fact, we will be redoubling our efforts, in spite of our clearing particularly, parts on the East

Coast and the West Coast, some people still seem to think that they have a right to steal public land, to use the reserves in an unsafe manner, to not leave for the engineer margin of safety or error - a car or vehicle which may come off of the highway. This is an issue which we will continue and I call for the full support, not only from the House, but also from the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (N.D.C.s) and people out there, to get vocal in their support for this project. I know we have the support for it.

In terms of our nationally funded programmes, we have continued work in respect of doing roads and bridges throughout the entire Coast. I am surprised sometimes that people may suggest that the works are somehow not paid attention to with respect to these roads. Under these various projects and programmes, we have spent 2.4 billion in 2009, the roads in Mahdia were looked at, critical roads in Black Bush Polder were looked at for \$8 million; 90 million was spent on bridges, 2 billion was spent on miscellaneous roads all over the coast and 190 million was spent on urban roads. Some of these projects rolled over into this year and if we are already not at a road in your area, we will soon be at a road near you. We have completed almost 266 roads throughout the entire length and breadth of the coast but we have also done roads in the Rupununi at Lethem, in Region 10 and at Buxton. I am reminded, where many of the young men in the village were actually working on those roads.

The Hon. Member Murray did pose a question as to the longevity of the roads because he suggested that after you make a road one day, in a week or two... and there was something said about Prince William Street in Plaisance... [Mr. Murray: I said about all of that?] ...yes. I want to say that in terms of our road designs, through our work services group, the roads done with asphalted concrete – whether they are highway roads, residential streets with main access or residential streets with secondary access – have a design life of 15 years. For highways, the cost for one mile standard road is \$300 million; for residential main arterial access it is \$75 million and for residential streets secondary access it is \$55 million. For what is called a double bituminous surface treated road which is usually built in the cases of residential streets, main access and residential streets, secondary access, the life of the road is six years and the cost for main access residential street is \$55 million and \$45 million dollars per mile for residential street. An un-surfaced road... [Mr. Murray: Give us the information for Prince William Street.] I will give you all of it. No problem. In the case of Prince William Street, there

was some suggestion that there were two holes in the road and we have been made aware that the reason there are two holes in the road, is because there is a water main breakage below there, which created the failure and in fact when I visited, the residents were asking for speed bumps because the cars were flying along the road and putting the children at risk. This road is still under warranty and that will be attended to in the normal course of things. I have the information here and I am sure that you will be happy to have it.

Let me say, that one of the important things that we will be doing, to maybe try to help allay all these fears and accusations about what we do, is we are establishing a new website, upgrading it and putting in routine algorithms so that the public can interface with the Ministry's Work Services Group with respect to the work that we do. So, you can make a complaint not only by telephone about the particular...

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

Mr. Hinds: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I propose that the Hon. Minister be granted another 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Benn: ...thank you Mdm. Deputy Speaker. We are upgrading our technology by putting in place internet web access so that persons can report, through the internet or telephone these issues – a hole in the road, a speed bump wanted, and striping on the road – all those things persons will be able to do within a few months. Persons will be able to report many of these things that we hear about and we will be happy to try to allay, through that, hopefully some of these issues and it will enhance our responsiveness to the concerns of the communities.

In terms of a significant improvement in 2009, we have been able to put in a new asphalt plant and this plant is working now at Garden of Eden. It has replaced the old plant which is more than 30 or 40 years old. It is already providing a great boost to the road maintenance and rehabilitation programme. If I may state it again, the acquisition cost was US\$153, 900.

In 2010, some of the significant projects we will be doing include rehabilitation of the East and West Canje Road, which will allow for the improvement of farm to market access for over 17,000 acres of rice land. The rehabilitation of Sheriff Street and Mandela Avenue, 20.5 million

has been provided for that. The designs and cost benefit analyses for the extension of the East Bank, Four Lane road – from the National Stadium to Grove. The terms of reference and bid documents are being prepared and \$197.6 million have been provided for this work in 2010. Overlaying of the concrete section of the road - from the Cheddi Jagan International Airport to Soesdyke Junction - with asphalted concrete. This road has issues with cracking and flooding, and this is a project with one of our development partners, the IDB and we have \$451 million allocated for this.

With respect to the Soesdyke/Linden Highway, the critical sections work... and I think that again Ms. Kissoon had raised this issue, the contract has been awarded for this project and this work is expected to begin shortly.

We have been working with the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (G.G.M.C.), along with National Funds in respect of interior roads. In Region 1, work on the Kwabaka/Kwabanna roads, at Santa Rosa, Kabana, works valuing \$13.7 million will be done on that road in March, 2010. Thomas Hill, Barima to Morawhanna – \$89 million, Wanaina Bridge to Yaraketa – \$128 million, construction of three bridges in Karasabi so that, hopefully, perhaps later in the year persons can have a good safari going up into the Pakaraimas – \$23 million, an enormous effort is being made. I could also say rehabilitation of the roadway between Linden and Kwakwani – \$65 million has been assigned for the work on this road.

In terms of sea defences, the sea defence districts have been active and steadily improving in respect of their work. Our development partner has been the European Union (E.U.), under what is called the 9th European Development Fund (E.D.F.) and significantly, we have had the reconstruction of 1.5 kilometre rehabilitation in Wakenaam and West Coast Berbice... [Mrs. Backer: Yes, exciting.] Of course it is not exciting but when the water comes, you will have a different kind of excitement.

The work in terms of sea defences continues all over the country and we have had roll-over contracts for 2009 which have been completed in Leguan, on the West Bank and West Coast and at District 5, East Coast Demerara (E.C.D.). The details in sea defence will be worked on and would be advised on later – I guess in Committee – but particularly, one of the significant progress activities we had done last year was the plating of mangroves. We planted some 8,000

units of mangrove seedlings and we now have a new project with the European Union (E.U.) which sees us working, through the expertise of National Agricultural Research Institute (N.A.R.I.), in the rehabilitation of mangrove which would have us move ahead of the sea defences, hopefully earthen dams; we will move from a position where we spend US\$4, 000 per linear metre for hard and rip rack structures, hopefully to a position where it will fall to about US\$1,500 per linear metre. That is what is important because if this is successful, this will yield funds for more sea defence and would yield funds for other works to be done in terms of developing our natural infrastructure.

I move to the Cheddi Jagan International Airport; we have had situations... I am sure we are all proud of the way our airport look and the way our airport is managed. I always say that when you get to the front door of a house, it speaks volumes, everything about your house and in the case of our airport, our country. We feel proud when we come to the airport; we feel proud when we see the advances that are ongoing, of course there is the issue of the squatters that is still to be dealt with and we are working on this problem. Let me say that income in 2009 was about 600 million, slightly lower than 602 in 2008, expenditure was \$315 million compared to \$332 million in 2008 – a decline of 5%. Passenger movement for 2009 has vaulted to 216,064 persons or 5% more than 2008. This is the second highest recorded arrivals following the 228,285 passengers recorded in 2007. This again in context, as was stated by the Hon. Member Prashad earlier, was while passenger movement worldwide declined by 3.1%. Cargo movements were 2725 tonnes – a 4% decline, exports amounted to 1393 tonnes, a marginal decline of 0.5% when compared to 2008. Cargo movements worldwide declined by 15%. In terms of aircraft movements, there were 3652 international aircraft movements in 2009, a 17% decline. This is a decrease as a result of the airlines reducing capacity and increasing pay load. Aircraft movement worldwide declined by 3.1%. Certain concessions were approved during the year: Oasis Café, Republic Bank, Rituals Coffee, Kings Jewellery World and a new Security unit were established.

Rehabilitation of the international apron and taxi way commenced for \$247 million and is ongoing. A new car park booth, a common user terminal, equipment facility for 20 new check-in systems and a new flight information display. A new aircraft museum was established using an old DC-3 which was used to fly the beef out of Lethem to Georgetown and from Georgetown to

Miami in the old days. I want to invite the Hon. Members to visit the new aircraft museum, runway lights and navigation aids which were all looked at.

Mr. Trotman: Where is the museum?

Mr. Benn: The museum is next to the airport navigation tower at Timehri. In terms of the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority, it has been an historic year. A contract has been signed for \$660 million of national funds with Intel Can. of Canada to modernise the navigation systems in the tower. This project is underway and is expected to be completed within a year's time. The rehabilitation and repairs to the control tower complex is ongoing, a new water distribution system, a search and rescue report was completed and submitted. Significantly, in terms of staffing and training, we have had training of seven new air traffic control officers and these persons are now undergoing on the job training. Twenty-five persons were recruited for air traffic control officer training and 11 of these persons have completed the course in October and 9 have completed facility checks. New radios were received, a new generator has been installed, the aviation safety regulation has been improved and put in place, the aviation security systems are being looked at and a risk assessment with respect to aviation matters, along with air transportation management, is being looked at.

I turn to the Maritime Administration Department (M.A.R.D.); it has been carrying out its mandate in an exemplary fashion. It has certain challenges with respect to facilitation of the port and estuaries. Operationally, we have had repairs to the Allan Young, the Steve N and ML Thompson done and we are evaluating the whole issue of getting a new pilot launched because our harbours present particular challenges with respect to getting ships into the bay area. Significantly, 24-hour dredging has been implemented on the Demerara Ships Channel. This is important because we have been losing draft over the years and, maybe surprising, the dredging effort was only constrained to an eight or ten- hour period. We have changed this to a 24-hour system.

Some persons who travel the country, and even cross the river at Demerara, may know that we are putting on sheds and super structures on passenger boats in the Demerara and Essequibo Rivers; this is redounding to the comfort and safety of passengers. We have maintained too,

uninterrupted daily hour pilotage. While we are faced with the challenge of employing new pilots given the rates of payments that we make.

In terms of piloted ships, the total of 856, 778 freights at Georgetown, 82 at Berbice, 6 at Essequibo involving 206 tankers, 298 cargo ships and others of 76. Cargo imported by piloted ships was 368.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Your time is up Hon. Minister.

Mr. Hinds: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I ask that the Hon. Minister have another 10 minutes to conclude his presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Benn: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I am giving these statistics because I think it is important that the Hon. Members have an understanding of the kind of activities that take place at our ports. Cargo imported by piloted ships was 368,902 metric tonnes and cargo exported by piloted ships was 1,540,494 metric tonnes, 21,591 containers came into the country, 3087 vehicles were imported, total piloted ships gross tonnage was 5,389,000 and the net tonnage was 2,404,000 tonnes. 1,540 manoeuvres were completed in Georgetown, 108 in Berbice and 17 in Essequibo.

These statistics, if we track them year to year, and for many of us hearing them for the first time, are a record of our development activity effort and while we are having the idle chatter and gossip on the one side, I want people to pay some attention to this issue.

Our Transport and Harbours Department is faced with particular challenges, challenges with our oldest vessel. Our oldest vessel is Lady North fort which is now 68 years old. It turned back today with a mechanical defect while going to the Northwest. We have been working, while we await the new input with respect to vessels, to keep the service going. The onset of the Berbice River Bridge resulted in a loss of 55% of revenue but we continue to work to provide service to the people. During 2009, 303,000 persons were carried by this service including 48,000 vehicles and 102 tonnes of cargo. These include new service to Port Kaituma in the Northwest District, a service which was out for over two decades.

We continue to work with our Chinese partners. The Chinese Government and the Government of Guyana are working together to acquire two new roll-on/roll-off ferries intended for the Essequibo Passage while we work on the issue of the Northwest Passage. I would also say that we have put in place more vessel transits, both to Bartica and on the Essequibo, while we work on other issues.

We have had the unfortunate issue so far, where we are still delayed in operationalising the new Supenaam Stelling. This matter is being addressed by the department's employees along with the Demerara Harbour Bridge and we expect in two weeks time that this small challenge will be addressed and fixed and we will be using the new Supenaam facility.

I want to invite the Hon. Members again, particularly those on the Opposition, to maybe open their agenda for the annual engineers' conference – we did have one last year in 2009 – and we will have another one in 2010. We hope that all the great concerns at the technical, accounting and financial levels will be raised there for detail in-depth discussion. So, I want to invite you all to come to this engineers' conference.

Mrs. Backer: Where will it be held?

Mr. Benn: It will be held at the Guyana International Conference Centre.

Mrs. Backer: When?

Mr. Benn: In March, you will get your prospector soon. Mdm. Deputy Speaker, in closing, I want to say that if we go along the... and there was some person writing in the Kaieteur News a few days ago about goats taking over Guyana. He suggested that the blinking traffic lights... it is so unfortunate that in Guyana there were blinking traffic lights. Apparently, he does not understand that when the traffic light is blinking amber you are supposed to pass through with caution. When it is blinking red, you are supposed to stop, see if it is safe and then proceed.

3.44 p.m.

But, this person who said that Guyana is taken over by goats is still confused. I would not say what type of person was driving. Edgar Allan Poe has a very famous story which is called "The

imp of the perverse”. I hope that Members on this side of the House are not joining the “Imp of the Perverse” paying attention to some of these irrational things being said.

As I said throughout the country signs of progress could be seen, could be heard and could be felt. Those who are questioning this particular issue should take their case to the people who are benefiting from this progress. I thank you Mdm. Deputy Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. Norton: Mdm. Deputy Speaker it would be remiss of me if I first do not congratulate the new entrance to this Assembly, and so I do. I hope you have a productive stay however challenging that will be.

May I also take the opportunity Mdm. Deputy Speaker to say that the People’s National Congress Reform 1 Guyana supports the statement made by the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs on the question of Suriname and to say we do believe that the territory is ours and we should develop the diplomatic and other work to ensure that it continues to be like that.

It is usual for it to be said that there are not recommendations from this side of the House. For four years I have made recommendations and today I will do the same. I hope however, on this occasion, the questions asked will be answered and the recommendations made, looked at.

I think the Government has listened. Last year I told them that they did not have a Foreign Policy context in the Budget, this year they have tried. But having said that they have tried, I want to say the Budget fails to put the Foreign Policy position in context. I will therefore proceed to put it in context.

To put it in context we must understand first the world in which we live. The world in which we live is characterised by globalisation and liberalisation occurring simultaneously with regional integration and hegemonisation of international organisations. In the realm of international security the focus is on counter-terrorism with all its implications for developing countries such as Guyana. At the same time there is a decline in the focus on the State, while concomitantly there is an increase role for civil society and non-governmentalism, and the accentuation of actions aimed at dealing with the challenges eventuated by the environment. In addition there is the existence of what is being called: the emerging economies which are the future, and were our traditional allies but have developed new interest which we have to analyse thoroughly. Coupled

with the foregoing, we exist in a world in which there are a number of hot beds of tension and civil wars particularly in Africa and Asia.

When you look at the world, it is a developed and dominated world. Therefore what we need to do at the level of Foreign Policy is to first of all understand the world and then articulate our interest to make that world, though it is a developed dominated world, conducive to our interest. And so the task for us is to define and promote our national interest. That would be good. I said that it is our interest that is critical. When the President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana was in Syria he said and I quote as reported on the 23rd March, 2009 by one Mr. R.S. Chickerie and it could be found in the Chronicle Newspaper and the internet,

“The purpose of the trip is not to pursue national interest since it would be a good source of investment, but it is really to pursue better relationships”

While I agree we are to pursue better relationships, we must never make the mistake of saying we are not here to promote national interest. The task of every diplomat be it the President, the Foreign Minister or anyone, is to promote our national interest. I checked to see if there was any response to that statement online and in the documentation and there was none, and it is a quotation from the President.

It is in that context we now have to recognise where our interest lies. Our interest does not lie in counter-terrorism though we have to take cognisance of it. I want to suggest that in terms of our security we must maintain our commitment to the promotion and protection of our territorial integrity. We need to redefine security however to recognise that Guyana's greatest security threat is poverty. We must initiate actions at the international level to ensure that poverty is placed higher on the international agenda and be seen as a threat to our security, stability and the environment. A strategy that redefines security in this way will create conditions propitious to a new more relevant approach to security, and more in consonance with Guyana's interest while opening new vistas for Guyana to obtain the required assistance to deal with poverty.

As it relates to International Organisations our interests lies in Guyana promoting changes in the procedures and rules of international organisation, particularly as it relates to reducing what is called the 'democratic deficit'. In international organisations Guyana has got to be in the

forefront of reforms that democratise international organisations and increase the power of developing countries in this world, there again is where our interest lies.

We have to ensure that we put our interest as it relates to economic security. A nation that does not pursue its international economic security interest is in trouble. We have to maintain good relations with the countries that traditionally supported us. In addition, we need to develop a clear and comprehensive strategy to ensure that Guyana benefits from the development of the emerging economies. I want to make a suggestion Hon. Minister; probably there is need for a Department in the Ministry of Foreign Trade and International Corporation to promote relations with those countries and for there to be a similar Mission in Geneva. I am aware that Geneva can be expensive but that it turns out to be expensive I want to recommend to the Minister that the agency be set up in the Permanent Mission of Guyana to the United Nations. Where all the countries are and we can in a direct way at a cheap cost access them, because therein lies Guyana's interest.

I believe we need to overhaul our entire diplomatic infrastructure to ensure it can serve us optimally in doing these things:

1. Accessing markets
2. Encouraging investment
3. Mobilising resources to promote our economic development

Under Dr. Jagan they used to call it 'Economic Diplomacy' but it is word; I have gone through the statements and I noticed it would have dropped out. It was initiated by the Late President Hoyte who had said that it should be Economic Development through the Diplomatic effort. Different names same thing.

So I believe we have to pursue those economic interests and there is much noise in the press about the President's visit to Iran. I want to say this simply, I believe and the People's National Congress Reform1 Guyana believes that every state has the right to choose its friends that is an entitlement. However, I want to suggest this must be done within the context of the extant international situation in Guyana's strategic interest. Much more analysis as it relates to timing of State visits is required.

Regional integration is critical to us. I believe that there is need for a Hemispheric Vision. We must not go down the road. I heard the Prime Minister said we had a continental destiny; that is a dangerous position to take. I believe we have to recognise that we can deal with both the Caribbean and Latin America. First and foremost we need to consolidate our relationship in the Caribbean and then clearly articulate where we go in terms of Latin America. There is this tendency for once CARICOM runs into some trouble, we start to criticise it. I want to say this, every integration process has its own dialectics, it produces positive and negatives and therefore there will always be problems and challenges. But good leadership is leadership that will see those problems, analyse them, surmount them and come up with new approaches. I believe we did that when we were in Government and I recommend that it be done now.

It demands diplomatic skills and an ability to overcome problems that is the kind of leadership we need. I believe Guyana needs to initiate in CARICOM a strategy for production integration. We seem to look at one dimension but one of the problems we will face once we do that is that we will have to have a budget that caters to our manufacturers so that they can access those markets. I believe Hon. Member, the Minister of Finance one of the things lacking in the Budget is adequate incentives and support for the manufacturing sector so that they can take advantage of integration, not only in the Caribbean but in the wider Latin America. I hope that that is rectified.

May I point out also that civil society is emerging as playing a critical role in foreign policy; so if one looks, many International civil society organisations are pursuing strategies that serve the interest of small societies such as Guyana. We need to develop alliances with international civil society so that we can benefit and that we can network with them to ensure we achieve our objectives.

No one will doubt that environmental diplomacy plays a critical role in modern day diplomacy. I want to say, that we need to pursue a much wider strategy than the Low Carbon Development Strategy. One of my criticisms of it is, that it tends to put all the eggs in one basket. You saw what happened at Copenhagen; we ran into problems. I believe, that there are many other areas in which we should seek benefits, for instance under the Biological Diversity Convention, there are provisions for us to benefit from our biodiversity. I want to quote what the Telegraph said about Foreign Scientist visiting Guyana. The Telegraph article entitled Guyana: A Journey into

the Jurassic on 12th August, 2009, on Telegraph.co.uk. John Gimlette states, I quote, and he is speaking about being it the Rupununi

“By day, we potted around the forest, identifying cures for everything from wring worm (aromata) to diabetes (wild mango)”.

I hope that it is evident to all that here we have people with scientific ability and skills coming, going into our forest and looking at our traditional cures. We need laws to deal with that and we need to recognise that if the genes are taken they will be developed in the developed world and then we would not benefit. We need to put mechanisms in place because the convention says we much benefit as a country of origin and therefore we have to put mechanisms to deal with that.

And so we need to pursue in the international community assistance to help us meet the challenges that climate change brings in agriculture. I warn more than two years ago in this House that climate change will bring an increase in pest, we are now talking about it. In that speech I advocated that we do research to deal with that.

One last area of concern to us; Civil Wars and Hot Beds of Tension - we cannot as a small State allow the develop world to direct us to all the conflicts but ignore the wars in Africa and Asia. Five million people or more died in the Congo while the International Community turned a blind eye. Guyana must be in the forefront of organising initiatives to help focus this world on the interest of developing countries in general and Guyana in particular. I believe that is necessary.

We need to understand foreign policy in a modern context. I am suggesting here that the context from when the P.N.C.R. was in Government to now would have changed. Therefore, foreign policies issues have now become multi-dimensional, multi-disciplinary and multi- ministry. We need therefore to change our approach and to do a few things which I need recommend.

1. We need to create under the aegis of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a multi-ministry and multi-agency body that contributes to foreign policy formulation and implementation.
2. We need to be exposed to diplomatic training, all the relevant agencies and Ministries involved in foreign policy. You have a situation now in which an officer from the Ministry of Agriculture, an officer from the Ministry of Trade; have got to be

involved in foreign policy. There is need for the requisite, diplomatic training so that they can do us good and serve our interest well. There is nothing partisan about this, this is not anything P.N.C., it is a fact that we have to face and I urge you to do it.

3. We need to restructure our overseas Missions to adapt to the change in foreign policy situation, including appointing competent professional diplomats to head the Missions.

Missions in the old days were essentially politically oriented, they need... [Interruption]
...that time was different Mr. Nadir. The point is here, we need to make that change and en passant I want to mention China, every diplomat knows that Governments deal base on reciprocity and we will get more out of China if we have an Ambassador in China. We really need to deal with the situation. No Chinese authority wants to be dealing with a low level person when they consider your relationship of a certain level. And so here it is not a criticism, it is a recommendation that in the interest of Guyana we need to appoint an Ambassador to China.

I want to suggest here that to do all of this; to do all that I would have said and to promote Guyana's interest, we have to change our thinking about foreign policy. We must see foreign policy as playing a role in the development of Guyana. The funds that are expended on diplomacy come back when you get benefits, etc. That is why I am very much of the view that we need to change our approach. We need an approach in which the Foreign Service officers are allowed to do their work. The various technical people are... allowed to do their work is bad language; let me change it to say, we need an approach in which the junior foreign services officers are involved from the bottom right up going through the process. Missions must do their work and then we create an intelligence mechanism of information and at the same time we create areas of influence that we can use when we go to a conference. So that when the Minister arrives at a conference he is going, having being served by a proper diplomatic infrastructure. So the point here is we have to structure our foreign policy. The President appearing in a country without the requisite work will never give us the desired benefits. There is a role for the President, the Minister and for the Technical people. We must allow them to perform their roles and our foreign policy will be efficacious.

I want to say therefore that I believe the rudiments of a good foreign policy is there, we need to professionalise it a little more, accept that there is need for change, the world has changed. And make those changes so that we can achieve our objectives.

Communication: The Minister of Finance states in the Budget on page 42 and I quote,

“Government will compliment this private sector initiative with the installation of a fibre optic cable that will link Lethem and Providence through Linden, establishing connectivity with Northern Brazil, for the purpose of facilitating our E-Government efforts. A sum of \$847 million is provided for this purpose in 2010. A further amount of \$640 million is provided in 2010 to commence the establishment of a robust infrastructure to facilitate E-Government throughout the coast.”

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, all and sundry will be aware that GT&T has expended US\$30 million to land a fibre optic cable on the seawall, thus ensuring there is the capacity to provide all the services needed in Guyana. As I understand it, it will provide two 64 gigawaves. By that I understand it to mean 2 fibre strands each with a capacity of 64 gigawaves. I would like to be told in this House how many gigawaves the Government will have so we would know. I want to add this, my understanding is that the capacity that GT&T has developed is 3,000 times more than the current capacity and it is enough to satisfy our needs. I also understand, and I think this is on the internet, GT&T has also stated that it will upgrade the Americas 2 cables. This means that there will be additional capacity. When I queried why they need to do this, I was told that easy disruptions occur. And then I went online to look at disruption and saw how easy it is for these disruptions to occur. But I understand that when these disruptions occur the system goes down. I want the Government to tell me, when the disruptions occur in their own where will they go. As I understand it with the new cable that GT&T would have brought they will now use the Americas 2 as backup. As I understand it and the information on the internet suggest, therefore the system will need back up.

Having stated that, it is clear to me that, if GT&T has the capacity, then the Government must tell us why are they investing so much money in something that we already have. The Prime Minister let the thing out of the bag he whispered quietly when I was observing he said,

“Security”. Redundancy is security but if you are saying redundancy as I understand it and I read it, once that cable comes in and they repair the Americas 2 that provides for redundancy, so you have three now, you wanted three, waste! That is the word, waste, not three, waste! It is not an investment in I.T.C., it is an investment that is unnecessary, because we have the capacity in Guyana. What is worst, if it is true that you wanted to deal with redundancies and you claimed that you are promoters of private enterprise development, you should have encouraged private enterprise to do it, Government need not. I want it to be made clear. And then there is another frivolous argument that is being raised, it is said you end the monopoly by bringing Digicel, why can you not do the same thing with the cables, why do you have to do it yourself.

I want to make the additional point that the Government says, that one of the purpose of it is to...

[**Mr. R. Persaud:** Do not let GT&T hand you anything to read.] GT&T cannot hand me anything to read I am not you, Mr Persaud, I research and when I am finished researching I come with the material. I want to say this to you, we heard in this House and outside that we are going to sell the shares in GT&T and one of the things that was said was that we would put 20,000 computers in homes. I believe that is the most backward step we can take. [Interruption]

If you listen, I will tell you what we need to do. What we need to do is to first of all increase the real wages of the people, create employment so that they can purchase their computers. We must end mendicancy, which child wants the Government to be able to present... there are children there, each child would like to know. Yes they want a computer but they would like to know their father and their mother have the capacity to buy it. That is what they want; they do not want the Government giving them handouts.

So we need to end this mendicancy approach, we need an approach that permits the people of this country to be able to buy the goods and services they need, that is genuine development.

Let us assume that we accept that you should give 20,000 computers, in this modern world every two years computers have got to change. If you give 20,000 computers, how are you going to maintain it, keep up with the changes it is a useless exercise. I am saying to you it does appear to me that this Government is not interested in the genuine development of people; they want to control the resources and decide how people develop. A proper Government creates the conditions for the people to be able to have their wealth and spend it. I am saying that there is a

need for a change in an approach of one from mendicancy to one in which people are empowered to achieve their objectives.

4.14 p.m.

I want to respond... As you know idiocy transcends the normal, if what I have said boils down to I am against computer. I am for people getting computer, but I am for them getting their own computer by the Government empowering them to buy it with their own money and not being a godfather... [Interruption]. I want to turn away from those...

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, one minute please. We have all recognised that we have students in our midst. I failed earlier to welcome these students, and I think they come from, I have it here, Xenon Academy. It is a private school at Grove, on the East Bank of Demerara. I wish to welcome these students. I also want the House to recognise that if we have future parliamentarians amongst them, they will realise that this is not the norm. Let us try to keep the noise level down so that you could hear, so you do not have to shout. The students are listening; they are taking notes. Let us try and show some example as from now. Go ahead Mr. Norton, you have two minutes before your first extension.

Mr. Norton: I concluded that this whole thing is linked to the Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.). The Government once secured it into its Central Intelligence Agency. Now, let us assume it is that; that in itself might be sinister. But I want to say this, we like to talk about good governance. Under the People's National Congress, which P.P.P criticised, whenever it had made a major departure, it would have brought a *State Paper*. [Mr. Neendkumar: What is a *State Paper*?]. Let me tell the Hon. Member what is a *State Paper*. I know that he does not know what is a *State Paper*. Listen! A *State Paper* is a paper that is prepared and which outlines the policies and all the elements. It comes to the National Assembly, and is debated. Since I am in this National Assembly from 1997 I think an attempt was made to bring one once, it was tabled and never debated. I know the People Progressive Party (P.P.P.), while the P.N.C. was in Government, debated *State Papers* on education, National Service, and on local government. Sometimes we must accept where we have erred. I believe that *State Paper* will contribute to the development of our democracy. I want to suggest that if we are serious about good governance

we must return to producing *State Papers* on the major issues, so that they can be debated and then we can move to the laws.

I want to respond to something that was said by the Hon. Member, Minister Benn. He would want us to believe that the Soesdyke-Linden Highway should not be given light because it does not have people. Well, first of all it has people; it is not heavily populated. Let us take it as given that it does not have people. I believe and I said in this House, one of the most lucrative places to put people to live in the context of climate change is on the high lands on the Soesdyke-Linden Highway.

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

Mrs. Backer: I rise to move that the Hon. Member be given 5 minutes to conclude his enlightening presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Norton: I am saying that if we, this Government – we like to talk about Brazil - want to encourage that investment, a critical link is the Soedyke-Linden Highway. It needs to be upgraded and it needs to have light. Additionally, if one looks at the statistics for death on the Highway, one will see that a lot of them would occur by night due to parked vehicles, which cannot be seen. It is a different context. It is not emotionalism. It is not politics. There is need for lights on the Highway, the upgrading of the Highway, for it to be part of the context. Do you know what I have found interesting?

I have found interesting that the Minister did not mention the Ituni-Linden to Kwakwani road, because last year when I told him “*dat de sand and red mud wa he trowin aint mek sense*”; and by the time he threw them and the rain came, the road washed away. So if he will put another \$65 million he is throwing Guyana money “*down de drain*”. The approach to take to that road is to spend some money, give it a base and, then as you go along, upgrade it to a multi-purpose type road. If you keep just throwing red loom and sand, they will go where they go all the time. We are wasting money. Hon. Member Ashni Singh, I think you are trying to do a good job, but your Minister of Works is treating you badly. We need to invest those moneys properly.

One last thing before I go. Hon. Member Mr. Whittaker suggested in the debate that the Chairman in Region 1 was involved in and knew about the fuel story. I want to read what he said, Region 1 Chairman, *Stabroek News Monday, February 8, 2010*, a few days ago, ‘He said the authorities “did not get a signal of whether GuyOil will continue to supply our region with fuel”’ and if you go through it you will see that... I would never tell the Hon. Member that he is lying; that is not Parliamentary, but I believe he was distant from the truth. I thank you. [Applause]

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, it is now 4.24 p.m. and our next speaker is Mdm. Minister Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett. But in the light of what I have said earlier, I do not think that we should truncate her speech by giving her five minutes now and the fifty later. So with your concurrence, I think we should take the adjournment now and return in an hour’s time.

Assembly suspended accordingly at 4.25 p.m.

Assembly resumed accordingly at 5.36.p.m. with Mr. Speaker in the Chair.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I would like to thank you for your warm solicitations on my welfare. I am fully recovered. Nothing was wrong with my heart, I wish to assure you. I would like to thank you for your cooperation with my dear colleague the Hon. Deputy Speaker, Mrs. Clarissa Reihl. I understand that Mrs. Reihl was forced to exercise, unusually, some authority which she is not accustomed to doing, yesterday. But I am glad to note that at the end of the day all went well, and that you were able to accede to her request for orderly debate and conduct. I would like to thank Members for that. I would like to thank Mrs. Reihl as well. I will start this session with Hon. Minister Mrs. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett.

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Ramson]: I wish to welcome you back Cde. Speaker. I wish to apologise to you and this Hon. House for the conduct of some of my colleagues in your absence. I do so as the keeper of the constitutional mandate of this country.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Attorney General.

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker, and let me also welcome you back. I am glad that your heart is in the right place. I rise to make my contribution, that is, to the 2010 Budget Debate. In so doing I want to, at the outset, congratulate my colleague Hon. Dr.

Ashni Singh and his team for producing a budget that is both equitable and realistic, and does not add any burden to the population, as no new taxes have been introduced, yet spending has not been curtailed. Of course, this budget is not inconsistent with those before it that he, Hon. Minister Ashni Singh and the Government as a whole have presented in the past.

Allow me too, to congratulate Mr. Lloyd Pereira and Mrs. Dawn Hastings on their assumption to the office of Member of Parliament. I have known the Hon. Member Lloyd Pereira in several capacities including Toshao, Regional Democratic Council (R.D.C.) Councillor and Community Development Officer. Hon. Member Dawn Hastings too, also holds her own, coming from a family who is holding leadership position in Kako for a very long time. These recent appointments, I think, as Members of the National Assembly are just natural progression.

Before I go into my substantial presentation I just want to respond to a few of the comments made by the Hon. Member Mr. Norton. First to let him know that Mr. Raymond Chickerie - I think he had referred to the one Mr. Raymond Chickerie who wrote a letter in the newspapers - does not represent the Government of Guyana. He is not a staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mr. Chickerie's opinion of Guyana's President's visit to Syria was not to promote national interest but to develop relations was just his opinion. Mr. Norton, I think, is well aware that foreign policy is no small part an externalisation of one's domestic priorities, and Guyana's national interest would always...

Mr. Norton: Mr. Speaker, on a Point of Order. It is not factual. I quoted and I pointed out that it was a quotation from the President. It was not Mr. Chickerie's view. I made it clear and the information is there which could be checked. So I will like to correct...

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett: Thank you Mr. Norton for elucidating; but let me say again, Mr. Chickerie was not part of our delegation. Certainly, he could not have quoted this, because I was present, and at no time, I think it would be highly unusual for the national interest of one's country not to come first. I just want to make that clarification.

I also want to let Mr. Norton know, that when the Hon. Prime Minister - he probably misinterpreted it - spoke about Guyana's continental destiny. We never said on this side of the House that we would be pursuing our continental destiny at the expense of our relationship with CARICOM or the part we have to play in CARICOM. I just want to make that very, very clear.

He spoke about appointing an Ambassador to China. I guess he has some information; but certainly this is a priority for Government, and very shortly this National Assembly, and Guyana as a whole, would be appropriately advised.

I want to also say that in terms of Foreign Service Officers being involved from the bottom right up, is how we always operate in the Foreign Ministry. With the advent of, not the advent of because it so late right now, technology, we make use of that technology. The President would never visit a country before the groundwork is done, because that is what he has said we must make sure that the requisite work is being done. I have it noted here to let him know that is never the case.

The budget cannot be more appropriately themed, *Consolidated, Transform, Sustain*. These three words came about after a careful assessment of where we have come from, where we are in 2010, and what we must do to enjoy a brighter future. Many of my Opposition colleagues have spoken about their expectations that this budget would have included more. Some have sought to minimise, and at times trivialise the progress we have made thus far, and questioned why we could not have done more. Their impatience is understood, as is that of all Guyanese, especially the younger generation. We on this side of the House are impatient too. We want much, much more. Context is very important, and my colleague Minister Benn spoke of this, and I want to speak of this in a different way.

Whenever we speak of where Guyana is today, we must put it in context. What is the story of Guyana? We are a country that is 44 years old; the greater part of that time was not used wisely, resulting in us regressing in the 70s and 80s, while other countries in the Region were moving forward at an enviable pace. That is the truth and Members of the P.N.C.R.-IG. cannot plead not guilty for that part of our country's past. When we attempt to analyse where we are, or compare Guyana with developed countries and some of our sister CARICOM states, we must bear this reality in mind. I am sure that when we take these things into consideration, we would come to the realisation that our country is in fairly good shape, notwithstanding, the precious time that was squandered in those early years.

But be that as it may, this is not to say that we must not plod on to accelerate growth and development. This is exactly what this Government has been doing over the last eighteen years.

We did not find the country where the infrastructure was perfect; in fact, it was in a very poor state. We therefore spent most of the last sixteen years on massive reconstruction, rehabilitation to bring our country where it is today. There were many other things we had to fix. The debt, for instance, was strangling this country. The word “consolidate”, therefore, is very, very appropriate, since we must consolidate our gains that we have made in the relevant areas.

We are now at another stage of our development, having moved significantly from the rebuilding stage. We have started the task of transforming our country, the other word used in the theme of the budget. We cannot afford to be left behind in the development process, and as His Excellency has said on several occasions, “we cannot be evolutionary in this regard, we have to be able to transform our country in the shortest period of time.” To do this we must have new thinking. Even as we worked to become more efficient in the traditional sectors - rice, sugar, gold, etc., we must think out of the box about new and exciting interventions which will ensure that Guyana fits into the modern world.

The construction of the National Stadium, the Berbice River Bridge, a modern Convention Centre, the training of large numbers of doctors and nurses, are all in keeping with our goal to transform this country. In this year’s budget, a total of \$847 million is included for the installation of the fibre optic cable out of Brazil that would link Lethem and Providence via Linden. An additional sum is included to link Moleson Creek to Anna Regina. The Hon. Minister of Finance has said clearly how this would benefit our country. This is no ordinary project; it would put our country in another phase of development all together. It is very disappointing, therefore, that the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, instead of preparing himself for the opportunities that this project would bring, sought to derail it, by imputing sinister motives by this Government. I urge him to look pass these petty accusations and see the big picture. The Hon. Member Mr. Basil Williams, he said he did not see any provision for science and technology. He should just look at that part - that is part of science and technology. [**Mrs. Backers:** He never said that]. Yes, I have it written down in quotation. Hon. Member Mr. Murray, too, said he could not find anything exciting. Hon. Member Mr. Aubrey Norton called it a waste. I think that they have not looked at the benefits of this project, and I would want to submit that this is a necessary redundancy and would certainly transform the Information

Technology (I.T.) landscape of this country. You do not have to be I.T. savvy to appreciate this project.

The same is true for the Amaila Hydro-project. Our budget includes an amount for the construction of the road to the site where this hydro is expected to be built. It is true that we have been talking about hydro for a long time, both of us, both sides of the House. In fact, the P.N.C.'s Administration had tried unsuccessfully to install one. The difference now is that we are moving closer to realising our dream, and again, this project will transform our economy in more ways than one; making power more reliable, hence creating more opportunities for attracting investment.

This transformation is taking place in many areas. My colleague, the Minister of Sports spoke about some of the new additions that we will be having - an Olympic sized pool, a good track, and all of those different things. These are all evidence of our country being in another stage of development. We all must be proud about this. We all must be excited about this as well. The job is now ours to sustain progress. We must not let up on this very important task. This is not a job for the Government alone. It is a job for all of us - Government, Opposition and all citizens alike. We must know where we want to see our country and we must work to that end. On this side of the House, we are prepared to do so. The theme, *Consolidate, Transform, Sustain*, is, therefore, wholly appropriate.

In turning my attention to the Ministry which I hold responsibility, let me reiterate that the thrust of our foreign policy is one that is based on the preservation of our country's sovereignty and territorial integrity; seeking assistance to confront the economic and social challenges at home; and enhancing Guyana's role in the international arena. In terms of our territorial issues, these have not changed from the last time I had spoken when we met to debate the last budget. However, there have been some developments. In terms of Venezuela, over the last year, our relations, I think, continued to be strengthened. In July, 2009 I paid an official visit to that country, and held discussions. Those discussions led to the advancement of the consideration and the implementation of several projects including the centre for rehabilitation and reintegration of homeless persons, and the coal-chain agricultural project. Discussions were also held on the Guyana/Venezuela road link and the proposed dredging of the mouths of Mahaica, Mahaicony and Abary Rivers.

Another important outcome of that visit was reinvigoration of the Good Offices Process of the United Nations Secretary General which culminated with a joint Guyana/Venezuela nominee being proposed. That nominee was proposed to the Secretary General in October, and we are hopeful that the Good Offices Process will recommence this year. Significant progress was also made in terms of negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding between our two countries to address issues related to the treatment of fishing vessels and crews after apprehension for illegal fishing.

I should also mention that senior officials of Guyana and Venezuela met in Caracas to discuss cooperation and coordination in combating cross-border trade in illicit drugs. I had indicated in my last budget presentation that we were going to do this. As we continue to build the relations with Venezuela, we are also looking to further develop our trade relations, as you are aware an agreement was signed with Venezuela for Guyana to supply 50,000 tons of rice. We are hoping that all things be equal, we can conclude the longer term agreement. This year we hope... we will be considering that is, the establishment of a consulate in Puertodas, more than 20,000 Guyanese are living in this area of Venezuela. We will be looking at upgrading representation or establishing a consulate there.

In terms of Suriname, just a few days ago, I had, recent, to make a statement to this House regarding information emanating from Suriname in relation to that country's claim to our New River Triangle, which is cause for concern. We take it very seriously any threat, real or perceived, to our territory, and will continue to utilise the diplomatic process to deal with this issue as far as possible. We are equally serious, though, about engaging with Suriname on other issues that will benefit both of our peoples. Over the last year, Guyana and Suriname were engaged in bilateral discussions with a view to addressing issues relating to navigation on the Corentyne River. It is anticipated, that as agreed, those talks will continue. You will appreciate, that the diplomatic process is one that at times is slow on haste, but it is one of the better options and we must therefore persevere.

In terms of Brazil, we all witness the inauguration of the Takutu Bridge on September the 14th, 2009 which saw our two countries for the first time establishing a physical link of this nature. On that very occasion several agreements were signed in the areas of culture, trade and investment, defence cooperation among others. Disagreements will be useless if we do not make

use of the provisions included therein, and this year we will be focusing on the implementation of some of them, bearing in mind that the Brazilian process is also different from ours, and some of these agreements require its Congress approval.

Mr. Speaker, you would also recall that both of our Presidents - President Bharrat Jagdeo and President Luis Inacio Lula da Silva - alluded in their remarks on the occasion of the inauguration of the bridge, that in terms of Brazil and Guyana, or in terms of the co-operation between our countries, Guyana's priority will be that of hydro-power and the road link between Lethem and Linden. It was just mere weeks after the inauguration of the bridge that an engagement was held with our Brazilian colleagues, and at the moment we are considering signing a Memorandum of Understanding to look at other hydro possibilities in Guyana. Brazil has a lot of experience in this area and we will be working with it in this regard.

The feasibility study for the Linden-Lethem road is ongoing and discussions will continue with Brazil regarding its construction. As I had indicated too, it was the intention of the Brazilian Government to establish a Vice-Consulate in Lethem. That Consulate has been established and in terms of Guyana, this year we will be establishing a Consulate-General in Boa Vista, as it would certainly facilitate the increased of trade activities envisaged between our two countries.

In terms of our engagement and our involvement in the Caribbean Community, not unlike 2008, questions continued to be asked in 2009 about the commitment to regional integration by Member States. Perhaps at the regional level we need to improve our public relations to adequately inform the populace of the progress and challenges faced by the Community. The Hon. Member Mr. Norton said that there are times when things do not go too well, we criticise. These criticisms come from across the Community and some of them at times are very valid. Some people believe that the pace is too slow.

5.58 p.m.

The Community will be thirty-seven years old this year, and we probably should have been at another place altogether. But the story of Guyana, and our role in CARICOM is one where we remain committed to this integration process. In fact, there was an appraisal just done on the CARICOM Single Market, and what it has shown, in terms of Guyana, is that we have put in place most of the measures that we are required to put in place for the Single Market to work.

Overall, there has been tremendous improvement. Some countries still have to put some measures in place. But some of the things that have been mentioned in that report, in terms of progress, include the right of establishment; our citizens in the Community can establish businesses with little hassle; the movement of capital - there have been lots of improvements in that regard; the movement of people in the approved categories - and I want to stress that in the approved categories - that has been going pretty well. In terms of Guyana, we have issued 457 CARICOM Single Market and Economy (C.S.M.E.) certificates in 2009. That is not to say that 457 persons have left Guyana. They have applied for the certificates. People are making sure that they have it handy so whenever they get a job they can leave without a problem.

Guyana, like I have said, we have put in a lot of measures at the legislative and the administrative levels. We have also successfully hosted the CARICOM Heads of Government Meeting here in July, and at that same time Guyana was appointed as Chair of the Task Force - no other person than His Excellency President Jagdeo - to look at the impact of the global financial and economic crisis and the Region's economy.

As we further demonstrate our commitment to this integration process, we will be signing three agreements shortly. In fact, we will be signing this at the next Heads of Government Meeting which is on the 11th and 12th in Dominica. These agreements include the Maritime and Air Space Security Cooperation Agreement; that agreement is intended to promote cooperation among our States to enable them to conduct such law enforcement operations as may be necessary to address effectively their own security as well as the security of the Region. We will also be signing the protocol to amend the Treaty of Chaguaramas to incorporate the Council for National Security and Law Enforcement. We will be ratifying the CARICOM Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Serious Criminal Matters. I should also say that as CARICOM seeks to strengthen relations with the South, the first summit between Brazil and CARICOM will be held shortly.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of our continental ties, having signed the treaty of the Union of South America in May, 2008, this National Assembly will recall this House passing a motion for the ratification of that Treaty in October 2009. As I have indicated last year, Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) has established links with the African and Arab group of countries - I guess you will see the link there - and Guyana was represented at the South America Arab Summit in Qatar in March last year and the South American African Summit in Margarita.

Guyana, I should mention, was the co-Chair of the Working Group on Agriculture, and we hosted a meeting here in Guyana in preparation for that summit and the positions advanced were adopted by the summit. This year Guyana will assume the Chair of UNASUR, and we should be hosting a summit here as well.

In terms of some of our achievements, some of the things I had mentioned last year that we intended to do and we did - the submission of information relating to our request for an extension of the continental shelf or an extended continental shelf. We have been able to submit that information to the Commission on the continental shelf. I am pleased to inform this National Assembly that we would be completing that process in the first quarter of this year. We know that it is going to take some time. In fact, so many countries have submitted requests that I was told it can take us as long as fifteen years. But we are hoping that additional resources would be made available and the Commission will be able to do its work in a shorter period of time. I should also mention that in preparing our submissions, both Guyana and Suriname shared information on our submissions, and we both agreed for the submissions to go forward without prejudice. We also did the same with Barbados and Trinidad, not to share technical information, but had consultations with them.

I had also indicated that we would present before the National Assembly the Maritime Zones Bill. That was done and we are considering that in the Select Committee. We are hoping that we are going to complete our work in the near future so that we can have a new Act that is consistent with international development. We are also hoping to have the regulations prepared so that we can implement that Act with little delay.

In terms of trade - because I am responsible for International Trade as well - I want to indicate that Guyana has successfully completed its World Trade Organization (W.T.O.) Trade Policy Review. The Trade Policy Review for developing countries is done every six years and for developed countries, every two years. We were able to have that process completed and Guyana was actually commended. I just want to read from the concluding remarks of the Chairman of the Council when he said:

“The efforts of Guyana to maintain economic growth and attract investment have been widely commended by members, as have the numerous reforms that Guyana has

undertaken in such areas as fiscal policy, government procurement, investment and competition policy.”

Our involvement in this process is because we believe that we need to have a transparent and objective appraisal offered trade regime in the context of the ongoing economic reforms. We are disappointed that the W.T.O. Doha round, the negotiations that is, did not go forward. We, together with our CARICOM neighbours, will continue to remain alert to ensure that our vital interests are safeguarded as far as possible. While expectations remain guarded about a possible conclusion of the Doha round this year, Guyana will intensify its attention to the W.T.O.’s aid-for-trade initiative. In fact, the Government has been able to secure some funding under the U.K. funded Caribbean Trade Support Fund for the National Competition Commission.

At the regional level, in addition to Member States pursuing individual opportunities for aid-for-trade, CARICOM has recently agreed to develop a significant regional project to take advantage of promised support from the W.T.O. Director General during the Seventh W.T.O. Ministerial Conference in December 2009. I recall the Hon. Member Mr. Norton was speaking about us not thinking in a one dimensional way, and he was speaking here about not having enough support for the manufacturers. I want to inform Mr. Norton that some of these very issues have been considered. Some of them have been included in the Tenth European Development Fund (E.D.F.) and also would be included in this regional project. At the moment there is a study ongoing on regional transportation so that we could improve our trade. We are hoping that that study will be out shortly so that we would be able to focus where we put the resources and be better able to improve our trade in the Region, because, as we are all aware, the imports into our Region from extra regional sources are three times as high as what we export. That, I think, is unacceptable and we have to improve that.

In terms of negotiations with Canada at the level of CARICOM, we are fully engaged in that negotiation process. The first round is completed and the second round of negotiations will be held next month. As for all of CARICOM, the development dimension of the proposed agreement is a top priority for Guyana. I should also mention here that nearly all of CARICOM’s exports to the United States benefit from preferential arrangements under the United States Caribbean Basin Initiative (C.B.I.). The C.B.I is made up of the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act and the Caribbean Basin Trade Partnership Act. The Trade Partnership Act will

expire in September 2010. It is a concern for Guyana because the garments that are exported from Guyana receive preferential treatment under that very Act. As such Guyana will, along with other CARICOM countries, conduct a joint approach to lobby the U.S. authorities for the renewal of this Act beyond September 2010.

I also want to speak a little on rum. CARICOM has been...

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

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Minister be granted 15 minutes to continue her presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett: I was speaking about rum. Maybe it is not a good thing to speak about that at this time of the day, but CARICOM has been engaging the European Commission for the past two years for the extension of the period to achieve the full implementation of the Integrated Development Programme for the Caribbean Rum Sector. CARICOM Ministers recently decided to intensify contact with the European Union (E.U.) at the highest level to resolve this matter quickly. The problem is the E.U. has not yet indicated that it will be able to extend this project and what this means is that the Community will lose \$14 million Euros because that is the amount which remains unutilised by the sector. If the European Union refuses to extend the project, rum producers in several countries, including Guyana, having already invested in new plant and equipment on the basis of reimbursement from the European Union, will be left with large debts. In Guyana, the Demerara Distillers Limited has been modernising its operations under the programme to take advantage of the export market.

But there is a worrying development. At the same time we are faced with this non-response from the European Union, we have been reliably informed that it has permitted significant preferential treatment to competing rum producers in Latin America. This will seriously undermine the market access of the African Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (A.C.P.) and of course our rum into Europe. This is a very important issue for us and we will continue to engage in that dialogue.

In terms of Brazil, as I mentioned, we signed an agreement for the promotion of trade and investment. We also have an existing partial scope agreement with Brazil. We have consulted with the private sector here in Guyana, and it has submitted a list of additional products that it will like to have included in that partial scope agreement. We have submitted that to Brazil and we are awaiting a response. We already see that some of our business people are taking advantage of the Takutu Bridge and the opportunities presented there, but it would help us if these additional items are added. We will be pursuing that this year with our Brazilian counterparts.

Before I close I want to briefly respond to the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan. I am happy that he is here. Yesterday he spoke in very unflattering terms about our country. He indicated that Guyana came last in many areas. I think he was quoting some document. I beg to differ. I am going to tell you why I beg to differ. We should be proud that Guyana has gained international recognition in no small part because of the work in the area of climate change. Guyana has played a leading role not only for Guyana, not only for the Region, but for all of the small vulnerable states. It is public knowledge that together with the Heads of Government of the United Kingdom, Ethiopia, Norway, Guyana represented by our Head of State has just been appointed by the United Nations Secretary General as a member of the High Level Advisory Group on Climate Change Financing.

If we came last in everything as the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan submitted this would not have been the case. For a long time the image of our country has been one that was tainted with the tragic events of Jonestown. Guyana is now seen in a very positive light and we should be proud of this.

Much has been said about the Low Carbon Development Strategy. The Low Carbon Development Strategy is not only for today. It will continue with successive Governments. It is sad sometimes to see people from other countries lauding the L.C.D.S. and the work Guyana is doing in climate change, when right home here persons, because of partisan interests, cannot recognise a good thing.

Robust debate must be encouraged as well as constructive criticisms. However, we must all remember that we have a responsibility – all of us in this National Assembly – for the

governance and development of this country, and we must know when we should rally around the cause that is good for Guyana. We must be able to do that at all times. I thank you.
[Applause]

Ms. Sampson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Allow me to, on behalf of the P.N.C.R.-1G., to say it is good to have you back and I hope that your good health will prevail. I will like also to welcome the two new Members of Parliament, Mrs. Dawn Hastings and Mr. Lloyd Pereira, to this August body. I hope that they will not be daunted by some of what goes on in this National Assembly. Before I go into my presentation, I would just like to say to the Hon. Member, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, that if there is one thing during the twenty-eight years of the People's National Congress' Administration that the late President Cheddi Jagan never questioned, was its foreign policy.

The Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, last week Monday, presented his fourth budget to this National Assembly. In a rather lack-lustre presentation, the Hon. Member took three hours to take us through 62 pages of a document under the theme, *Consolidate, Transform, Sustain*. I listened to him, and I am still unable to find out what this largest budget of \$142.8 billion has for the ordinary man. Yes, there may be no new taxes, but the income tax threshold has not moved. Hence, the take home pay for those who are still fortunate to be gainfully employed has not been improved.

In my contribution to today's debate, I will be taking a glance at the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, since our shadow Minister, the Hon. Member Ms. Volda Lawrence, is not in a position to do so. I will begin with the plight of our children. I am one who will join in calling for the establishment of the Rights Commissions. They are long overdue, but I will look to the Rights of the Child Commission. I will start with the rights of the child. From what I saw in yesterday's *Kaieteur News*, *Wednesday, February 17, 2010*, the headline which reads: "Sisters, 9, 8, 7 reveal shocking details of sexual molestation--- Five arrested." Then today's paper, *Kaieteur News*, *Thursday, February 18, 2010*, it continues: "Sisters, 9, 8 and 7 identify abusers."

During the last few months there has been a lot of work done in this Assembly as it relates to the protection of the child. There has been the Child Care Protection Agency; and the Children's Bill has been passed. Along with those came the controversial swearing in of the Rights of the Child

Commission. With the various agencies and laws governing children's rights in place, I too call for the movement of this Commission. I also take the opportunity to ask the Hon. Minister to acknowledge the requirements for membership of that Commission, and name the representative from her Ministry. It was a Committee of this Hon. Assembly which agreed with the constituencies to be represented on the Rights of the Child Commission. Let this National Assembly then instruct that the requirement should be adhered to. When we break the laws at this level can we expect 'John Public' to respect the laws of this dear land of ours? The Rights of the Child Commission needs to start working in the best interest of all children of Guyana.

I will now turn to the plight of our elderly – the pensioners. The non-functioning of the Commission of the Elderly has been a source of concern since this present Minister took office. The Hon. Minister, I am advised, told this House in an answer to a question that the Commission functions under the chairmanship of the Hon. Former Justice Mr. Donald Trotman. This was news to the dear man since he was never contacted nor informed of his appointment. To date, no meeting has ever been held. What we have is the staff of the Ministry of Human Services putting together a few programmes in October for Senior Citizens' Month and at Christmas time. What about the Commission which has among its tasks, that of addressing the concerns of our seniors, to formulate programmes and provide feedback to the Minister about their various concerns and the bottlenecks in the system, to mention a few?

Pension Books and Encashment of Vouchers: It is true that the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security responsible, by our advice, for the issuance of pension books to our old-age pensioners made every effort to distribute same on a timely manner. But the Hon. Minister has to make certain that her staff or the printers are a little more careful. Can you imagine, how some of our senior citizens who look forward to their mere \$6,600 felt when they turned up to encash their vouchers only to find that there were problems with some of their books? Some of the pension books contained public assistance vouchers. This caused those persons who eagerly look forward to the 1st of the month to have to wait a little longer. You can also understand how disappointed they were when they did not get their six per cent increase in January, 2010. I sincerely hope that has been corrected for February.

I also note that the Hon. Minister in her contribution to last year's budget said:

“Pension is a supplemental income. It supplements someone’s income from different sources. Many pensioners are receiving N.I.S. They have their own businesses and children who are supporters and duty bound by law to house them. So this pension is not supposed to be something that they live on alone.”

This statement could not be wholly true. There are some seniors who have never worked anywhere to earn an income. Many have no children. They anxiously wait for the beginning of the month to line up at the post office to receive their pension and pray God blesses the Non-Governmental Organizations (N.G.O.s) and the churches so that they could get added blessings for the month.

The P.N.C.R.-1G. on several occasions brought to this House, aired on television stations and had drawn attention to letters written in the newspapers of the fact that the Guyana Post Office Corporation always seems to have difficulties in encashing the vouchers of pensioners. No redress has been given to this situation. Pensioners continue to be told that moneys are not available for payment and must have to return another time before vouchers are encashed. This problem is one in which the lack of will to find a solution is seen. Therefore we, of the P.N.C.R.-1G., suggest the following: that the Minister seeks to engage money transfer agencies to encash pensioners’ vouchers as well as public assistance vouchers. This, we feel, would alleviate to some extent the issue of the shortage of funds.

6.30 p.m.

Water Rates: In Minister Manickchand’s 2008 Budget Presentation she said, and I quote:

“Mr. Speaker, the pensioners also receive many other services, including water waiver of a certain amount. The water waiver allows pensioners to use water to a certain amount for free because the Government pays for that, and when the mathematical calculation is done, this year in excess of \$270 million is allocated to pay water rates for 41,000 pensioners in Guyana.”

Such a statement by the Minister indicates the following:

- That all 41,000 pensioners are property owners;
- That the data supplied by pensioners are not utilised in planning; and

- That moneys are allocated in a haphazard manner, and not based on data or proper planning.

We are all aware that most pensioners do not own properties.

Identification Cards: Not being able to encash one's voucher due to the non-availability of cash is one matter, but the Elections Commission thought that that was not enough of a problem for pensioners, so it too added its bit. After receiving their new I.D. Cards some pensioners soon learned that they could have not received their pension, because in some cases there were Postal Clerks who refused to pay them on presentation of their new I.D. cards with the distorted pictures. What a calamity! Pensioners who reside far from the post offices had to incur added expense.

The National Insurance Scheme had to add its bit too to the lot of the poor pensioners. The N.I.S. has, over the years, provided free medication to pensioners with chronic illnesses. As of last December this service has been withdrawn and pensioners are now being told that they must purchase their medication and submit the receipts for reimbursement. This is surely one of the cases where we laugh instead of cry. Sir, do you not think that the pensioners would have purchased their medication if they could have afforded it? We must also think in terms of the turnaround time to receive reimbursement from the N.I.S. Let us say two weeks to receive it in the post. Of course that is hoping that there are no queries at N.I.S. and that N.I.S. completes its task in time. What a tragedy! Almost three weeks before a pensioner received a refund.

Then there are those pensioners who complain regularly of not receiving N.I.S. pension. When enquiries are done these pensioners are told that the records of N.I.S. show that they are dead. I have a good friend who spent five months in the United States, returned home and received her pension for those months while she was away. Lo and behold! After coming back she missed three months' pension. When she checked, investigations at the Head Office of the N.I.S. revealed that she was recorded as dead. She then had to show proof, although she was standing before the N.I.S. Officers with her pension book, her N.I.S. Social Security Card, her National Registration Card, that she was still alive. She had to provide them with an original birth certificate. This could be frustrating to our elderly. There are many more cases like that.

I note also Mr. Speaker, that there is a surfacing problem with some seniors who reside overseas for a while. I have a copy of a letter from one Mr. Cecil D'Souza which was written to the Hon. Minister, Ms. Manickchand, and to date he says he has gotten no response. The letter was dated December 2, 2009. I have heard reported on one of our nightly newscasts of other similar cases. This should also be addressed urgently.

I trust that the Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security will give attention to these issues in keeping with the objectives of the budget as stated in paragraph 1.10, on page 3, especially the second objective which says:

“(ii) secondly to lay the basis for continued economic growth, social development, and improvement in the quality of life enjoyed by every single Guyanese man, woman and child;”

Board of Guardians: In 2009, a request was made by a Member of the P.N.C.R.-1G. to the Hon. Minister who has responsibility for the Board of Guardians to appoint another such Board on the East Bank of Demerara. This has not been done to date. I trust that this matter is still engaging the attention of the Minister. What is also important is that in several areas these Boards do not function, and where they do function there is heavy political interference and no representation of the Opposition on these Boards. Further, there was no consultation on the appointments done in 2009. We of the P.N.C.R.-1G. feel that the needs of members of our constituency are not properly represented.

The high-handed decision to remove destitute persons' names from the Public Assistance Register is a demonstration of a Government that only gives lip service to people and does not demonstrate the care for the vulnerable in our country. Good examples can be found in several villages in the North-West Region where residents are angry at the manner in which they are treated. I refer to villages such as Sacred Heart, Hotoquai, Hobodia, Kamwatta, Port Kaituma, to name a few. On the Essequibo Coast and in the Pomeroon River, in Regions 3, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10 there are many persons whose cases warrant public assistance. There are complaints made of them being removed from the register without any visits or interviews by the Boards or Social Assistance Officers.

In Region 1, residents complained of the Board in Mabaruma, not holding meetings, and it was Mr. James Rampersaud, Chairman of the Board, who was making all decisions without calling any meetings of the Board. The Hon. Member, Ms. Volda Lawrence paid Mr. Rampersaud a visit and was told that he had retired for over a year and at the that time there was no Board existing. He claimed that it was the Chief Social Assistance Officer who visited the Region and made the decisions. Boards in Regions 2 and 4 complain of the recommendations being thwarted by the Ministry, since the Ministry sends a list of names, not submitted by the Board, regarding who are the persons that are entitled for assistance. There are complaints emanating from Regions 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10 of the unprofessional behaviour of Board Members. Very personal and impolite questions are being asked. There are also, again, incidence of political interference.

Once again I cannot help but mention that consideration should be given to those pensioners who reside in satellite villages in our Hinterland, in areas such as Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9. Mechanisms should be put in place to have the Social Assistance Officers visit these villages through the Regional Democratic Council Office. We ask that the decisions made should not be based on guessing, or the Toshaos, or the Social Workers recommendations. Even if it is a once per year visit, it would be better done by the Social Assistance Welfare Officers so that an assessment can be made.

We also ask, again, for consideration to be given to the encashment of vouchers by community shops, or other business persons in some of our remote areas which will ease the transportation costs by seniors to the village post offices. In your consideration do remember that the value of \$6,600 on the Coast is not the same as those in the Hinterland.

Where is the transparency? Where is the respect for our people? Once again we of the P.N.C.R.-1G. call on the Minister to have the system under which these Boards are constituted and operated be reviewed. These moneys belong to the people of Guyana. Government or any person who works on behalf of Government is only a custodian of the public coffers, not gods unto themselves. Since the Hon. Minister wants us to believe that she is magnanimous in her thinking I will ask her to let us review the system under which these Boards are constituted and operated.

School Uniform Vouchers: The P.N.C.R.-1G. has always held the view, and still does today, that our children are our most valuable asset, and that investment in our most valuable asset means a

more prosperous Guyana. Hence, we as a Party always sought to assist parents to equip their children for school, be it fabric produced in Guyana by Guyanese, or materials grown from our own soil, planted and reaped by our people, or vouchers. We are happy that this Government has sought to continue this commitment to our people, even if we do not agree with the methods of distribution. This budget has raised some cause for concern regarding the uniform project. The last sentence on page 41 of the Budget Speech, at paragraph 4.102 states:

“Furthermore, our school uniform assistance programme will be expanded this year to provide every child with a uniform.”

During the budget debate last year the Hon. Minister told this House that 30,000 students out of 195,000 would receive assistance from the Government yearly. Unlike every other programme mentioned in the Hon. Minister of Finance’s Budget Speech this year there is no sum attached to the uniform project. All we have are words. If we use the figures from last year as mentioned by the Minister, and we take it that there are approximately 195,000 students in the systems, and I hope the Hon. Minister would point me to where the allocation of this venture is in the 2010 Budget, if we would use her figures at \$1,500 per child for the cost that was given out in the vouchers, I am sure that when we multiply it we will get \$292.5 billion. Is there some mistake here? Please, Hon. Minister, do not allow this uniform project to go the way of the Single Parent Fund. People are already making enquiries and their apprehension is noted. Even I, myself, find it quite unlike this Government to have such a large allocation without even splashing it across the front pages of our newspapers.

I would like now to turn to women. I waited with some anticipation for the Minister of Finance to mention women in his budget presentation. Apart from mentioning the word “woman” in the second objective of the budget, which I quoted earlier, I am still waiting. I am aware that there is mention made of single parents, who are both women and men. But what is there in the budget for us women, as a group. What are the plans for programmes that will empower women?

A little earlier my colleague, the Hon. Member Deborah Backer, indicated that there are 488 cases of domestic violence reported recently. There are more. [Mrs. Backer: It is 4,000 now.]. I had the figure wrong, my apologies. Guyana has experienced high incidences of domestic violence against women. When will the laws be enforced to deal with these cases?

Women have borne the blunt of domestic violence over the years. Between the reading of the last budget and this one many women lost their lives. I know that there are some men who are also victims of domestic violence but women are in the majority. Many women's organisations have expressed condemnation of the frequent acts of domestic violence, but rarely do we hear any disgust being expressed from the Government benches. We are aware that there are three Hon. Ladies in this August body who have served as Ministers with responsibility for women's affairs and continue to do so, and continue to be women's rights activists. Why is it that they are silent when our sisters are victims of domestic violence whether physical, mental or high-tech? The Hon. Minister boasted in her 2009 Budget Presentation, and I quote:

“In 1996 it was this Government, in this National Assembly, with the assistance of this National Assembly, or approval perhaps, that passed a very comprehensive domestic violence legislation; legislation of which we can be justly proud.”

I continue.

“It is legislation that is comprehensive and that provides for orders, from protection orders to occupation orders; that provides custody and maintenance and other consequential matters that have to be addressed when persons are in abusive relationships.”

I call on these Hon. Ladies who sit on the Government benches to stand up for our women folk. Are you afraid of your colleagues? Or have you been ordered to ‘shut up’? The laws should be applicable to all and sundry. Today there is a new trend by those who perpetrate a gruesome act - that is, of burning the home in which the family resides. Thus, depriving not only the victim of shelter but also the offspring, their children, of possessions. This must not be condoned. We of the P.N.C.R.-1G., and I am sure all Members of this Hon. House, will join with us as we call for law enforcement officers to act swiftly and condignly to bring these perpetrators to justice. The officers of the Guyana Police Force must help in these instances when reports are made to them. We, therefore, call on the Hon. Minister to set up a task force to make women's lives safer, so that they can make their contributions to this country.

The Ministry of Human Services must be more care-oriented rather than power-driven. “Services” must always be its watchword. In delivering human service the recipients must be

helped in such a way that they do not feel dependent, but they must be helped so that they can help themselves. Both adults and children come under the purview of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, and they should always be cared for.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Hon. Minister, through you, to seek to have some financial resources allocated to research, so that we can research the many ills in this society which affect our families.

Before I close, I noted that the members of the Women and Gender Equality Commission took their oath of office...

Mr. Speaker: Before you conclude on that last point Hon. Member, you still need an extra five minutes.

Mrs. Backer: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that the Hon. Member be given 5 minutes to conclude her presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Ms. Sampson: I note that the members of the Women and Gender Equality Commission took their oath of office last August. It is time for legal protection against gender discrimination in the workplace to take place. The Ministry of Human Services and Social Security should revamp the Inter-Ministry Committee which looked at gender equality. We need to accelerate the gender empowerment process and assist the development of gender equality policy framework. It is time for the Women and Gender Equality Commission and all other Rights Commissions to begin their work. Let us honour our Constitution. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Minister of Local Government and Regional Development [Mr. Lall]: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker and welcome back. First of all, allow me to join the others in welcoming the two new Members to this Assembly. I am sure Minister Manickchand would have wished to take my place in answering some of these issues. I understand that she is bored. However, I will help her in trying to deal with two issues just raised by Ms. Sampson.

The first one is the statement that Dr. Cheddi Jagan, the leader and founder of our Party, had no problems with the foreign policy of the... [Mrs. Backer: She did not make any statement.]

Why do you not just shut up? ...P.N.C. This is a very remarkable statement. I have never heard of anyone saying any such thing. I want to quote from an article written by Dr. Jagan which is entitled "Is Guyana becoming another Vietnam?" I just want a minute, Mr. Speaker, just to give you what he said about P.N.C.'s foreign policy. [Mrs. Backer: What is the source?]. I just said what is the source. You are not listening. When you talk you do not learn. "The balance of payments position has moved..." He is speaking about the P.N.C.

"...from a surplus to a deficit necessitating standby credit from the I.M.F. to help maintain the external value of the Guyana Dollar and tied as Guyana is to imperialism it was forced to devalue her currency with the devaluation of the British Pound. Besides fiscal, trade, economic and foreign policies have been tailored to suit Washington. The Guyana Government voted against the seating of people's China in the United Nations and has refused to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. There has been a break on trade with Cuba and severe restrictions have been placed on imports from other socialist countries although the economic advantages, including lower prices, are obvious."

I just found that a minute after Ms. Sampson made that statement which for the first time in my entire life I have heard someone saying something as ludicrous as that.

The second statement which amused me was that the Minister of Finance did not mention the word "woman". I am shocked. Has our Minister of Finance who has proposed an all encompassing development project for this year, dealing with all of the Guyanese people, forgotten half of our people? I want to quote just from the beginning of the Budget Speech by the Hon. Finance Minister, and listen to the profound statements he has made in this one paragraph.

"Mr. Speaker, against this background, this fourth Budget of the current P.P.P./Civic Administration, in the Ninth Parliament of Guyana is informed by the following imperatives: (i) firstly to guard and to protect the stability we have achieved for our economy and our country, in the immediate term and for the long term; (ii) secondly, to lay the basis for continued economic growth, social development, and improvement in the quality of life enjoyed by every single Guyanese man, woman and child;"

How more profound can that be? The Minister was talking about the quality of life of women and it is all encompassing. Mr. Speaker, I am sure you can hear me above the din. I once again want to congratulate the Minister of Finance for his budget this year. The other side has outright condemned this budget. It has even gone so far to take the pain to dislike the manner in which he presented the budget, his tone of speech - even to that level. I want to say that presenting an annual budget is serious business, and the Minister of Finance dealt with it with the seriousness that it deserves, in a very measured calm tone. But do not make the mistake to think that the Minister of Finance does not have any more method. You will see it later on. You will see it on Monday.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, you were not here when some Members of the House made reference to what was taking place in Bartica; gave the impression that this is a particular location in Guyana that is in turmoil, and that they are so vexed with everything in Guyana that they have lost all hope. Yesterday morning I had the honour to attend the second anniversary of the Bartica Massacre. All of the speakers... [A Member: What honour is that?] It was an honour to me. Perhaps it was a dishonour to you. All of the persons who spoke, mainly people from the religious organisations - because there was an inter-religious faith memorial - emphasised the peace and tranquility in that community. The fact is since that massacre Guyana is now experiencing peace and tranquility throughout its territory.

7.00 p.m.

There was praise, because at the time when the massacre took place no one thought, given the political encouragement some criminal elements were having, that this Government would not have been able to take control of the situation... [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Mrs. Backer I am asking you to please desist.

Mrs. Backer: Sorry Sir.

Mr. Lall: I do not mind Mr. Speaker, we are accustomed to that.

Mrs. Backer: I am offended by this attack...

Mr. Speaker: There are other ways of expressing your offence other than disturbing the peace in the National Assembly. Proceed Hon. Member.

Mr. Lall: On the last note on this matter: there was clear cut appreciation for the peace and tranquility this Government has brought to this country since those days. I am sure the Minister of law and order, Minister of Home Affairs, will deal more with that.

In dealing with the budget and our economic development for the coming period I want to deal with some specific issues. I will probably divert this time from going through all the details on what we have done and what we intend to do in each and every village, especially in the Hinterland areas. All Members have access to those details which are included in the Estimates. I want to deal with a particular direction emphasised by the Minister of Finance that is on page 52 of his Budget Speech, paragraph 4.143 where he says,

"The maximising of programme effectiveness continues to be of highest priority to our Government. In 2009, work commenced on the development of a results-based monitoring and evaluation system and the designing of training programmes to be rolled out in 2010. In addition, Government will pursue an agenda for further strengthening public financial management which, when implemented will see improved internal controls, expanded use of I.C.T. in the delivery of information and services, and the further strengthening of the Audit Office in support of expanded conduct of performance and forensic audits. These and other initiatives will be pursued in keeping with Government's increased emphasis on quality of delivery, value for money, and enhanced accountability for performance, across all programmes".

The system that we have in Guyana, the state structure, makes the regional system an extremely important vehicle to implement crucial and critical Government's programmes in the delivery of services, and in the general administration of the ten Administrative Regions. This year, as I just have stated, having spent all these billions of sums in all the various Regions, we want value for our money. So this year we are going to continue spending money, but we are going to concentrate in a very serious way on the manner in which we deliver those services, the effectiveness of those services, and results of the expenditure, and the use of those resources.

A key element in the programme of regional development this year will be training. We have found that, especially our hard-working regional officials and personnel engaged in the delivery of services especially in health, agriculture and education, many of them do not have ready access to educational institutions, educational materials and libraries, as we do here, especially, in Georgetown. We need to design and devise training programmes that will take modern management practices to them in their places of work. My Ministry together with the Ministry of Public Service will this year be working out programmes to deal with methods of management; dealing with our people's ability to have a better relationship, better communication, with people in the community. I think throughout the debate, even through criticisms of the Government and through some admissions on our part, we recognise that this is a key element in the development process. Spending all this money, training all these people, putting them into various places, we have found that sometimes what is lacking is that care - patient care, care for students, care for pupils, care for parents, and care for communities. I think the local government system is probably the best positioned structure within the Government's structure to deal with these issues, because these are the people who are in constant contact with the basic units within our society - that is the villages, the small communities in Hinterland areas, and riverine areas and on the Coast. So, we will be going through a very aggressive training programme in all the various areas to see to it that, especially those who are put or given the responsibility to carry all the delivery of services, they have the requisite training.

Mr. Speaker, I want to touch on this issue of consultation. I, perhaps because of the job I have, see it through a different prism, because a lot of people think that consultation in devising or crafting a budget has to do with talking with some big organisation like the Private Sector Commission. But if one were to sit on any one particular day in my Ministry, one gets the reports various..., and I do get daily reports from practically all corners of this country, one will see the amount of meetings that are going on, not only between local government structures and the communities, but with people in the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Housing, and Ministry Agriculture, on a constant basis. As I speak now, officials of my Ministry and the Ministry of Finance are talking to all the National Democratic Councils (N.D.C.s) in this country on how we are going to carry out the programmes for this year - each and every N.D.C. We do not only consult them, regardless of what some people think, we also

bring them on board to assist us in implementing our programmes. Let us not think that this thing is a Georgetown based activity.

Let us take Region 8. We are going to construct a health post in a place called the, excuse my pronunciation, because I have never been to this place, Arasawa Valley. Do you think the Minister of Finance sat down in his air-conditioned office and pluck this out of the air, and put it here to spend \$9 million to build a health hut in Region 8? Do you think that is how he did it? If that is how you believe the Minister of Finance constructed his budget then you are right in condemning it. Let us not fool ourselves that this budget is aloof and it has nothing for the people and that the people were not consulted.

I want to deal with a particular reform that the P.N.C.R.-1G. seems to want to introduce in Region 4. The P.N.C.R.-1G. wants Region 4 to be a state within a state, for the Regional Chairman to decide how much money he needs to run the Region and to dictate to the Minister of Finance how much money he wants and the Minister of Finance must give him; and he must decide which roads, which bridge... So now a system that the P.N.C. R.-1G. has put in place, and that has been in existence all these years, its wants to change it in Region 4, but it does not want to change it in Region 6. It does not want to change it in Region 2. It does not want to give Mr. Ali Baksh the authority to tell the Minister of Finance the Region wants \$10 million. It is not satisfied. But it wants the Government to give that power to Region 4 to do whatever it likes, because of the fact that Region 4 has a very small majority; a majority which will not be there in two years time. I am talking about the Regional Democratic Council (R.D.C.). [Mrs. Backer: Will you be there?]. I will be here; you have better watched yourself. I will be here. I have been here longer than you, and I will continue to be here longer than you.

Another charge made by the P.N.C.R.-1G. is that the Government is starving Region 4. Most of the money which is being spent through this budget, if one looks at it and goes through all the various sectors, will be in Region 4. All the moneys the Government is spending in Region 4 are not all in the regional budget - the roads, electricity, water, all these different things, what we the Government is doing in Georgetown, the billions of dollars which are being spent. Those are not in the regional budget. Let us not fool ourselves that we are not giving the Region money. The Government of Guyana is spending billions of dollars in Region 4 outside of the regional budget through the Minister of Public Works, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry

of Education, the central Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Housing and Water and the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport. The Government is spending \$600 million for a swimming pool. That is not reflected... it is built in Region 4. Let us dispel this thing that there is some sinister reason this P.P.P./C. Government seems to be starving Region 4. I do not know why it is choosing Region 4, as if Region 4 is some enclave of the P.N.C.R-1G.

Much has been said about the shortage of teachers in the various places. I want to make this point especially about teachers. A few years ago we did not have this problem with not having enough teachers for schools in the Interior, because we did not have schools in the Interior. We have just gotten a very good dose of how P.N.C.R-1G. plans things. It employs the teachers first; it does not build the school, and then it goes to build the school. It will teach the children under the mango tree. We have chosen to build schools in riverine areas; secondary schools in places in this country where for centuries they have never had secondary schools.

We are trying with the limited resources to have these institutions run properly, to bring more and more students to them. We know the importance of giving education to our children. What people miss and some of them should come with me, and Mr. Harripersaud Nokta, who is the Regional Hinterland Coordinator, when we go to the Regions, to see the sacrifices those who are in the job are making. You must go and see how people are walking two hours in the morning to get to school to teach children and walking back in very difficult terrain. They are committed to their jobs. Our position is that if you want to be a teacher and you are on the job, do your job! If you do not like the salary, you can protest, but when you are in the classroom you must teach. That is your job! If you do not like the job, look for another job. We tell this to all Public Servants, everyone who is working in the system. That is what the Minister of Finance is saying all along in simple terms – you are on the job, do the work! When we train a nurse, he or she may be dissatisfied with the salary, we put him or her on the job, when someone comes for patient care he or she must take care of the patient. That is his or her job. That is what we are going to see to it that her or she does. [*Interruption*].

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, would you please tone down and allow us to proceed with our business.

Mr. Lall: I want to repeat that the regional system has been playing a very important role in taking services to people in the various Regions. This year, given the seriousness of the waste disposal problem in our country... Let me make this point first of all, that as a people we have been generating more and more waste, and we have been generating a varied kind of waste. I want to read these two sentences: "The quantity of waste is closely linked to the level of economic development in a country. We have been generating more and more waste." Generally speaking, the wealthier the country it tends to generate more waste. This year a very important aspect of my Ministry's job is to develop a very comprehensive national plan for waste disposal management. We have already decided and agreed to set up a Solid Waste Management Division within the Ministry of Local Government. We have already started to work on a comprehensive programme of waste collection, disposal and management, in various parts of the country. This year as we all know the Haags Bosch Landfill...

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

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Minister be granted another 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Lall: The Haags Bosch Landfill Waste Management Project will come on stream perhaps in six months time. That will of course take care of waste in the city and the fifteen N.D.C.s within Region 4. We have already identified landfill sites which are being constructed in accordance with E.P.A. standards on the Essequibo Coast and on the Corentyne. We have already identified a place in Lethem. We are soon to identify a place in Mahdia. There are some proposals to acquire some properties in Region 3. So before the year is ended we are going to have a very comprehensive system and we will apply the formula which is being used under the Haags Bosch Project to replicate that in many parts of Guyana, so that we create infrastructure now to deal with what is going to be a very, very difficult problem if we allow it to continue as it is.

Of course there are many other aspects in dealing with the waste that are being generated; the manner in which people dispose of them and so on. One of these good days I think Guyanese are going to come to the realisation that these same things they are doing are going to affect them. We saw in the last floods the effect of waste that we tend to throw in all the drains and all these

different things, how they came back to haunt us. Sometimes people just blame the rain and weather, and climate change, but they do not see sometimes we contribute to our own sufferings. That is going to be for this year a very important aspect.

My good friend, Hon. Member Mr. Benn, will also have to assist me because we, at the moment, are paying absolutely no attention to marine waste. There are a lot of hazardous materials which are being thrown into our rivers and across the seawall. At some point in time, as we go into tourism and develop our beaches, especially along the rivers, we are going to find that if we do not start dealing with it – we would be cognisance of marine litter – it is going to affect us as we start, more and more, to develop our tourism prospects along our rivers.

I just want to conclude by saying that I want to urge all Guyanese to take this matter seriously. No one for instance takes into consideration that we dump millions of gallon of waste oil in different parts of our country, willy-nilly – in our backyards, in drains, on the roadside, in rivers and canals. We do not think about it. One of these days it will come back to haunt us.

Another aspect of my Ministry's contribution is to have better management and more effectiveness of the use of our resources in dealing with markets. Markets are very important meeting places for Guyanese. They are places, perhaps other than the sugar industry, which afford employment for more Guyanese than any other single industry in Guyana – the market places in the country. The Government is going to pay special attention to them. It has already built a few tarmacs in several parts of the country to accommodate those people who are plying their goods on the various roadsides, creating traffic hazards and even dangers to themselves. The Government is going to try to accommodate them, and this year it is going to continue with that process. At the moment it is dealing with refurbishing the Port Mourant Market, and it is going to build a brand new market in Mahaica.

Mr. Speaker, I want to encourage my colleagues in the National Assembly to go through the budget, and they will see that it has a lot of good things for our people, in all the ten Regions, through the ten Regional Democratic Councils. Of course, this year through N.D.C.s, through the subvention and rates and taxes collection, which will amount to about \$2 billion, which the various local authorities collect, they are going to spend those moneys in their various communities too. I will not go through those details.

I want to conclude by saying a few words on local government elections. As we all know the Government of Guyana, the ruling P.P.P./Civic, the people of Guyana have been trying for us to deal with all the various outstanding issues comprehensively so we can have local government elections in Guyana. I think we have gone a very far way. The Government has spent a lot of money so far at the level of the Elections Commission to prepare for these elections. I was made to understand that the Elections Commission will be ready very soon to have these elections. While I am very optimistic that we will have those elections this year, I am also very worried about certain statements and pronouncements which were being made by various political parties, which seem to me that they either do not want these elections to be held or they want them to be held in such a way that they will have some political advantage. I do not know how that is going to happen. But it seems to me that parties in the political Opposition are gearing to put up some kind of obstacles for us to have local government elections. I want to urge them to see with our people that we really need renewal at the grass root so we will have the local government system working so come budget time, next year, we will not have this big talk about lack of consultation and so forth. We will be having a very vibrant local government system and through that system we will be able to talk to our communities, get their feelings of what they want and have their demands and desires included in the Budget. Thank you very much.
[Applause]

Mr. Patterson: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I rise to make my contribution to this year's Budget. Before I proceed, let me take this opportunity to welcome our two new Members and hope that they have a productive time in the rest of this Ninth Assembly.

Let me also offer my congratulations to the Hon. Minister of Finance firstly, on the birth of his second child and secondly, on the presentation of his 4th Budget to this National Assembly. Finally, on behalf of the Alliance For Change, I would like to express our appreciation to the hardworking staff within the Ministry of Finance for the long hours which they would have put in towards the preparation of these estimates.

Several Speakers before me have already mentioned the general disappointment of our fellow Guyanese with this Budget. The Government has failed to address the issue of personal or corporate taxes and the lack of initiative to assist in job creation. The dream of any disposable income has now become a nightmare.

A Budget is usually looked forward to by individuals as an indication as to how it will influence their activities in the years ahead. This Budget suggests that we continue as before changing nothing, alleviating none of the pain, suffering and hardships of stakeholders. There is little in this Budget that can be used for strategic planning. Only a few specific industries will be impacted. As such, this Budget will be ignored by most stakeholders. However I cannot ignore all the contents of this Budget.

Thus, permit me to examine more closely specific areas which are under my preview starting firstly with Local Government.

Firstly, I am sure that the residents in Lodge will be very pleased to hear that Haags Bosch landfill will be completed in six months time. I am sure that at that time they will hold a party to celebrate the departure and the closure of the Mandela dump site. So that at least is a comfort for the residents in Lodge.

It is interesting that the last Speaker who is the Chairman of the Local Government Select Committee referred to nothing regarding that community. The Local Government Select Committee has not completed its work. The reasons for its non-completion are well known. It primarily stems from the Government's inflexibility. When it comes to the consideration of the various Bills before the Committee, suggestions from the Opposition Members of that Committee, and even the ABC countries who took the bold step in writing to the Committee with some recommendations were all very interestingly extremely similar to the position that the Opposition Members had. That shows that we were not being unreasonable, and that our proposals are globally accepted. All our suggestions were rejected forthrightly by the Government Members. As always, their position is either their way or no way at all. So currently, it is no way at all.

The very difficult task of fiscal transfer which the Minister has alluded to remains unresolved. As he said we are heading into a Local Government Elections, if it happens this year. After which, the elected citizenry will have no better control of their finances than before the elections.

This year's Budget is no different from last year's or any of the previous three. The N.D.C. will receive their usual subvention or annual gift from the Ministry of Local Government. Such

subventions have no bearing whatsoever on the size, complexity, needs or whatsoever of the N.D.C.s. It is just a lump sum dropped to them - take it or leave it.

With regards to financing of its operations, the Georgetown municipality requires a special mention. To this end, rates and taxes are the lifeblood of a municipality. It has been its largest revenue earner. In his 2007 Budget presentation, the Hon. Minister of Finance promised and I quote:-

"A moderate system of taxation that shall feature uniformity and an equitable tax structure, a revaluation of properties based on market value."

Three years onwards, not a mention! Nothing has been done. No update. As my Hon. Colleague, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, asked last evening: What is the status of all these projects? Where has all this money been spent?

Likewise, the previous speaker, the Hon. Minister of Local Government, also came to this Parliament three years ago in 2007 to assess an eleven year old evaluation list for Georgetown, claiming that because of some procedural matter it was never laid before this Parliament, and by mid 2008, we will have a revised evaluation list. This year, 2010, that evaluation list will be fifteen years old since their last evaluation exercise was completed in 1995.

What the Hon. Minister is not saying to the people is that whenever a new building is open in the city, the Government Ministers, foremost among himself, trip over themselves to get a photo opportunity and pronounce on G.I.N.A. about the progress being made under this Government. What they fail to tell the general public is that the City Council will not be collecting a cent or a dime on all these new buildings. The only taxes that the City Council should collect on these new malls and high raise buildings that they proclaim show progress in our economy, would be the value of the property in 1995.

The Valuation Division which is the agency that is tasked with conducting property assessments does not even possess a vehicle. They are understaffed. In the last ten years hundreds of millions of dollars were uncollected by the City's Treasury. The Government always fails to inform its citizens about the part that they have played in transforming Georgetown from a 'Garden City' to a 'Garbage City.'

I would like to address sports. This year's Budget contains a provision of \$392.5 million for the completion of a swimming pool, construction of an athletic track, upgrading of Colgrain pool, fences, guard huts and the purchasing of sport gears and equipment, to which I say well done. However, the devil has always been in the details.

Firstly, the Minister of Sports, during his presentation, indicated that four sites were proposed and one has been selected for the athletic track. Do not worry Minister. I will not reveal the location of the selected site. I heard you are holding a press conference very shortly, so I do not want to steal your thunder. **[Interjection: Go ahead!]** It is going to be at Uitvlugt. Thank you for the permission.

However what the Hon. Minister has not informed the public at this stage is that in order to make this track a reality, the Government has requested some moneys from the I.A.F., the International Federation of Overseas Athletics. Of course, the I.A.F. being a nice international federation has agreed to advance the monies, but under one condition. The condition is that the title of the proposed site must be vested in the local agency.

Let me say up front Mr. Minister that this requirement is not unique to Guyana. The I.A.F. did not look up transparency; international law has a poor rating which is imposed unilaterally on Guyana. All countries that get financing from the I.A.F. are required to have this provision in place. The simple reason being that in obtaining funding the I.A.F. needs to be confident that the local federation will have unfettered access to these facilities.

For this country to finally get an athletic track, the Government will have to depart from its normal position of 'control-freakism' and vest the title and control of the sport ground in a Non-Governmental Organisation. Judging from the proposed location, I have my reservations. However the proof of the pie will be in the eating. *[Interruption]* You are speaking next so you can tell this Assembly whether the Minister has already asked the I.A.F. to release their money without even vesting and transferring the title. You will have your opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, a topic that I have consistently championed is the designs of these sporting facilities. My investigation revealed that on this occasion the Ministry has sought the input and are accepting the suggestions of the Local Authorities. But this is only after they did their own thing. The normal routine is that they have hired a consultant, paid him, and did the wrong thing.

But on this occasion, they have been accepting the word and the recommendation from the local association. Maybe they have learnt their lesson from the Olympic pool.

Firstly, let me congratulate the Minister of Sports, the Government of Guyana and the Ministry of Finance for finally doing the correct thing by subcontracting the fabrication and installation of the pool to an international firm. However on behalf of the local consultant fraternity, I would like to register our objections to the impression that the Government is giving that there is no local expertise to execute such a project. What would have been a more truthful statement Mr. Minister, is that the Government-favoured consultants do not possess the requisite skills. Three years ago in a similar Budget debate, I informed this House that no one drives piles to build a pool. Three years ago! Check the Hansard!

The interesting thing is that the first comment made by the international consultant that came in was 'Why all these piles?' This is a consultant based in Miami. He says he builds pools in the swamps in the Everglades and never had to drive a pile. All these years in the business, he had never seen so many piles for a swimming pool. We had to bring a consultant to the country for the Ministry to finally accept that over \$150 million of taxpayer's money was wasted. Not a single pile, not that massive pit that almost reached to the bottom of China was needed.

Let me tell you what is even more upsetting in this pool-gate process. What the Minister of Sports failed to inform this House is that even after this pool is built, and it is scheduled to finish in June or July, this was confirmed by the consultant as well, Guyana will still not have a F.I.N.A. certified 50m pool. Mr. Needkumar and a set of Cabinet heavyweight want-to-be's are coming after me and they would then have the opportunity to refute what I am saying. In order to reach F.I.N.A. standards we must have a warm-up pool. That is an international requirement. So in order for any races to be certified F.I.N.A., so as to qualify the timing as recorded by F.I.N.A., we have to have a warm-up pool. This is what we will end up with at the end of June: we will have to divide the pool in half. It will be a 25m pool until a warm-up pool can be built. Half will be from races and half will be for warm up. That is the truth. \$250 million, \$150 million later and that is where you are at.

Even more, the consultant recognising this problem proposed an alternative and Mr. Needkumar can tell you this. He suggested that a 65m long pool be built so that the extra 15m can be used for

warm-ups. Guess what? There is not enough money in the Budget for this extra section. Thankfully the Minister has decided that after the \$150 million has gone to waste, he will not entrust any further money onto this association. If there is ever a case for value for money audit I will like to submit, this is a prime case. In any other country Ministers and Directors of Boards would have lost their jobs. But unfortunately here in Guyana, there is security of tenure.

While on the topic of value for money, permit me to depart briefly from my task ministries just to enquire on the status of the Albatross building on High Street. I am referring to the much hyped Ministry of Labour headquarters which is now abandoned like an unwanted child and handed over to Guyana Revenue Authority (G.R.A.). Not a word was said by the P.P.P./C. Minister responsible for Labour on the status of this project. In the last Budget I informed this House about the *mumbo-jumbo* dealings by the Government on this project, something which both Subject Ministers denied. They further got up to state that the contractor had until March of last year to complete the project. If not, he would be fired, blacklisted and drowned out of business. One year later the contractor is still on the job. It is limping along. The reason for this is that the Ministry was advised that they cannot terminate the contract because the contractor will have excellent grounds for a counterclaim based on the money which they deducted from his contract and diverted elsewhere. They deducted money and denied it, but that is the reason why the contractor is still there. So they have arrived at a win-win situation for all parties. The contractor in his own sweet time, when I say own sweet time, last month's valuation for the contractor barely met \$100,000. Everyone who builds their house knows that a contractor would spend more than that in a month. This is a \$380 million project; they took \$70 million away. He is only doing \$100,000 work per month.

To his credit, the same two men that were there last year are still there. He will complete the building up to roof level and then leave the project. That way the contractor can claim he completed his works to the Ministry's satisfaction. The Ministry can claim that they accepted the work hence no one can call on the Ministry to blacklist the contractor because it is all a mutual win-win situation. Not another word will be stated about the \$70 million which they deducted out of his advance and diverted elsewhere. This is another strong case of value for money or a strong financial audit.

I would like to pronounce on Amerindian affairs. Having listened to the Hon. Minister of Amerindian Affairs' presentation, one got the impression that all is well in the Hinterlands. However the Hon. Minister failed to inform this House on a few things, firstly, on the status of the report on elections of Orealla and Siparuta. The Court on the direction of the Chief Justice (ag), led a ruling that the Minister, and I quote:-

“...must proceed to appoint a Committee to investigate the question raised by the residents' complaints as to whether the applicant, Mr. John King, had the residency requirements to stand for elections for the post of Toshao and whether the Returning Officer had erroneously or improperly removed his name from the list of nominees for the post of Toshao.”

The gentleman had to go to Court to exercise his God-given right to be elected... *[Interruption]* He went to Court to find out whether he had a case or not. If he does not have a case why do you not bring it to us and say he does not have a case. The Court has ordered that a Commission be instituted. We are aware that such a Committee was appointed. They have completed their report and submitted it to the Hon. Minister who promised that by the end of January, 2010 action will be taken on this report. I know the Hon. Member, Mr. Norman Whittaker, has indebt knowledge of that report.

On behalf of the residents of Orealla and Siparuta, we demand that the Minister makes this report public and afford residents the opportunity to select their preferred Toshao.

The Minister of Amerindian Affairs also failed to mention anything about the progress of demarcation of boundaries in 2009. She said that there is money allocated in 2010. We know that there was money allocated in 2009 as well. No mention was made of the fact that the money to continue these surveys was only released to the Lands and Surveys Department in November last year. Seven months after, it was approved by this Parliament. If the Government truly wants to empower these communities, why is there the delay? Of course on this side of the House we know quite well that general elections are drawing near. There will be a title fight and a flurry of activities everyday as the general elections draw closer. G.I.N.A. and the Minister will be on the air handing out land titles. If you are doing such a good job now why wait till then to hand out the titles? Why withhold the money to do the surveys?

Moving quickly onto the Public Procurement Commission, we on the A.F.C. are heartened to hear that none other than the General Secretary of the P.P.P./C., he is not here, has now publicly reaffirmed his commitment that he is desirous of having this Commission established.

8.00 p.m.

The Opposition Members of the Public Accounts Committee (P.A.C.), since I have been a Member, have already submitted our nominees. However on numerous occasions, the Government Members have reported to the P.A.C. that the delay on the Government side for submission of their names was entirely up to a body whom the General Secretary, who is now purporting his desire to move this Commission forward, has direct control. Such a Commission will bring transparency to our procurement.

Mr. Murray mentioned that every year we come to this National Assembly stating that we should have the names of whom the contracts are awarded to so that we could know, like Minister Manzoor Nadir's albatross, how many more projects this particular contractor would have, where the money will be spent, deducted and diverted. But that is not being done.

There has always been a report that says persons can go to the Tender Board and get that information. But all that you get at the Central Tender Board is the names...

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

Mrs. Holder: Mr. Speaker, I move that my colleague be given 5 minutes to conclude his presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Patterson: All the information that you get from the Central Tender Board are the names of the persons who tendered and nothing else. In the housing sector, we in the Alliance for Change has always been supportive, me in particular, of the provision of housing to our citizens. I had said so in my last budget presentation. However this must be done in a lawful manner. I am personally disappointed in the 'unministerial' manner in which my good friend and I hope he will remain my good friend, the Hon. Minister of Housing, behaved in defending himself

yesterday evening. Not only to the fact that he improperly used the budgetary stipend, which is a matter that will be taken up by the A.F.C. shortly...

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, can I ask that the Hon. Member retract the word 'improperly?'

Mr. Speaker: I was worried about that.

Mr. Patterson: I retract the word 'improperly'...used the budgetary stipend in an improper manner.

Mr. Speaker: Is that not the same thing?

Mr. Patterson: I thought the objection was to the word 'improperly', I said 'improper'. It is two different words. He has not provided to this Parliament any details of this proposed land acquisition other than statements from the Minister of Agriculture who is frontloading for Guysuco.

Mr. Speaker: Ask the question and it will go on the Order Paper as soon as you ask it. Sorry, I did not mean to interrupt you.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Speaker, this question was asked before: 'Where are the lands being bought and at what cost?'

Mr. Speaker: There is a formal procedure of question asking.

Mr. Patterson: Sir I thought you were advising me to ask the question. I just did.

Mrs. Holder: No, he means an official question.

Mr. Patterson: Okay, very well. In closing, I would like to express our disappointment in the 2010 Budget. Maybe, next year's Budget will bring some relief to our people. Unfortunately 2010... [**Interjection:** Then you will say that it is an Elections Budget] ...they need it. Election year or not, the people need some relief. Maybe, next year's budget will bring some relief to our people. Unfortunately this 2010 Budget does not. I thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Member. We will take our usual suspension at this time.

Assembly suspended accordingly at 8.05 p.m.

Assembly resumed accordingly at 8.37 p.m.

Mr. Neendkumar: Mr. Speaker, let me first of all say that I am very happy to see you back in your position and I would like to join my other colleagues in welcoming the two new Members of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members of this House, I rise to support the innovative 2010 Budget as presented by our Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh. Further, let me compliment him and his highly competent staff on a job well done.

The Sports fraternity is indeed heartened by the 2010 Budget allocation for sports in this country. The Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, announced that the Government has allocated \$395.5 million to upgrade sports infrastructure in 2010. The budget allocation clearly demonstrates Government's commitment to the completion of the Olympic-sized swimming pool in 2010. Further, the Colgrain Swimming Pool will also be upgraded. The lawn tennis and squash courts will be fully constructed and the athletics fraternity will finally get a synthetic athletics track. This year, over \$100 million has been allocated to the National Sports Commission (N.S.C.) to develop sports opportunities countrywide.

President Bharrat Jagdeo must be recognised for his tremendous contribution to the development of sports facilities in Guyana. The Guyana National Stadium at Providence is indeed a world-class facility that all Guyanese are proud of. The construction of the Olympic-sized swimming pool at Liliendaal will be a monumental achievement. Under this Government, the swimming fraternity was given the opportunity to use the once privileged pools such as Colgrain, Castellani and Watooka swimming pools.

It also cannot be denied that it was the People Progressive Party Civic administration that introduced swimming at the Inter-Guyana Games, thus giving our young swimmers the opportunity to compete internationally. The entire world and the Caribbean in particular, rallied behind the Caribbean athletes at the last Olympic Games in 2009. The Jamaican athlete Usain Bolt's magical runs inspired and motivated people all around the world. This P.P.P./C. Government has announced and has made monies and resources available for the construction of a state-of-the-art Athletics track. Thousands of students in schools are participating in schools' athletics programmes. Our athletes' dream to train and perform on a synthetic track will become

a reality. The school programme must now promote sport activities in schools aggressively. Our students are now given the opportunity to write a sports-related subject for Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate (CSEC) Examinations. This combination of academics and sports will give rise to more quality sports personalities in our country.

The establishment of the racquet centre at Woolford Avenue will be a tremendous achievement for sports development. Approximately 10,000 students will be given the opportunity to train and compete at the centre. In addition to the two lawn tennis courts, two warm up courts will be available. The Squash courts will be the best in Guyana. Our squash players are among our top sports achievers in this country. This new facility will attract more players from all walks of life to play squash. Table tennis and badminton can also find a home at the racquet centre.

The day that the cries for better sports facilities becomes a thing of the past, are eminent. The major tasks of sports administrators will be to design and execute development programmes that introduce and develop a positive attitude towards the benefit of sports.

The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports is collaborating with several other ministries to make a significant impact on social issues in Guyana through sports. The alliance with the Ministry of Health is developing rapidly and our people's awareness of the necessity for a healthy lifestyle is quickly growing. An end to the promiscuous behaviour will certainly lead to stronger family ties. The recognition of the role of the family will lead to less single parent families and giving our children the opportunity to grow up with both parents thus, improving mental and physical fitness and readiness to face the challenges of life with discipline and morality.

Sports give rise to personal and social discipline and sports personalities are amongst the most popular and influential people in the world. Thus, it is necessary to recognise sports as a path to peace and social harmony.

A review of the year 2009 reveals many accomplishments including the first national female football team to represent Guyana at an Inter-Guyana Games. Our sports programmes that focus on communities and schools throughout Guyana attracted approximately 20,000 youths. A sports activity in the lower Berbice area attracted in excess of 200 participants and a further 500 spectators and team supporters were the first of that magnitude in the Berbice River. We must be

thankful that the Budget allocated over \$100 million to develop sports opportunities countrywide this year.

The Budget allocated \$392,500,000 for capital works during the year 2010. Hence, for the completion of the swimming pool, there is \$274 million, provision for a synthetic track - \$95 million, rehabilitation of Colgrain Pool - \$5.8 million, purchase of sports gears - \$8.8 million, purchase of gym equipment - \$700 million. Dr. Ashni Singh, we must tell you a special thanks for this.

The year 2010 will be a revelation of success for sports in this country. While some Members from the Opposition were critical and failed to recognise the positives in the Budget, others were more reasonable in this debate.

In the *Stabroek News* on 11th February 2010, Mr. Christopher Ram wrote:

“The Minister attributed the dramatic turnaround in the second half of 2009 almost entirely to sugar, the second crop of which grew by 23.2% over the corresponding period in 2008 and a huge 80% increase over the first crop. Rice production at 360 tonnes was 9.2% higher than 2008. The heart to measure other crops sector by 5.8% and gold by 14.7%.

It may mean little to the single mother, the children at school, the small farmer in rural Guyana or youths in urban Guyana, but the message in the Budget was all positive – a strong balance of payment surplus of \$US234.4 million – the highest level of international reserves ever, an appreciation in the rate of the Guyana dollar for the first time in fifteen years and the lowest rate of inflation in eight years.”

We must congratulate this Government. It is Mr. Christopher Ram who wrote this in the *Stabroek News*.

I would like to explain that during the month of January, Minister Dr. Frank Anthony held meetings with several national sports associations and federations to discuss the way forward. We had meetings with the Guyana Amateur Swimming Association, Athletics Association, Guyana, Professional Boxing Board of Control, Guyana Lawn Tennis Association, Guyana Netball Association, and the Guyana Volleyball Federation.

I want to tell you that after careful discussion and consideration with the Guyana Swimming Association of which the President is a full-fledged member of the Standing Committee which meets every week to discuss the construction of the pool, we decided to offer the contract to build the pool to Marta Pool – the contractors who are tied with F.I.N.A. and the people who are presently building pools for the London Olympic Games which are upcoming.

Mr. Tiffany came to Guyana and showed us the whole breakdown of the construction of the pool. He guaranteed us that upon completion of the pool we will get a ten-year warranty and international certification.

I want to ask Mr. Patterson where he got his information from. **[Mr. Patterson: Confidential]**
It cannot be confidential. That is why they kicked you out of the Association!

I must tell you that the driving of stakes for the pools was the decision of the engineers and that was carefully decided by the Committee. In respect to warming up, I must tell you that the Castellani Pool where we will be having the Goodwill Games and the Inter-Guyana Games...
[Mrs. Backer: That is for warm up.] I do not know who wants warming up. If you want warming up, Mrs. Backer, you have to go get it somewhere else. Not here!

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that we are ready for the construction of these things. We already have a Draft Sports Policy. I must assure this Hon. House that I shared copies of that Draft with Members of the People's National Congress Reform and the A.F.C. Let me assure the National Assembly that we are presently interviewing persons who will be given the task to produce the final product.

The Ministries of Education and Culture, Youth and Sports set up a Special Committee which is overlooking planning and organising sports activities in school. Further, the Ministries of Health and Culture, Youth and Sports are working in close collaboration to improve physical activity through sports to make sure that our people participate fully in physical fitness.

As a geographic Member of Parliament with direct responsibility for Region 4, it cannot be denied that there are tremendous developments in this region. As we peruse the Budget allocation for Region 4, we can see that from 2001 when \$1,169,423,000 was allocated for current expenditure, that sum has increased annually. In 2010, a total of \$2,327,493,000 is

allocated. Hence to date, Government would have spent a grand total of \$16,700,000,000 in Region 4. This shows clearly how this Government is investing.

I must tell you that is why the P.N.C.R. has a Regional Chairman there, but the Councillors that they have, do not support him. At the statutory meeting on Saturday last, it was so shameful that when Mr. Kwame McKoy called on him to discuss the issue, he was forced to walk away.

These sums of moneys clearly reveal that the citizens of Region 4 are living much better and healthier under the P.P.P./C. Government. I visited all the Health Centres in Region 4 and I am proud to report that I was amazed to see how the Health Workers are working to provide better health care delivery to the citizens there.

As for the schools, we must say that the quality of education is improving. Let us look at the results of our students. **[Injection: Failures]** Only those who are programmed to talk about failures will talk about failures. Those who are reasonable and are following the development will recognise that the youth and students of today, some of whose parents are sitting on the other side of this House, are doing better with better opportunities available to them.

Gone are the days when you could have seen people fetching water on go-carts and walking miles to get water. Our people in Region 4 are getting water in their homes and yards. Our youths do not have to line up for Labour Exchange Cards to get jobs or pensioners do not have to do means test or acquire party cards to get their pensions. Our people can buy their own food stuff in abundance. Never before in the history of this country have we seen so many supermarkets. Gone are the days of the Knowledge Sharing Institute (K.S.I.).

When we look at capital investment in Region 4, we are indeed proud. Look at the numerous roads and bridges in our region. Today those donkey carts, bridges and mud dams are replaced by heavy duty bridges and better roads.

This caring and responsible Government at a national level must be proud to report that our people can drive from Georgetown to Timehri on perfect roads. This main thoroughfare is illuminated with bright lights at nights. As we traverse from Georgetown to Rosignol, the roads are perfect and the bright street lights make us feel that we are reaching for greater heights.

The success of the P.P.P./C. Government goes beyond the expectations of the average Guyanese. Today persons in the Diaspora are rearing to return not only to visit friends and family or for holidays, but they are making a genuine effort to return to their Motherland. They are seeing that better days are here and that progress and prosperity are guaranteed under the P.P.P./C.

Under the year in review, the Government spent \$394,407,000 to maintain and further develop the drainage and irrigation system. Hence, our farmers and residents are much more comfortable living in Region 4.

I must say something more about the athletic track. I would like to refer to it to tell you that our Minister held a meeting with the Guyana Athletic Association (G.A.A.) and at that meeting, we put it clearly to them our position in respect of the construction of a synthetic track. That is, the Government has decided to put \$US800, 000 into the construction. The entire amount is catered for in the Budget.

In our discussion with the G.A.A., we said that they would have \$120,000 and we said to them that the money is to source equipment so that we could strengthen development. The collaboration with the G.A.A. and the Ministry will help to provide better facilities for sportsmen and women. I challenge Mr. Patterson to give me his source.

I would like to say that I listened to some comments in respect to Region 10 and I was surprised when I heard... we have some teachers in that region. When you look at the results and some of the warning letters which they received from the Ministry of Education, this is what was revealed. In the month of September:

- Lateness - 61 times
- Medical leave -1 time
- Unauthorised leave – 2 times
- Minutes late – 61 times

In the month of October:

- Medical Leave – 14 times
- Unauthorised leave – 6 times
- UPA (Urgent Private Affairs) – 1 time

- Minutes late 250 times

In the month of November:

- Medical Leave - 32 times
- Unauthorised leave – 1 time
- UPA – 0 times
- Minutes late – 400 times

Total – Medical Leave - 48 times

- Unauthorised leave – 7 times
- UPA -3 times
- Minutes Late -711 times

I notice that there are some persons coming around and showing a bottle with some water that they brought from the Creek. At McKenzie High School there are three 500 gallon tanks and two water dispensers so the students are well taken care of. [Ms. Kisson: Licshous does not have water!] And the people at Licshous have the same thing – three 500 gallon tanks and two dispensers.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member this is not a shouting arena.

Mr. Neendkumar: In Region 10, the Government through the European Union (E.U.) ventured into a ten-year programme. Five private advisory business agencies were established; 5,500 used the business libraries; three new business advisory services were set up, forty-nine entrepreneurs benefited from development classes, \$3.3 billion was invested in Region 10 over the last ten years, \$732 million was allocated to small and medium enterprises, 3,095 jobs were created over the last ten years.

Infrastructure rehabilitation in Region 10 revealed that \$612.7 million was spent, ten public buildings were upgraded, eight community groups benefited from infrastructure support, 8.1 kilometres of agriculture roads were completed, eight economic structures were rehabilitated or built, wharfing facilities were rehabilitated and an industrial lubricator was set up.

When we look at the development in Region 10, it was not surprising that the P.P.P./Civic won the seat comprehensively and was awarded. I must say thanks for that. When the Chairman of the Region took us to court and we won again, we must realise that it is the performance of the P.P.P./C. Government.

In conclusion Mr. Speaker, allow me to once again congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh and on his behalf and all members of this House, encourage us to work together for a better Guyana. Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you very much, Sir. My first duty is to welcome you back. I am happy that you are healthy. My second obligation is to welcome the new additions to the National Assembly and I hope that the long hours we have spent here will not stymie their support and I hope that they come back re-energised.

You were not here yesterday, but many Members of the National Assembly wished me Happy Birthday and I wish to say thank you to those people and of course, to Mdm. Deputy Speaker who presided and facilitated the announcements.

I wish to begin by congratulating the Hon. Minister of Finance, a person with whom I am familiar for a number of years. We attended the same school – Queens College – a school of great distinction. He was my Head Prefect and I am well acquainted with his level of scholarship and his scholastic achievement. I wish to announce in this National Assembly that this Budget is a representation of his scholarship and his scholastic achievement.

It is regrettable however that I have sat on this side and listened to his hard work, diligence and competence being denigrated in the manner that it has been by Hon. Members of this House.

We must recognise certain facts in the Budget. I have no difficulty with politicians and parliamentarians who stand to criticise and voice their parties' position. I do have a fundamental difficulty when they will stand up repeatedly, one after the other, and announce that the Budget has nothing for this country.

9.02 p.m.

When the Budget says that it allocates public spending in the sum of \$146 billion. Something must be right. The Opposition is made up of many of my friends and persons of high intellectual integrity. I sought long and hard and attempted to find some type and degree of rationale as to why they would take what seemingly are, unreasonable and irrational positions. My own personal view is that it has to be that we on this side were socialised differently as a political party. We came from a different political background and our perception of Government and governance is radically different from the People's National Congress.

I will demonstrate with practical examples about what I am speaking. We on this side for example, believe that development comes at a particular price and democracy is an indispensable ingredient to development. We have always argued that.

What is the record on the other side? As you said today in your article Sir, from 1968-1985, they rigged every election in this country.

Mr. Speaker: Did I say that?

Mr. Nandlall: That is stated in your article today.

Mr. Speaker: Did I say that?

Mr. Nandlall: The point I am making is that I have to find some rationale to explain the different approaches. How can they look at a Budget like this and see that there is nothing in it? They see development. They see how our programmes are so radically different from theirs that they cannot enmesh. Take for example the manner in which Parliament is functioning from 1992 to now. You will concede that Parliament has never functioned in the manner that it is functioning now. Look at our Committee Divisions. We have Standing Committees that sits regularly. They are presided over by Members of the Opposition. Ministers go there, Public Servants are summoned there and they have to answer with respect to the discharge of their functions.

Look at the transparency we have in this country. Regularly we are hearing that we are not transparent, but who are we hearing it from? We are hearing it from a party that when they were in power for twenty years, they did not submit an Auditor General's Report to this National Assembly.

We have been accused repeatedly over these debates that we have not consulted and that this Budget apparently was hatched at Dr. Singh's office by himself and staff. But every single day we see in the newspapers the Ministers of this Government meeting with the members of the public. We see Minister Priya Manickchand meeting with the pensioners, we see Minister Robert Persaud meeting with the farmers, we see Minister Kellawan Lall meeting with the R.E.O.s, and we see Dr. Leslie Ramsammy meeting with the health workers. Every single day there is consultation. Our Government and our President takes the entire Cabinet into the streets, villages and towns to talk with the people at regular intervals. That is the consultation that we undertake and the Budget is an end result of that process.

We do not believe in sitting with Mr. Murray in a room and say we are consulting on the Budget. That is not the type of consultations that we believe in. We believe in consulting with the people and that is why they have returned us to power continuously since 1992, in elections that have been certified to be free and fair. Of course we will be returning again in 2011.

The Hon. Minister in his Budget commenced his presentation by first situating Guyana in a global context. It is no secret that we live in a global village and what happens outside of Guyana has a direct correlation and consequence to what transpires in this country. The Minister in a commendable fashion outlines what is the position globally. The Minister made reference to the economic decline that is going on internationally. He outlined that there was decline in growth in all of the major economies in the world. In England, Europe, North America and the Caribbean, there was consistent decline in economic activities, rise in unemployment and devaluation in the dollar as well as high inflation rate. In fact, the Budget points out that the only two economies that recorded any substantial and recognisable growth were the economies of China and India.

It is against that background that we have to look at the growth recorded by Guyana. Last year we grew at the rate of 2.3% and that must be commendable. Every other country in the Caribbean if we are to look at the Caribbean alone, recorded a contraction in their economy. In fact, only Trinidad and Tobago recorded positive growth and that is because their economy is so tied to the oil industry. Every other country economy in the Caribbean had to go to the International Monetary Fund (I.M.F.) to get monetary injections to keep their economy afloat and to keep inflation at an acceptable level. And in the face of that, we recorded a positive economic growth for four consecutive years.

In 2005 when 60% of our economy was destroyed by the floods, that was the only year in about twelve years that we did not record economic growth.

We also recorded a growth in our Gross Domestic Product and that was as a result of an increase in sugar and rice production. In fact, in the rice industry we recorded the second highest growth in the history of the industry. The highest I think was recorded in the 1995/1996 crop. In the mining sector we excelled in gold. We declined in bauxite and diamond, but at an aggregate level, we recorded a positive growth rate in that industry as well. In the livestock sector we recorded an increased productivity. There was growth recorded in the manufacturing, transport and communication sectors. How is it that we are able to record growth in these various sectors under this bad management of this economy we keep hearing about from the other side? I am saying that they can criticise us, but they must give us give us credit where credit is due.

As a result, we recorded a balance of payment surplus of over US\$235 million. This surplus has caused the Bank of Guyana to increase its external reserve to US\$628 million - the highest level that we recorded in our country's history. We were able to achieve all of this whilst we kept inflation rate at a manageable level of 3.6%. Inflation sky rocketed as I said in almost every other major economy in the world. We were also able to maintain a stable interest rate while facilitating at all the commercial banks, an increased ceiling for mortgages so that our working and poor people of this country can access loans to build their houses. Against all of that, we were able to pay across the board a public sector increase in salaries at a rate of 6% last year.

The Budget also outlines our development agenda for the year 2010. We will continue to be a leading force in the international arena to establish a new model of Low Carbon Economic Development. We are leading the world in this regard. It is public knowledge that we have signed a historic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of Norway. When this MoU is implemented, Guyana is expected to receive approximately US\$250 million by the year 2015. Although we recognise the importance of diversifying our economy and will continue to strive to do so, we recognise the importance of the traditional sector and the fact that they continue to form the foundation of our economy. We pledge to implement the necessary policies to improve and modernise these sectors in order to make them more productive. We will continue to work in the sugar industry. In this regard, approximately \$10 billion will be invested

in this industry this year to modernise land preparation, to increase mechanisation, modernise the factories and to complete and make fully operational the Skeldon Sugar Factory.

In addition, the Enmore packaging plant is expected to be completed this year. This plant is expected to enable GuySuCo to supply some ten thousand pounds of packaged sugar to CARICOM, the United States and the United Kingdom.

The Government Sir, will continue to work in the rice industry so that we can continue to enjoy the high levels of production enjoyed over the last year. The Budget says that a new seed facility will be built at No. 56 Village, Berbice and a new seed dryer will be purchased for the Burma Research Station. Further, additional drying facilities will be constructed in Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, at Ann Regina, Cane Grove, Bath and Lesbeholden.

In the mining sector, the Government will continue to work with the gold and diamond miners in the framework of the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) to ensure the continued prosperity of this industry. Importantly, we have targeted Lethem for some serious development this year. This year it is known now that with the opening of the Takatu Bridge, there is an increased degree and level of commerce in the Lethem area. The Lethem industry estate will be completed this year and we will be laying a fibre optic cable along the Linden to Lethem roadway all the way to Providence.

I listened to the Hon. Member, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, who criticised the Government by saying that the Government is laying this cable so as to allow certain friends of the Government to get the work. At the same time, the Hon. Member, Mr. Aubrey Norton, accused the Government of not giving it to the private sector. I do not understand how we can satisfy the Opposition. The A.F.C. is saying that we are keeping it to give to our friends and the Hon. Member Mr. Aubrey Norton is accusing us of doing it ourselves and thereby not giving it to the private sector. [Interjection by Mr. Patterson] The point I am making Mr. David Patterson is that the Opposition is in confusion.

Presently, there is a team of consultants from India who are here in Guyana doing a feasibility study for the construction of a deep water harbour at Berbice River. If that comes through, there will be a road that will be built from Lethem to New Amsterdam that will open an entirely new area of our country. We recognise that Brazil is an important economic partner for this country.

Brazil is a land luck country. [**Interjection:** No! The Northern part of Brazil] The Northern part of Brazil, my apologies. Brazil is so huge. That huge part of Brazil, the Northern part of the country is a land luck country and if they wish to access the Atlantic Ocean, they have to traverse Venezuela. If Guyana provides them with that access, we would have an avalanche of trade coming from that area.

The Government continues to build the infrastructure of this country and in this year, approximately 600 community road projects will be completed in all the regions. Street lighting projects along the East Bank Public Road, Anna Regina, West Demerara Public Road from New Road to Crane, Winsor Forest to Dekinderen and Zeelught to Vergenoegen will be completed this year. 35 kilometres road will be constructed in Black Bush Polder. Major rehabilitation works will commence on Sheriff Street to Mandela Avenue and/or the access road leading to the Cheddi Jagan International Airport. In addition, designs for extending the four lane highway on the East Bank Demerara up to Grove will commence. Works are expected to be done at the Demerara Harbour Bridge at a cost of some \$700 million.

All of these are capital works project designed to build the infrastructure of this country and yet we are accused of presenting a Budget to this Assembly that has nothing for the people of this country. And that we are presenting a Budget that does not offer people employment. Who are going to build all these roads, bridges and street lights? We are not going to import people. It is the people of this country who are going to get employment through all these projects.

Another significant achievement is the certification of Ogle as an international Airport. Today we have almost daily flights between Suriname and Guyana at the Ogle Airport and discussions are afoot to bring Liat here to fly from the Caribbean to Ogle. Yet we are doing nothing for the development of this country. The Budget lists a number of aerodromes and airstrips that have to be rehabilitated this year. Yet your Leader, Mr. Ramjattan, sees nothing in the Budget for the people of this country.

Since 1992 to now, this Government has consistently invested almost one third of budgetary allocations in the Social Sector. This year again is no different. We believe that the best and greatest assets to this country are the peoples of this country. Every single year we invest heavily to develop them, improve their lives and develop their welfare. That is why in the Education

sector last year, we spent \$20.3 billion. This year we will spend \$21.4 billion in the Education sector alone.

In the Health Sector last year, we spent \$12.8 billion. This year we will spend \$13.3 billion. The Hon. Member, Dr. Bheri Ramsaran, did an excellent presentation and of course the Minister of Health dealt with all the hospital and health facilities that have been built last year and that are going to be built this year. I do not have to get into the details of that.

I now come to the Housing Sector, a sector that was dormant and non-existent under the P.N.C.R. In fact, they closed the Housing Ministry. One of the first things we did in this country when we took power in 1992 was to re-establish a Ministry of Housing and to aggressively pursue a national housing policy. So far how many houses lots you have distributed from 1992 to now Minister Irfaan Ali?

Mr. Ali: More than 90, 000.

Mr. Nandlall: More than 90, 000 house lots have been distributed by the P.P.P./Civic administration from 1992 to now. \$2.8 billion is allocated again this year for the housing sector. Over 5,500 house lots are expected to be allocated. 3,750 titles will be distributed this year. The Government has worked out an arrangement with the commercial banks as I said which allow for these house lots allotters to access low income loans to build their houses. This facility is available at almost all of the commercial banks.

Improvements are expected to be done to the road networks and the water distribution areas in these housing schemes; specifically in Anna Catherina, Plantation Schoonord and Hope Estate. We will see this year the construction of new sites for housing schemes at the following locations: Block 8 Tuschen, Section EE Non-Pareil, Ordnance Fort Lands, No.76 Village, 5-miles Bartica, Ameila's Ward, etc. Over 1,500 house lots are going to be distributed at these sites. Yet we are accused of doing nothing for the people of this country.

In the Water sector, \$3.6 billion will be spent in this sector this year. This will allow for the completion of treatment plants in Lima, Cotton Tree, Vergenoegen, Central Ruimveldt and Corriverton. In addition, a number of services have been listed for connection upgrades and

metering, for example, Bartica, Leguan, Patentia, Soesdyke, Herstelling, Nabaclis, Craig, Prospect and Covent Garden. Yet we are doing nothing for the people of this country.

The Opposition cannot see this? Compliment us and then you can still criticise. These are the facts. You must remain credible in the eyes of the Guyanese people. In the Hinterland communities, potable water supply will come to these places: Capoey, Mainstay, Surama, Toka, Tiger Pond, Saint Cuthbert's Mission and Paramakatoi.

If you were doing a good job when you all were in Government, we could have been spending money elsewhere, but we are still engaged after seventeen years in supplying the basic utility like water to the people of this country.

Look at the Justice sector. Mr. Ramjattan likes to speak about the development between the Justice sector and development. I acknowledge that nexus as an important one. I looked at the 1992 Budget of the P.N.C.R. and not a single cent was allocated to the Justice sector by Minister Carl Greenidge for that year. We are spending \$1.4 billion in the Justice sector this year. When the P.N.C.R. was in power under the doctrine of party paramountcy, they abolished the Privy Council. We have established the Caribbean Court of Justice as our final Court of Appeal. All of this is remedial work we have to do. We have inherited a judiciary that was tainted by political influence.

Today we have a judiciary that is independent and free to rule and actually rules against the Government on a regular basis because the Judges feel that enjoyment. Today we do not fly the P.P.P./C. flag in the Court of Appeal compound; you all flew the P.N.C.R. flag in the Court of Appeal compound. Today we have a High Court in Essequibo, a Registry in Essequibo, a High Court in Berbice and we are building a Family Court in Georgetown for the first time in the history of this country.

My friend, Mr. Ramjattan, says he does not see the Court and the Court is a three storey building in the Court compound. I do not want to cast aspersions on the man's optical ability. We have established a Commercial Court because we see that commerce and development and litigation are linked. We also have a mediation centre that we have established. Mr. Basil Williams and Mrs. Clarissa Reihl are Members of that centre. It has not come on stream... **[Mr. B.**

Williams: Which centre?] ...the mediation centre, you are a certified mediator. You know how many cases are disposed of there at a short period of time.

This year we will be constructing a Court at Lethem, Charity, and Lenora. We are going to do back the Courts there.

The point I am making is that all of the 63 pages of the Budget which spans development, traces what we did last year and what we plan to do this year. But then speaker after speaker on the Opposition stand and they repeat like a mantra, the Budget has nothing for the people of this country. My point is that you are free to criticise, but you must do so constructively and with creditability because you are an important set of people for the development of this country.

[Interjection by Mr. B. Williams] I do not wish to regale you, Mr. Williams.

I have no hesitation in conclusion to commend this Budget to this National Assembly. I thank you very much, Sir. [Applause]

Mr. Ninvalle: Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening in this August House to support the 2010 Budget presented by my capable colleague, the Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh. Yet again Dr. Singh and his industrious staff have produced a document that will allow Guyana to remain resolutely on course and foster development for our human and physical resources whereby all Guyanese can truly be proud of to be a Guyanese. I also take this opportunity to congratulate the two Members of this House who were recently sworn in and to encourage them to contribute of their best efforts in this Assembly.

The Hon. Member, Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, Dr. Frank Anthony, dealt extensively on Youth and Culture. So this evening my attention will be focused mainly on the discipline of sport. We in the P.P.P./C. feel that Sport is an effective tool to develop the youths for nation building. With this in mind, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports continues to give leadership to the Sport sector in our country.

We have a very comprehensive programme for the development of sports in Guyana which includes the development of sports infrastructure, the revitalisation of community sports and school sports.

We have seen the rapid development of sports infrastructure in Guyana. The National Stadium at Providence, which some in the Opposition Members claim was a white elephant, is now the pinnacle of national and international sporting activities.

Last year the stadium played host to national and international cricket, international and local football, national hockey and athletics. In addition, we were able to host workshops and various conferences including a national conference on the preparation of cricket pitches run by an International Cricket Council consultant, Mr. Andy Atkinson. This workshop is already benefiting many of the cricket grounds across Guyana as the knowledge acquired is put to use on making better pitches.

The National Stadium is now recognised as the premiere outdoor entertainment venue. This is evident by the many entertainment activities held there almost on a monthly basis. In 2010, we have already a long list of events that will be taking place at Stadium including an International One day cricket, Twenty20 cricket and International Rugby.

The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports has commenced the development of a Racquet Centre at Woolford Avenue. This centre when fully completed will house several lawn tennis courts, training areas for lawn tennis, two squash courts and an area set aside for badminton and table tennis. In addition to this, we will develop a facility that will house two conference halls, a library and a cafeteria.

We in the Ministry have consulted with the sporting community and they welcome the development of these facilities. It would create more opportunities for the training of young people. In fact, the facility is strategically located in a school district and all of the children from Queens College, Richard Ishmael Secondary School, the Governmental Technical Institute, Stella Maris Primary, North Georgetown Secondary School and St Joseph High School would be some of the direct beneficiaries. Of course any person who would like to learn will be welcomed to any of these facilities.

9.32 p.m.

When I hear this skepticism from the Hon. Member, Ms. Africo Selman, who questioned why a squash court is being built, I am left to wonder how sincere this Hon. Member and those she

represent are in the development of our young people. We in the P.P.P./C. will not apologise for progress because we know that the Guyanese people are fully behind us. I am not sure who is behind the Opposition. Perhaps it would be timely to remind the Hon. Member, Ms. Selman, that since 2000, a squash player has won the sportswoman award five times. Maybe the Hon. Member needs to be enlightened to the fact that from 2005 to 2009 Guyana won five consecutive Caribbean titles and seventeen overall team titles since 1981. Maybe she needs to be reminded that with more facilities there will be more opportunities for our youth to play and Guyana will produce many more champions like Ms. Nicolette Fernandes.

In a response to the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, I wish to say five things about our swimming pool:

1. The construction of the pool was advertised in the papers.
2. Construction was awarded through the central board. The local engineers decided that piling was necessary. I am asking the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, to produce the expert consultant or any report that say otherwise. We know that we are having value for money. The international contractors have agreed that they will build a F.I.N.A. certified pool. I will invite the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, in a few months time, if he could swim, to come to the Olympic size F.I.N.A. certified pool.

When completed, this pool will allow our swimmers to train in a world class facility. A game that was never played in Guyana would be possible. This game is water polo. I look forward to the day when Guyana fields a team to play international water polo. This facility will also open up the possibilities for synchronised swimming and I am sure that the swimming Association will soon prepare a team in that area. If all of this is not enough, we will be able to host international swimming competitions in Guyana. This is the kind of progress associated with the P.P.P./C.

In keeping with Government's thrust and commitment to solidify and collaborative work with the private sector, supportive groups and individuals, the Ministry shifted its focus to more community related activities. This is where persons at the grassroots level can be greater beneficiaries and more active participants in sports and games.

We know that physical activities can be beneficial to health, thus it would be prudent to promote such activities and target both urban and rural folks. The Ministry has forged partnership with many associations and companies to concretise this. One prime example is the 10-10 Softball Cricket Competition. This countrywide tournament has nearly 600 teams participating and by extension, over 5,000 participants.

Apart from the players, we need to consider the involvement of organisers, local sponsorship, supporters, etc. and the obvious spinoff benefits. It is plain to see the impact that will be created. The 10-10 Cricket Competition has piggy-backed on the Ministry's Inter-Block Football programme which is now a prominent fixture on our annual calendar of events. Last year as promised, our programmes were able to roll smoothly into Berbice thanks partly to the construction of the marvellous structure we call the Berbice Bridge. We now have Inter-Block Football in all three counties of this country. The Ministry also partnered with Banks DIH for the *Guinness Greatest* of the Street Football Competition. Recently, the Ministry has invited the Guyana Football Federation to collaborate with us to produce a better Inter-Block Football programme in 2010.

We have extended our partnership to both the professional and amateur boxing associations for the realisation of Friday Night Fights, which is basically a boxing event that has both professional and amateur fighters appearing at the same time. It is held once a month and will allow our amateur fighters the much needed exposure and fighter experience which is critical to the upliftment of their skills and competency as boxers. While we are on the topic of amateur boxing, a sport that has won Guyana its only Olympic medal and in due time, will repeat that feat, and let me inform this House that the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports has directed that the National Coach be employed by the Ministry. This Coach will traverse every inch of our 83,000 square miles to seek out and nurture these talents. The employment of the Coach will impact heavily on our decentralising programme and give the impetus to the reactivation of some now defunct clubs and gyms.

Mr. Speaker, last year in my presentation, I stated that our Inter-Block community based activities would move from being football oriented to embrace other sports disciplines. I am pleased to inform this Hon. House that volleyball and basketball have been added and that the success story and enthusiasm that have been demonstrated by both participants and supporters

implore that we include more disciplines this year. Inter-Block Volleyball, although in its rudimentary stage, has been a success story in Region 9, where the Ministry held its inaugural competition last year where both the males and females participated. What is important to note is that throughout the three year life of our Inter-Block activities, there has not been one single reported case of participants sustaining injuries, neither has there been reports of any crowd and participant indiscipline - a factor which speaks highly of the players, spectators and organisers in various communities.

Last year saw a total of 58 schools from across Guyana benefiting from a collaboration of the Ministry of Sports and the Ministry of Education. 28 teachers participated in a five-day Level One Course ran by the Argentine Volleyball Coach, Mr. Belmon, and another five-day course, this time in the field of Table Tennis was conducted by Mr. Johnson of the National Sports Commission.

This Level One Teacher Certificate Course was attended by 30 teachers from a similar number of schools. It is clear to see that with such collaboration, the teachers who nurture the minds of our future are being better equipped.

In 2010, the two Ministries will join forces as it has been recognised that most of the 168 students writing the Caribbean Examination Council Physical Examination and Sports Subject last year, choose Cricket as their practical test. Flaws in the technique have been detected, which has prompted the staging of a cricket workshop to be held next month.

Late in 2009, the Ministry recommenced weekly meetings with sports associations with the aim of among other things, getting first-hand and updated information from them. These meetings are important as it allows the Ministry to properly gauge the Association. It also makes us cognisant of the specific needs and places us in a better position to offer support.

To date, we have met with several associations which pave the way for a more inclusive relationship. There was a time in Guyana when the game of chess was played by many, even statesmen. The years following that saw the literal dissolution of the chess body and a loss of interest and participation. More recently, through an initiative taken by Dr. Frank Anthony, there has been positive fruit bearing action with the Ministry of Education and an action team resulting in the resuscitation of the Chess Federation and the playing of chess in schools and clubs.

The Five Stage Cycle Road Race, a joint venture between the Ministry and the Cycling Federation, stand poised to become the premier cycling venture in the English-speaking Caribbean. The inaugural events in 2008 saw participants from less than four countries. In 2009, the number jumped to seven and we expect many more during 2010.

Another success story we have is the Inter-Guyana Games which has a staggered approach and we also have our days of interaction which were successfully held across Guyana.

In concluding, I stand here confident that our Sporting sector is in capable hands. Of course there will be hurdles, but expect us to produce an amalgam of commitments, astuteness, determination and the foresight to once again rise to the occasion.

Mr. Speaker, I support the Budget presented by the Minister of Finance and call upon all other Members of this House to do likewise. Thank you. [Applause]

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Member. Hon. Members this brings us to the end of our business for today.

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

Mr. Speaker: The Assembly now stands adjourned until tomorrow the 19th.

Adjourned accordingly at 9.44 p.m.