

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2006-2011) 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

142ND Sitting

Tuesday, 25TH January, 2011

The Assembly convened at 2.10 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following paper was laid:

1. The Customs Duties (Amendment) Order 2011 – No. 1 of 2011
[The Minister of Finance]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

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

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2011

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

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

AND WHEREAS estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of Guyana for the financial year 2011 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 17th January, 2011;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2011, of a total sum of one hundred and forty-six billion, eight hundred and seventy-nine million, six hundred and fifty-four thousand dollars (\$146,879,654,000), excluding fourteen billion, five hundred and fifty million, five hundred and two thousand dollars (\$14,550, 502,000) 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.
[The Minister of Finance]

Assembly resumed Budget debate.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now resume the debate on the Budget for the year 2011. I was presented with a long list of speakers and I am happy to note that almost without exception they are speakers who speak succinctly and briefly. So, I think, we could have an early evening and I would not have to leave you prematurely. Thank you very much.

Hon. Member Ms. Amna Ally will start today's proceedings.

Ms. Ally: Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members of this House, I rise to make my contribution on the Budget presentation of 2011, under the theme *Together Building Tomorrow's Guyana Today*.

Sir, the presentation made by the Hon. Minister is structured for political convenience; is an election budget; and one to make us believe that it is all rosy. Not so. We note very conveniently that the Minister's presentation did not only evaluate the year 2010 and gave projections for 2011, but caricatured the PPP/C's last five years in Government.

As I reflect on page 2, paragraph 1.8 of the presentation, I am appalled as to the provisions for all of our young people to be given the opportunities to have access to the education system- the national school feeding programme, the school uniform project - and the war against social ills in our society. No doubt, and as is reflected in this Budget, a large chunk of the National Budget is allocated to the education sector. But, I must point out early that outstanding irregularities, managerial deficiencies, discrimination and corruption, loom large in this sector. The achievability and the timeframes of successful implementation of the National Strategic Plan promises the completion of the Technical Vocation Institutions and their interrelated functions - expansion of teachers of education, delivery of education for the benefit of our children - are all vital components which focus on the development of the education sector.

The programme, as outlined, is good but, no doubt, its achievability is stagnated with a plethora of managerial deficiencies, discrimination and corruption. Hence the end result, which should see the children of our country who should be the real recipients of quality education, is compromised. I must forewarn that we should not be the beneficiaries of the taxpayers' money and funding from the international donor agencies, and lack the capacity to ensure that they are channelled to the real beneficiaries. What we need is a better Guyana.

I shall now spend some time examining various areas within the education sector.

The National Strategic Plan

On page 35, paragraph 4.63 refers to an amount of \$24.3 million being allocated towards the continued successful implementation of the National Strategic Plan in 2011. Let me say from the outset that the National Strategic Plan, which started in 1990 by the late Mr. Deryck Bernard, and is now being built on by this Government, is a good one. The 2008-2013 version of the National Strategic Plan has completed three years, and is now in its fourth year. So far many of its projections have not come to fruition within the given timeframes. Sir, the fulfilment of the many indicators in this Plan leaves much to be desired, and I can substantiate this fact.

One: the indicator says that by 2008 the new Education Bill, approved by Cabinet and the Ministry of Education, will be presented to the National Assembly for approval. This is 2011, three years later, and the Education Bill has not come to the National Assembly. Is it that there is a problem with the Government and its own task force which is set up to deal with the Education Bill? Or is the problem at the foot of an inefficient Attorney General's Chambers?

Let us examine another indicator from the National Strategic Plan which states that by June, 2009 the Technical Vocation curricula would be revised and improved to fit Guyana's needs. [**A Member:** Fit which Guyana's needs?] And I will come back to technical vocation later. But what needs? When some of the practical instruction centres are falling down and there are no materials available for children to complete their practical? Just imagine sand and cement in shortage to do practical; equipment are not available, and those that are available are obsolete.

Monitoring, Evaluating, Reporting and Development (MERD)

The National Strategic Plan speaks to the functions of the Monitoring, Evaluating and Development (MERD) Unit as outlined, and I quote:

“It will absorb some of the roles and functions of the school system management committee, and all those of the inspectorate unit as regards quality assurance.”

I recall that at the commencement of the functioning of the Unit under Ms. Donna Chapman it served a very good purpose. I was a young Head Teacher at that time. I observed that after visits to schools were made, defects were identified, policies articulated, time frames set, and corrective actions were monitored to ensure that policies and programmes were implemented.

Monitoring of education in the eleven districts has now become questionable. It is very clear that the Government of the day is not clear as to where they want to go. In the daily *Stabroek* news of 21st January, 2011, there was an article captioned “*Cabinet Taking Closer Look at Schools Administration.*” Well, the Inspectorate Unit, which is looking at that issue, falls under the Office of the President while the MERD Unit falls under the Ministry of Education. It is very clear that the Government does not know which road to travel. They are not sure if Mr. Benn's four-lane highway is the right road. What is clear is that the very Government does not have the confidence for its own ministry to monitor the work of the Minister and Ministry of Education, but the Office of the President has taken on the monitoring of administration of schools. What an interesting revelation.

Let me offer some advice: be mindful of your management systems as you are confusing your very school managers and, as a result, inhibiting progress.

Technical Vocational Training

I wish to refer to a very important issue highlighted in the National Strategic Plan, as well as in the Budget. Contained in this Plan, Technical Vocational Education Training is identified as being a vital link between the world of work and school. Since Government has proposed a reform of the technical vocation sector as a strategy to provide skilled labour necessary to drive the economy, it is therefore expected that all stops will be pulled out to facilitate conceptualism to finality in order to achieve its objective. It is known that the Technical Educational Education Training (TVET) Council, which was established at least three years ago, has made little or no progress because of the lack of direction and political will. The Budget presentation at page 35 says:

“\$923 million was expended on construction works at 2 new technical institutes in Regions 3 and 5, along with the procurement of furniture, tools and equipment...” among other things.

Sir, in both regions minimal work has been done and, as a matter of fact, only the walls are presently going up. I hope it is not a case of misuse of funds. And I will come to the misuse of funds shortly. Are there checks and balances with that project? And are we getting value for money? Or are you going to be proud of not being able to account for public funds as seem to be the norm in recent times?

Mr. Speaker, the quest to develop Guyana’s technical vocational programme must be accompanied by the relevant strategies, systems, training, sourcing of appropriate resources, including getting CARICOM’s regional occupational standards in place, among others. In an effort to have a successful TVET programme, and I hope that consideration would be given to the successful consultancy advice so that the major scope of work could be addressed.

In this country Government Ministers believe that they know it all, and feel they do not need guidance, but that has been one of the Government’s major failures. For example, does not this Government see... [Ms. Manickchand: inaudible] Do not look into the mirror Ms. Manickchand. ...the necessity to develop, organise, and facilitate, the delivery of appropriate training programmes for the staff of the TVET Council and the institution? If they knew that why did the report for the Christmas term of 2010 reveal vacancies in large numbers in primary tops, practical instruction centres and secondary schools in all Regions?

I do not only wish to make statements, but to recommend that there be an improved teacher’s training curriculum for technical teachers in keeping with the National Strategic Plan. Stop making promises-keep them.

But, in addition to the large number of existing vacancies in the technical vocational institutions, the programme lacks focus. I know that the Hon. Minister does not like to hear me speak of lack of focus by the Government, but one always sees, in the Budget, procurement of furniture, tools and equipment. The fact of the matter is that these institutions do not have equipment, and as I have said before, where they have a few, these items are obsolete. I do not know if the Government, in this modern age, buys obsolete equipment - maybe. But more than that, equipment is necessary to deliver a competency based programme.

The comparison of the CARICOM facilities standards against what is in the institutions has revealed that all the institutions do not have many of the tools and equipment required, and, as such, they cannot deliver competency based programmes to make them eligible for recognition to issue the Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) which was established by the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD); it is notable that the Minister of Education is currently the Chairman of that Council.

Let me take you back just a little. In the 1980s Guyana was leading the Caribbean in technical education and vocational training. Today, the National Training Agencies in Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Caribbean Examinations Council, have been approved by the Council -the very COHSOD- for Human and Social Development for the awarding of the Caribbean Vocational Qualification. Guyana is still to come off its mark. Here in Guyana we must recognise that we must be in a position to issue the CVQ. Every day we hear about CARICOM the Caribbean Single Market Economy (CSME), and we must strive to get there. Hence, we must ensure implementation of our programme assessment and certification strategy, training, establishment of curriculum committees, and utilise, as far as practicable, the Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies (CANTA) guidelines.

To conclude this aspect of my presentation, I wish to posit a few questions:

- (1) What is preventing the implementation of a national system for competency based education and training?
- (2) Have assessors and external verifiers been identified?
- (3) Did industries nominate persons who are willing to serve in these capacities, and if not what is the problem?
- (4) When will we have an appropriate curriculum developed for technical teacher training?

Education Delivery

I now turn my attention to education delivery. Education delivery is at a low ebb. Poor examination results, a gloomy remediation programme, poor salaries and conditions which offer no motivation... [A. Member: inaudible] You are out of sync...for teachers. Too many senior acting appointments and automatic promotions are all burning issues which inhibit the delivery of education in Guyana.

Guyana's historical high literacy rate, estimated at around 96 % and one of the highest in the Region and western hemisphere, was an acknowledged achievement of our education system. The policy of free education provided under the PNC for nursery to university level was, clearly, to maintain this high standard. Today, despite many programmes and large injections of finance, that percentage of literacy has fallen dramatically in Guyana. The Government must examine the real reason for the current literacy and numeracy problems existing in Guyana. I hope too that the projections of the \$US4.2 million will be allocated appropriately to enhance the upgrade of teacher training capability so that we can see improvement in the literacy programme.

Poor Examination Results

In the Hansard of 19th February, 2010, the Hon. Minister of Education posited that according to the National Strategic Plan, it is intended that the passes at the CSEC Grades 1 to 3 will move

from 56 % to 70 %. Gloating about the exam results may only be for the media or for public propaganda. Our gifted boys and girls of Regions 2, 3, 4 and 6 afforded us to have a proud increase to 65 % passes at the CSEC. But, sir, let us take a more detailed look to see how our students really performed. Our Minister of Education proudly made a press release which stated,

“...that for the first time at the secondary level 11,443 students sat the May/June 2010 CSEC Examinations. Of that amount 27 students excelled from our regions.”

But let us look at Region 2, for example, which has eight secondary schools but only two were given honourable mention. Region 3 has thirteen secondary schools and only two were given honourable mention. Region 4, Georgetown, has 38 secondary schools and only five were given honourable mention. Region 6 has 17 secondary schools and only one was given honourable mention. And the trend goes on. Regions 1, 5, 7, 8, and 9 fell off the map with no outstanding performance. The education system is failing and unless you positively accept that fact, the system will continue to deteriorate. Stop believing that putting up buildings will improve it. That alone can't achieve improvement. The results always expose the reality.

Public statements by the Hon. Minister of Education, media publicity, and spending international funding, cannot alone do it. If all the glorious plans outlined in the budget must seriously become a reality taxpayers moneys must be properly accounted for, and the manoeuvrings of the moneys from the donor agencies must stop. The time is now.

Gloomy Remediation Programmes

At one time we heard that 9,000 students benefitted from the remediation programme. At another time 12,000 students benefitted from the remediation programme. I do not know which figure the Ministry will regard as valid, but the real issue is that there has been no adequate remediation programme implemented. Saying you have a remediation programme does not mean it really exists.

2.40 p.m.

During the summer of 2010 schools across the country were instructed to hold classes; no assessments were done; no resources were provided; and even the teachers, who taught, during the holiday, were not paid until November after strenuous negotiations, and even the snacks which were promised, most of the schools did not get them. When all was done, the amount of children who attended was counted and it was decided that twelve thousand students benefitted. Is that how benefits are calculated? Well, Mr. Speaker, it is a sad day - a sad day, indeed, to follow on that pathway. The time has come when scientific method must be used to determine who deserves to benefit from the remediation programme.

This brings me to the issue of automatic promotion. Sir, according a Government Information Agency (GINA) release of Wednesday, 1st December, 2010, the Hon. Minister of Education reiterated that he will stick to his position of automatic promotion. Sir, the Minister in his usual autocratic style did not find favour in having consultations on such an important matter; a matter which affects all students. Sir, the fact is not whether we in the PNCR-1G support automatic promotion, the bottom line here is that there is a problem and we must find ways of a finding a

solution. Automatic promotion is a real problem and our programmes must be so designed to effectively address it.

I take my hat off to that head teacher of Christianburg Secondary School who stood up for what he believes in. Threats of indiscipline must not deter him. The programmes must be clearly defined to cater for the needs of the children, and that is why there were community high schools; that is why attention must be paid to the technical vocational institutions.

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

Mrs. Backer: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that the Hon. Member be given fifteen minutes to continue.

Mr. Speaker: I know that is just a figure of speech and that means fifteen minutes to conclude.

Mrs. Backer: It is not necessarily, sir.

Question put, and agreed to.

Ms. Ally: That is why the blanket approach is not used, look at individual needs. And that is why a monitoring programme has to be one that tells and not shows. This is not about building bridges or digging wells; this is about moulding minds. I hope that the Minister will take this issue seriously, and I assure him that the PNCR – 1G will be willing to support a professional review of the present policy to ensure that the theme of this budget is achieved, *Together Building Tomorrow's Guyana Today*, by ensuring relevant education policies today.

Teacher's Salaries

If we do not have teachers we cannot have any other profession - no doctors, no Ministers, no carpenters. Our teachers, like many other workers, have continuously been deprived of the type of wage package they received. I am sure that this National Assembly might be overwhelmed hearing about multi-year agreements. But let me say that 5 % and 1% for teachers cannot work. That is why many of our teachers resort to giving extra lessons. They looked for second jobs; many are not motivated to go the extra mile, and there are great problems with absence and punctuality, not forgetting the migration of our skilled people that is continuously on the rise.

In the *Guyana Chronicle* newspapers, January 16, the Minister of Education addressed head teachers at the Diamond Secondary School. There was a lot of pomp and ceremony about discipline, but I want to urge the Government to address the issue of an upgrade in teachers' salaries by 15%. I ask, sir, that the Minister stop intimidating the head teachers by threatening disciplinary action. I ask that the Minister train them and work with them so that he could get more than 100% out of those very head teachers.

Our senior Ministry's officials need job security. We do not want senior officers operating at the will and fancies of the Minister. Our officers must be able to work within a framework which will allow for development of the education sector. I note that three senior vacancies have been filled after the prolonged misfortune of Ms. Genevieve Whyte-Nedd, a woman with integrity and professionalism, but God has smiled on her and she is now moving on progressively. I note also Government's anxiety to appoint its cronies with super salaries, and I call on you, sir, Mr.

Minister, to provide the basis for the appointment of all existing senior vacancies, give them the tools and scope to work with.

Furniture and other Equipment

The availability of adequate furniture is a burning issue. Millions of dollars are budgeted and ploughed into building new schools. Why can there not be adequate furniture? What is the purpose of having new schools when the existing schools do not have adequate furniture, the schools are short of staff, and student and teachers are made alike to endure poor physical conditions? Where is the value for money? Sir, large sums of money spent on substandard furniture is an everyday recurrence. Where is the value for money? It is a blame shifting. When a matter comes up, it is heard, "Oh, that is a matter for Ministry of Local Government." Well, I thought that in a Government sitting there will be inter and intra-regional relations to ensure the success of programmes, but what we have is a blame shifting - if it is not the Ministry of Education, it is the Ministry of Local Government or some regional Chairman. Sir, I can now see why the Office of the President had to muzzle the Minister of Education.

Education delivery needs people with knowledge, skills and experience. In Guyana, when you reach that pinnacle you are cut off and have to retire, but in this Ministry of Education there are a lot of double standards. A teacher reaches the age of fifty-five and has to retire. Herein stands an example: young qualified woman with requisite knowledge and experience had to officially retire from making a contribution to the development to our young children. Sir, I do not know where in CARICOM, for example, our teachers retire at the age of fifty-five and I have heard umpteen times the Minister promising that the age of retirement will be moved from the age of fifty-five to the age of sixty. I, again, call upon the Government to address this issue. At the age of fifty-five one is at the peak of performance.

National School Feeding Programme

I am happy that the continuous pressure from the PNCR – 1G has caused the Government to respond to its call to provide a meal or snack for our children, not only in the Hinterland, but on the coast land, also. While in the nursery and the levels one and two of the primary schools are benefiting, we would like to see all the levels of primary schools being recipients of a meal or snack. In addition, in the present scheme of things, there are too many logistical encumbrances. The problem of transportation, distribution and storage among others, contribute to a waste of investment. Hence, I wish to recommend that transportation and distribution be done in a timely fashion; that freezers or some sort of cold storage is invested in so that the high percentage of juice spoilage is reduced, and finally that a hot balanced meal is considered rather than the juice and biscuits.

Sir, it is a pity but it is this Government which brought us to this pitiful economic state which obviously must be cushioned by these supplemental measures.

Violence in Schools

There are growing incidences of violence in schools, while this may be considered to be widespread; we must try for it to be extinct. We must work towards eradicating it from our school system. I wish to say that I agree with the Menu of Measures outlined by the Ministry of

Education but, more than that, I want to appeal to our teachers, our parents, churches, community leaders and others to engage themselves in a meaningful way to curb this ugly monster. It is our responsibility to promote safe and acceptable behaviour and to instil positive values in our children. Sir, in the Menu of Measures, however, my recommendation is that the role of the Welfare Officers must be a more proactive one.

Accountability

When I listened to the Hon. Minister, Ms. Jennifer Webster – I want to get the “Ws” correctly – last evening who said that the watchwords of the PPP/C are “transparency and accountability”, and that the Auditor General continues to report on improvements on the question of transparency, I concluded that the Hon. Minister thought that she was not in Guyana and was not speaking for the PPP/C Government. I wish to address the question of accountability since, again, in this Budget 2011 large chunks of money are being voted for and this Ministry must be able to account for every dollar. Mr. Speaker, you will recall at the last budget, the largest disbursement went to education and I wish to ask a few questions:

- Who really are the beneficiaries of these large chunks of moneys?
- Are our children really recipients of the moneys and services budgeted for?
- Are you satisfied that you are getting value for money?

Mr. Speaker, when you hear that \$923 million is being invested on two new technical institutes, \$875 million on teachers’ education, \$24.3 billion on the National Strategic Plan, US\$4.2 million on the upgrading of teachers training programme, you would want to get value for money or you would want a better education system as the end result. And what do they get? Sir, I am glad that this budget presentation takes us five years back. In a news report dated 12th April, 2010, a release captioned “*Ministry repeatedly flogged procurement law*” could not carry a more accurate statement. For more than three years, rather, since 2007, there are outstanding irregularities which have not yet been corrected. Sir, I will point to some of these areas where these irregularities exist and I wish that Minister Webster pays careful attention.

- (i) There have been repeated over payments to contractors – one job recorded twice.
- (ii) A questionable \$32 million spent on dormitories at President’s College.
- (iii) Officer cashing large cheque worth millions of dollars to keep in safe and to wait for payments.

These are public funds which must be returned to the Consolidated Fund. As if it were not enough, the systems under which the Ministry operates are plagued with high irregularities. Just to name a few:

- (i) Tender Board procedures are not followed;
- (ii) Tender Board files are not presented for audit examination;
- (iii) Tender Board round robin for decisions, and
- (iv) No minutes for Tender Board meetings.

In an extract from the Auditor General's Report 2009, it states *inter alia*, and I quote:

“Noticeable among the payments are amounts of \$17.9997 million, \$14.445 million, \$16.920 million in respect to the Ministry of Education”

Earlier, I made a point of poor management in the education sector and I want to reiterate that, it is not only me, but the Auditor General also said so:

“These entities are facing serious challenges in the quest to recover the amounts overpaid. Even more troubling is the prescribed managerial inaction in relation to this troubling trend since there was no evidence to suggest that disciplined actions, of any kind, have been meted out.”

I wonder if the Hon. Member, Ms. Webster, will withdraw her statement that Government will deal with anyone culpable of that.

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

Mrs. Backer: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that the Hon. Member be given fifteen minutes to conclude, and I mean that, Sir.

Question put, and agreed to.

Ms. Ally: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The trend in these days is to reward people for wrongdoing by this Government. That is the philosophy of the PPP/C Government. As a matter of fact, people are offered contracted employment and overrated super salaries as their reward.

Discrimination

It is unfortunate that discrimination continues to exist in this era and under the PPP/C Government. One would have hoped that with time this Government would have grown but, instead, what do we see? Right here, in this National Assembly, there is a fresh incidence of discrimination. Sir, as soon as Ms. Dawn Hastings became a Member of this National Assembly, under the PNCR –1G umbrella, instructions were given to end her employment with the Ministry of Education as an Education Officer and she was sent back to the Jawalla Primary School to her original position as the head teacher. But more than that, for the time she served as the Education Officer her emoluments were withheld. Up to now she has not been paid for the job she was doing for that period of service. How can Guyana progress with these attitudes? How can we build Guyana together, Sir? I do not want to dwell on this aspect of discrimination because when I recall how Ms. Genevieve Whyte-Nedd was discriminated against, it only gives credence to the PPP/C philosophy.

In conclusion, I wish to say that it is unfortunate that this Government cannot build tomorrow's Guyana today since it lacks the vision to do so. Tomorrow's Guyana is envisaged to be one free of corruption, free of discrimination, have policies with development in the mind's eye, a country where there are job opportunities, a country where there is hope for our children and adequate wages among other things. We want a Guyana where we can boast of moulding our children's minds as a consequence, moulding a nation.

Mr. Speaker, the diction, paces and trend of this Government exclude the togetherness to build tomorrow's Guyana today. Let me call upon you, however, to work towards an improved society of which we can all be proud. I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, if you hit that instrument on the desk, it will cause me now to remove all the glass rests...

Mrs. Backer: No Sir, I apologise. Please do not do that.

Mr. Speaker: ...as I had to remove the paper weights before.

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. R Persaud]: I rise in making my contribution in support of the Budget 2011, as was presented by our Minister of Finance. I wish to join Members of the National Assembly in commending the Minister for his erudite presentation. Certainly it is giving all Guyanese greater hope, greater confidence, for them to identify opportunities for themselves in the years to come.

When we look at the analysis provided in the Budget and also the day to day reality in Guyana, we see that Guyana is in a very fortunate position when compared to economies and also countries with similar socio-economic standing within the Caribbean and outside of it.

We in Guyana are very fortunate. The people of Guyana are very fortunate to have a Government and, certainly, to have policies, programmes and projects in place whereby we can see an enlargement, an expansion, an increase in spending in our people and at the same time a reduction in taxation. Nowhere else is this taking place across the world; there is no other economy whereby people are seeing more investments being made in them and there is less taxation. In fact, there is a reduction in taxation. Also, in the year 2011, we have seen that the Government has been able to increase its investment in all sectors focusing on people's development and at the same time being able to have the debt at the manageable and at a sustainable level.

In fact, if we look at the impact of the global fuel food, – many countries are still going through that global economic crisis – we will see that Guyana has certainly fared well and that is because of the sound and prudent management and leadership of this country by President Jagdeo and the PPP/Civic Government.

I do not have to contrive any story or paint any picture that is unreal. If we look at the *International Monetary Fund Assessment Report* which was released on 10th March, last year, if we look at the *2010 World Bank Analysis of Latin America and the Caribbean* and, in fact, its global economic outlook, we will see that Guyana has in fact exceeded many other countries and countries of likewise status economically, and even socially, in many regards. All of us ought to be proud of that. That is not only credit to the PPP/Civic but it is to the credit of the people of Guyana. Also, last year Guyana was one of three countries within the Latin America and the Caribbean region to have achieved the Millennium Development Goal Number One, that is, to half poverty and to reduce hunger. Guyana was one in three, in the entire Region. Does that not tell us about good management? Does that not speak to the progress that Guyana has made in Latin America and the Caribbean?

If we look around...and we do not have to even use the Government's statistics. Just yesterday in the newspaper, over the weekend Banks DIH had its Annual General Meeting (AGM), we saw across all the headlines and on the television about the billions of dollars profit and the reserve, and also the viability of the company. Before that, we also saw the Demerara Distilleries Limited (DDL)... Before that, we also saw Republic Bank. If you are to speak to the principals of Republic Bank, based in Trinidad, they will tell you that Guyana is the only group in which they would have made five years of consecutive profits throughout the region. Does that not tell us about progress? Does that not tell us about economic dynamism in our country? Those are facts that cannot be changed.

3.10 p.m.

All of us today must be proud of where we are and where we are going, all of Guyana, because if we look from whence we came, very few countries would be able to make that rapid progress in such a short time; we were able to transform this country at a rapid pace.

Today, in Guyana, we not only stand as, what the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in the early 2000 described us as, "a shining light" but also, today, increasingly we are recognised as a global player, notwithstanding the size of our economy and also of our population. A global player, for instance, in our leadership in climate change, our leadership in advocating the issues for developing countries and ensuring that developing countries, such as ours, have a fair share. That is something that all of the people of Guyana must take credit for, not only the PPP/Civic Government.

In the Minister of Finance's budget presentation he pointed out that in the year 2011, the economy is projected to grow by 4.6 %. I wish to remind this National Assembly that Guyana's projection is, in fact, ahead of what the World Bank is projecting for the entire region, at 3.3 %. That, again, points to where we are going; it points to the progress, and it points to this country making rapid economic and social development for all our people.

We heard in some of the interventions earlier that the Government is spending huge amount of resources. In fact, one of the Hon. Members described this as a "massive budget for massive corruption". Spending \$4.5 billion on our elderly, is that considered as corruption? The Government is spending \$500 million for the School Feeding Programme, is that considered as corruption? Is spending close to \$9.1 million in taking care of some of the issues of our farmers, corruption? Is spending \$5.1 billion also in Housing and Water corruption? And if the Government is spending close to \$25 billion in continuing to address the advancement of our education sector, is that considered as corruption? Well, it clearly points out that the often and repeated line of the Opposition has no answer or alternative and what it seeks to do is, on every intervention, every programme and every progress that the Government makes, to put corruption as a label. Well the people of Guyana who are benefiting from these programmes are the ones who will judge, and on many occasions they have judged this Government on consecutive elections that this fabrication of widespread corruption is merely a fabrication.

The Auditor General's Report was talked about. I do not have to quote a former Auditor General who may have issues or a bee in his bonnet. All that could be is to look at the consecutive

Reports presented by the Auditor General, and any analysis or assessment of that Report will point out that, year after year, the level of public accountability and... [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Come on Mr. Norton, please.

Mr. R. Persaud: ...transparency is increasing, and that points to good stewardship and commitment in dealing with corruption.

In this attempt to continue to harp on this fictional issue of widespread and rampant corruption in Government there was also a creative link to link the discussions that are taking place with the establishment of the Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund (GRIF), involving the arrangement of the Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with Norway. That was a deliberate misrepresentation of the facts because the issue was never about corruption. The issue was about the process through which the funding will be delivered and, in fact, the seriousness... [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Aubrey Norton, I will not speak to you again.

Mr. R. Persaud: Government's commitment in this regard is solidified in the fact that not only did it agree to adhere to the World Bank safeguards, but under this particular arrangement it is adding on the IDB safeguards. So in managing the Guyana REDD+ Investment Funds, and the US\$250 million that will come from Norway, it will have to go through three levels in terms of ensuring that Government has safeguards and proper utilisation of the resources. That shows how acutely aware the Government is insisting and ensuring that the resources coming to the people are used, managed and utilised in a very transparent way.

I wish to refer to the Rainforest Alliance Programme which has just completed the verification process related to the enabling activities for the Guyana/Norway REDD+ agreement. The Report was released on 6th January, and this is what the Rainforest Alliance had to say about the work which was done regarding this-because it seems as if with every progress or every good initiative for the people of Guyana there are attempts to discredit or misrepresent, but my analysis does not have to be used neither is what the Government is saying, let us go to the internationally reputable firm that the Norwegians have hired- just over fourteen days ago:

“The following are the principle findings of the Rainforest Alliance Verification Audit of enabling activities as outlined by the joint concept note between the Government of Norway and the Government of Guyana.”

It is page 4. Then I will go further down. First of all, on the strategic framework this is what the Rainforest Alliance assessors had to say: “a framework is in place and is being implemented.” Then they went on to put some more details on that.

Mr. Corbin: Mr. Speaker, could we have the Hon. Member say the source that he is quoting from so that we can have it for the records?

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Speaker, I will repeat for clarity. *Rainforest Alliance verification of progress related to enabling activities for the Guyana/Norway REDD+ agreement*. Date of report - January 6th. It has the authors' names and this was released. [Mr. Ramjattan: Is it a

public document?] It is a public document. And I go on to quote from the document: “Regarding the consultation and the involvement of stakeholders...”

This is what the international assessors just said. This is not last year. It is this year. This is what they said.

“The Government of Guyana got off to a positive start in consultation activities as has been reviewed separately by the IIED, and has been generally successful in its stakeholder outreach...”

Then they went on. Under the issue of governance, this is what the assessors had to say:

“There has been significant progress in the REDD+ Government development plan as described in the report on twenty-three different activities being implemented and based on further information being provided between the Auditors and the Government of Guyana. “

Then, also, on the financial mechanisms, this is what the independent assessors just said:

“A GRIF agreement was just signed upon the arrival of the RA Auditors in Guyana. Thus, the GOG reporting on the GRIF continues to make progress in this regard...”

And I can go on. I can quote also on numerous efforts to move forward on a MRV system which is evident. The MRV progress reporting is going forward and should encourage discussions on both achievements and constraints.

On the rights of indigenous people and local forest communities as it regards REDD+, this is what the independent assessors had to say: “The Government of Guyana has placed strong emphasis on the rights of Amerindian communities and the process involving multiple agencies and Amerindian interest.” There are other conclusions and summaries.

The point I want to make is that the Hon. Members, from time to time, seek to misrepresent the progress we have made as a nation; the progress we have made on behalf of the people and for the people of Guyana, which all of us must be proud of. We must not be carried away and join in this stigma that developing countries are inefficient; that they are corrupt and cannot even manage their own affairs. That is what the Opposition wants to reinforce. If we are patriotic and proud we will recognise progress, and work together to deal with the inadequacies that we have had and that we continue to experience.

The issue in terms of investments, and we talk about job creation in agriculture and out of agriculture, there was the observation made that the Government is going about increasing the debt and putting burdens on future generations. What are the facts? The facts are that when this Government came into office it was spending 90% of the revenues on servicing the external debt. Today only 13% is being spent. Is that not prudent management? Is that careful consideration of our debt management? We are a very lawful Government and whatever we do is in conformity of the law. Our debt management approach is also guided by the External Debt Act which was passed by this National Assembly - all are consistent. So for anyone to suggest that the

Government is being irresponsible in increasing the debt and making it unmanageable, and also burdening future generations is far from the facts. Because, on one hand, we heard that Government needs to do more to create value added; it needs to do more value added in agriculture, mining and forestry, and to look at other sectors of the economy.

We also heard that it needs to increase the rate of investment, but is how are we going to do that if investments are not made in infrastructure? How are we going to do that if we do not facilitate the means through which persons can invest and create economic activities? We can only do that by working with our partners. As all of us know, the international agencies are very strict and they insist that people conform to good governance; they must conform to the highest level of financial prudent management. We have satisfied those international criteria, the fact that we have a Government which is willing to provide resources in terms of a stewardship of management of our forestry resources and to support economic development activities. The fact that we have the support from the World Bank, the IDB and other donor agencies speaks to the fact about their satisfaction in the level of management, in the level of progress that we have made in the country.

If we look at the budget, in terms of taking care of our people's needs,... because this budget can be described as a people's budget, because the investments that the Government is making are in its people's welfare and its people's development. It is a people's budget. Perhaps when we consider the Estimates we will see that every single item and heading, the expenditures that are made, are about improving the welfare - the lot of all our people. As I said, the response, lacking any alternative solution or proposal, is unable to point to any weaknesses in the Government programmes and policies. What the Opposition does in a knee jerk - in a predictable knee jerk reaction - is to claim corruption, lack of transparency and discrimination. That is the Opposition's response to everything. That is all it dreams of, without any single evidence, because the Government has put in place mechanisms through which if there is evidence there will also be means through which those will be dealt with.

In terms of moving our country forward, we have all recognised that agriculture is an important player and will continue to be an important driver of the economic transformation process in our country. If we look at the budget we will see that there is a lot of emphasis being placed on the restructuring of the traditional agricultural activities. But also, and very importantly, there is a large amount, an increased amount, of resources in ensuring, too, that we diversify and we build a new agricultural sector. We need to build a new agricultural sector to accelerate the transformation process taking place in our country.

Let us turn to the issue of sugar, in terms of the restructuring. In the national budget the allocation to the agricultural sector has increased by 22 %, with an increase of about 35 % on the Capital Expenditure and a reduction of about 12% on the Current Expenditure. What that tells us, when we break down that investment and allocation, is that the investments are focused on the transformational aspects of the agricultural development as we seek in a larger and a much wider context of modernising and diversifying our national economy.

The issue of sugar has been well analysed by the Hon. Minister of Finance in his presentation. But I want to say that Guyana's sugar industry and the difficulties that it faces are not dissimilar to what is across the Region. In fact, just yesterday in the *Trinidad Express* newspaper it was

reported that the Barbadian sugar industry, the remnants of their sugar industry, had to send home hundreds of workers because of low production, low productivity and poor performance. In fact, in Belize too, which is significant in terms of size to Guyana, in November of last year the Government had to inject close to \$6.7 million as a loan to the Belize sugar industry as a bail out to deal with the issues of production, productivity and its difficulties. In Guyana, we have crafted the Turnaround Plan which is called the Strategic Blueprint for 2009-2013, and I wish to report that all the indicators, except the production target, have been satisfied under the Turnaround Plan. I can go through it. In terms of the upgrade and the expansion of the Enmore Factory and rationalisation of East Demerara cultivation, that is well advanced, and in a few weeks time there will be the commissioning of the packaging plant. If we look in terms of expansion of the Blairmont Estate and the agricultural site, that is in progress. If we look, also, in terms of the raising of financing through the sale of the Diamond Estate land for housing and commercial development- that is being realised.

I wish to address this point, because the financing of the Strategic Blueprint, the main source of financing, is on the basis of land disposal, more particularly the Diamond Estate land as it is being advanced for housing and other economic activities. So this suggestion that this Government, in some form, in some wicked deed, is seeking to divert moneys from Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA) into GuySuCo is total rubbish.

This Strategic Blueprint was also made aware to the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services of which the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan is a Member. So he was aware that the means and mechanisms through which the Turnaround Plan will be financed was through the sale of land or land disposal by GuySuCo. How, then, can he come several months after and then suggest some ulterior motive that the Government is diverting money to GuySuCo. Even if the Government was diverting money, as long as it was done through the legal means and once it is in the interest of the sugar workers, what is wrong with that? [Mr. A. Norton: You must speak the truth.] This document was made aware to Members of the National Assembly. This document was fully ventilated, so it is nothing about speaking the truth; the facts are known. If people do not do their research, that is a different issue. Or if persons cannot recall what was discussed several months ago, it is a different issue. It is doing a disservice to this august body to come and inject any motives or to also cast aspersions on a totally legal sale transaction that even this National Assembly was aware of.

In terms of going forward with the sugar industry, we all agree that the issues, in terms of managing industrial relations, will have to be improved and be given serious attention, because we are dealing with an industry with a new social reality: a new employment arrangement whereby there is more job opportunities for workers, whereby GuySuCo itself is having difficulties in attracting workers and the numbers that it has. All of us must agree that, in fact, we need to give the issue of industrial relations and the workers welfare greater attention. That is why last year, and this National Assembly was advised, the Government was able through, again, a sale transaction to provide \$2 billion to GuySuCo and \$750 million of it went directly to the workers, in terms of the addressing issues of remuneration. That will continue to be an area of priority for the board, management and, certainly, for all other stakeholders in going forward and in overcoming those difficulties.

Additionally, based on the programme of GuySuCo this year, close to 43% of its capital programme will be spent also on mechanisation, because the issue now is that there is cane, but there is not enough, or adequate hands, to deal with this matter in terms of harvesting and taking to the factory. So in this year, the plan, as outlined by the Board of Directors, on going forward is to address those critical issues and ensure that that remaining indicator, that single but certainly very important indicator, as outlined in the Turnaround Plan, is met.

In terms of the rice industry, attention will continue to be given, in terms of increasing and expanding the competitiveness of it. I wish to salute our rice farmers once more for an outstanding performance last year, in terms of production, and other stakeholders - the millers and the exporters - for us also recording a historic level of exports in excess of three hundred and thirty-five thousand tonnes. All stakeholders need to be commended on that achievement.

In the rice industry, though, we have already seen progress, in terms of value added, in terms of ensuring that there is greater value for our rice. But criticism was made of, for instance, our entrance into the Venezuelan markets. This is a new market. In fact many persons from the Opposition, and all stakeholders,... when there was the European Commission funded study on improving the competitiveness of the rice industry, it was recommended that there was need to diversify our markets, because we were too reliant on the European markets and smaller markets within this Region. In pursuit of that the Government aggressively, working with the stakeholders in the rice industry, pursued new markets. And the Government was successful in breaking into the Venezuelan market. Yes, it is not the ideal situation of exporting large amount of paddy...

Mr. Speaker: Your time is up.

Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communication [Mr. Hinds]: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. R. Persaud: Perhaps, it is not the ideal, but, as in business, as those who are involved with business and know business, you have to break into a market and when you have broken into a market and have developed that reputation then you will be in a position to expand your project range. That is clear basic Business 101 in this regard. The Government will continue to pursue new markets for the rice industry and at the same time it will continue to embark on diversification within the rice industry with an emphasis on value added.

Today, our package rice can be found in supermarkets across the Region, in the United States and even in Europe. Does that not tell us about the value added? Does that not tell us about the efforts and progress that the Government has made in terms of diversification within the rice industry? But we will also have to look at the issue of greater protection to those who are the most vulnerable throughout the rice value commodity chain, and that is our farmers.

Mention was made of the fact that there are laws and these laws are not being enforced. But where do these comrades live? Where do these Hon. Members live to be making such statements? As it stands now the Government has five court actions against a defaulting player. The licence of that defaulting player has also been withheld. In 2009, when I withheld the

licence, the matter was taken to Court and it ruled that the licence must be handed back. So this suggestion that the Government has laws and protection on the books which are not being enforced is far from the reality once more.

In terms of value added and where the Government is going strategically in the development of the agricultural sector, and the suggestion again that the Government does not have a plan or a road map, this National Assembly, in the middle of last year, and on other occasions, deliberated and ventilated fully on various aspects of the Low Carbon Development Strategy. This National Assembly also deliberated on the National Competitiveness Strategy, and both documents referred to Government's commitment, allocation of resources and a plan to strategically diversify and strategically to look at value added throughout all agricultural commodities. In fact, the arrangement with the Government of Norway, also, is looking at how the Government can secure the resources. Last year, Government was successful in the engagements with the IDB and International Fund for Agricultural Development to mobilise US\$30 million to commence a five-year programme of agricultural diversification, the first of its kind ever in this country. So the suggestion that the Government does not have a plan, or the suggestion that the Government is ignoring value added or diversification, certainly is out of touch with facts, out of touch with the realities, and certainly is a mischievous attempt to mislead and also not to recognise progress in this regard.

Government will also continue to pursue large scales agriculture whilst it is supporting the small farmers. The small farmers do face real difficulties. That is why I am happy that we have seen an increase in allocation by 22 %. No one is saying, out there, that the situation and the conditions under which our farmers and, perhaps, other sectors exist is the perfect one, but the Government has recognised and has its priority right in making the necessary investments and putting the programmes in place, so that issues can be dealt with - the limitations in terms of drainage and irrigation, the limitations in terms of dealing with planting materials, in terms of dealing with new pest and animal disease that is rising as a result of climatic changes among other factors, and the issue of dealing with financing to help especially our small farmers and large farmers. These programmes are being geared to address those inadequacies. So I will say up front that there are inadequacies, because I go out nearly every day to cover as many farming communities and I sit and we work together to try and identify those, and this Government seeks to find solutions to those issues.

3.40 p.m.

We are not going to come here and say it is paradise; it is the Garden of Eden. It is not the Garden of Eden, but what we will tell you and what the facts are is that there is a Government which is cognisant of the reality; a Government which has the vision and a Government which has a very aggressive programme of transforming this country, including the agricultural sector in this regard.

Much is said about job creation. Job creation is a priority, but when the Government seeks to go out there and create more jobs, do not come here or go elsewhere, out of political opportunism, and seek to misrepresent those initiatives. Yesterday, we heard persons mentioning large scale farming enterprises which are coming into the country and suggesting that there was something underhand with those arrangements. One cannot... [Mr. Corbin: It is the land policy.] I

will come to land policy. One cannot, on the one hand, say that the Government is not doing enough for job creation, modernising the sector and the economy, and then, on the next hand, when there are investors and when they move... for instance, RiceTech out of Brazil, there is the Simpson's Group farm within the Rupununi area, or the three new farms which are starting up in the intermediate savannahs, or many other small farmers along the coast. When those start up, we cannot go and discredit them and create the impression that something is wrong. It is a contradiction. It sounds confusing. Sometimes it is not clear what some Members of the Opposition really want or whether they are interested in Guyana's progress. It brings one to question that. The Government is very resolute. It is focused on ensuring that in all sectors...

We have heard much about what the Government's plans are within the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector; within all sectors and, particularly, within the new agricultural sector that is being created - it will take time. The Government is ensuring that it provides the opportunity for wealth for all farmers and also provides the opportunities for job creation throughout the value added commodity chain. Agriculture is not only about planting in the fields; it is throughout an entire value commodity chain and that is what we are building. We are building an agribusiness sector in this country whereby opportunities for wealth, job and our country's development are given much attention and focus.

The issue of land is also important and that is why, under this Government, we have restructured the land management system of our country. We have modernised it. We have, in fact, gone through what other countries would describe as a revolution in land tenure policies. In fact, today, the ODA did a study out of the United Kingdom (UK), in term of the land management systems, and it found Guyana to have one of the more progressive land management systems. There is also a draft land use policy and certainly that will go through the stages, also, of engaging the National Assembly. We want, at the end of the day, to ensure equitable access to land but also ensuring that in future generations...That is why the Government is taking a very studied, careful and, in fact, scientific approach to land management and land utilisation in which future generations – future farmers, future Guyanese, the young people – of this country can also have access to land so that they can develop themselves and our country. We are very clear about where we are going. We are very clear about where our objectives are in this regard.

That is why in Budget 2011, the Hon. Minister of Finance used the opportunity to talk about the progress the Government has made since 2006. We are a very accountable Government and we take the pact we entered in 2006 with the people very seriously. I just want to skim through this document, *A Brighter Future for all Guyanese*, the PPP/C Manifesto for 2006. I will cite a few examples where we have kept to our promise, our goal and the pact we entered with the Guyanese people of transforming, modernising and developing this country. If we look in terms of agriculture, in it we stated that “We will pursue policies aimed at developing both traditional and non-traditional sectors through improved research, technical services, fiscal incentives” and some other specifics. This is an example where we have kept the promise.

I can then go on talking about rice where we promised new varieties. Guyana is the only country within FLAR, which is the Latin American Institute for Rice Research- many countries take six years to roll out a new variety- which was able, in four years, to roll out two new varieties to deal with the effects of climate change. Go to the farmers out there and talk about the yield and the response to those varieties. In fact, six strains are being tested as we speak. That, again, is

another example. Looking in terms of training farmers, in our Manifesto, we talked about training six thousand rice farmers, in terms of exposing them to new techniques. Already, at the start of 2011, we have surpassed six thousand farmers who have been trained in this regard. We talked about providing relief support for rice farmers. We have delivered on that and, in fact, we have exceeded in some of these areas. In fact, the example of the drying floor and the examples of helping people to cushion the drop in the price in 2009 are examples where we have stuck to the promise.

In terms of livestock development, the same can be said.

In terms of the forestry sector, what the Government has done in terms of managing and stewardship of the forestry sector is certainly something that every single one of us must be proud of. Today, Guyana is used by the International Tropical Timber Organisation. It is used by the Food and Agriculture Organization. It is used by the United Nations Forestry Forum as an example. In fact, Guyana was the first country under the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) to qualify because of the stewardship and management of its forest. That, too, was a commitment that we gave in the 2006 Manifesto and which we were able to deliver on.

The same can be said in terms of our commitment to expanding roads. People will look at that and try to suggest all sorts of motives. What is wrong with opening up the Interior? What is wrong in spending resources on Hinterland communities? What is wrong with spending moneys on roads - farm to market roads or community roads, be it in Buxton, Port Mourant, Linden, Essequibo Coast, or West Demerara? That is a commitment we made. That is a pact we entered into with the Guyanese people. We have no apologies for fulfilling the promises we made to the Guyanese people.

The same can be talked about draining and irrigation and sea defence. Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is clearly adumbrated here in the PPP/C Manifesto. We are delivering on those.

I can go on and cover all the other areas. In terms of social welfare: the increase in pensions and public assistance, and what we have done in terms of increasing the conditions of our working people. How can we talk about not looking at people's welfare and not honouring our commitment when in this year's budget alone the Government is giving back working people close to \$1.7 billion because of the increase of the income tax threshold? Thirty-five thousand sugar workers, bauxite workers, farmers and others will no longer have to pay income tax. What about the \$2.2 billion in terms of the reduction in the corporate tax to stimulate more investment and more job creation within all sectors of our national economy? This clearly speaks to a country, and a Government, which is on the move, and a Government which is clearly committed to delivering on its promise to the people and certainly on improving the welfare of the people.

In going forward, this budget certainly...

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

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

Question put, and carried.

Mr. R. Persaud: In terms of this Manifesto, the Budget 2011, as described as the people's budget, offers an opportunity for us to continue this transformational process. It offers an opportunity for all Guyanese, notwithstanding our political or other affiliations or allegiances, to work together. Our Government, in all sectors of our economy, will continue to pursue and to ensure that the opportunities are there for all Guyanese to make a contribution towards the peace, progress and prosperity of Guyana. I thank you very much Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Ms. Sampson: Before I make my contribution to the business of the day, allow me to join others in welcoming the new Member of Parliament, my colleague, Ms. Joan Baveghems, to this August body. The Hon. Member is no stranger to the walls of this Assembly, having sat in the wings during many of our sittings. Now that she has, actually, joined us on this side, I hope she will not be daunted by some of what goes on here.

The Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, on Monday, 17th January, presented his fifth budget to this National Assembly. The Hon. Member took over three hours to take us through 63 pages of a document under the theme, *Together Building Tomorrow's Guyana Today*. Having listened to him, I have concluded that although the theme speaks of togetherness, there was a lack of consultation, especially with civil society, in the preparation of this much touted largest budget of \$161.4 billion. I have also concluded that this budget has not provided anything to shout about and that there should have been much more allocated for the ordinary man. Yes, there may be no new taxes and the income tax threshold may have been moved from \$35,000 to \$40,000, but that does not make life any better for the ordinary man. As I make this statement, I am reminded of the cartoon which appears in one of our daily newspapers which portrays the ordinary man indicating that the movement of the threshold was not enough, especially when there is the fat VAT (Value Added Tax) waiting in the wings.

We all know that as soon as there is an upward movement in salaries the prices of commodities, as well as transportation, automatically rise. With this unconscionable 16 % VAT still in place, how much relief do you think the new threshold brings to the ordinary public servant? A few weeks ago, I had a conversation with a young teacher who is a single parent of two children and who was hysterical, one evening, at classes. This young woman is trying to make a better life for herself. She owns her own home with the assistance of one of the banks and now resides in one of the new housing areas in Region 3. She teaches in Georgetown and also attends the Georgetown In-service centre at the Cyril Potter College of Education, at Turkeyen. Her take-home salary is \$25,000 with a mortgage of \$16,000 per month. I ask the Hon. Minister of Finance to fill in the blanks as he does the mathematics. What is left for food, transportation, light bill, water bill, etc? Mr. Speaker, I am quite certain that you will agree with me that she is in deep financial trouble. She is not the only one. The PNCR-1G has asked for the movement of the threshold for a long time, but the shift provided in this budget is definitely not enough. Cost of living is too high. How can this young teacher really be part of the theme of this budget, *Together Building Tomorrow's Guyana Today*?

I turn to child abuse and children. Child abuse is one of the grave social ills in our society that is perpetrated against our country's most valuable resource. The Government's inability to deal frontally with this issue demonstrates the lack of interest and concern in the preservation of a

safe and secure environment for our children. If the integrity of our children cannot be preserved, how can we build tomorrow's Guyana today? This August body has passed a number of legislations relating to children's rights and we, of this side, of the House ask that these laws be implemented to safeguard our most valuable asset – children.

A report emanating from the Childcare and Protection Agency of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security stated that between January and March last year one thousand and fifteen child abuse reports were received, but this number was seen as just a fraction of the real figure. The report provided statistics on cases involving sexual, physical and verbal abuse along with those where children were abandoned and neglected. These recorded cases for this period represent both sexes up to the age of sixteen years.

As I refer to the report from the Childcare and Protection Agency, I cannot help but refer to two teenagers: Twyon Thomas who suffered at the hands of law enforcement officers and the late Neesa Gopaul whose life was snuffed out through abuse. Investigations were done and Neesa Gopal's case is still pending in the Court. It is unfortunate that something went wrong and the case relating to Twyon was dismissed due to the non-appearance of the victim and witnesses. Someone took advantage of the poverty of the Thomas' family and like the lawyer, who was his attorney, I believe that money was paid to keep them quiet. There is no need to rehash Neesa's case, except to say that those who have taken on the responsibility to support children should take their jobs more seriously. The same must be said about the law enforcement officers. Those who brought Neesa's case to light must continue to look out for others. A lot of things with children could be helped if the community is vigilant, if it is a caring community. The officers who work in agencies must also be vigilant and caring. We all have got to take care of our children and every community should see it as its responsibility to protect the children. Child protection is everybody's business.

I now turn my attention to school uniforms. The People's National Congress Reform – 1 Guyana has always held the view, and still does today, that our children are our most valuable asset and investment in them means a prosperous Guyana. We have always sought to assist parents to equip their children for schools, be it fabric then produced in Guyana by Guyanese with materials grown in our soil, planted and reaped by our young people or with vouchers. We are happy that this Government has sought to continue our commitment to the people, even if we do not agree with its methods of distribution.

In Guyana today, our school system suffers from a high rate of truancy and school dropouts. Our schools' registers and monthly reports can authenticate this. Even our child population has become a vulnerable group to the extent of the introduction of the uniform project. There is need for more administrative control rather than political manoeuvres. I say this, because there is no need for the Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security to personally present uniforms to children. Why all this politicking?

There were some parents who never uplifted their children's vouchers. These, I am advised, were returned to the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. Complaints also reached the PNCR-1G that there were cases where parents had three or four children at school and only two vouchers were received. We do not know if this was the decision of the head teacher or if that

was an instruction. Nevertheless, not all children received school uniforms. What happened to those returned vouchers?

Given the experiences with regards to the distribution of school uniforms, I wish to recommend that this exercise must be done with thoroughness and equity in the future. The records from the head teachers from the Ministry of Education can be very helpful for the next exercise, especially since we, on this side of the House, know that, unlike the story told, not all of our schoolchildren benefited from one school uniform from the National School Uniform Assistance Programme.

I now turn to women and single parents. During the last budget debate, the Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security noted:

“I am happy to say this is, perhaps in my tenure, going to be the year that most is done for women. This will be the year where women’s development is going to take the front burner of the Ministry’s agenda.”

WOW! Apart from the Women of Worth (WOW) programme which was launched mid last year, there has not been much. WOW! According to paragraph 4.94 of this year’s budget, over five hundred women benefited from approval of loans ranging from \$100,000 to \$250,000. This programme should have empowered our women, but today a large number of our women and single parents who applied are still on the waiting list for their communities or catchment areas to benefit and become empowered.

When it comes to grants being made available to the graduates of the various training programmes, the monitoring mechanism needs to be evaluated. This is necessary to ascertain whether the purpose was fulfilled for the grants given. I question this, because I have information that some persons did not use the grants for the purpose set out.

As an educator, I am appalled at the quality of training given and hence many of the participants were not equipped with the tools and instruments for operating a successful business venture. This aspect of the programme needs to be looked at carefully. We of the PNCR-1G strongly recommend that the curriculum be revamped and that the programme be reorganised so that our women may really become entrepreneurs and take their rightful places in society. WOW! That is all there is to speak about the programme for women. Which front burner was the Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security referring to?

We have taken note of the fact that the Women and Gender Equality Commission has finally been established. The Women’s Affairs Bureau which was established during the tenure of the Government of the People’s National Congress and falls under the remit of the Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security has not, over the last few years, initiated programmes that will meet the needs of our women to empower them in our country. It is, therefore, a waste of taxpayers’ moneys to operate a department that is only a window dressing. If there is no use for this agency, close it down. We of the PNCR-1G hope that the Hon. Minister will, before the end of this Ninth Parliament, pay a much awaited visit to the Guyana Women’s Leadership Institute to interface with those women who should benefit from the proposed training to which the Hon. Minister of Finance allocated some \$25 million in his budget.

During her tenure as Minister, the Hon. Member spent more time fixing legislations that govern the rights of children and sexual offences, etc., maybe because she is a lawyer, while neglecting women's empowerment. Women's affairs are under her remit. A PNCR-led government, as it did when it was in office, would ensure that our women are trained and technical support given to them so that their business ventures are successful.

Domestic violence: Guyana has experienced high incidence of violence against women. Domestic violence... [Mr. Neendkumar: Tell us how Shirley died.] You killed her. Domestic violence continues to increase in our nation. The passage of necessary legislations is not enough. These laws must be enforced. Or should I say, when will these laws be enforced to sanction the perpetrators of these crimes in our society? Both men and women have suffered, but our women have borne the brunt of domestic violence, over the past years and 2010 has been a record year. Between the reading of the last budget and this one many women have lost their wives. I know that some men are also victims of domestic violence but the women are in the majority by far.

4.10 p.m.

It is appalling that the members of our society whose motto is, "To Protect and Serve", and I refer to the Guyana Police Force, pay little or no heed to those persons who are affected when reports are made. Complaints are deemed a matter of civil action only to assume importance when the victim is seriously injured or died, but even as we cast the blame on some policemen for their attitude to persons who make complaints, we need to ask for continued training for these public servants. They do receive some training while in the Police Training School on how to deal with reported cases of domestic violence but these policemen are not councilors or welfare officers. They need regular upgrading after leaving training school. The PNCR-IG calls on the Government to enforce necessary laws so that it can be a deterrent to those who may take pleasure in committing such crimes in our nation.

According to the Hon. Minister of Finance, the Family Court will at long last be established this year. The construction phase of the court is almost complete and we look forward to it becoming functional soon because there are cases dealing with domestic abuse that are waiting to be heard. Also, it should be a less hostile place for hearing such cases.

Having heard repeatedly in this Hon. House of the five consecutive years of positive growth, I now turn to the elderly and homeless. I once again wish to quote from the 1992 Manifesto of the People's Progressive Party Civic:-

"The new Government..."

... and, please listen to me carefully

"...will strengthen institutional relationships to absorb the growing army of destitute, street beggars, pavement dwellers, park occupants and the mentally insane, as well as to provide meaningful support for their rehabilitation. It will explore ways of bringing down the high cost of burial."

This group referred to is still going to the extent that they are rounded up when dignitaries visit Guyana. Funeral costs have increased over 300% since. Each year, by October, the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security's allocation through the Difficult Circumstances Unit for funeral expenses dries up, yet there is no request through the many supplemental provisions brought to this House for expenditure. How caring are you?

We note the rehabilitation works to the physical infrastructure to the Palms Geriatric Institution. We also note the planned construction of the residential facilities to accommodate more persons in the Night Shelter. This clearly indicates that more persons are finding it difficult to exist in this climate of unemployment, high cost of living and five years of positive growth.

Pensions

I would like to refer to a statement made by the Hon. Member, Ms. Bibi Shadick, last evening. A few sittings ago we were served with a current list of the Boards of Guardians. Having perused the names listed, I dare say that the Opposition is not represented on all of the boards. There are also names of persons who have migrated some years ago that are still listed as functional members. We call for the reconstitution of these boards with Opposition representation.

Budget 2011 provides for old-age pension to be paid with effect from 1st February at the rate of \$7,500 per month – a 14% increase over the current rate of \$6,600. During my readings, as I prepared for this presentation, I came across a very interesting paragraph in that same document, the 1992 Manifesto:-

“Our country needs to be both grateful and generous towards our pensioners and senior citizens. The P.P.P/C Government will ensure that institutions, such as the NIS, adjust benefits and pensions to cope realistically with the cost of living, to permit our elders to live out their lives not as destitute but as citizens deserving of compensation for their contributions to our society.”

This election statement was made some 19 years ago, and I am sure that you will agree with me that this is one of the many failed promises of this PPP/C Government.

Allow me to put into perspective the treatment of old-age pensioners by this Administration with respect to pensions. While the Government touts of an increase of \$900 in 2011 the withdrawal of pertinent benefits to our NIS pensioners during 2010 is not mentioned anywhere. Prior to 2010, pensioners enjoyed a two-month supply of prescription drugs from NIS. This has been changed. Pensioners are asked to purchase drugs and then seek reimbursement based on the NIS criteria. Most recently pensioners have been told that the N.I.S. would only reimburse medical bills for persons with preconditioned illnesses. As one grows older, he or she cannot develop any other illness and hope to get coverage from the National Insurance Scheme. What is a pensioner supposed to do now? The Government gives with one hand and takes back with two.

During the 2010 Budget Debate, I referred to a statement made by the Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security in her contribution to the 2009 Budget. I would like to repeat the same again:

“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.”

When the Hon. Minister made such a statement I was reminded that when the PPP/C Government came into office in 1992, it removed the means test for recipients of old age pension. This became a proud boast of the PPP/C Administration. Are you now using the same means test by which to calculate the pension given to that class of persons who would have given human service in our nation-building efforts?

I maintain that the Minister’s statement cannot be wholly true. There are so many seniors who never worked anywhere to earn an income. There are so many who worked as domestics and have no pension for the years of hard work. Many have children who do not pay attention to them and there are many who have no children. These are the pensioners who anxiously wait for the beginning of the month to line up at the post offices to receive the small \$6,600, which has now been increased by \$900 to \$7,500, and pray that God will bless the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the churches so that they will get added blessings for the month.

The increased rate of old-age pension translates to \$247 per day; certainly not enough to pay for one let alone three meals per day; so many of them supplement their pensions by begging. One only has to check out the large numbers who on Fridays go from one business place to another to collect those little coins. The traffic lights in the City of Georgetown have their own clients. In many cases the small old-age pension is their only income. Think of how much \$7,500 can buy – certainly not a basket of nutritional items, especially when the unconscionable VAT lurks in the wings. [Mr. Hinds: inaudible] No, but they have to go the market, Prime Minister. As I refer to pensions, I bring to the attention to this Hon. House the plight of those teachers and public servants who are in their late 70s and 80s. When these persons retire from active duty their salaries were small and the cost of living was not that high. Although they have benefited from the 5% increases over the years, their pensions are still very small compared to someone who retires now at the same level. We of the PNCR-1G ask that their plight be addressed.

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

Mrs. Backer: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that the Hon. Member be given 15 minutes to conclude her presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Ms. Sampson: Thank you. Even though the laws governing the Poor Law Relief Act stipulate that a review must be done every six months, the reviews being done leave much to be desired. Who or what improves the conditions or situations of a person who is born mentally, physically or visually challenged? Why are such persons not being considered for public assistance after the six-month period? They have to wait a long time and literally have to fight for that support. We are in a society where HIV/AIDS has taken its toll. Where will the guardians or grandmothers of those persons who have passed away turn to when the review denies them of being a recipient? To whom should the children of the 200 or so men who lost their lives on the streets of Guyana turn for help when they are denied public assistance after review? Where should the destitute that

have increased significantly over these positive growth years, go when they are denied public assistance after review? Those persons who are physically challenged need a more comprehensive assistance plan, since they cannot exist alone on public assistance. The visually impaired children need an educational facility to cater for their needs and they are placed in the normal school situation where they have great difficulty coping. Much more attention should be paid to them by the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. There are complaints emanating from some regions – Regions 2 and 10 just to name two of them – of the unprofessional behaviour of some members of the Board of Guardians. Very personal and impolite questions are being asked as well as rude comments are made. Women are told to go find the fathers of their children. When we think of the plight of these persons, how can we hope for them to build tomorrow's Guyana today?

Before I move on, I am advised that the Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security promised that there will be, established, a second welfare unit on the East Bank of Demerara. Two years later we ask that the Minister please fulfil that promise.

Once again, I ask that consideration be given to the pensioners who reside in those satellite villages in our hinterland. Mechanisms must be put in place to have welfare officers visit these villages through the regional system. We also ask them, again, for consideration to be given for the encashment of vouchers by community shops or business persons in some of our remote areas which would ease transportation costs by seniors to the village post offices only.

In closing, a National Budget should be a financial plan. A Budget should set out to do more than spend a huge some of money so that the architects can boast that it is bigger than ever. Our people are in pain. The reality is that the lives of too many Guyanese are still, in the immortal words of the solicitor Thomas Hobbs, "Solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Is it any wonder that Guyanese continue to migrate in record numbers? These are challenges which the policy makers must confront. These are questions which the Hon. Minister of Finance should have responded to in Budget 2011. This Budget, under the theme *Together Building Tomorrow's Guyana Today*, must demonstrate its capacity to transform the lives of our citizens and not merely to keep an entire nation on life-support.

Women are always the ones to face the hardship. When the economy goes haywire, the women feel the squeeze; when GuySuCo goes on strike and the money is short, women have to stretch the dollar. The Budget before this Hon. House has not inspired a vision of a transformed country. The Budget does not give our people the hope that tomorrow's Guyana will be better than the crime, unemployment and poverty of yesterday. We are certainly not building tomorrow's Guyana today together. I thank you.

[Mr. Harripersaud Nokta assumed the Chair]

Minister of Public Service [Dr. Westford]: Mr. Speaker, I would appreciate if you could address me as the Hon. Dr. Jennifer Westford. I rise to add my contribution to this 2011 Budget Debate. Before I continue, it is incumbent upon me to congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, for his excellent presentation of this year's estimate. Recognition is also given to the staff of the Ministry of Finance which I know has worked tirelessly to ensure this budget's early entrance into this Hon. House. Like all of the Budgets which preceded this one,

misinterpretation and deliberate misrepresentations are the order of the day from the Government's critics. This Budget, totalling \$161.4 billion, will allow the sectors to which it is allocated to continue implementing projects that will improve the standard of living of the citizens of this country.

We have heard insinuations such as "Elections Budget"; we have heard claims that this Budget has nothing in it for the ordinary people; and we also heard that the Government will not have the capacity for implementing or utilising all of the moneys that were allocated in this Budget. Obviously, these utterances have no merit and represent a blatant deviation from the truth. Let it be known that this PPP/C Government has no reason to be presenting an "Election Budget" as is preferred by the Opposition.

A proper analysis of the Budgets presented by this Government since 1993, would reveal that they are all crafted in a manner to ensure that the developmental programmes would progress annually in tandem with our planned physical improvements. Nowhere in this Budget can they point to any project that has been inserted because of this being an election year. All of the major projects, and I repeat, all of the major projects reflected in this Budget did not just happen this year. They can be found in all of our previous Budgets at different stages of development. The Government spent millions of dollars every year to prepare current and capital budget documents which are distributed to every Member of this House. I would, therefore, like to advise the Members on the other side of this House to not only read the books in isolation every year, but to cross analyze the various years' programmes. I am convinced that the Opposition really does not believe in this "Election Budget" theory that they are harping on. If they really believed that an "Election Budget" could have won votes, why did they not present an "Election Budget" in 1992?

The most preposterous utterances from the Opposition are that there is nothing in the Budget for ordinary people. Who will benefit from the 14% increase to old-age pension, as well as the increased public assistance? Are they not ordinary people? The thousands of workers who will benefit from the increased threshold, are they not also ordinary people? The \$10.1 billion to be spent on roads and bridges that will be built or repaired, the \$171 million that will be spent on markets, the \$1.3 billion that will be spent on agricultural diversification, the \$178 to be spent on the Cheddi Jagan International Airport, the \$88 million to be spent on the Leguan Airstrip, the \$24.3 billion to be expended in the education sector, the 90,000 laptops that will be distributed by the Government... Who, may I ask will benefit from these interventions, aliens or ordinary Guyanese people?

I urge the Opposition Members not to allow themselves to be blinded by political brinkmanship, and see the benefits this Budget will offer to our nation at large. After realising that their utterances of an "Elections Budget" was not convincing, the Opposition then started querying the capacity of the Government to expend the money that is provided in the Budget.

We, on this side of the House, do not just speak about capacity. We have been ensuring that we built capacity to provide the enabling environment for the efficient implementation of our developmental programmes. Over the last 15 years, this PPP/C Government has given scholarships and have trained 2,513 of our Guyanese people as professionals in the fields of human medicine, dentistry, physiotherapy, pharmacy, radiology, ophthalmology, biomedical

technology, veterinary medicine, plant science, agronomy, meteorology, hydrology, civil, electrical and mechanical engineering, mining engineering, automation engineering, computer science, computer engineering, architecture, informatics, forensic science, environmental science, environmental engineering, forestry, forestry engineering, human resource management, project management, hospital administration, special education, tourism, auditing, economics and accountancy.

Contrary to the picture that is usually painted by the Opposition in relation to the mass migration of our trained professionals, I would like to report that of the 2,513 trained professionals that returned to this country that 20 have resigned after serving their stipulated 5-year contracts and another 6 resigned prior to the termination of their contracted period, but honoured the repayment of their training costs. The others are meaningfully employed in the various Government and private sectors in the Republic of Guyana. **[Mrs. Backer:** The Cooperative Republic...] The Cooperative Republic of Guyana, thank you Mrs. Backer.

It must be noted that our training of professionals is continuous so as to cater to the increasing demands for skills both by the public and the private sectors. Shortly, we will be welcoming 385 new Guyanese professionals, 300 of whom are medical doctors, who will ensure that the ordinary people of this nation continue to access adequate health care.

To ensure that we create the enabling environment to propel our developmental agenda, we have also been training and continue to train persons in other skill categories such as heavy duty machine operators, plumbers, carpenters, masons, drafters, surveyors, nurses, technicians, medexes, community health workers and microscopists. Wherever necessary, the Government will continue to source additional foreign skills to compliment our local capacity.

4.40 p.m.

Dr. Westford: It is therefore evident, without a doubt, that this PPP/C Government has the capacity and will ensure that all of the proposed projects listed in this 2011 Budget are undertaken efficiently.

We have heard several Members of this House, who spoke before me, mention the quality of service that is being provided by some agencies. I do agree that in some cases the quality of service received by the public is lacking. For this reason it must be remembered that individuals are employed into the public sector and they come from all walks of life with different attitudes. We have been conducting and will continue to conduct training programmes for our government workers in order to try to change their attitudinal outlook to persons. I said, in my Budget presentation of 2010, the Ministry of Public Service will not rest until the citizens of this country receive efficient and adequate service from the public servants. As it pertains to the quality of service, we have been conducting staff development programmes, both locally and overseas, with an aim of upgrading our staff. This, we will continue to do.

We heard, also, of the infant and maternal mortality. All of us in this House should be concerned about this occurrence, but we have to be careful and not make it seem as if Guyana is the only, or the worst country where there is this occurrence. To show that this is an international problem,

the United Nations made some objectives – the Millennium Development Goals – two of which, numbers 4 and 5, are related to infant and mortality rates. This was not because they just wanted to do it, but because they saw this as an international problem. As I have said before, we have been training persons, we have been building and equipping institutions, but, again, the onus is on us and we have been ensuring that the quality of service that is provided is of the highest order. We have seen the Government castigated for occurrences of these maternal and child deaths. I agree that the responsibility rests with the Government and I can assure this Hon. House and the public that the Government has conducted the necessary investigations and it has, to date, implemented the necessary methods to try to curb this situation.

Yesterday I was a little unhappy when one speaker referred to some of the health workers as “murderers.” I do not think that anyone deliberately sets out to kill persons. The Hon. Member, Dr. Bheri Ramsarran, when he spoke, gave some statistics of our delivery record and he mentioned that six high risk pregnancies were referred to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC). Another Hon. Member of this House retorted by saying, “Well, of the six high risk patients, how many died?” I would like to advise, not only, that Hon. Member but other Members of this Hon. House that maternal and child death is a very sore topic. I would advise all of us to take a step back and read on what is a high risk pregnancy so that we will not cast too much aspersions on the health workers if and when one of those persons die. Let us be fair, let us understand the situation being faced and let us all endeavour to ensure that our mothers and babies live happy lives.

We have also heard about the income tax threshold not being adequate. Here again, I do not think anyone in this country would have heard the Head of State or any one of the Ministers say that our salaries are adequate. Government has often said that it pays salaries based on its ability to do so and the economic realities. Let us take a step back. Government has not been sitting idly by and allowing salaries to languish. Let us recall that in 1992 workers salaries, at the minimum level, was \$2801. To date that salary has been increased 1,118%. At that time it was approximately \$US 25. Today it is approximately US\$200.

Apart from the threshold, even though there was the global financial crisis when all around us in the developed countries, underdeveloped countries and our neighbours were sending home workers by the thousands and cutting salaries, this Government continued giving increases in salaries. Instead of sending home workers, we created 28 new categories within the public service. Into these 28 new categories we employed, in the very period, 328 new workers even though we heard that no jobs are being created. Apart from that, these are government workers and we look after their welfare. Over the very period, we have also added more public servants to our duty free list. More public officers are now entitled to get duty free concessions.

Every year there is a fiasco over contracted workers and every year I keep telling Members that our contracted workers do not get a different salary from pensionable workers. It is there for them to see in the books and all they have to do is to read and understand what is before them. We do not pay super salaries to contracted workers within the public service. I dare any person in this House to bring to me a contracted worker on the list of workers in the public service who are receiving super salaries. I dare anyone of them.

Yesterday the Hon. Member, Dr. Ramsarran, also spoke about certain indices. One particular thing that caught my attention when he spoke about the satisfaction index was when he said that among the 112 countries, Guyana is rated 35. To my astonishment, one of the Hon. Members in this House said that the satisfaction was because of rum. Is that how we look at our fellow Guyanese? That they are all drunkards? It was a Member of the Opposition who said that. Let us have some respect for our fellow Guyanese. They are satisfied because of conditions that are being provided for them by this Government and we will continue to provide such conditions and they will be more satisfied and happier. Because of that satisfaction, Government will be here another five or ten years to ensure that it keeps satisfying them.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Robert Persaud, spoke about the PPP/C's Manifesto a short while ago. I would like to also mention that in relation to the human resource development, all of the objectives listed in the PPP/C's manifesto for the last five years have all been realised. This can be said for all the sectors in the public service.

I do not grandstand. I speak of facts. It is my hope that all of us in this House will also speak about facts. Constructive criticism is very good; it is a recipe for development. Very few times the Government gets constructive criticism. All of us, in this House, are leaders. As the theme of this Budget says let us all strive to work together so that we can ensure that all of the moneys that go towards the developmental programmes which this Government is so ably trying to implement, all of it can assist in that implementation so that all people, theirs as well as ours, will continue to benefit.

Again, I would like to ask the Opposition to join with us in this task. However, if the Opposition Members fail to do so, Government will have no recourse and it will not be held back. It will ensure that together with the people of this country, who will benefit, that we will continue our progress. By making them satisfied, we have assured that we will continue sitting on this side of the House while Members of the Opposition will still be sitting there for the next ten years.
[Applause]

Mr. Speaker: I think this is an appropriate time for us to suspend.

Sitting suspended at 4:56 p.m.

Assembly resumed at 5:45 p.m.

Mrs. Holder: Thank you Mr. Speaker.

To put what I have to say in context, perhaps, it is advisable that I lay the framework by stating that, as a Member of the Opposition, it is my duty to tell this Hon. House and, in particular, the Members on the Government side, that in a true democracy the people's views matter. The Members of the Government benches have given the impression that this truth offends, rather than informs them.

The first point that I would like to make is that the Hon. Finance Minister, in holding down this Hon. House for some three hours, unwittingly, pushed the tolerance of many Members on this side of the House. Particularly, because he chose to include, extensively, Public Relations (PR) type commentary in his presentation. This is clearly unnecessary for elucidating the true intent of

any budget and I would like to recommend that the Hon. Finance Minister desist from this PR exercise and I advise that he stick to financial matters.

From all appearances, one is led to believe that the Budget has nothing to with the necessities of a development strategy that involves the nation as a whole, has nothing to do with addressing the desire of the Guyanese people to pull themselves out of the poverty tract in which they have been placed, has nothing to do with addressing the social and economic ills plaguing this country or, indeed, the political conundrum regarding economic growth, chasing away investors and adversely impacting political stability in our country.

What the 2011 Budget, in fact, does is to provide continued opportunities for this Administration to engage in spending on Capital Works, in continuation of the practice of giving out largesse, strategically, in seeking to guarantee the incumbent's political survival.

I predict that in this year, designated to honour the descendents of Africans in this country, we would witness greater marginalisation of peoples of all races, new depths of maladministration and corruption and worse ratings issued by international corruption perception assessments. Evidence of this possibility has already been poignantly noted by my colleague, the Hon. Mr. Ramjattan, last evening. Another evidence to the malady of this corruption has also been made in relation to the costs budgeted for the execution of the Amerindian land demarcation exercises earmarked for this year.

In an astute assessment of this year's Budget, the Ram and McRae Budget Focus points out an extremely important observation made by Attorney-At-Law, Dr. Arif Bulkan. He noted that the 2006 Amerindian Act greatly simplifies the demarcation process, thereby causing red flags to be raised when the large sums allocated for this exercise are taken into consideration. This, I opine is merely the tip of the iceberg given the capital expenditure is projected to increase by 33% to some \$62 billion this year.

In a budget that claims to be building tomorrow's Guyana's today, where are the jobs? As I searched the Budget for evidence of job creation, I found this to be one of the biggest failures of this Administration in responding to the loud cries of our people for more jobs. According to the Hon. Member, Mr. Manzoor Nadir, his agency alone found jobs for more than some 6000 persons, as if to say that that, in itself, solves the massive unemployment that this country faces. My experience tells me differently as I move around the country meeting qualified people who are actively searching for jobs. For those without skills, who are within the ranks of the unemployed, the Alliance For Change (AFC) recommends upgrading technical schools to provide vocational training in such areas as carpentry, computer repairs, hospitality management and so on. We also recommend for the creation of jobs in the Hinterland, for instance in Region No. 9, the revitalisation of the peanut and cashew industries.

The point has to be made that it is a crying shame that for 19 years this Government has refused to commission a study to determine the level of unemployment which prevails in our country. Now, we are expected to take, seriously, the intention to conduct a labour market information exercise by the Ministry of Labour whose Minister, by the way, has become the main bulwark for this Government's economic policies. I predict that such an exercise is doomed to encounter serious credibility issues as a consequence.

It would be remiss of me not to rebut some of the points made by the Hon. Minister responsible for public servants. It has become this Government's practice to misuse the contract workers facility. To put it bluntly, the situation created by this Administration is nothing more than scandalous. Here is why: It spawns unfair treatment of workers, masks the payment of huge salaries to favourite friends of the Government by putting them in the same basket with a large number of small-salaried contract workers and, more importantly, it undermines the public service system. As a result, grave injustices now exist in the public service. For instance, there exist, today, situations where contract workers of one year could now earn more than a public servant with many years service. In addition, every six months, a contract worker receives gratuity at the rate of 22 ½%.

5.55 p.m.

What is developing, as well, is the situation where some contract workers have been in the system long enough to attain the age of retirement and, now, have expectations of receiving a pension as well. This begs the question, how could the Administration expect to achieve the quality of Governance, of which they speak. How can they expect to achieve transparency and accountability when they have systematically destroyed a quality public service?

On the question of governance, transparency and accountability, the Hon. Finance Minister, in his Budget presentation, I think it is on page 53, as well as many of his colleagues, who have spoken since, have referred to a fictitious country of which I have no knowledge. Their description of democracy, governance and accountability in no way fits the reality that exists in this country. Imagine they are making copious references about the enhanced democratic governance this Administration said it created. Imagine telling us they have adopted principles of inclusivity, when large sections of our society continue to express feelings of exclusion; continue to describe their experiences of discrimination being denied equal treatment in their professions and in their business experiences. How could Members, on the Government, side speak so brazenly about good governance when they have been dilly-dallying for a decade on establishing the Public Procurement Commission, the Human Rights Commission, and their Attendant Tribunals? How could the Hon. Minister of Finance talk so boldly about transparency and accountability, when he was unable to explain to the Hon. House why a Financial Order issued in his name was made to increase the salary of the Chief Justice to the same level as that of the Chancellor who is head of the Judiciary? Real democracy could only be attained when there is no need for questions like these. Real democracy could only be attained when a programme is devised to restore power to the people; restore village government; and hold regularly, timely Local Government elections. Real democracy could only prevail when systems are in place to allow the Judiciary and the National Assembly to be financially independent of the Government. Until then, this Administration gets a poor rating, as far as I am concerned, on the quality of Government they have spawned.

While I am on this subject, it is apposite to note the discriminatory tax treatment introduced in this year's Budget for the telecommunications sector. Does that not provide evidence of corporate discrimination? I make this point having being loud in my critiques of this sector.

On the matter of health, we all would have been enamoured with the Government's budgetary plans of the health sector, had we not known of the heart wrenching experiences of negligence

experienced by the public in some sections of the public health system. We were regaled, last night, by the experiences of the Hon. Member from Linden, clearly, indicating that something is seriously wrong and needs serious attention.

I must say that I observed one glaring omission in the plans for the health sector: the absence of a strategy to retain the large numbers of doctors, nurses and other health workers being trained at a great cost to the treasury, and upon which plank the improvement in all areas of the health sector rests.

In view of the recent maternity deaths, I strongly recommend the adoption of a Patient's Bill of Rights to be introduced by this Administration. I believe it will aid in curtailing the high levels of negligence being witnessed in the public health system.

Turning now to the issue of power generation, I am pleased to learn that some 14,000 households and four Hinterland schools have been provided with electricity. I am also pleased that a number of faulty meters have been replaced. However, I am disappointed that in this the 19th year that this Administration has been in office, they are still unable to move beyond recognising that for the private sector to become competitive, and for the citizenry to become more productive they all require adequate, reliable, and affordable electricity supply. That is what the Hon. Finance Minister told us in his Budget presentation. Eureka! When are you going to transform the system into this reality? We are tired of hearing about this. We hear about this every Budget year but when will it become a reality?

I would like to deal with a matter, and when I do, I believe, it will reveal that a far larger pension can be paid to old age pensioners. It is stated on page 60 of the Finance Minister's Budget presentation that some 42,000 pensioners who receive monthly old age pensions stand to benefit from a 14% increase. According to the data provided to this House by the Ministry of Human Services on the number of pensioners receiving old age pensions over the period 2002 to 2009, some major discrepancies have surfaced which I now bring to the attention of the House. An analysis of the rate of change noted in the number of persons receiving old age pensions reveals a rather peculiar phenomenon. Over the period 2002 to 2006 the number of pensioners was virtually static, however between 2007 and 2009 the numbers increased by an alarming 40%, approximately. The situation is further complicated and becomes most disturbing as a result of regulations that came out from the 'value for money' audit undertaken by the Auditor General for the period January 2008 to September 2009. While a number of serious deficiencies were discovered and appropriate recommendations made to improve the system, it is worthy to note that the audit, also, determined that approximately 24% of persons, 65 years and older, were not recorded in the Ministry's data base and were, therefore, not in receipt of old age pensions. The implications of these irregularities are twofold. One, an increase in the population of old age pensions by approximately 30% over a three year period implies that the life expectancy in Guyana has increased by a corresponding percentage over the same period. Therefore, assuming, that the life expectancy in Guyana was 70 years in 2006, this would now have improved by some 21 years to 91 years life expectancy in this country. That is probably among the highest in the world. Alternately, it would also mean that the population in Guyana would have increased by a similar percentage. Both scenarios being unlikely bearing in mind the country's high immigration rate. The fact that only 76% of persons at 65 years and older are, in fact, in receipt of old age pensions also indicates that in 2002 the pensions of approximately 8000 persons out of 32000

identified by the census in that age group were being diverted as well. This number has increased exponentially since 2006. The financial ramifications of this are extremely troubling. In broad terms, this indicates a monthly difference of over \$68 million and an annual difference in excess of \$824 million that appears to have been diverted out of the system. The number of phantom pensioners would have increased to 17,640. The monthly haemorrhage from the fund would, therefore, be over \$116 million or \$1.3 billion, annually. This is evidence of the high level of corruption under this Administration.

Minister of Human Services and Social Security [Ms. Manickchand]: On a Point of Order, Sir, I ordinarily do not interrupt a Member when they are speaking about my sector but this is important. The Hon. Member, Mrs. Holder, just said that there are phantom pensioners receiving money. That leads to a very reasonable interpretation by any person listening that we are saying that we are paying money to people who do not exist...

Mrs. Holder: That is exactly what I am saying.

Ms. Manickchand: ... and except the Hon. Member has evidence of that, then I ask, kindly, Sir, that you order her to retract it.

Mr. Speaker: I am not sure that that is a Point of Order Member.

Mrs. Holder: I will retract nothing, Mr. Speaker. I am prepared to give the study to the Hon. Minister and to the Auditor General.

Ms. Teixeira: Could the Hon. Member tell us which study she is quoting from and tabling in this House? None of us heard what the name of the study is, who wrote it and when.

Mrs. Holder: This is a study done by me based on the questions that the Hon. Minister answered in this House; based on the Auditor General's report; and based on the census. I am prepared to let the Minister have it or anyone who wants it. The logics are here; the facts are here; the data is here; where the data comes from is quoted. It is all legitimate. It is a simple matter of deduction; it is a simple matter of logics; it is a simple matter of mathematics. Anyone who can add, subtract and multiply will come to the obvious conclusion.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, there is nothing that I can see in the Standing Orders that would allow me to stop the Hon. Member.

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, I am not asking that you stop her. Even if I were not on strong grounds earlier, now that the Hon. Member has, pretty much, said she made this up herself, then I ask you Sir...

Mr. Speaker: The Member did not say that, proceed Mrs. Holder.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, according to Standing Order 41.6 "No Member shall impute improper motive to any Member of the Assembly". *[Interruption by Members]*

Mr. Speaker: Members please allow me to hear what is being said.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, according to Standing order 41.6 “No member shall impute improper motive to any Member of the Assembly...”

Mr. Speaker: The Member has not imputed improper motive to any Member of the National Assembly.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I do not wish to contradict you but the Member said that the moneys were diverted into other areas. These are imputations of improper behaviour.

Mr. Speaker: The objection that has been raised by the Hon. Member, Ms. Manickchand, is that the Hon. Member said that there are phantom pensioners receiving benefits. That does not impute improper motive to a Member.

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, I am presiding over that Ministry if I am paying people who do not exist with the money of this country then that says I am not managing the State’s money properly.

Mr. Speaker: I do not agree with your Point of Order, proceed Mrs. Holder.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I have raised a different issue about what Mrs. Holder said and I quote her. She said, “millions of dollars were diverted and pulled out of the system.” Those are my notes of what she said verbatim. Therefore, that is a different issue of imputation of improper motive.

Mr. Speaker: I rule that, that does not impute improper motive to any Member of the National Assembly. Proceed, please, Mrs. Holder.

Mrs. Holder: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I spent a great deal of time dealing with this matter. I had it checked with a number of economists locally and overseas. I sent copies of the answers to my questions to the Hon. Minister and her Ministry that compiled the data on which this study was based. I simply used the data contained in the 2002 population census and came to the mathematical conclusions that I came to. Everything that I said here can be checked, double checked and confirmed.

Minister of Finance [Dr. Singh]: I must confess that I do not know which Standing Order covers the enquiry that I wish to make but may I enquire, Sir, if I could, possibly, ask the Hon. Member a question about the study that she has made.

Mr. Speaker: I cannot allow you to ask a question.

Mrs. Holder: I repeat the number of phantom pensioners has now increased to 17,640. The monthly haemorrhage from the fund, this is the pension fund, would, therefore, be over \$116 million or \$1.3 billion annually. This is evident of the high level of corruption under this Administration.

In closing, it is necessary to state that had the Auditor General, in his review of the Old Age Pension Programme, had he taken into consideration the census figures rather than solely rely on the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, this situation would have been properly investigated and old age pensioners would have received thousands of dollars more than they are now receiving.

I am prepared to make my study available and public whenever necessary.

Mr. Speaker: Far from being prepared to make your study available, I am directing that you make it available to the Clerk of the National Assembly for the benefit of Members. You quoted from a report and that report needs to be available.

Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce [Mr. Prashad]: I would like to commend the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, Minister of Finance, for presenting to the National Assembly; a people's Budget; one aimed at improving the livelihood of the vulnerable and working class. A Budget which is Private Sector friendly; a Budget which will boost investment, drive growth and expansion, create more jobs and strengthen the economic and social foundation of our beautiful country. I wish to place on record my support for the motion by the Ho. Minister of Finance to approve the estimates for the 2011 Budget - *together building tomorrow's Guyana today.*

The Hon. Member, Mrs. Holder, spoke about lack of reliable electricity in the Finance Minister's Budget presentation. I would like to point out that on page 33 paragraph 454, the Minister of Finance said, "the generation of adequate reliable and affordable power supply to the needs of our private citizens and our private sector remains and urgent priority." He further went on to say that "in 2010 over \$5.3B was spent in the power sector" and in paragraph 457 he spoke, at length, of the Amaila falls hydro-power project which he says was sized at 154mega watt with financing for this project of approximately U.S\$650 million, is this not caring for the supply of electricity for the people of this country? What more could the Hon. Member want? I would like to, also, mention that the Hon. Member... [**Mrs. Backer:** Which one?] Mrs. Volda Lawrence, in her maiden presentation as lead presenter in the Budget debate mentioned that the Chairman of the Guyana Manufacturers and Servicicers Association (GMSA) are complaining about the lack of reliable supply of electricity to the private sector. That is not an unfair comment because my colleagues in the private sector complained to me several times about that. However, what the Hon, Member did not mention, is what the Chairman of the Private Sector Commission said and what the same chairman of the GMSA said about the Budget. The former president of the Chairman of Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Chandradat Chintamani; the former President of the Private Sector Commission, Capt. Jerry Gouveia; the President of the Association of the Regional Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Rohan Marray; and all of the chambers throughout the country is in praise of the Budget and what it does for the people of this country.

I would like to let the entire membership of this House know the genesis of corporation tax. This was started in 1993. I was part of the delegation that met the, then, Minister of Finance Mr. Asgar Ally. In those days we were asking for corporation tax reduction from 45% and for the manufacturing sector to have one rate at 35%. We did not succeed in 1993. From 1994 until 2000, when I became president of Chamber of Commerce and the Private Sector Commission, I led several delegations to the, then, Finance Minister and current President for the reduction of corporation from 45% to one rate of 35%. We still did not succeed. Several other private sector leaders, who are looking at this debate, can attest to this: every year, at Budget debate time, we visited the Ministry of Finance because we wanted a reduction of corporation tax. We wanted it to be moved from 45% to 35%. This has surpassed our wildest dreams and expectations. I never thought that I would see, in my lifetime, not only the corporation tax for the manufacturing sector came down from 45% to 30%, even more than we bargained for; the service sector tax was reduced from 45% to 40%. We are extremely happy with this.

Additionally, there were no shortages of goods and services throughout the country; while the products being offered were of quality and within an affordable price range of all Guyanese. Listen to this statement “additionally, there were no shortages of goods and services throughout the country”. It is not often that one can make statements like these.

In terms of cost for public transportation, 2010 saw no increases for the consuming public. The Mini Bus and Taxi Associations must be commended for working along with my Ministry to keep the price of the fare structure stable.

In 2010, the prices of chicken and eggs at the markets were relatively stable, and there were no instances of shortages on the local market. The Commerce Ministry and the Guyana Poultry Producers’ Association (GPPA), continues to share information and monitor the industry closely along with the Ministry of Agriculture. In 2010, not one single chicken was imported; we were self sufficient in chicken in 2010. Even during the Christmas season there were no shortages of chicken. In fact- and this is a record because- I have never known the prices to reduce during the Christmas season. This happened for the first time in 2010.

With a successful housing drive by the Ministry of Housing and the continuous construction boom in Guyana, the Guyana National Bureau (GNBS) ensured that the consuming public was not faced with any shortages or substandard building material. I am sure you could remember, we had questioned the zinc sheets and PVC pipes and the length of steel rods. They corrected the situation.

In order to successfully equip consumers with the information necessary to make wise choices as well as to inform them of their rights and responsibilities, the Ministry used several strategies in 2010 to ensure that information was disseminated throughout the country. These included weekly live informative radio and television programmes, etc.

We at the Consumers Department of the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce work closely with other organisations. These include the Guyana Consumers Association, of which the Hon, Member, Mrs. Sheila Holder, is well aware of all the good work that was done in the past...we worked closely in those days; the Consumer movement in Guyana and the Consumer Advisory Bureau; the food and drugs department; Analyst department, and the Guyana National Bureau of Standards.

6.25 p.m.

I am pleased to announce to the House that the Consumers Affairs Bill has been drafted; it is in its final stage of review and vetting, and is in preparation for presentation to the National Assembly, during 2011. This consumer protection legislation will assist in promoting and protecting consumer interests in relation to the supply of goods and services and will, also, prevent businesses engaging in fraud or specific unfair practices. Consumers will be able to make better choices in the market place; and fair trade and free flow of truthful information will take place in the market place.

Mr. Speaker, a commercial zone was created in Lethem to facilitate private sector development. To date sixty-one plots are available and fifty-seven have been distributed. Forty-six of the distributed lands have received leases. This commercial zone will host the following: there will

be four retail stores, four hotels, seven restaurants, one insurance company, one bank, two gas stations, one supermarket, bakeries etc. Approximately seven recipients have completed construction of their buildings and are operational, while about twenty businesses are presently under construction. The commercial zone holds tremendous prospects due to the road linkage between Georgetown and Brazil, which will substantially increase trade with Brazil's northern states.

I am pleased to inform the House that the sum of \$25 million has been earmarked, for 2011, to improve the infrastructure at the Lethem Commercial Zone. Roads, drains and culverts will be strengthened to facilitate better access in the Commercial Zone. I should mention that very soon we will be heading a small team to do a pioneering exhibition – maybe some Members from the Opposition can join me – what we would be doing is having breakfast in Georgetown, having lunch in Boa Vista, we set out at thirty minutes after midnight from Georgetown, we have lunch in Boa Vista at twelve o'clock, we have dinner in Santa Elena, Venezuela, at six o'clock and we will be back at Lethem before midnight. Within twenty four hours we will be doing that.

The Small Business Bureau was established on June 1st, 2010 under the auspices of the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce and supervised by the Small Business Council (SBC). The S.B.C has been actively involved in the needs assessment for the small business sector in Guyana. Over the past few months the Council has been addressing matters of local and export market opportunity, sectoral support and promotion, and regulation reform. Additionally several key sectors have been identified with growth potential; agriculture, tourism, agro-processing, aquaculture, handicraft, poultry and livestock. Small business operators received assistance to participate in the Linden Expo 2010, the Berbice Expo and GuyExpo 2010. One hundred arts and crafts producers and agro processors received training which was conducted in the areas of standard and conformity assessment, packaging and marketing, entrepreneurship training and strategic business planning. Training was facilitated by the Guyana National Bureau of Standards, Empretec Guyana Inc., and the Junior Chamber International Guyana.

Fifteen craft producers were trained in packaging and marketing. Producers in these sectors have been exporting products, but needed further technical assistance in the areas of packaging, labelling and marketing of our products. We in Guyana have quality products, better than some of the products which come into the country, but because of packaging and marketing we suffer tremendously. This is an area in which we are advancing training. In addition, twenty young entrepreneurs, mainly craft producers from Kabakaburi and other neighbouring communities, Pomeroun – Region 2, received training in Business Ethics.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) have contributed significantly to the economic development of Guyana, especially in terms of job creation. Small and Medium Enterprises are perceived as the economic force of nations, and, as such, must be able to provide high quality products and services.

Research has shown that small businesses are an effective vehicle for the development of the national economies, which contributes to the reduction of poverty. In addition, it is estimated that about 80% of the world's businesses are small to medium sized. In Guyana, small businesses represent 75% of the total business activities, and make a substantial contribution to the generation of employment and income.

Mr. Speaker, 2010 was a very successful and eventful year for tourism in Guyana, as the Ministry embarked on a market led strategy to harness our potential and develop the sector. Tourism supports thousands of jobs and creates employment for many Guyanese; it also generates revenue in foreign exchange and has been, increasingly, attracting both local and foreign investors. Many of our hinterland communities have seen and are enjoying the benefits of tourism as a means of livelihood. Tourism is growing and expanding and has seen excellent returns on investments. I believe that Tourism has the ability to transform Guyana into a world class destination. Every Member of this House should support our tourism drive. Each of us can help in protecting a cleaner environment. Do not litter; be courteous to our tourist. The Immigration and Customs and airport taxis are already leading the way. They are doing an excellent job. If you check the reception with the Immigration Officers, they are smiling, they are pleasant, they are courteous and friendly, and the customs people are praising Guyana now. There is a vast improvement in services upon coming into this country. The same cannot be said for many of our neighbours in the Caribbean, and also as far as North.

Last November at our Fourth Annual Tourism Awards Ceremony, Mr. Hugh Riley the CTO Secretary General, delivering the feature address, rightly observed the potential of tourism in Guyana when he said “Guyana is an incredible story waiting to unfold and is a natural magnet for travellers who want to do more than just fly in and flop down”. This is from the CTO Secretary General. There was a time when no one from the CTO visited Guyana, but Guyana now is on the move, and they are recognising the potential of Guyana. The CTO is conducting training courses free of cost to Guyanese. We are now part of this CTO drive to promote Tourism because of what is happening in the world market. Guyana is seen now as a destination of choice.

Bob Payne, the famous journalist – most of you have heard about him – writing for the Condé Nast Traveller Magazine referred to Guyana as “The Avatar on Earth”. Visitors are wowed by Guyana’s pristine nature, wildlife, unique experiences and by our hospitality.

In 2010, Guyana saw a record breaking year for arrivals, with a 6.3% increase in arrivals over 2009 despite the world financial crisis. I note the Hon. Member Mrs. Volda Lawrence mentioned that there was a decline in income from tourism. There is no way that anyone, not even the Finance Minister could have told me, when I asked him, there was a decline. Because the revenue is not quantified in the budget; it is captured in different sectors of the economy: craft producers, hotels, restaurants and bars. We have increased to one hundred and fifty thousand visitors. The average tourist from Europe spends 4,500 Euros for a nine day tour to Guyana excluding airfare. This nine days travel from Cheddi Jagan International Airport to Surama, Rockview, Aricarinambo or Atta Rainforest Lodge. We are on the increase, *big time*.

This record breaking visitor arrivals points to visitors’ confidence in Guyana as well as the success of the marketing initiatives and programmes of the Ministry of Tourism and the Guyana Tourism Authority in collaboration with the Private Sector, especially the Tourism and Hospitality Association of Guyana. These arrivals are just air arrivals from CJIA which are captured in the mis-system that all the other countries such as Jamaica, Barbados, St. Lucia and Grenada use. This one hundred and fifty thousand visitors in 2010 do not include visitors coming across Lethem, Moleson Creek crossing, Ogle International Airport and also the cruise and yachts that are checking into the country now.

Guyana is now a more popular and known tourist destination as a result of excellent and effective marketing and promotions in the international arena. We have marketed and promoted Guyana by attending the following international forums:-

- ITB in Germany – The world’s largest travel and trade show

Incidentally, while we were at ITB, in 2008, we were able to attract a German cruise ship which came here last year.

- Vakantie beurs in Holland – which is the largest consumer travel show
- WTM. – the World Travel Market in London
- The British Bird Watching fair in Rutland England
- The Shanghai World Expo – which we spent six months
- Suriname Tourism Fair
- The Caribbean Week in New York
- The Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organisation (ACTO) Fair

As a result of Guyana’s attendance at these international travel trade shows, an increasing number of prestigious and reputable tour companies and operators are proactively selling destination Guyana. Hon. Member Keith Scott may want to come on these tours, because I understand he is my shadow. The sales distribution network is critical to tourism development and growth. Today, some of the largest tour companies are selling Guyana, these include; Saga Holidays, Wildlife Worldwide, Bird Holidays, Travelling Naturalist, American Birding Society, Eco-ventures, Geographic Expeditions, Andean Trails, Explore Worldwide, Journey Latin America, Mass Audubon Tours, Manu Expeditions, Nature trek, just to name a few.

In 2010, Guyana hosted two international FAM Tours for tour operators, journalists, researchers and conservationists. You do not make money from FAM tours, you bring people to let them familiarise themselves with it. FAM tours are critical in creating and increasing market demand for destination Guyana and in expanding our sales distribution network. FAMs also provide excellent travel stories on Guyana and help to raise our destination profile and image. Only last week we came back from Holland, and a Dutch FAM tour will take place within weeks.

Guyana was granted “approved destination status” by China which allows Chinese tourists to travel to Guyana. International Surveys have shown that China is slated to become the largest outbound tourist market in the world by 2020. This provides an excellent avenue to boost arrivals and investment in Guyana. Guyana had, I am told from our Caricom friends and even from those who visited from Guyana, probably the best booth in the Caribbean village and over four million visitors passed through and obtained information from the Guyana booth. This provided tremendous exposure and awareness of destination Guyana.

In 2010, the website visitation reached a record of 3,956 million hits and 78,261 unique visitors. Social marketing tools, blogs, facebook and twitter are also now being used to promote and market destination Guyana to the world. Advertising: Caribbean Airlines in-flight videos are also used.

Destination Guyana received excellent coverage in the international travel press/media. We estimated that the exposure leveraged is valued at millions of US dollars for 2010. In fact, one

member of this Assembly told me that she learnt that one exposure was worth US \$6 million. These are some of the exposures that we got:

- Sunday Times of UK;
- Katie Spatz, rowed a solo across the Atlantic and arrived to a warm reception in Guyana – this was internationally recorded;
- Charles Montier, an adventurer, paddled the entire length of the Potaro River, 140 miles, the first person to do so;
- World famous explorer, Colonel Blasford Snell visited Guyana to continue his work with the Wai Wai;
- The Travel Channel, “The Wild Within” – a one hour documentary on Guyana
- 101 Amazing Adventure Destinations of the world – Guyana is recommended.
- Rupununi – Into the Lost World, Dr. Graham Watkins’ book.
- Wild coast – John Gimlette’s book on the three Guianas
- Wanderlust Magazine – Guyana featured;
- Bird Watch Magazine – Guyana featured;
- Conde Nast Magazine – Guyana featured;
- The BBC – Jana Chan – Guyana featured;
- Adventure Travel News – Birdwatchers land in Guyana again;
- Aishti Magazine – Voyage into the unknown: explore Guyana’s rainforest;
- The New York Times 2010 – we are featured several times in the New York Times;
- Lime Magazine – Guyana featured;
- The three part series on the BBC, lost land of the jaguar;
- Wildlife Magazine;
- Winging it – a bird watching publication; and
- WSEE – One Caribbean Weather Channel, the Parrot Man, we are featured there again.

All these sum up to millions of dollars in advertisements. One can only remember during cricket World Cup when we took a team of journalist to the Kaieteur without promising them anything, and during their lunch session, in a span of about twenty seconds, which would have cost US \$50,000 which we cannot afford, they aired Guyana throughout the world. These are moneys that we have to talk about, which is millions of US dollars.

I am delighted to report to this Hon. House that the BBC advanced team is here – I met with them – in Guyana to film a ten part series titled “*Serious Explorers Retracing the Footsteps of Sir Walter Raleigh*”. This television series, which focuses on a venture for kids, is an award winning show having won the British Association of Film and TV awards. This series will be aired in October 2011 on the BBC in the UK and to over one hundred and fifty countries around the world reaching an audience of over 60 million viewers.

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

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

Question put, and agreed to

Mr. Prashad: Mr. Speaker, in effort to retrace the footsteps of Sir Walter Raleigh – it is important for us to listen to this because this is what is taking place in Guyana – in search of the city of gold. The team, including eight kids aged twelve to fifteen, who were selected from over sixteen thousand entries worldwide, will arrive in the Waini River on February 4th via the sailboat Scaramouch. Those you who remember Scaramouch, the famous sword fencing pictures... [Mrs. Backer: I hope it is not bringing any pirates.] Actually Hon. Backer let me tell you what will be happening. They will be sailing down the Waini River. If you have seen Pirates of the Caribbean, a vessel like that will be coming through the Waini River again. [Mrs. Backer: Let Minister Rohee know that there are pirates.] Filming will be done also in the Waini, Kaieteur, the Rupununi, Mahdia, Mount Roraima, Surama and Rewa. This series will boost Guyana's image and destination awareness. Icon films commissioned by animal planet will be here next month also to do a two hour documentary on Monster Rivers, featuring the Essequibo River, wildlife, the Rupununi, Kaieteur, Iwokrama, our indigenous people and our culture. Again, this will be beamed to worldwide audience.

Domestic tourism is critical to the success of any destination. Over the past few years the Ministry of Tourism has been encouraging Guyanese to travel, explore and discover their own country. Some of the areas and events that are recorded which increased visits locally were: Kaieteur Falls, No. 63 Beach, Surama, Iwokrama, Karanambo, Yupukari, Rewa, Cow Falls and Wanatobo Resort in the Corentyne River, Moruka and Wakenaam Expos, Rockstone Fish Festival, Pakarima Mountain Safari, Bartica, Mainstay and Orealla Regattas, Rodeo and Rupununi Expo, GuyExpo and many others.

The Ministry has encouraged event planners to organise cluster entertainment events during the Easter, August and Christmas holidays to boost and complement the tourism experience.

GuyExpo, Guyana's and the Caribbean's largest trade expo – no other expo in the Caribbean covers over six days – has been a tremendous success with over 100,000 persons attending. It witnessed participation from Suriname, Brazil, India and Mexico among others.

Mr. Speaker, 2010 was an excellent year in which we achieved greater diversification and tourism expansion in key areas. Some of these areas are:

- Bird watching – Guyana is now being compared with Peru and Ecuador and is the hottest new bird watching destination. Of recent Guyana has gained a lot of international attention with over 840 species of birds. Today several large international companies are selling bird watching tours to Guyana with the slogan “Guyana, a birdwatcher's paradise”. All those with laptops may check it up now: on Google-search engine Guyana comes up two times among the top ten of 5.2 million search results when the words “bird watching” is typed. Check it out now.
- Eco Tourism – with the largest pristine tract of tropical rainforest, high species biodiversity, amazing wildlife, pristine rivers and mountain ranges, Guyana has become a hotspot and a new and much sought after destination for eco tourists.
- Wildlife watching – Guyana is known for its rich and viewable wildlife. Tourist are often fascinated by the amazing diversity in Guyana since we are known to be the home for the giants of the Amazon, by this I am referring to the harpy eagle, the giant anaconda, the

black caiman, arapaima, the giant ant eater, the jaguar, and if you check outside of Guyana Stores Ltd you will see a new billboard featuring the giants of the Amazon.

Two Amerindian communities received international tourism awards in 2009, these being Surama – these are international awards, the Ministry honoured them earlier, but they received international awards – Surama – for community based tourism and eco-tourism and Yupukari for the conservation of wildlife. Recently, Mr. Sydney Allicock also received the Anthony N Sabga award for excellence in public and civic contributions.

Sport fishing has tremendous potential for Guyana. A sport fishing plan is currently being developed by the Ministry of Tourism and several investors have expressed an interest in investing in this area in consultation and partnership with the local community.

Costa Del Mar, Oearch, Nervous Waters along with the International Game Fishing Association were here to conduct feasibility studies of our sport fishing potential. They were here only a week ago.

Guyana has been attracting a number of tourists by the hosting of sporting events – cricket, motor racing, football, horse racing, hockey, rugby et cetera.

In 2010, we welcomed the cruise ships Vista Mar and Clea II which docked at the Guyana National Shipping Corporation (GNSC) wharf for a day. We are expecting in the first quarter of this year, two cruise liners. Additionally, yachts continue to arrive in Guyana, especially in the Essequibo River and Bartica area. Last November we saw over ten yachts converge in the Essequibo River just outside Bartica and Hurakabra.

In 2010, over 400 persons were trained in the hospitality sector. Training was done to personnel at the Airport, Customs and Immigration, Airlines, Hotels and Taxi services. We also conducted training in tour guiding, event management, event planning, packaging and distribution, and customer service training for staffers in the hospitality sector. We plan to expand training in 2011. New investment in the tourism sector includes:

- new guest facilities constructed at Kaieteur and Tukeit,
- new spa at Princess Hotel,
- new Hotels and guest houses – Tower and Pegasus renovated,
- new nightclubs – Edge Lounge and Mojos,
- new restaurants - Hibiscus, Coffee Bean Cafe and Eatery, Nal's Food Court
- New and renovated lodges - Atta lodge is completed
- New taxi services – most of them are now in yellow
- Acquisition of served additional small aircrafts

The year 2011, will see the implementation and enforcement of the Tourism regulations to ensure the improvement of quality standards and services, and safety in the hospitality sector. This will also boost our competitiveness and satisfy visitor expectations.

I am pleased to report that the Taxi Service Association of Guyana formally adopted the Taxi Drivers Code of Ethics which was drafted in consultation with the Taxi Association and the Ministry of Home Affairs.

6.55 p.m.

The Ministry of Tourism has been making great strides by working with the private sector in Guyana and abroad - the Tourism and Hospitality Association of Guyana (THAG), USAID-GTIS, Iwokrama, Conservation International, World Wildlife Fund (WWF), IICA, German Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ), CESO(Canadian), DFID, the Private Sector Commission and the Chamber of Commerce.

We are trying to attract new airlines. We had discussions with KLM. They want to do a service from Amsterdam/ Paramaribo, Georgetown/ Amsterdam, which will expand our European route. Also, we are awaiting an answer from Suriname Airways. They want to do Miami/Paramaribo, Georgetown/Miami. We also met with Jet Blue in New York and are having discussions with them because they are in St. Lucia and Barbados.

The Ministry of Tourism Industry and Commerce has been working assiduously to promote and market Guyana as a meeting, conference, and event destination. Additionally, the Guyana Conference Centre has been able to provide similar, and, in most cases, better facilities at a competitive price than our top competitors in the Caribbean. The Conference Centre hosted forty-six conferences for 2010. Some of these have been the COSHOD meeting, the ILO meeting, the IICA meeting and most recently the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) meeting where we saw seven South American Presidents converging on the International Conference Centre. That was a proud day for Guyana.

The Social Entrepreneurship Programme (SEP) is a \$27 million programme funded mainly through a loan from the Inter American Development Bank to enhance Guyana's competitiveness and contribute to the increase in the levels of private investment and exports in the country. As an integral part of a wider initiative to implement Guyana's National Competitive Strategy (NCS), this programme has been focusing mainly on policy reforms, institutional strengthening and public private partnership, all of which will contribute towards improving Guyana's global competitiveness through increased investments, economic growth, and job creation.

Some of the activities planned for 2011 are: continuing the process for telecommunication reform in Guyana, conducting a feasibility study on expanding shipping capacity, staffing and support of consumer protection and competition secretariat, continuing institutional strengthening of GO-Invest, strengthening the capacity of GNBS to provide support to businesses on international standards, upgrading GNBS laboratory equipment and delivery of matching grants initiative to improve firms export potential.

Members of the National Assembly, I am pleased to announce that a private sector summit will be held in the first half of this year.

The Guyana National Bureau of Standards continues to provide a service to the Nation in the areas of standardization, conformity assessment and metrology. These areas form the pillars upon which successful trade is hinged; by this I mean local, regional and international. Another key function of the Bureau is in the area of consumer protection, and this is evident in the number of services provided by the Bureau. In addition to that, the GNBS provides vital scientific and testing services to the manufacturing commercial and public sector which is an

essential support mechanism for international trade. The impact of these activities by GNBS is visible in the export of rice, sugar, sea foods, fresh fruits, vegetables, and other commodities.

In 2010, GNBS monitored both local manufacturers and importers of new weighing and measuring devices, in order to ensure devices used in commerce were accurate, and consumers received the correct quantities purchased.

The GNBS also conducted subsequent verification exercises countrywide at shops, municipal markets, airlines, hospitals, health centres, rice mills, post offices, sugar estates, petrol stations, terminals, and supermarkets.

The registration of importers and local manufacturers under the Standards Compliance Programme continued during the year to ensure that the eighteen commodities monitored by the Bureau were in compliance with the respective national labelling standards. Monitoring requires examination of products at bonds, warehouses, and wharves, which resulted in a total of 276 importers and seven local manufacturers being registered.

As an integral part of the National Competitiveness Strategy, the capacity of the GNBS was strengthened through training on the ISO Management System Standards 9001:2008 (Quality Management Systems), 14001:2004 (Environmental Management System), ISO/IEC 17025 (Laboratory Management System). I am pleased to inform the House that through this programme, the following companies have been provided with technical assistance to implement the ISO9001 Management System: Guyana Stock feeds Inc., Bounty Farm Ltd., Brass Aluminium and Cast Iron Foundry while GUYOIL was given technical assistance for ISO 14001 Environmental Management System, and Tandy's Manufacturing for ISO 22000, Food safety Management System. Technical assistance was also provided to testing, inspection and certification bodies that were vying for accreditation to the respective standards.

Mr. Speaker: Time is up Hon. Member.

Mr. Hinds: Mr Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given another 10 minutes to conclude his presentation.

Question put, and agreed to

Mr. Prashad: Mr. Speaker, Members of this Hon. House let me once again congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, for presenting a budget which has something for everyone. It is a people's budget which is geared towards improving the livelihoods of the vulnerable and working class in our society, and has outlined policies that will certainly boost investment, drive growth and expansion, and at the same time, create more jobs and strengthen the economic and social foundation of our beautiful country Guyana. Thank you. *(Applause)*

Mrs. Blair: Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution on the Budget of 2011 with the theme *Together, Building Tomorrow's Guyana Today*. This theme definitely suits this year because Guyana will be having general elections. This theme is used to try to captivate the minds of all Guyanese, but it is sad because, as Guyanese, we are using all our wisdom that the Lord has bestowed unto us to define propaganda and promises from reality. We are offered technology

from the toys that children play with, cell phones and every other equipment possible to decide for ourselves.

“Biggest Budget ever”, we hear this every year, but the 2011 Budget is filled with slush funds for national elections. The lives of people remain the same. The rich is getting richer, and the poor is getting poorer. This budget ignores the cries of the Guyanese people. It has no satisfying increase in salaries and wages so there will not be a better quality of life for the people, especially those living in poverty. To compound that there is the 16 % vat that is raping the pockets of all Guyanese. The increase in the threshold is a slap of disrespect to Guyanese because most Guyanese earn under \$35,000 per month. It is unfairly balanced. The tax system needs to be revisited.

Mr. Speaker, a person with two, five or even ten dependants pays the same tax as a person without dependants. The Government needs to use some of the 16 % vat to give better increases in salaries and wages. The 5% increase in salaries and wages to the \$5,000 threshold cannot match the increases in food prices. The 2011 increase has already been implemented.

I will give a small example of the basic food items. In 2009 rice was \$560 a gallon and in 2010 it was \$800 a gallon. Milk was \$360 a pound and it is now \$500 a pound. Eggs were \$600 per tray, now \$1,000 per tray. Chicken was \$240 a pound, now \$380 a pound. Salt was \$40 a pound, now \$80 a pound. Eddoes were \$60 a pound, now \$120 a pound. Plantains were \$50 a pound, now \$120 a pound. Bananas were \$80 a pound, now \$160 a pound. Laundry soap was \$40 a cake, now \$80 a cake. Sugar was \$60 a pound, now \$100 a pound. Cooking gas was \$2,900 a bottle, now \$3,800 a bottle. Cooking oil was \$320 a bottle, now \$460 a bottle. If we add the increases in prices for items at unit price we will, actually, get \$5,000 per person. This has gross effects even on the increase for those receiving public assistance and for pensioners.

Huge sums of moneys are mentioned in this budget but value for money is absent. There are reports of substandard works from every region, especially in the hinterland. To be honest, the many schools built are already collapsing in one way or another. Some have not even been used because of staffing and furniture. The same can be said for hospitals and health centres, even markets and wharfs.

I will now turn my attention to my constituency. Had I known that my colleague, on the other side, had nothing to say about our Region, I too might not have said anything. It clearly shows that the Government has nothing to offer Region 7, because my colleague said nothing to us. A few words to describe the budget for Region 7 is “same old, same old story; nothing new.”

This Budget has failed to assure us, especially the young people, of any new job creation and increased employment. It has only made them more frustrated, depressed and uncertain. There is no hope for them to be independent and owners of property. The only alternative is drugs and crime which has now opened its doors even in our schools. Education is sinking, dropouts are increasing, absenteeism is increasing, discrimination is on the rise because of the automatic promotion, slow learners are left behind, and, thus, in the near future we will have a nation of illiterate people.

Mr. Speaker, moneys are allocated for the University of Guyana which we appreciate, but no mention is made of a public library for the children of Bartica. Our children need a library. The

examination results are poor at both Secondary School Entrance Examination (SSEE) and Caribbean Examination Council (CXC).

A lot is mentioned in this Budget for the regions or constituencies of the PPP/Civic. Why discriminate against the Regions or Constituencies of the PNCR-1G? There should be equity in all regions. We recognise the feeding programmes and uniform distribution, but I must inform the Minister that not every child receives a uniform voucher.

'Quality education' are only words mentioned but is absent in Guyana. For example, Wineperu Primary School has one teacher who teaches all the grades. When she is sick or absent the school is closed. Kuratoka Primary School has not opened its doors as yet. This morning the students and parents of Two-Miles Primary School staged a protest in front of the Regional Democratic Councils Office in Bartica. The foundation of that school is in its worst stage. Please, Mr. Minister, a new school is needed. Build it now, please.

The secondary schools in the Region need guidance and counseling officers. Too much is happening in our schools – drugs, stabbing, teenage sex, pregnancy and abortion. Adequate staff is needed. Teachers are running for a better life. We can hear of their awards in places like the Bahamas, because they are performing at high standards- the reason being better salaries, opportunities and benefits.

I now make reference to the President's Youth Choice Building. This building has been used for everything else, even a hotel, except for its real purpose. It is now used by a women's group. And I can remember when the meeting was held for the young people, I was, actually, thrown out of that meeting by the police when I said to them "this building will not work". This building is for our youths. This is wasted tax payers money. I would like to advise the Government that a trade school is needed. This building can be used for fabricating small equipment for the mining industry, like shafts, impellers, back plates et cetera. Our young people can have a future if the Government really focuses on issues of concern rather than political schemes.

Health

Thank God we have not had any maternal deaths in my Region-if my recollection is correct. But there is need for the malaria department to work every day for the full 24 hours. Too many patients come out of the interior after 3 p.m. on Fridays and have to wait until Monday to get testing, results and medication. This has caused many deaths in 2010. I have been imploring since 2001, for this to happen. This is 2011 and no changes have been made.

There is need for testing booths to be set up in the interior mining districts. Patients still have to traverse the murky waters for further medical treatment. I hope that the Minister will give us confirmation on the opening and operating of the theatres in our hospitals in the Region. I must commend our staff for their hard work under strenuous conditions while receiving unsatisfactory salaries. It is, indeed, the love for people and their jobs that carry them through.

Housing and Water

Mr. Speaker, there is still a large amount of people in the housing schemes that cannot construct because of the situation of their lots in the swamp, and access to get to it is difficult. Why is so much money required to pay for a house lot? Why so long a wait for land title? Why do residents have to buy lamp poles and pay to have them planted before they can have access to electricity? Allottees were told that the cost for the lot includes infrastructure works, light, road and water—too much corruption in this process. The Government boasts of low-income loans, but if one does not have a job loans are impossible to access much less to pay. The truth is that now many people are facing difficulties and many homes will be repossessed by the banks.

Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI)

This is a handicapped entity. Whoever the consultant was that prepared and designed the plan was either blind or short sighted. They did not take into consideration the geographic structure of Bartica and its environs. Even as I speak, water woes are part of everyday life. It is still “today for you, tomorrow for me”. The hours of distribution are limited and restricted, the water is, at most times, discoloured, and the bills are higher than usual. The Guyana Water Incorporated system needs to be revisited. We are grateful for the generator that will be purchased, but that alone cannot work. There is need for the erection of an elevated tank to bring some relief.

Youth and Sports

The Region has a Youth and Sports Officer who only operates during August to ensure that the President Youth Award Republic Group (PYARG) has its camping sessions. Our children only have sports sessions for National School Championships. Sports clubs have to finance their own programmes. The Director of Sports should visit our Region. If he is afraid, I can undertake to escort him around so he will recognise what I am saying is the truth.

The Community Centre is in a deplorable state. When the massacre occurred, His Excellency promised the residents, more so the young people, that he will rebuild the Community Centre. That is a failed promise. The young people listened to the great contributions being made by the President and Government to private sponsors of competition and recognised the discrimination they are faced with because Region 7 is a PNC/R-1G constituency. Mr. Speaker, only yesterday a fourteen year old young lady took her life because of problems. That is a sign of frustration. We need to have them meaningfully occupied.

All our playgrounds are pastures. Mr. H. Nauth and Sons, who constructed our roads four years ago, has failed his commitment. He used the Mongreppo Playground to store all his equipment and materials for construction and left the playground in a miserable state, rather than grade the ground as he had committed his firm to do.

The Community Centre has been fenced through private business entities. The Government and Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture have failed us miserably.

Roads

Some of our roads were done four years ago. These roads have already started to deteriorate. The roads in the Biadaraboo area are in a deplorable state. The one to Five-Miles was done by Gaico Construction and that was all substandard work. The tender is out again to do the road. The

Gaico construction is, again, a bidder. Why give contractors work to do when they are not doing it with value. When will the Government consider the Parika to Makouria Road to enhance movement from Region 7, through Region 3, to Region 4 to conduct business at a cheaper cost?

Mining

At the last Budget debate this subject had caused chaos in this National Assembly. Problems are still numerous and have not been taken care of by the Government, GGMC or the GGDMA. The GGDMA is only for a few 'big ones' not the small miners. This has lead miners in Bartica to form an association to take care of the 'unheard of' small miners.

The Brazilians continue to rape our natural resources. They have refused to employ Guyanese and were issued work permits with the understanding that they will employ 50 % Guyanese. The representatives of GGMC visited the interior and all Brazilian camps, and refused to close them because of breaking the law of employment. The corrupt practices between Brazilians and GGMC officials must stop.

The roads to the interior are in a deplorable state. Large tolls are paid to use the road. What a shame. Since the implementation of the LCDS the Government and the GGMC have made laws to enhance quality mining but failed to educate miners about the laws. Instead of GGMC sending rangers to close dredges, they should be educating miners and giving them the entire 2011 to put themselves in order. It seems as though it is more important to collect Norway's money than saving the Guyanese populace. After all, gold mining has, again, produced more than rice and sugar together. A high percentage of Guyanese depend on the revenue received from mining.

Every aspect of life and living has ties with mining. Why can't the Government and the GGMC release the lands to our miners, with licence to prospect and mine, and stop giving it to their cronies to sell to foreigners. Our future generation is not guaranteed a place to work.

Guyana Power and Light (GPL)

Bartica has become a fairy land now with GPL. We are facing tremendous blackouts, low and high voltage. Thus, our residents are experiencing losses because of damaged electrical furnishings, and no compensation is given. Then the light bill, regardless of blackouts, is still extremely high.

Not so long ago the GPL station was on fire. There is a list of concerns: the GPL Station needs to be relocated; there is no proper access road to the engine rooms; there is no fire hydrant to assist in case of another fire; the smoke from the engines is contaminating the environment- all the food sold in the market is contaminated with carbon. If a fire of a bigger nature should occur the entire First Avenue to the southern direction will be destroyed. GPL contributes to our water woes.

The two engines that were given to Bartica by the Hon. Prime Minister are junk - if I am permitted to use that word - that should be thrown away. It is junk from No. 53 Village and Canefield. And I see in the Budget that there is rehabilitation for No. 53 Village and Canefield Stations. Cde. Prime Minister, what a shame to take old engines and bring it to Bartica! Are we the dumping ground?

7. 25 p.m.

I visited the GPL and was very disappointed. The distribution panels need to be changed. The switch gear feeders are worn and should be replaced. Those were the cause of the fire not so long ago. The entire surrounding is suffocating and if we are speaking of low carbon then the immediate thing to do is to relocate GPL. We cannot entertain tourism in an area that is not environmentally safe and clean. I must commend the staff of GPL for their commitment to their job under these strenuous frustrating, challenging and health threatening atmosphere.

In closing, this budget can never achieve *Together Building Tomorrow's Guyana Today* when our young people are jobless and poverty is still present amongst our nation. The small miners must not be made to pay for the ills of OMAI and the Government. It is time to stop discrimination from lands; stop the lottery; stop the auction and give miners what is theirs. The Bible states, "...give on to Caesar what belongs to Caesar".

Before I close, the Government keeps saying that the country was in debt in the days of the PNC Government. Mr. Speaker, yes, President Burnham did borrow but when he borrowed he said to them "not a blade of grass" – one cannot come in and take. But the Government of today is selling out our rights; selling out our lands, changing the shape of the map of Guyana, and instead of saying to the foreign investors – Barama and the others – to tow the line and abide by our laws, it is saying to us Guyanese "do not cut a branch". Our Guyana is being given away for nothing. At the end of the day we will have to change the name of Guyana from the Republic of Guyana to, probably the Republic of Norway-Guyana. We are afraid for our lives. We are appealing to this Government that if it really wants to *Together Build Tomorrow's Guyana Today*, it is time to get out into the Regions, listen to the people's concerns and do what is right. Please, it is your people; please, it is your nation. The Government was put there by the people of Guyana to serve them and to do what is right for them, not to fill pockets and not to build oneself, but to build the country and the lives of the Guyanese people. I thank you Mr. Speaker.
[Applause]

Mr. Whittaker: Permit me first before I make my contribution to Budget 2011, to comment on some of the several matters raised by the Hon. Member and a very good friend of mind, Mr. Desmond Fernandes.

The first one is to refer is the promise of a new steamer. There is no record, written or otherwise, of any commitment having been made for the granting or the purchase, or the acquisition, of a new steamer for the residents of the Northwest Region. The PPP and the PPP/Civic committed to restoring the steamer service which had disappeared by 1992 when they took office. That is what happened: There was no steamer service. What was there was a situation where, from time to time, at the behest of the people, there may have been a steamer taken off from another run to travel to the Northwest, so people could not plan, farmers could not plan, nobody could not plan. Nobody knew when the steamer would come, and so what this Government did was to fulfil a commitment to restore the service. I say to you that the service exists even on to today. The steamer is schedule to leave on Thursday for those of you who wish to make a trip to the Northwest Region.

Secondly, Morawhanna was abandoned by the Government. What a statement? Morawhanna was not abandoned by the Government. Morawhanna is a port of entry and there was a lot of activities at Morawhanna during the days of fetching of contraband. Nobody bothered to meet with the people of Morawhanna. Nobody bothered to visit Morawhanna to ascertain what is happening and so nobody observed that there was erosion taking place in Morawhanna. Nobody observed these things. It took we, of the PPP/C, because of our interest in people's development and on our visits... *[Interruption]* We observed that and we interacted with the people of Morawhanna. It was for that reason that we invited the team which was headed by then Chief Sea and River Defence Officer - if I am permitted to call his name because it is a statement of fact, Mr. George Howard - and it was based on its advice that we asked the people of Morawhanna to relocate. We even identified an area called Kokerite, and it was the Hon. Minister of Education, then the Minister of Housing and Water, who helped us to prepare that area. But the people of Morawhanna, on the advice of the PNCR-1G, refused to move. Later on, as the rising water level became obvious, some of them left. **[Mr. M. Williams:** Where is the record?] I have the record. Today there are only ten families residing at Morawhanna. The PPP/Civic Government did not abandon Morawhanna. The people of Morawhanna left because of rising water levels.

Thirdly, Kumaka and Port Kaituma wharves and people building on these wharves: What were there at Kumaka and Port Kaituma was the PNC's idea of shopping centres, shopping complex and housing schemes. That was what it thought was housing schemes - people constructing little buildings in any willy-nilly fashion, selling anything. This was its idea. It is the PPP/Civic Government which sought to restore order, to regularise what was taking place at Kumaka and at Port Kaituma, and those persons who were there, with the support of the PNCR-1G, of course, resisted it. I say these things, Mr. Speaker, because I was the head of the Regional Democratic Council during those times and I was the person who led, in terms of our attempt, our efforts, to get people to regularise. Now there is a situation where nature is forcing them to move and they are complaining.

There is a complaint that GUYOIL has been removed. Where does the Regional Democratic Council (R.D.C) get its fuel? I am not aware that there is any shortage of fuel in Region 1. I am aware... *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon Members of the Opposition, would you kindly...? I heard Mrs. David-Blair speaking and there was not a single interruption. Why is it, when Government Members are speaking there is this very loud noise particularly from certain Members? Could you please allow the Government Members to speak without interruption?

Mr. Whittaker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am aware that there are a number of persons who have obviously met the requirement for acquiring, storing and selling fuel and have got the requisite permission from the authorised dealers. I am aware also - up to this morning I spoke with the Regional Chairman - that the RDC acquires its fuel through the legally authorised dealers. There are some other issues that the Hon. Member would have raised and the others of my colleagues would deal with those because I would wish to focus on Budget 2011.

Like thousands of my fellow Guyanese, I eagerly look forward to the Budget 2011 presentation by our competent, respected and esteemed Minister of Finance, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh. May I

hasten to add, Sir, that like them, I am delighted and enthused by a budget that presents a vision for a better Guyana? I wish, from the very outset of my presentation, my contribution, to this Budget debate, to offer my congratulations to Dr. Ashni Singh, his staff and all others who would have contributed to the preparation of this Budget 2011, under the theme, *Together Building Tomorrow's Guyana Today*, and for presenting it in a timely manner.

This Budget 2011 is all about investments in the Guyanese people. I stand taller than my six feet and as a proud Guyanese who refuses to be blinded by precocious, prejudice, irrational opinions and comments to say to this National Assembly that Budget 2011 evidences that the PPP/C Government's management of the economy of Guyana has been no less than par excellence.

Every year we hear the same tune from that side – “the budget lacks so many things; it lacks vision; it does not address poverty”. There is no change in the lyrics or even the melody of the tune they sing. It is just a change of a few of the band members and they quickly learn the tune. But this is what happens when you roll in and roll out of communities: checking in the wrong place with the wrong people, looking for the wrong things, and therefore, by logical deduction, you will get the wrong answers. Unfortunately, it is being presented in this National Assembly.

But if this is so, if Budgets 2006 to 2011 lack so many things, how is it that our economy continues to grow each year? How is it that this growth even eclipses that of our sister Caribbean countries? I have the figures if the details are needed. How is it that our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and our external reserves continue to rise? How is it that our external debts are reduced significantly? How is it that inflation is kept in the low single digit, against a background of a not- too-good global condition? How is it that all these positive things are happening, and this budget lacks all these things? Can somebody tell me on that side? Surely, my friends, this is testimony to the fact that Government's policies, programmes and projects are appropriate and have been working.

There has been focus on our core values: education, health, physical infrastructure, housing, water, and, generally, on providing more goods and services to our people. There has been the focus on the internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals. I think most of the speakers on our side would have mentioned those and I do not need to go them over. **[Mrs. Backer: No. Go them over.]** You want me to go them over. They are eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving from primary to university education, reducing child mortality and improving maternal health. There has been the focus on our poverty reduction strategy and there has been focus on our 2006 Manifesto which was presented to the Guyanese people. I wish to suggest..., because it seems to me that the Opposition Members may require some budget literacy workshops for those who are still there at 31-12-2011.

The Budget 2011 demonstrates our Government's commitment to improve in the lives of the Guyanese people by a spread of resources and a focus on the social programmes, infrastructural development and programmes aimed at increasing economic opportunities and improving living standards of our people, including the Hinterland regions such as Region No. 1 where a significant percentage of our Amerindian people live. I would wish to look at some of those sector programmes and some of those activities.

Education

This success story of Guyana under the PPP/C, as I said earlier, extends to the Barima–Waini Region where there is visible progress in all areas of our social programmes, physical infrastructure and, more recently, the transformational of the village economy. This improvement notwithstanding the deplorable state in which the then Government left the Guyanese people who democratically evicted them from the seat of office in October, 1992, and this, notwithstanding the challenges and remoteness and cost to deliver services.

During the year 2010, the Regional Democratic Council of Region No. 1 received \$1.199 billion under its Capital and Current Expenditures of the Estimates, representing a 9 % increase on its 2009 allocation. Thirty nine million dollars was expended to extend a number of schools, Baramita included, in the remote part of the Region, Barabina; to begin construction of Technical Vocational Training Centre; to rehabilitate a number of school buildings and teaching quarters, and I wish to say that unlike the schools in some Regions, that I learned from the previous speaker, which began to fall, not those in Region No.1. They have not begun to fall and our teachers have not been leaving, and I will give you the statistics.

In fact, 50.7 % of the Regional Democratic Council’s (RDC) budget was expended on its education delivery programme, testimony to the importance which our Government attaches to the education of our Hinterland people and to Government tangible efforts [*inaudible*] monitoring reports and indicators. I can make this available to Members at the end.

The above investments have made possible a much improved teaching-learning environment for teachers and their students. In addition to what I have just mentioned under the (EFATI), that is the Education For All Fast Track Initiatives, with its focus on institutional strengthening in our Hinterland schools and in improving school facilities, a significant number of our teachers have been receiving - what is called in remote areas - “incentives”; a significant number of our teachers are being able to benefit from teacher housing; text books, the core text books are being provided to all the schools; utilities have been upgraded; school improvement plans have been prepared and, of course, many have spoken about the school feeding and the hot meal programmes. The latter programme has made possible improvement of the nutrition of students, improved schools and community collaboration, and it has simulated, in most instances, community economic activities and builds capacities and food preparations, and project management, at the community level.

What are the outcomes of all of these investments? During the year 2010, 86 of our 416 schoolteachers were upgraded while a further 30 of them were trained. In fact, I have statistics which states that between the year 2009 and the year 2010 there was an increase in enrolment in our schools of 17.4 % and there was also an increase in the number of teachers trained at the nursery, primary and secondary levels so that there is now 39.3 % of our teachers trained, and that is not very far from the average at the national level. In addition, there has also been improvement in students completing their primary education. The attendance rates of teachers are up and the attrition rate among them, especially trained teachers, has reduced. This improved stability has allowed for the development of a stable corps of teachers committed to delivering quality education to our pupils and students.

In terms of examinations, at the grade six level pupils attained 50% or more at the national assessment. In the year 2008, it was 35%; in the year 2009, it was 48%, and in the year 2010, it

was 49%. Somebody read some statistics to say that Hinterland Regions were not doing well at the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC). They might not have reached the desired level of performance that we would wish at this point in time, but there is clearly evidence of improvements as we go along. During the year 2008, 42.8 % of the students who wrote CXC got between grades I to III. In the year 2009, it was 48.7 % and in the year 2010, it was 48.62 %. For the year 2011, the budget allocation under education delivery has increased by 5.6 % and represents 49.1 % of the RDC's overall budget. The aim is to provide quality affordable education. The focus will continue to be on literacy and numeracy programmes, and, of course, on teacher training also.

The Opposition gives no recognition to achievements and improvements under this Government. It makes no proposals or suggestions of substance, but the PPP/C Budget 2011 captures both, and I am happy about this.

Health Services

The health sector in Region 1 has been making continuous strides over the years as a result of the progressively increasing budgetary allocations to the RDC and other interventions at the level of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs. These interventions have allowed for the establishment of health posts and health centers; the rehabilitation of district hospitals in Santa Rosa, Port Kaituma and Pakera; the construction of a new hospital in Mabaruma at a cost of \$120 million; the intensified training of health service providers and a consequential improvement in quality service provided by these personnel.

The new hospital at Mabaruma, which opened its door for clinical works during the year 2009, provides a superior service, including X-ray and laboratory services and surgeries because there is a theatre, an Intensive Care Unit (ICU), and, in fact, eighty-four surgeries were done during the year 2010, including hernia and the removal of fibroids. There is also an ambulance service; there is more trained staff including a graduate nurse; it has a better physical capacity. The quality of service, and the extent of the service provided, has increased tremendously, and this has resulted, contrary to the reports that we have been getting from across there, to a reduction in the number of referrals. Referrals coming from Region 1 are in respect of patients who required surgery. Most of the referrals coming from Region 1 are in that regard. 22.8 % of the Region's 2010 budget was provided for this sector so that education and health together provided for approximately seventy-three percent of the RDC's 2010 budget.

For the year 2011, the health allocation is 23.4 % of the budget so that the social sector has an almost similar weighting in terms of central Government allocation of resources. The results of all those interventions have been more medical outreach in clinics with a wider focus; greater emphasis on education of our people; emphasising a preventative approach to health care rather than just simply a curative approach. There has also been the focus on post natal and maternal child health and all of those interventions, as I said earlier, have combined to bring about a reduction in the incidence of referrals and, indeed, Sir, child maternity has been reduced and maternal health improved.

During the year 2011, a number of structures will be rehabilitated. Mortuary freezers will be purchased along with solar panels and accessories for the Mabaruma and Port Kaituma Hospital

mortuaries. There will be a continued focus on community based child health, intervention including immunisation; there will be more outreaches with greater frequency; there will be a continued focus on malaria control which is a challenge as a result of increase mining activities and the increase in economic activities resulting there for.

The wealth of a nation is a function *en parte* of the health of its people. The PPP/C Government has never and will never lose sight of this truth. The Millennium Development Goal for Health is always in our sights.

7.55 p.m.

Physical Infrastructure

We believe that by building roads and bridges, by rehabilitating roads and bridges where there is need, we facilitate and support development, and in large measure, improve the quality of life for our people, because the measure of the level of poverty is a function of some many variables and the quality of education delivery, health care, existence of roads and bridges for communication, etc., are important variables in this measure. So during the year 2010 some work was done, hindered in large measure by the continual heavy rainfall which occurred for a number of months during the year. However, the RDC was able to do a number of concrete bridges, notably on the Moruka to Kwabanna road. This is a road about twenty-two miles, and what this road meant for the people of Moruka, especially the people of Kwabanna Village in the Waini River, is that instead of taking three hours to go around by river one can use a mini-bus and reach there in about forty-five minutes - tremendous improvement.

In addition, some works were done on the Hosororo to Kumaka road. Last evening, the Hon. Member mentioned the roads at Kaituma where some bitumen work will be done. I wish to say that I have been informed by the Regional Chairman that that work was affected because of the weather conditions, but certainly during the course of this year, in the early part, it will be done.

The noticeable increase in the number and types of vehicles being brought into the three Sub-regions of Region 1, by ordinary residents, is testimony not only to the upsurge of economic activities and earnings resulting from these activities, it is testimony not only of persons confidence that these significant improvements will continue, but also it is testimony to a realisation that greater focus is being placed on expansion and improvement of our Hinterland roads. So during the year 2011 \$32 million will be spent on the construction of a bridge and revetment from Orinduik to the Port Kaituma waterfront, on the construction of gravel surface roads from Koko to Hymacabra, from 11 Miles to Manawarin, the Kamwatta Junction to Parakeese and an upgrading Kokerit Hill housing scheme roads, the roads to which I referred to earlier on.

Access to Potable water

During 2010,...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, before you move on to another subject, first, your time is up. Secondly, I think this will be an appropriate time for us to take the suspension for fifteen minutes and when we resume you will have to get an extension of time.

Sitting suspended at 7.57 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 8.29 p.m.

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

Mr. Speaker: Continue Hon. Member.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Whittaker: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I would wish to continue to examine this people-centred budget which looks at us in the Hinterland, providing additional goods and services which make a difference to the living standards of persons. One such area of investment is in the access to potable water. I say to the House that during the year 2010 pump stations were rehabilitated in Mabaruma and Port Kaituma. What this means is that approximately four thousand residents in those two areas were able to access potable water. Water storage facilities were set up in a number of Amerindian villages namely White Water, Sebai, and Kamwatta villages, that is, in the Mabarum Subregion, and Santa Rosa, Waramuri, Manawarin in the Moruka Subregion. This was a \$15 million intervention and eighteen thousand persons are the beneficiaries of that project.

There was also the drilling of potable water wells. \$19 million was expended to improve water quality and reliability in terms of supply. Wells were also drilled in a number of other communities and villages. Notably Kamwatta, this time in the Moruka Lake, Kobarimo, Mora, Kariako, Kokerite, that is, way up in the Barama and these communities in the mining area - in the Barama, there are a number of mining communities, Kariako and Kokerite are mining areas - is where the improved water supply, and water quality, is most needed - approximately two thousand more beneficiaries there. Work is in progress in the rehabilitation of the Matthews Ridge water supply system, that is, in the Matarkai Subregion. That Region has three Subregions. That project when completed will benefit about one thousand and five hundred residents at a cost of about \$4.3 million.

In addition, during the year 2011, provision has been made for the delivery of potable water in Amerindian villages and communities such as Koriabo, as distinct from Kariako, and Kwabanna. These investments aim at satisfying the demands of our people in Region 1 for a more reliable and safer water supply. During the year 2011, another \$103 million is budgeted for the provision of water to Hinterland communities in Region 1, and I wish to add also Region 8 - Mahdia.

Another area of investment has been the energy and power generation. The PPP/Civic Government, aware of the importance of energy services to enable Hinterland residents to access needs such as lighting for the home, school, health centre, pumping of water, communication for the radio sets, education in the schools, and health care, has been providing solar panels to households even as we support communal building and community projects such as peanut processing, electric sewing machines, etc. Coming out of the Presidential Grants, a number of villages have identified projects which involve processing of primary produce and therefore the electricity in such instance is very important.

During the year 2010, one hundred and seventy-two households in the Redhill, Sedai and Hobodia villages in the Mabaruma Sub-regions were provided with a similar number – that is 172 - 65watt solar home systems. If you would appreciate that one of these systems cost about \$200 000, that is the acquisition cost, plus to transport and to install, you can appreciate the level of the investment which is about \$14 million, while three 250- watt system with inverters to provide AC power to the school in each of those villages were also provided. So it is not just about giving the households but Government also provided for the communal building, the school, and the health centre, etc.

In addition, solar panels were also provided for health huts in the villages by the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development for purposes of lighting, refrigeration of vaccines, the recharging of batteries for the purpose of radio communication. Government also commences extension of the electricity network to some un-served residents in the Port Kaituma area. The year 2011 will see the completion of this system with the installation of the generator. Approximately two thousand persons in the Port Kaituma area will benefit. Other scheduled interventions include the construction of trestles and the installation of distribution networks at Kobarimo and Kwabanna.

During the year 2011, also, our Government will continue to support Hinterland communities' access to electricity and energy from renewable sources such the solar panels. In fact, substantial funds, as indicated in the budget, have been earmarked under the Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund, under the LCDS, for the Hinterland electricity programme to provide solar panels to other villages and communities in Guyana. This is a tremendous improvement in terms of the range and quality, and extent of the services provided to communities.

Another area of investment which has not touched the Hinterland before now - it may surprise many of you in the House - is the area of Hinterland housing. We are accustomed to talking and hearing about housing schemes in the urban and rural areas, now the Inter-American Development Bank has agreed to the Government of Guyana request to support a second Low Income Settlement Programme. That programme includes a pilot housing for the Hinterland and it is intended to address the housing needs of Hinterland communities. The respectively communities identified for the pilot were involved in the design and the development of the pre-housing prototype and they will also be involved in the construction of their own housing units. Very shortly, the construction of model housing units will commence. In Region 1, three villages have been identified - White Water, Manawarin, Orinduik - and the model will be done in the White Water area and replicated.

In Region 9, there are five villages, Katoka, Massara, Kwatamang, Central Annai and Apoteri, and the model will be set up in the Massara vllage and replicated. So what will happen in time is that two hundred units will either be constructed, there will be new buildings, or rehabilitated - a tremendous improvement, a tremendous intervention. Each housing unit is expected to cost in excess of \$1 million Guyana dollars and be assured that the villagers will be making their own contribution towards the project.

I have been focusing on the social services and physical infrastructure. I need to look at the village economy, because when we talked about transformation of the village economies we of the PPP/C have been making several interventions, even at the level of the Office of the

President, where Presidential Grants have been made available to villages and communities for projects of their desire. They meet, they discuss, they agree and we fund and to help them monitor.

Agriculture continues to play a significant role in providing food for Hinterland residents, and in a transformation of the village economy. In this regard, several interventions of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs and the Office of the President cannot be overlooked. As I go into this aspect of the presentation I wish to draw attention to a statement made yesterday to the effect that Region 1 was the breadbasket of Guyana and it is no longer that. Region 1 is still a principal supplier of primary agricultural produce for Guyana - it is still. What has happened is that there has been a transformation and only those who have eyes to see will see it, so that we no longer depend on the traditional eddo and yam, we get in to other areas, and the school feeding programme has allowed us. We get in to projects like poultry rearing, cattle rearing, citrus... [Mrs. Backer: What about goats? Are they rearing goats?] It is possible. The continual effort from the Ministry of Agriculture to expand the non-traditional sector and to diversify the village economies is noticeable.

Training and capacity building, targeting scores of farmers into three Subregions, is being done. This includes farmers' outreaches to villages and communities - \$7 million to provide acoushi ants control training. This is an area that has been of some concern for farmers and it is being addressed. This is an intervention by a Government which cares for the farmers - that is concerned about the farmers.

Training in the use of the swing fog machine in pest and disease control, in crop production and animal husbandry - it is not just about eddo and cassava - apiculture, supporting the farmers also with bait and fastac, activating acoushi ants committees in the villages, providing vegetables seeds and bitter cassava sticks on trips. So it is not just about going and talk; it is about demonstrating and getting the people involved. They must know how to help control the ants. If we want to get the farmers into animal husbandry and apiculture, and so on, we must show them this. Cassava mills were provided to a number of women farmers' groups - those mills cost \$750 000 each - at White Water, Wauna, Kwabanna, and Matthews Ridge, even as agricultural extension workers worked with the farmers on a cassava improvement programme. All are part of the Grow More Food Campaign. We talk, we demonstrate and we walk the talk.

A number of livestock farmers in the Mabaruma and the Matarkai Subregions were provided with a number of breeding pigs - diversification, you will call that - and training in artificial insemination as part of the Ministry of Agriculture efforts to bring about livestock improvement. Forty-five farmers in Mabaruma were given the equivalent \$1500 per rod, up to thirty rods, to assist with drainage. It must be noted that several farmers were affected by flooding, not only in the coastal areas, but also in the riverine areas. So Government through the Ministry of Agriculture came to their assistance.

Support for several emerging subsectors - this is where we need to talk about the citrus and the passion fruits, the honey, the livestock and the aquaculture - through the Hinterland Secured Livelihood Programme, a programme which targets two hundred and sixty farmers and processors drawn from fifteen communities in the Mabaruma Subregion.

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

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

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Whittaker: Thank you Sir. Thirty-five farmers were involved in ginger, black pepper and turmeric cultivation, trials were done and those spices were planted. In fact, locally produced turmeric will soon be on the market. I was pleasantly surprised, but impressed and happy, that generators and farm tools were given to the North West and Port Kaituma Secondary Schools. We have taken agriculture to the schools so that the children can come out of school with the love, understanding and appreciation for agriculture, and this is for the poultry project.

The above interventions have brought about increase diversified production of food to support households, to support the Hinterland schools hot meal feed programme, and there is surplus production in several instances, as the Toshao of Kwabanna who has a surplus of cassava and Santa Rosa which is providing poultry for their school feeding programme.

I am told that during the year 2011, because of all those intervention, and those activities, the Ministry of Agriculture will be looking to have more mobility. The Ministry will be acquiring an additional outboard engine and boat, and an ATV for Matarkai. I am told also that the staff will be increased, and the National Agriculture Research Institute (NARI) nurseries at 4 Miles and Kamwatta... My good friend, the Hon. Member Desmond Fernandes, will be pleased to hear all these things - polder of farmlands along the Waini, Barima and Moruka Rivers. No cost is too much if we are to help our farmers to continue to increase and diversify their production. The year 2011 promises to be a very good year for agriculture in Region 1.

There have been some other interventions which have been of help to our people in Region 1, and very quickly I wish to refer to the demarcation of the titled land of the Amerindian village called Three Brothers in Waini area at the cost of \$25.6 million. That has been completed. I wish to say also that during the year 2011 there will be consultations with a number of communities which have, *prima facie*, reached the requirement for titling. These are 4 Miles and Eclipse Falls in the Matarkai Subregion and Kariako in the Moruka Subregion.

As one of the presenters said earlier that there is something in Budget 2011 for everyone, even our elderly people, and I learned that one thousand three hundred and thirty-two pensioners from Region 1 will benefit and are appreciative of the fourteen % increase in pension. That increase is at a cost of \$14.4 million. Our public servants or teachers, many of them, will also benefit from the increase in the income tax threshold.

Unlike budgets of the PNC, with its focus on the military and paramilitary, and on providing opportunities for rewarding comrades and keeping the then PPP Opposition under close scrutiny, this PPP/Civic budget is about people-centred development. This Budget 2011, for us in Region 1, reflects Government continual emphasis on investment in physical infrastructure and in expanding and improving social services, and in advancing the transformation of the village economies.

We have been delivering on the promises to the Guyanese people as set out in all of our manifestos. We must not and will not be distracted from our focus and in our efforts to improve further the lives of our people, especially our indigenous people.

We are not saying for one moment that there is not much more to be done, that there is not room for improvement, but when one examines the depths from which we started and the progress that we have made thus far, we cannot but feel a sense of pride and be encouraged by that progress. Our track record has the envy of many. We are better off today than were in 1992. We are better off today than we were in 2009 and that is why the PPP and the PPP/C continue to enjoy tremendous popularity and support among the Guyanese populist. That is why this said populist plans to return us to office, come *e-day* 2011, with a much larger majority that it had given to us in 2006.

I commend this Budget 2011 for your approval. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Needkumar: Members of this Hon. House, as I rise to reflect on this caring and responsible Budget 2011, allow me to congratulate our Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh and his reliable and competent staff for the timely preparation and expert presentation of this year's budget.

I find it very uncomfortable to sit in this National Assembly and listen to what the Hon. Member Mrs. Holder said. She said that there are phantom pensioners to the tune of seventeen thousand six hundred and forty, and \$1.16 million is being paid monthly and \$1.3 billion annually to phantom pensioners. This, I think, is an insult to the pensioners in our country, and I am asking that it must be investigated. You and I should not be part and parcel of this type of thing, and I feel very hurt to sit and listen to this. I hope that it will be investigated.

The theme of this budget is indeed appropriate, "*Together building tomorrow's Guyana today*". It is customary during the budget debate for us to discuss the year under review and the projection for the year under consideration. However, this Budget 2011 is significant for this Ninth Parliament because we must reflect on what took place over the last four years and we must discuss the success and the foundation which we laid for the future of this country.

This Budget 2011, which is \$161.4 billion, is, indeed, a budget with an abundance of opportunities and certainly offers great facilities for our people. I followed the work of the Eighth Parliament with great interest and let me congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, for the efficient way in which you have managed the Ninth Parliament. As for the Parliamentarians, it cannot be denied that the Prime Minister Mr. Samuel Hinds did well to keep this side of the House far away, in front, as development and progress continue countrywide. Mr. Corbin, in difficult times, tried. While Mr. Trotman tried but lost to Mr. Ramjattan. Mr. Franklin did well to survive.

I listened attentively to the debates, so far, and I must inform this House that I continued to listen to some gaff. Mr. Fernandes reported that everything was bad in Region 1. However, I would like to inform the National Assembly that November last year I went to Moruka in Region 1 with the General Secretary of the People's Progressive Party, Mr. Donald Ramotar, and the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, Dr. Frank Anthony, for a day of interaction. Hundreds of youths and persons from the community turned up at the Moruka Community Centre and they played several games. I witnessed the business at the Moruka market and was impressed with the

positive attitude of the people, in general, and the youths, in particular. It was most interesting to see almost all the youths with cell phones. Dr. Anthony took time off to distribute sports equipment to several communities which were present at the day of interaction.

While I speak of the opportunities, I am delighted to remind Members of this Assembly of some developments in sports. Doretta Wilson was the queen at the National School Golden Jubilee Athletics Championship. She sparkled as she defeated CARIFTA gold medallist, Jevina Straker, and sent the crowd at the National Stadium at Providence wild, as one of our indigenous daughters won that spectacular race.

8.55 p.m.

I am proud to report that I had a discussion with the president of the Athletic Association of Guyana, Mr. Colin Boyce, and we will make sure that our indigenous daughter, Doretta Wilson, be a member of the Inter-Guiana Games Athletics team. I am waiting for that proud moment when this dear Amerindian daughter will wrap herself in the Golden Arrowhead, as she receives her prize we will be singing the National Anthem.

The sports fraternity is indeed heartened by the Budget 2011 allocation for sports in this country. The Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, announced that the Government has allocated \$747 million for capital expenditure. The budget allocation clearly demonstrates this Government's commitment to the completion of the state-of-the-art, Olympic-size swimming pool and the construction of the international athletic tract. Further, this compassionate and responsible Government will be developing approximately one hundred playing areas and facilities in the ten Regions. The special tract at the National Park, currently utilised by hundreds of Guyanese for daily exercise and by our young cyclists for training, will be resurfaced to the delight of all the stakeholders.

Under colonial masters and the Opposition, PNC, which was in Government for more than quarter of a century, Guyanese were never able to enjoy the benefits from genuine international sports facility. President Jagdeo and the PPP/C have already given us a state-of-the-art National Stadium at Providence. The Olympic-size, state-of-the-art swimming pool will be declared open in another few weeks. The Racquet Centre will also be operational shortly. Further, let me explain that at the Racquet Centre, Guyanese squash players will be playing at one of the best facilities in the Caribbean for the first time. Thousands of students will be given the opportunity to play long tennis at this newly developed facility at Woolford Avenue.

We are in the process of upgrading the Colgrain Pool and we are working on the construction of an international athletic tract. Last year, the Cliff Anderson Sports Hall was upgraded and subsequently several international events were successfully held there. An international karate tournament was held there along with Inter-Guiana Indoor Games. The Cliff Anderson Sports Hall is now being further developed to hold pro-am fights on the last Fridays of every month. It is indeed a revelation that our people can now relax in their homes and look at professional and amateur boxing live from the Cliff Anderson Sports Hall.

Other sports discipline such as table tennis, basketball and volleyball will also be played and shown live to our people. We must see the synergies within the Ministry of Culture, Youth and

Sport, National Communications Network (NCN) and the various national sports associations/federations are yielding tremendous success.

A few years ago, the doomsayers were bad-mouthing the construction of the National Stadium at Providence. Today we are witnessing thousands of spectators rallying at the National Stadium in supporting our national teams. The National Stadium is indeed a multipurpose sport and recreational facility. While cricket continues to attract massive sold out crowds, we saw that football attracted even larger crowds. While there were international rugby and boxing matches at the National Stadium, there was also the Golden Jubilee Athletic Championship.

Given the opportunities, our young people who have potential and talent can now perform at the highest level. To this effect, the PPP/C Government has budgeted \$100 million to be spent on developing playing areas in all the Regions. It is our responsibility to provide the necessary facilities to make it possible for our youths and students to play more active roles in sports. I can assure the Hon. Member, Mrs. David-Blair, that we will be going to Bartica and we will be doing something there.

President Jagdeo must be recognised for his tremendous contribution to the development of sports and sport facilities, in particular, in Guyana. Over the years, several sports associations, teams and personalities received tremendous assistance from President Jagdeo's direct intervention.

The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport is collaborating with several other Ministries to significantly impact on social issues in Guyana through sports. The alliance with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education is developing rapidly and our people's awareness of the necessity and importance of a healthy lifestyle is quickly growing.

Government's spending on sports must be fully supported. 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, social harmony and cohesion.

A review of the year 2010 reveals many accomplishments. Our national cricket team won the regional Twenty/20 Tournament and represented Guyana, and the entire Caribbean, at the Airtel Tournament in South Africa. Our own Huge Ross captured the world title. Significantly, several sports disciplines made genuine progress and Guyana is truly set on the path to greater international achievement where our Golden Arrowhead will fly high.

As we come to the end of the term of the Ninth Parliament, I must recognise the tremendous impact and the development of sports in the country. Allow me to express my highest appreciation for the aggressive and solid support of our Minister, Dr. Frank Anthony, who has improved relationships with all the national sports associations/federations along with the unflinching support of the Government of Guyana and President Jagdeo, in particular.

As a geographical Member of Parliament representing the people of Region 4, I am pleased to report to this Hon. House that based on the performance of the PPP/C Government, and particularly during the Ninth Parliament, our people are living a far better lifestyle. Gone are the days when our young people were getting married and living under people's houses. Today, thousands of Guyanese, particularly the poor, middle-income and young people are getting house

lots and reasonable loans to build their own houses. Members of the other side of the House must appreciate the tremendous success of the housing drive. May I take them back to Mr. Greenidge's budget speech of 1992, page 22, the third paragraph:

“Cde. Speaker, one of the evils of rampant inflation has been the marked upsurge of destitution and homelessness.”

“Destitution and homelessness” - that is what the presidential candidate, hopeful, talked about. Please turn to page 63, the last paragraph:

“In 1992, the Central Housing and Planning Authority has been allocated \$29.5 million mainly for the execution of housing related projects, including the regularisation of squatting areas.”

What a shame! \$29.5 million and Members on the other side of the House want to criticise our Minister when he is carrying the housing drive.

As we travel from Georgetown to Rosignal, we are tremendously impressed with the spanking new houses and housing schemes. Further, as we travel from Georgetown to Timehri, we are amazed to see the development. The new housing scheme at Diamond stands out where we have approximately ten thousand houses put up in the Grove/Diamond area. The Foulis/Buxton, the Good Hope and the Non Pariel Schemes are only a few of the Government's achievements in housing. Do not forget water, electricity and roads are all in place. The PNCR-1 Guyana Members of the other side of the House have no basis with which they can compare the unprecedented work done by our PPP/C Government in continuing betterment of the standard of living for all the people of this country.

Approximately \$100 million was spent on the development of roads and streets in Region 4. The citizens are satisfied with Central Government and most of the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils' efforts to ensure that the roads and streets are in acceptable condition.

For the drainage and irrigation works, I will like to commend Minister Robert Persaud and his Drainage and Irrigation (D&I) section for a job well done during the year 2010. The D&I department was able to ensure that we did not experience any serious flooding during the year 2010. Further, our farmers were particularly pleased with Government's genuine effort to provide genuine conditions for them to work and live.

I visited all the health centres in Region 4 and all the schools, and I am proud to report that I am amazed to see how the health workers are performing in their attempts to provide better health care deliveries to the citizens. As for the schools, we must recognise that the quality of education is improving. The results of our students are manifestation of success in education.

Today, the citizens of Region 4 are living much better and healthier under the PPP/C Government.

Region 10, bauxite industry: Everyone who had worked at the bauxite industry would have known that the industry has been unprofitable since the year 1982 and it deteriorated under the PNC administration. The poor condition of both plant and mining equipment resulted in heavy

loss of market during the years of 1980s and early 1990s. In 1985, there was a financial intervention of \$34.5 million ECU by System of Mining Products (Sysmin), Special Financing Facility, and we had a further financial intervention in 1991 by the World Bank, Sysmin and the European Investment Bank which provided US\$23 million in that phase for the use of Initial Restructuring Phase (IRP). Despite abundant assistance, Linmine's production fell more than forty-five % in 1991 to 1992 and continued to drop thereafter, despite MINPROC which was brought in under the PNC administration to manage the industry in an attempt to make it profitable.

A decision was taken by the Government of Guyana in June, 2003, to have Linmine operations managed by Cambior, a Canadian company which owned Omai gold mine, (OBMI), as an interim measure until financing for the full joint venture through privatisation took place. In the month of December, 2004, the Linden bauxite was privatised by joint shares with Cambior having 70 % shares and Government 30 % shares. The Cambior shares were sold to BOSAI, China, in the year 2007. Today, the PPP/C can boast that BOSAI is running the Linmine operation at a profit over the last two years.

The Berbice operation is also a success story. The Bauxite Company of Guyana Inc. (BCGI) is administering a successful business. The workers are no longer insecure. With the development and the extension programme, RUSAL will ensure that the Berbice operation is also run as a profitable business in the interest of the workers.

A careful look at the period under review reveals that there was significant development in Region 10 and this makes me wonder where Ms. Kissoon is living. The Linden Economic Advancement Project (LEAP), which was the brainchild of His Excellency President Bharrat Jagdeo, provided a tremendous development in the Region. Let me tell you some of it: rehabilitation and extension of West Watooka farm to market road; installation of culverts at West Watooka; rehabilitation of Moblissa Road; rehabilitation of three sluices/*kokers* at Burnham Drive; construction of Spreightland Bridge; rehabilitation of Mackenzie car park; construction of sub-office at Ituni for the Regional Democratic Council (R.D.C.); rehabilitation of Mackenzie wharf and building of stalls; rehabilitation of Haimara road; construction of water system at Moblissa, and the list continues.

What about investments in Linden? Let me tell you about a few investments: BaiShanLin Wood Timber Company invested US\$10 million; Sunshine Timber Wood Processing Company invested US\$5 million; Arawak Shoe Factory invested GUY\$20 million; Sebra Wood invested US\$75,000; Compare Bread invested US\$125,000; Toucan Connection invested US\$510,000; Triple L Bakery invested US\$10,000. Do you want to hear what Guyana did? GNIC Container Yard invested US\$855,000 preparing Linden for the Brazilian operation; JB Metals Workshop and Operations invested \$80 million; L&L Modern Restaurant invested over \$45 million; A&R Collision Workshop invested over \$35 million. I wonder when we look at these, these are only a few things that happened, where the Hon. Member, Ms. Kissoon, is living.

During the year under review, a spanking new hospital was opened in Linden - a spanking new hospital! Today the citizens of Linden are boasting that the Charles Roza School of Nursing is attracting approximately two hundred students whilst this medical school is training our youths

in the Hinterland. They are jealous. They do not want to talk about those. They do not want the people in the Hinterland to get benefits.

The PPP/C also upgraded two health centres in Ituni and Christianburg. The people of Kwakwani and Ituni also received two spanking new ambulances to improve the health care.

The Agriculture Development Programme in Region 10 is a real success story. Several farmers received well drained and irrigated land to develop farmsteads. Some farmers received three acres, some five acres and others ten acres. The D&I workers are very efficient and they are certainly keeping the various areas clean and ready for people to live and work. The D&I department is attracting a strong three hundred ninety-five persons in the workforce – three hundred and ninety-five persons!

Education

[**Mr. Nandlall:** They are losing] They are losing Linden big time.

The PPP/C Government can proudly report that a new nursery school was built at Mabura Hill top and that school is accommodating sixty students. The Sand Hill Primary School is now better furnished and students are more comfortable. A further ten sanitary blocks were built in several riverine areas. There was an extension to the Kwakwani student dorms and now more than one hundred and twenty students are facilitated from the Berbice River area to receive a good secondary education. We must recognise that the dorms at Amelia's Ward have also attracted another one hundred and twenty students to live-in facilities. It is this PPP/C Government which built the spanking new Linden Foundation Secondary School, one of the best in the Caribbean.

This Budget 2011 is, indeed, a budget with opportunities and facilities. Our youths do not have to line up for labour exchange cards to get jobs. Our pensioners do not have to do means test and get party cards.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, allow me to once more congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, and his staff and urge all Members of this House to let us work together for a better Guyana. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Dr. Austin: Mr. Speaker, as we collectively consider the various aspects of this Budget 2011, I would endeavour to portray the sentiments of many Guyanese that the fiscal and complementary administrative policies of this PPP/C Government have taken Guyana to a stage where we are worse off than the time when PNC was in government.

Let us consider physical infrastructure. We see, for this Budget 2011, the usual trend of inordinate emphasis being placed on physical infrastructure development to the detriment of human development. Let us consider the years 2010-2011 education delivery and health services figures for Region 6 as example. The teachers received an increase of 6 % in wages and salaries while health service and other workers received a 5 % increase. However, capital expenditure for education delivery rose by 8.7 % and that for health services rose by 51.04 %. These figures are not the final figures because, as we have seen in Financial Papers 1,2,3,4 and 5 of 2010, billions of dollars are spent in addition to the amounts which are initially appropriated. What is here for this budget is most likely not what would be spent, eventually. One would wonder why there is

so much money being spent on physical infrastructure. As one looks at these figures closely, one realises that the PPP/C's delivery on physical infrastructure as compared with that of the PNC reveals that the people of Guyana are not getting value for money. There are billions of dollars being wasted.

The Government likes to refer to the Berbice River Bridge as one of its favourite pieces. I must mention here though that the Berbice River Bridge was not built by the Government of Guyana. It was built by the Berbice Bridge Company Incorporated as stated in the document, *The Berbice River Bridge Concession Agreement*, Article 49. Be that as it may, I would like to compare the amount of money that has been expended on the Berbice River Bridge as with that of the Demerara Harbour Bridge, especially in terms of value for money. The bridges were built at different times so I am not going to compare figures. When one compares the two bridges, it is found that the Demerara Harbour Bridge which was built so many years ago needs much less maintenance than the Berbice River Bridge which is relatively new. The Demerara Harbour Bridge can also accommodate various weights of vehicles whereas with the Berbice River Bridge there are times when other vehicles have to stop crossing to allow a heavy vehicle to cross. The Demerara Harbour Bridge facilitates cyclists and pedestrians crossing whereas the Berbice River Bridge was not constructed to permit persons to ride or walk across it.

Year after year, the Auditor General's Report states that the current Government of Guyana is not adhering to the provisions of the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (2003). The Auditor General reports on the finances of Guyana generally - the Ministries, departments and Regions - every year there is a long list of breeches. The Hon. Member, Mrs. Volda Lawrence, referred to some of them. These breeches are so many that if I should go into detail, it would take me more than half of an hour. However, I am just going to mention some of them: there is overpayment of contractors for works done and for works not done; there is abuse of Contingencies Fund, the Lotto Fund, various bank accounts, loans, and benefits and salaries of workers. In other words, this Government is making a mockery of the Act and yet it has the audacity to tell us that it has Auditor General's Reports whereas the PNC did not have Auditor General's Reports for many years.

The PNC did not have Auditor General's Reports for a number of years. It was aware of the financial improprieties and it did not want to fool the public... *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Order Please, Hon. Members.

Dr. Austin:...whereas the People's Progressive Party Government is being told, year after year, by the Auditor General's Office about these financial improprieties. Yet it continues to breach the regulations and boasting that it has reports, but the PNC did not have reports.

The East Berbice hire car drivers went on strike recently because of the poor state of maintenance of the East Bank road. Those hire car drivers were very dissatisfied with the state where a road which, during a period of ten years, had to have maintenance work done on it twelve times. The cost of these maintenance works are stated as \$245,049,000. This is actually money wasted because over those ten years the repairs were being damaged within a short while and the road was kept being repaired. We are now at the stage where it has to be repaired again.

Infrastructural works are also done in discriminatory manner and if one goes to Corriverton, comes off at the public road and enters Prince Town, and if one turns right, one will see a well maintained road. However, if one turns left one will see a road that one will think is prehistoric – maybe a road for tractors, not a road for vehicles. A lot of rough burnt earth is on the road.

9.21 p.m.

One has to be careful when walking and that is just a matter of turning left or right. If one goes to some of villages, for example Limlair, Nurney, Kildonan and compare them with neighbouring villages, one would see the state of the roads.

I mentioned these things and I am told that the last time I talked about them, one of the Hon. Members from the Government's side said that I talk as though I am a repeating record, but when that Member said that, the thought of Jesus Christ came to me. Instead of saying the exact words I said, "Father, forgive him for he knows not what he says." We, the representatives of the Region, have the duty to bring problems in our communities to Parliament so that they can be discussed and dealt with. And if I have to come here year after year and talk about the same thing, what does it show about the Government's care for the community?

When one considers why this Government pays so much emphasis on physical infrastructure and one does careful scrutiny of the figures, for example the 2011 figures for Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the most significant rise of all of the contributors for the Gross Domestic Product was in the construction sector, and this grew by 10.8%. By deduction, it means that the more money that this Government spends on physical infrastructure, whether it is to repair, rebuild, to re-repair or re-rebuild, the greater the GDP figures would be and the greater the Government would be able to say that Guyana's economy has grown. However, this Government does not give credit where credit is due and they keep repeating that they have taken Guyana from a stage where there was negative economic growth during the People's National Congress to a stage of positive economic growth. Yes, there was a stage of negative economic growth during the late 1970s and the early 1980s, but it was the same PNC that turned the economy around as a result of the Economic Recovery Programme launched while Mr. Desmond Hoyte was the President. In 1988, this programme was launched and it was able to turn the economy around to the extent to that when the PPP took office in 1992 the economy was growing and for that year, it recorded a rate of 20.1%. This is a figure from the US Library of Congress.

Mr. Speaker: Do you have that document from the U.S. Library of Congress, Hon. Member?

Dr. Austin: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I can give you a copy of it.

Mr. Speaker: I would be glad if you can leave it with the Clerk.

Dr. Austin: Another factor in our economic improvement which the Government does not readily acknowledge is that there was much debt relief from 1999 beginning with the Paris Club and the HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) Initiative. There was much debt relief so the servicing of the debt burden that the PNC was saddled with, the current Government was not. All of these were made possible because of the fact that the People's National Congress- Reform (PNCR-1G) – at the time it was the PNC – had turned the economy around and the economy was

in such a state that the country was more credit worthy and as one was able to negotiate, it was easier to get results.

Before I move onto my next portion of my presentation, I would like to quote a poem by Rabindranath Tagore. The name of this poem is, "Where the Mind is Without Fear". The words of this poem are very relevant to the state that we are in, in Guyana, at this time:-

“Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
By narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depth of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.”

During the 13th Sitting of the National Assembly on the 17th February, 2010, the Hon. Member Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo made a speech which contained many inaccuracies and omissions. I do not intend to go into details now, but if I have to I can. Notwithstanding, I would mention two of them. The first is that Region 6 was awarded the Best Performing Maternal Child Health Programme in 2009. The second is that the works of contractors have to be approved before the contractors are paid. The health sector in Region 6 still has many problems: Maternal mortality, infant mortality and general mortality are still higher than they should be. We have a history of difficulties in these fields. Some of these problems existed during PNC's time and we have been working to improve them and the PPP Government has continued to work to improve them as well. That does not change the fact that they are still not up to standard.

There is a shortage of staff. The stage has been reached where many junior inexperienced staff members are doing the work of senior staff and under such circumstances many of the staff members are overworked. There is a shortage of medication in hospitals and many times patients complain that they have to go buy medication. One would note that I am not saying that it was better during the PNC's time because we also had periods where there were shortages of staff, finance, and medication and there was also, during PNC's administration, a time when the staff compliment was higher than it is now. I quoted those figures and I can make them available to anyone who cares to challenge them. There are times also when we had to ask patients to go buy medication, so I am not trying to say that these aspects are worse during P.P.P.'s time. I am saying that they still need improvement.

Sometimes patients complain that they have problems communicating with the doctors because they do not understand the type of English that the doctor speaks. Sometimes the staff complains that they are being intimidated at work for various reasons. Sometimes they complain of inadequate working conditions. For example, the Fort Canje Hospital staff complained about that among other things like the risk with the bushes and inadequate lighting in the compound.

There are also many problems in education delivery. During the PNC's time education was free from nursery to university. Now students have to pay for many education-related services. During the PNC's time teachers were generally better treated and were more dedicated to work. I do not want to go into more details about this because there are a lot of ramifications and I do not have time to explain everything. During PNC's time, meals were provided more regularly and they were more nutritious. During PNC's time the school uniform programme catered for more items of clothing. During PNC's time, slow learners were better catered for. For all those students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, autism, we had community high schools to cater to them, but this Government has converted these community high schools to regular high schools and they now have a policy of "No Student Left Behind" where if one fails the exam or not, they get promoted.

Many persons in Region 6 still question why a retired person should have two consecutive three-year periods of renewed contract employment as the Regional Education Officer, hence, stagnating the promotion of younger persons who are qualified to function in that post. During PNC's time, persons were re-employed but they were not placed as the Head of organisations and institutions. They were placed in senior positions but the younger persons who were entitled to the promotion were put in those positions. The situation is more outrageous when one considers that the previously Acting Chief Education Officer was not appointed for many years, although she was acting for many years and was qualified for that position. She eventually retired in that position of Acting Chief Education Office, hence, she has been denied of her true benefits.

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

Mrs. Backer: Mr. Speaker, with the concurrence of both sides of the House, I rise to move that the Hon. Member be given 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Dr. Austin: Residents of Region 6 and other regions in Guyana are very dissatisfied with the fiscal and complementary administrative policies of this Government. There is high unemployment. In some areas in Region 6, unemployment is as high as 70%. In some areas, they claim to be higher but I do not want to go to figures that I am not certain about. There is much poverty. Many persons say that if they receive adequate wages they would be able to provide a better standard of living for their families and they would even be able to purchase their own laptop computers instead of having to wait for handouts which they know all will not be able to receive.

Land is allocated or obtained but many persons cannot build their houses because they do not have the finance to do so. During P.N.C.'s time persons were assisted. There were various schemes which P.N.C. set up. There were the Self-Help Housing, Self-Help Work, where the house costs a fraction of the amount one would have had to pay if one had to borrow money from the bank. In any case, borrowing money from the bank can now be a big hassle. Those of you who are not among the selected groups would know the push around one gets to obtain a loan from the bank, whether it is high-income, low-income or whatever. There are many housing schemes that have resulted due to the housing programme of the PNC – places like Tucber,

Amsville and schemes in other areas. There is Nurseville, Eerrollsville, Pearl Stewart, and there are some schemes in Corriverton also.

There is much crime in this country; unprecedented levels of crime and the U.S.A. figures state that Guyana, per capita, has more murders than the U.S.A. and we all know how the American society can be violent, but they are saying that we in Guyana, considering our population, have more murders than them.

Our justice system is not functioning properly. Many persons have to be waiting in jail or on remand for a long time before they are actually tried and sometimes they are not even guilty. Many youths complain about harassment and brutality by law officials. Some persons are arrested unnecessarily, not charged... I am also an example. I have tasted what it is like when I had to sit on a bench amongst some handcuffed criminals for hours. What was my crime? I forgot to renew the fitness of my vehicle. The magistrate asked me what work I do and I told him I am a Member of Parliament, a medical doctor and so forth and instead of allowing me to pay the fine, he told me to go and sit on the bench. After arguing and negotiating...and of course I had to wait for recess before I did that, the police did not want me to get up. They said "Magistrate said you must sit there. You must sit there." After arguing and negotiating, I was eventually told "You have seven days to pay the fine." I collected the money and paid it within 10 minutes. There are laws which are enacted but are not enforced.

Noise nuisance is a big problem. Vehicles, residential and commercial buildings... the noise is there. Even at the traffic lights, if one stop before the green light comes on, a set of horns start blowing. I have not seen anything like that in all of the countries I have visited, even in the Caribbean countries which are struggling and so forth. We have animals roaming the street although we have laws against it and there are many accidents which cause damage to vehicles, even loss of lives are as a result of this. Many of us are ashamed of the way our society is deteriorating and I would like to conclude my presentation by quoting from the 2010 Budget Presentation of the Hon. Member Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo:

"I often wonder why it is that some believe that if they shut their eyes and close their ears then others will not see or hear. It is only those who shut their eyes that they will not see and those who close their ears that they will not hear."

Thank you.

Mr. Atkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is pretty late and I know my colleagues are trying to get home so I am going to try to be as brief as possible. I rise to join my colleagues to give my full support to the \$161 billion Budget 2011 as presented on Monday, 17th January, by the Hon. Minister of Finance Dr. Ashni Singh. The theme of this Budget could not be truer today as it was yesterday. Its relevance to the residents of Region 8 is clearly reflected in the tremendous achievements in the region within a relatively short space of time, especially the empowerment and capacity building of our community leaders. The many accomplishments were no easy task. There were occasions when funds were inadequate due to cost fluctuations causing us to review work programmes and to ask for additional money. It was during these periods of difficulties that our Administration collectively looked for solutions to realise the sentiments and aspirations of our residents of the interior and, more importantly, that we got value for money spent.

In 2006, I had outlined to this Hon. House the enormous challenges faced by our Government in accessing the North Pakaraima Mountains in Region 8 by roadway. Today as I stand again in this Hon. House, I am proud to announce that the roadway is a reality – from Karasabai to Rokomoto onto Yawrapiaru and Tusenen and into Paramakatoi, Kurakbaru, Kato, Orinduik, Kopinang and Maikwak, a distance of over 200 miles.

The difficulties of transportation in the sub-region have been greatly reduced. We have bridged the Echilebar, Marabikaru, Yawong, Kawa, Chieung and Tumong, to name a few. These primary foundations are with us today. They will be continuously improved upon tomorrow. This is the vision of the People's Progressive Party/Civic, networking this part of our country by roadways.

What is impacting is in as that the structures are significant it is the vision that the People's Progressive Party/Civic behind its construction and the benefits that will accrue for over 6,000 residents. That is important. Prior to the People's Progressive Party/Civic acceding to office there were no road linkages to the North Pakaraimas. We have built over 200 miles of roadways and over 25 bridges. That is a significant achievement.

In 2011 Region 8 will spend \$15 million for an additional two bridges. These two bridges will allow us to access Taruka Village and Santa Maria-Chiung mouth on the outskirts of the main populated areas and will bring relief to over 300 of our residents.

The dust from the lateritic roadway in Mahdia, adjacent to our nursery, primary and secondary school present a health hazard to our children and residence. As a result, in 2011 the region will spend \$9 million to construct a chipseal bituminous roadway and to concrete the drains along these roads at a cost of \$5 million. This will benefit over 2,000 residents of Mahdia, Campbelltown, Princeville, but most importantly it will provide more conducive conditions for our school children whose health is placed at risk.

The Paramakatoi to Taruka, Tumatumari Junction to El Paso, Muruwa Junction to Muruwa and Monkey Mountain to Echilebar Roads are going to be rehabilitated at a cost of \$14 million. These are critical roadways for our miners and farmers and it will make it possible to venture into yet uncharted territory. This network of roadways has been based on the beckon call of our own residents. We have delivered to this call and one only has to visit the various villages to appreciate the degree of satisfaction of our residence to this form of development.

During 2011 the region has been allocated the sum of \$40 million to continue on the progressive path of road development and to concretize the foundation for the various spin offs. It does not have to take an intellectual to recognise the wisdom of this investment. The once rugged terrain in the Pakaraimas is now accessible as we continue to maintain and to carve new roadways.

9.55 p.m.

Transportation

Region No. 8 is bordered by the Kuribrong, Potaro, Essequibo and Ireng Rivers. The peculiarly scattered population along these rivers has always necessitated the purchasing of boats and engines. In 2011, the sum of \$2 million will be spent to buy a boat and an outboard engine for the Potaro/Kuribrong area. This will help public officials to visit residents. However, least my

colleagues on the opposite side question provisions for communities; all the riverine areas have been provided with boats and engines through previous budgets. These are Kanapang, Itabac, Cheong Mouth, Waipa, Kaibarupai and Maikobi. A further \$14 million has been appropriated to purchase one vehicle and three All Purpose Vehicles (APVs) to service the administrative and health departments. The Regional Administration in collaboration with the residents continues to investigate innovative options in order to make access easier; for example, the three-wheeled motorcycle and the amphibious All Terrain Vehicles (A.T.Vs).

Education

In 2010, the Capital expenditure for the region was \$42 million. The bulk of this sum was directed at building and upgrading the students' dormitory at Paramakatoi and Mahdia, to ensure adequate and comfortable accommodation for our 350-odd students from over 25 communities.

There has been a noticeable increase in successes at the National Grade Six Assessment. While some have proceeded to senior secondary schools in Georgetown through the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs Scholarship Programme, the majority are accommodated at the dormitories in the Region. As a result, in 2010, the money received was \$68 million for dietary provisions for the two institutions. This sum was inadequate and the Administration had cause to ask for additional resources.

In 2011, projections have been estimated at \$110 million. To ensure quality and efficiency at the administrative levels of the schools, a sum of \$2.4 million has been budgeted for training. Work plans have already been programmed for both sub-regions.

As Government continues to cater for increases in student intake in our schools, a sum of \$36 million has been budgeted for the enclosure of the bottom flat of the Mahdia Secondary School, the general rehabilitation of the Paramakatoi Secondary and the construction of a duplex block at Mahdia. The latter is for more comfortable accommodation for teachers. The overall objective is to continuously provide improved facilities for the enhancement of both pupil and teacher performance.

An industrial Arts Department at Paramakatoi is programmed for construction at a cost of \$8 million, while a sanitary block and a concrete fence at a cost of \$7 million is earmarked for Mahdia. The equity of our budgeting and the distribution of resources for both sub-regions are clearly evident here. It is only a matter of time before the department will have to lobby and budget for its own vehicle to ensure closer supervision in the Pakaraimas. For general maintenance of structures already built, a sum of \$10 million has been proposed.

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker I propose that under Standing Order No. 10, the time be extended until all the speakers would have had their say.

Question put, and agreed to.

Standing Order No. 10 suspended accordingly

Health

Mr. Atkinson: For 2011, the sum of \$10.9 million has been budgeted to continue maintenance of our health huts and health centres. Most of these structures were built around 1993 and to date, every community even as far as Mora and Karisparu, has a modern health centre and all are staffed. The availability of basic supply and drugs are adequately provided.

Professional upgrading is continuous and the sum of \$1.9 million has been budgeted for training and refresher courses for our Community Health Workers (C.H.Ws) and other health care providers. Training will entail meeting at Mahdia, Paramakatoi or Kato – where the Central Ministry is supportive with resource personnel. Our capital allocation for healthcare in 2011 is \$15.5 million. This will go towards rehabilitating the building for the Mahdia District Hospital and the Kato Cottage Hospital. The focus is to ensure quality service that is reliable. However, we have challenges at our staffing level in terms of attitude and dedication, but this is in isolated cases. Now that there is a permanent local doctor at Mahdia, supervision and monitoring will be improved. There are interventions coming directly from central ministries. These include the Unserved Areas Electrification Programme (UAEP). Five communities in Region No. 8 have benefitted from this Programme. The school hot meal feeding programme from the Ministry of Education benefits all 25 schools in the Region.

Payment of Old Age Pension

Both sub-regions have local board of Guardian bodies which supervise the execution of old age pension payments in the region.

Improved Water Supply

In previous budgets I had indicated to you that the Pakaraima Mountains present a problem for accessing water on a long term basis. The options are being investigated by the Ministry of Housing and Water to see the best possible one for longevity.

Up Keeping of Airfields

All of the airfields are annually maintained. The Chenapau Airstrip has just been completed. There are some problems there but they will be rectified. The problem is with the foundation and it needs to be “rammed” more properly.

Provision of Medivacs

This is a sore point countrywide, but Region No. 8 has been fortunate because prompt responses have been coming from the Central Ministry. Quite recently, we were able to evacuate a woman from Karisparu. Prior, Karisparu would have been one of those isolated communities where one had to walk five to 10 hours to get to Chenapau, then travel upstream for 37 miles to get to Kaieteur Airstrip and then get to Georgetown. Now that the airstrip is functioning, it means that it will be easier for the residents in that area.

Piloting Programmes in the Propagation of Non-Traditional Crops

Four communities, Tuzeneng, Paramakatoi, Kato and Kurukabaru, have been identified. The local extension officer, along with the Ministry of Agriculture is attempting to experiment with local spices in the area.

The Issuing of Much Needed Birth Certificates

This process has seen at least 85% of the population in sub-region No. 1 receiving their birth certificates to date. **[Mrs. Backer:** They are doing better than the people in Georgetown] The population is much smaller.

Interventions such as the Presidential Youth Choice Initiative and village grants from the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs are critical for the region, as delivery of these services bring considerable relief to our residents as in the case of the Government's response to the devastation that caused our food supply in the region to dwindle last year. During 2010, the rapid response enabled our farmers and their families to readjust to feasible actions to combat these shortages.

In the preparation of this Budget, the residents were consulted and many of the programmes are based on their recommendations. This, in effect, will see the \$847 million allocated to Region No. 8 benefit the majority of the residents and continue to solidify the foundations for the improvement of education, communication and village economies.

This brings me to the end of my presentation. However, before I take my seat, I wish to congratulate the Hon. Minister for a Budget which clearly defines the secure course of the PPP/C Government's agenda and its positive impact on our citizens. For the people of Region No. 8, the dreams of roads have become a reality, the dreams of vehicles travelling through various villages is, today, a reality. Our school children being provided with one hot meal, like their Brazilian bordering counterpart, is a reality. But more importantly, a sound education and prompt healthcare are realities. These are definitely signals that indicate a positive future. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Rev. Dr. Gilbert: Sir, as I listened to the earlier adumbrations by the Hon. Member, Dr. Austin, trying desperately to make a comparison between the fiscal management of the two Administrations, I felt constrained to respond to some of the things he said in the interest of ensuring that the records of this House does not in any way contain a travesty with regards to our history. However, I believe that a simple prayer would suffice and so I will leave that alone.

The Budget of 2011 has, as is expected, received critiques, overviews, criticisms and commendations and much has been said by many. The views that are more public are the ones that sometimes are more often responded to. There are persons who I believe hold political ideologies and ambitions. Our tendency is to react and respond to the most vocal of those commentators, which very often, I believe, a waste of time. In my estimation, the intent is not necessarily the pursuit of clarity, truth or information but mostly seeking an element of fault or diabolical intent in the financial roadmap of the Government. There is a saying that a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still. In that regard, some things you leave alone. If faults are the only thing one looks for, faults are the only things one will see.

While I must commend the Hon. Dr. Singh for his diligence and astuteness in the preparation and presentation of the Budget, I want to go further and congratulate him on his adroitness in the fiscal management of Guyana's economy. To the critics, the 2011 Budget will not pass the test of perfection and no one, on this side of the House, is purporting that this is a perfect budget. The question that begs to be answered is not whether the Budget is perfect, but whether in the present circumstance, given the available resources, is the economy being managed well. I say yes.

As we continue for this week and the rest of the time that has been allotted, I am hopeful that this debate will not become burdened down by the miniscule views of would be political pundits who, very sadly, underestimate the intelligence of the Guyanese people. While this debate is about seeking the approval of this House for the Estimates of the public sector and the Budget for the financial year 2011, the real impact of this Budget cannot really be appreciated if it is considered in isolation from the overall trajectory of the Government in terms of development.

As the Hon. Dr. Singh informed us in his presentation a few days ago, our G.D.P. now measures \$453 billion and our external reserves now stand at \$US718 million compared to \$US277 million four years ago. Simple basic kindergarten mathematics would tell anyone that 718 against 277 represent increase, growth and development.

We have repeatedly heard, from our colleagues in the Opposition, that the emphasis, more often, must be on human development and not on infrastructural development. The allocations that have been made, and the quantitative increase that we have seen over the past 3 years, is a clear indication that the priority of human capital development is highest on this Government's agenda. Only this morning, as a part of my preparation, I had the opportunity of briefly examining the United Nations Human Development Index and it tells a very interesting story. On the chart that provides a comparative analysis of growth trends that between 1980 and 2010, it revealed that from 1980 to 1990, the dots were falling continuously lower. Around the 1990s to now, there has been a steady continuous climbing of the dots representing a continuous growth rate of 0.7% annually. Our life expectancy in 1980 was 59 years. Today it stands at 66.7 years. I surmise that should the good Lord will and tarry, if the present trend of development continues, we can all look forward to our three scores and ten or four scores. That is an indication that people are living longer. Regardless of what is purported, people are living longer.

Another criticism that we hear about the Budget is that it says nothing about jobs for our young people. I am not an economist but my sojourn at the University of Guyana, where I sat in Mr. Norton's Politics 220 lecture classroom, has helped me to appreciate that in good governance, it is not as much the Government's job to create jobs, as it is about providing public safety, national defence, basic education, public health, transportation, infrastructural development and the creation of an environment in which the private sector, which is the real engine of growth and job creation, may thrive. This is one of the things that Government is doing although it is not the only thing that the Government is doing. It is interesting to note that some of the very things that the Government is currently doing as part of its developmental agenda, that there are persons who are aspiring presidential candidates and who are promising their constituents the very things if they should be elected. This would suggest that there is something that they see that is right and is worthy of aspiring to. **[Mr. A. Norton: Give us one] I will give you one.** For example on the web page of the Alliance For Change (A.F.C.), there is a highlight of its action plan for change and development.

It says:

“The A.F.C. proposes a private sector led development to reduce corporate taxes...and a number of other job creation measures working with the private sector.”

If you look on page 61 of the Minister's presentation, it is the very thing that the minister has presented. The question, therefore, is from whence have come these accusations that nothing is being done for job creation. There is no country, which I know of, where there is a situation where unemployment is not an issue. The issues are what the government is doing with the resources it has and what it is doing about the responsibilities it has. The fact that the government has been elected to serve the people, it has a responsibility to ensure that they not necessarily respond to pressure but plan, deliberately and strategically, to create an environment to ensure that there is a climate created that encourages foreign direct investments. I believe that the fiscal management demonstrated by the Government is one that is intended to create an environment that will attract foreign direct investments into country and one that will not only create jobs, but seek also to improve the overall economic opportunities for all of our people.

The issue of what is this budget doing for ordinary people is what has been touted. I consider myself to be an ordinary person, regardless of what are by pursuits. **[Mr. A. Norton: Tell us your salary]** My salary, after tax has been deducted, is about 120-something thousand dollars. There is evidence of that. I have no difficulty telling you what my salary is because the evidence is there and members can go and check. The issue of what the government is doing for ordinary people. *[Interruption by Members of the Opposition]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members of the Opposition please allow Dr. Gilbert to make his presentation uninterrupted – without any shouting, flailing of arms and other gesticulations.

Dr. Gilbert: Thank you very much Sir. I believe there are times when the truth as a way of hurting people and they cannot remain silent. The ordinary people of this country have had their say as well, regarding their views of what this Budget holds for them. The President of the Guyana Council of Organisation for Persons with Disability, Mr. Leon Walcott, said, a few days ago in an interview in the Sunday 23rd January *Chronicle* newspaper:

“The Budget is one that has something for everyone. With the allocations that we have this year and things will get better. Walcott explained that for persons with disabilities for 2011 it provides advancement for inclusion.”

He goes on:

“There is much more support for vulnerable groups and with each year more and more the Government is doing something for the Guyanese people.”

I consider Mr. Walcott to be an ordinary person. This is what the same newspaper reported Mrs. Magna Pollard, a veteran educator, as saying:

“She acknowledged that the 2011 Budget does build on facilitating the quality of life through education, health and culture. Quality of the people is a major area where we need to focus. We must address the social service and do more to address the status of women, especially. She explained that Guyanese below the poverty line need a supportive framework to improve the situation which can be assisted by the allocations made.

She also said:-

“I am no economist but it seems as the Budget is geared to do more.”

She is absolutely correct. It is geared to do more. [An Hon. Member: What about the views of Mr. Christopher Ram?] Mr. Christopher Ram is one who has political ambitions and he speaks as one with political ambitions. I am talking about what ordinary people have to say about the Budget. What Ms. Pollard and the other people said, is that the \$24.3 billion allocated to continued educational development or the \$14 billion is to improve health delivery to the people of our country.

Sir, you are aware, and the members of the Opposition who were heckling give recognition to this fact, that I am a Minister of Religion. It has been a custom for myself and our parishioners for the longest while, rather than have a service, every Christmas morning we would go to the streets and provide a breakfast and pieces of clothing for persons who live on the streets. Last Christmas was an instructive experience for us because for the first three years that we had been going on the streets, all of our resources would have been depleted at one stop. This last Christmas we went to four locations because there were less people; in that, we could not find one child. The years before there were always children in the numbers. My responsibility, tonight, is not to say that everything is perfect, but my responsibility is to say that given our circumstance and our resources, I believe that Government is making the best use of the resource it has with the opportunities that it has. We need to give credit where credit is due.

There was a time when families found it almost impossible to find affordable and acceptable apartments to rent. Families would be searching through the city to find a place that was affordable because the rent were exorbitant. I am not saying that it is over with, but in recent times people have told me they have apartments that they want to rent. They have invested moneys in building places but they do not have tenants. That is because more families are finding it possible to own their own homes.

10.25 p.m.

Let me tell you the story of Patsy; her name is not really Patsy but she is a real person. Patsy is a 57 years old woman, she has three grown children and she has spent all of her working life in the public service. She is a single mother who raised her children on her salary all by herself. Today, Patsy works to provide for her family. She makes some of the best ‘roti’ and ‘puri’ that you can taste; she has been able to establish small contracts with individuals who take stuff from her. I remember her calling me a few months ago indicating that she had difficulty accessing a loan because of her age. The Bank insisted that she needed to have a co-signatory, maybe, one of her children, so she struggled... [Mr. A. Norton: fabricating.] I am not fabricating. I can take you to her home, this evening. On New Year’s Day Patsy invited me to come pray for her new home, complete with patio and purple blinds. Patsy is a woman that I have known who has struggled because she has moved most of her life; I know of at least, three apartments that she has moved from in a struggle to keep her family together but tonight she is living in her own home and she is an ordinary person.

On behalf of the ordinary people, who may not be in these Chambers tonight, I would like to submit that this Budget is for ordinary people. The people whose dreams can become a reality in

this country of ours and I would like to commend this 2011 Budget for passage in this National Assembly.

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I move that this assembly be adjourned until 2pm tomorrow

Mr. Speaker: This House is adjourned.

Assembly adjourned accordingly at 10.29 p.m.