

# 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*

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143<sup>RD</sup> Sitting

Wednesday, 26<sup>TH</sup> January, 2011

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*The Assembly convened at 2.15 p.m.*

*Prayers*

*[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]*

## **PUBLIC BUSINESS**

## **GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

## **MOTION**

## **BUDGET SPEECH 2011 – 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 National Assembly on 2011-01-17;

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 law, as detailed therein and summarised in the undermentioned schedule, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to make further provision in respect of finance.” *[Minister of Finance]*

*Assembly resumed budget debate.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members we can now resume the debate for the Budget of the year 2011.

**Mr. M. Williams:** Thank you, Sir. This is perhaps the first budget in as many as twenty-five years to be considered by the National Assembly without an input from the late Mr. Winston Murray who recently departed. I just want to say that his contributions will long be remembered by all of the members of the National Assembly.

I reflect over the past few days as speaker after speaker from the Government benches, with some difficulty even, and in the case of the Hon. Member from Region 8, as an afterthought, heaped praises on the Minister of Finance for his budget speech. It is true that the present nineteen-minister Cabinet and their extended families are guaranteed a brighter future for both today and tomorrow. Contracts for friends, duty free lists as long as the Linden Highway for other friends, five acre plots of lands for special persons when ordinary citizens long for a place to call their own, and virtual immunity in some cases from prosecution for corrupt practices in high offices...

**Mr. Speaker:** I am not sure you are on the right track Hon. Member.

**Mr. Williams:** I withdraw that, Sir.

**Mr. Speaker:** You are talking about nineteen members of a Cabinet; these are identifiable people and their families.

**Mr. Williams:** I apologise, Sir. The wider Guyanese society will not in the immediate future enjoy that dream which most of them have since abandoned these last five years. A quick examination of table five of the National Estimates tells the story. The Nation was fined \$166.08 billion dollars to reach the projected Government spending. Current revenues are projected to provide \$126.398 billion dollars of this. This also includes the difference of \$39.709 billion dollars which is projected to come from miscellaneous capital revenues, \$2.15 billion, and external grants of \$13.263 billion, plus external loans of \$24.29 billion. Loans and grants therefore account for 22.6% of the total projected revenues- a further yoke around the neck of the working poor. While in 2010 we only managed to secure \$9.49 billion dollars of the projected \$13.78 billion in external grants, we nevertheless, boldly project an ambitious \$13.26 billion in 2011. Miscellaneous receipts in 2010 only realized \$2.56 billion of a projected \$6.65 billion, but in 2011 the Minister of Finance suggests that we will increase that number to a whopping \$16.895 billion. The People's National Congress Reform One-Guyana (PNC R1-G) does not share the Minister's optimism in this regard, especially since the figures of 2009 reflect appalling \$0.5 billion dollars.

In 2009, the cost of running this country's Government was a staggering \$40 billion. That figure of \$40 billion represents an alarming move from \$17 billion in 1999. If people do not believe me, I will respectfully refer them to the Bank of Guyana statistics table 10(1). These are the official numbers issued by a Government Agency which has the responsibility to do so. Whilst studies have shown that Guyana needs only nine ministers to administer the business of this country, we have nineteen. Here we have the evidence of the extent of the circle of lucky people for whom a bright future is assured and further evidence of a broad section of Guyana's population who must labour to guarantee this small group's bright future.

The Bank of Guyana Report as at the end of 2009, at table 11(1) captioned "*Indices of Output of Selective Commodities*" raises some serious concerns as it relates to the agricultural sector. It essentially proves that Government's performance in agriculture can only be reasonably

described as dismal. It is of little wonder that the subject Minister, the Hon. Robert Persaud, spoke so much about so little and so little about agriculture yesterday.

Table 11(1) uses the year 2000 as a benchmark. Not surprisingly, 2008 is the last year for which statistics are provided for all commodities under the sub-head "agriculture". The frighteningly low level of production, say for rice, apparently forced the Agriculture Ministry to withhold the 2009 numbers from the Bank of Guyana or has caused the Bank of Guyana to not publish them. Let me give you some examples of the dismal performance of which I speak using the official numbers. Sugar production in 2009 was only 85.2% of what it was in 2000. With the exception of rice and sugar, no numbers were provided for other crops in 2009. Using the 2008 numbers, coconut production was 32.9% of the year of 2000 figures. Cassava production moved from 44,854 tonnes in 2000 to 4,126.56 tonnes in 2008, 9.2% of what it was in the year of 2000. This is a drop in production of 90.8% over the years. Other ground provisions were 13.8% of year 2000. This in reality is an 86.2% drop in production over the years in question. Plantain and banana production were 11% and 24.7%, respectively, in the year of 2000. Pineapple production was at 41.2% in 2000 while citrus was at 38.6%. Egg production was at 63.5% in 2000, and so the sad story continues. Will the Hon. Minister of Finance therefore explain the alleged growth of 2.5% in agriculture? The absence of numbers for year 2000 suggests that the Agriculture Ministry may have used zero as its base figure which explains growth for 2010.

Poultry meat production was at 23% of year 2000. This is largely due to high duties on imported poultry meats from the United States of America (USA). In addition, generous duty free facilities given to a particular local company may have been an encouragement. The Government may wish to consider equitable distribution of such benefits to companies generally. Sadly, however, the company so favoured has essentially failed and a not-so-favoured company has had to fill the breach. The Minister of Agriculture will be well advised to examine the benefits of imported poultry on the price to the Guyanese people. Such an examination will reveal that such imports have historically aided in keeping the price of poultry within the reach of the working poor. Additionally, there was the one billion dollar tax revenue for the national coffers from taxes and imports. Today however, poultry meat is sold at higher prices than it would cost to import it from the USA. The Government will be advised to pay attention to policy review which could result in interventions which will allow poultry producers to provide poultry protein to our citizens at a more affordable price.

It is true that rice fared well. It is however necessary to point out that rice production in the 1960s was very much the same as it is today, that is around 360,000 tonnes. Because of poor drainage all along the coast, the only crop which has fared well is rice. The highly mechanised nature of production in a country which is rapidly losing its labour force and agriculture is perhaps the chief reason for rice doing as well as it has done. I join with my colleagues in congratulating rice farmers for their resilience. In the context of 1964, rice production has really not grown. Like I pointed out earlier, production then and now stands at the same level of 360,000 tonnes per year. In other words, rice production has really not increased over the last forty years.

The Minister of Agriculture spoke yesterday of two new varieties of rice for which the Government has engineered. I refer you, Mr. Speaker, to the Guyana Rice Development Board (G.R.D.B) Annual Report 2009. On page 4, the Chairman of the Board said:-

“In 2009 the G .R.D.B. released two new varieties of rice for commercial cultivation. These two varieties G.R.D.B.-09 and G.R.D.B.-10 have demonstrated their superior performance with a yield advantage of 15% and 30%, respectively.”

He goes on to say:-

“Farmers have achieved yields of seven to eight tonnes per hectare or forty-five to fifty bags per acre from GRDB FL-10, while the GRDB-09 produced yields of 6 to 7 tonnes per hectare or forty to forty-five bags per acre.”

On page 5 of the same report, the General Manager said:-

“These new varieties have yielded potential of 45 to 50 bags per acre under good management practices”.

This is a classic case of two people supplying conflicting information about the same thing. In speaking with farmers they will tell you that they do not know about these varieties and that the yield varied from 18 to 22 bags per acre. The fact is that poor varieties and poor land preparation, generally on levelled lands, late delivery of fertilizer, shortage of phosphate fertilizer and poor roads to move products to the mill have conspired, over the years, to guarantee that rice production does not increase beyond 360,000 tonnes mark. The industry essentially remains up to today as a peasant farming operation. The PNC-R does not advocate against peasant farming, what we are advocating for is the coordinated land preparation, planting, harvesting and marketing. We are advocating for a coordinated approach to drainage and irrigation works. There need to be a national approach which allows for farmers to come together in a major company with the management capacity which allows for the bringing together of resources skills and effort, collective bulk procurement of inputs including fuel and a single approach to marketing with the availability of a certified bulk-loading wharf, this can only serve to make rice farmers a happier group of citizens.

We are saying that the time for the completion of the final phases of Guyana Rice Millers & Exporters Development Association Ltd. (GRMEDA) project has passed. This fact, notwithstanding, is not too late to make this necessary step together with the coordinated approach I have just outlined. If as a country we are serious about managing our rice industry in a cost efficient manner and realistically increasing yields, we must get serious today. The global conditions are right for us as a developing nation to capitalise upon. It should be said here that our national yield still hovers around half of what it is in other rice producing countries around the world. In my respectful view, the much touted thirteen drying floors in Region 2, 3, 4, and 5 have done and can do nothing to enhance rice production. The cry of our youth for a safe recreational space has however been answered in part where ever these floors have been placed.

The question of value for money now arises. I hereby re-emphasise the PNC R1-G's position outlined by the Hon. Mrs. Volda Lawrence with respect to taking rice to the next level. There must be added value to rice as we know it. Baby cereal, cream of rice, breakfast cereals and, yes, rice flour, remains real possibilities in this regard: what is wrong with rice flour?

**Mr. Nandlall:** Nothing. That is the only one you promote.

**Mr. M. Williams:** Venezuela buys paddy from Guyana, They determine the grade of the paddy and use it to provide raw materials for its mills and employment for its labour force. Venezuela produces, perhaps, the best cream of rice in very attractive packaging. What is wrong with us? Why can we not do the same things with the very paddy produced by our

hard working farmers and allow them to earn considerably more while at the same time expanding the manufacturing sector.

Unlike rice, sugar has been on the decline. Sugar production moved from 321,000 tonnes in 2002 to 220,000 tonnes in 2010. I suspect that the high profile nature of sugar to the national economy is perhaps the single most reason for the Government's inability to conceal this fact. Sugar is suffering from three very serious afflictions: the Skeldon Sugar industry's expansion, insufficiency of cane and the nature of the land layout.

The Skeldon expansion project was poorly conceived. We were losing the European Union's (E.U) preferential prices which we were enjoying since the colonial days. It was a time of major uncertainty for sugar. There was clear declaration by the E.U. to the Government of Guyana that these preferential prices would be withdrawn. As though they could stop the powerful E.U. block, the Government of Guyana by its actions clearly refused to accept that this would ever happen. How else does one explain the Government of Guyana's expansion of our sugar industry at a time when the rest of the world are keen sugar producing countries were busy contracting theirs? The Skeldon factory now requires a supply of approximately 6,000 tonnes of cane per day. Of course, we said this before but there is need to repeat because the Government seems not to have heard. The Skeldon factory has a daily demand and if that is to be satisfied, it requires private cane farmers to cultivate acreage equal to the area under cultivation by the Skeldon estate. The estate itself would have to at the same time double its area under cultivation. The PNC R1-G is on record of having pointed this out since 1999. This has not yet happened, and raises the question about Government's seriousness with regard to the sugar industry in general and the Skeldon Sugar factory in particular.

The Skeldon factory is starved of canes. The factory has countless flaws which further compound an already bad situation. Even after reducing the factory's true put from 350 tonnes of cane per hour to less than 200 tonnes per hour, the factory is still not functioning efficiently. At least 80% of the lands under cane cultivation have camber beds. This is true for the Skeldon factory itself and the industry in general. Does the Minister of Agriculture not know that it will be impossible to mechanise the industry, if only because the camber bed layout was specifically designed for manual harvesting and loading? I would recommend that it would be more economical to remove sugar cane cultivation to virgin flat lands further inland. Let Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) pursue a flat land ridge and furrow layout which allows machines to plant, harvest and load the canes. Machines can also fertilize, do inter-road tillage and other husbandry practices.

I wish now, to refer your attention to page 20, paragraph 4.7, line 3 of the Budget Speech where the Minister of Finance says:-

“Irregular weather patterns contributed to loss of cane as a result of limited availability of water irrigation which at times hindered cane transport from field to factory and resulted in a loss of sugar content”

This is a conflict with what the Hon. Minister says at page 21, paragraph 4.10, and again I quote the Hon. Minister:-

“So as to ensure a sustained performance going forward, Government continues to provide substantial support in the areas of improved drainage and irrigation facilities”.

What are citizens to make of these two statements?

The PNC R1-G has repeatedly said that the sugar industry has been losing and continues to lose its workforce since 2001. I want to repeat this even as the Minister of Finance finally admits this fact. While the Minister does not give us the number of sugar workers at the end of 2007, he tells us at page 20, paragraph 4.7 that in 2008 there was a 72% turnout. This dropped by 10% to 62% in 2009 and again in 2010, it dropped by a further 10% to 52%. I do not know if the Hon. Minister of Agriculture needs to hit his head against an empty cane punt to wake up. Does not the Hon. Robert Persaud see that we have been losing our sugar workers at the rate of 10% per annum over the past three years? Clearly he has not, for in 2011 the Hon. Minister projects a bumper crop. The question is: who will harvest and load the canes into the punt? The cane harvesters are clearly not there. The mechanic harvesters cannot work on the cambered beds.

On average, the sugar industry harvests three million tonnes of sugar cane per year. GuySuCo now says that there are 500,000 tonnes of cane remaining in the fields at the end of 2010. Historically, the industry has harvested 40% of its total cane in the first crop and 60% in the second crop. That 60% of 3 million is 1.8 million. This means that during the 2010 second crop the industry was required to harvest one million, eight hundred thousand tonnes of sugar cane. To have five hundred thousand tonnes in the sugar fields at the end of 2010 means that 28% of the 2010 second crop remains in the field, to date. Because sugar cane is bread and grown to mature over a twelve month period, the industry would be reaping overrun, light, and poor quality canes. By that I mean that canes will become light and contain poor juice quality. The Government's suggestion that Guyana could expect a bumper crop in 2011 therefore has to be promised on something other than fact.

The Hon. Minister of Agriculture spoke about Guyana's Livestock Development Authority (G.L.D.A.). The G.L.D.A.'s Chief Executive Officer has assumed duties, I am advised, and I am informed that the first order of business for this officer was to withdraw the provision which allows for duty free cars to officers who were transferred into this new authority. The second order of business was to notify employees that, essentially, their salaries would henceforth be less favourable than those previously enjoyed. A promise of an official comfort letter that would preserve their services is yet to be honoured. Neither are they aware of when the matter of severance pay would be addressed. Over at National Agricultural Research Institute (N.A.R.I.), the staff of the Plant Quarantine Unit has been moved into the former Ministry of Agriculture training facility at the Guyana School of Agriculture. The office quarters have been renovated, but the operational offices have not been fully restored. There is for example no telephone service and hence no internet service. The extension services appear to have been integrated into N.A.R.I., but I am informed that some of the staff have been sidelined and are now visibly engaged in field outreaches. The payment of salary of Ministry of Agriculture staff transferred to the new N.A.R.I. under the accounting system of N.A.R.I. is yet to be effected. The big question everyone is asking at N.A.R.I. is when will the new N.A.R.I. come into effect, and when can severance pay be expected? This is the single biggest issue. For example, what happens to those who are enjoying pensions under the current N.A.R.I.? What measures are there to ensure that severance pay is expedited in a timely manner after the new N.A.R.I. comes into effect? The clear perception is that the authorities are playing for time to see how best they can circumnavigate around the issue of severance payment. What is needed is a clear need Human Resource and Industrial Relations Policy and a procedure to transparently inform staff, and in the process, offer them some comfort.

I now wish to pay some attention to Region 3. I listened to the Hon. Member, former Minister Ms. Bibi Shadick, as she spoke in glowing terms about the development in Region 3. I could

have only smiled as the Hon. Minister suggested to this National Assembly that I did not know what was happening in my own Region. But in typical “Animal Farm” style, the Hon. Member stayed clear of telling this National Assembly about the large sums of money budgeted for three consecutive years for the role-on role-off ferries and the construction of wharves to accommodate them. All that we have evidence of is one Minister handing over a structure referred to as a “wharf” to another Minister. After several months, several hundred million dollars and an enquiry, we still do not have a wharf neither do we have the ferries. The Hon. Member never told us that the people of Wakenaam and Leguan have no interest in airstrips. Yet, the Government persists in making provisions for the construction of airstrips on those islands over the past three years with no report of progress with regard to the expenditure on these projects which seem nowhere near completion. Why, if the Hon. Member Ms. Bibi Shadick cared so much for the island of her birth does she not recommend to the Government that the moneys identified for the airstrips be redirected to river defence. There is no mention in the Hon. Member’s presentation about the new schools which were declared open without running water, electricity and fences. These schools where our children are required to attend, picking their path through overgrowth and swamp, for example the Tuschen Primary school, just go and visit it. They are filling it with mud now after it was declared open and for four months was occupied by children. The Hon. Member did not tell us about the Government’s high handed move of taking away lands which were given to the Leonora Cattle Farmers Corporate Society Ltd by the Government of Guyana under the presidency of the late Hugh Desmond Hoyte. These lands were taken away to build a new school just so that it can be seen as one travels along the West Coast Demerara public road.

*2.45 p.m.*

The Hon. Shadick did not tell the National Assembly about the buildings constructed by Social Impact Amelioration Programme (SIMAP), Poor Rural Communities Support Services Project (PRCSSP), the President’s Youth Choice Initiative and so forth. Many of these buildings remain unused for as long as ten years. Having raised these issues in 2007, I had hoped that the Government would have acted to change the situation, but instead, a spanking new packaging facility was constructed at Parika. Farmers are unhappy with the non-functioning facility while the managers of the facility say that they cannot generate enough funds to pay Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL) for electricity. And because the authorities have not provided self-generation with the capacity to produce sustainable energy on a continuous basis, this facility has turned out to be useless. I was hopeful that the Hon. Member would have reported on that to the National Assembly.

Not surprisingly, the Hon. Member Shadick ensured that she did not mention the known fact that the assets of the Region are being abused by a regional official. Abuse to the extent that a vehicle, the replacement cost of which is \$19 million from Beharry Auto Sales could have been given to a non-employee of the region to go to a party in another region, crashing and writing-off the vehicle in the process. The result of this was the reduction in spending on drainage and irrigation and the acquisition of a replacement vehicle.

The health centre built for rehabilitation in De Kinderen, for example, was taken over by the Government, only because GuySuCo could not afford to maintain it. The Hon. Member did not tell us that. She did not say that Government’s failure to step in where GuySuCo stepped out, because of failure, would have resulted in permanent closure. The Hon. Member stayed clear...

**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 continue his presentation.

*Motion put and carried*

**Mr. Williams:** Sir, the Hon. Member Bibi Shadick stayed clear of the West Demerara Regional Hospital with its maternity ward on the upper floor and patients and their relatives having to fetch water for bathroom business. This hospital has been responsible for its fair share of discomforts.

The plumbing problems plaguing the Leonora Cottage Hospital were also not mentioned. No mention was made of the closure of this facility and the discharge of patients due to the unavailability of water. No mention was made about the abuse of our children in the school system. I really did not want to speak about this, but I shall do so as I have a few minutes remaining.

The question about why our boys are underperforming in the education system could be answered if we examine the level of abuse of our boys in the school system by people who are given responsibility to superintend their development and educational uplifting. Only recently a male teacher sexually molested a boy who is currently in hospital.

**Mr. Speaker:** Surely you are not saying Hon. Member that is responsible for the non-performance?

**Mr. Williams:** No, I am saying that if we were to examine that, we will find some answers.

**Mr. Speaker:** That is your position but I find it very difficult to believe.

**Mr. Williams:** Sir, you stopped being a boy a long time ago. You are now quite a mature gentleman. Here is a case where a situation could have been avoided. In 2002 when I was a Councillor on the Regional Democratic Council (RDC) of Region 3, the issue surrounding the conduct of this teacher was raised by me at that level. There were situations where this teacher...

**Mr. Speaker:** But you are saying that the reason for the non-performance of male students is because of abuse. Is that not taking the issue a bit too far? That is what you are saying.

**Mr. Williams:** I do not think so. I think the effect on the child's psyche...

**Mr. Speaker:** You are free to say what you want, but I find it particularly odd that the reason for the non-performance of male students is abuse by teachers.

**Mr. Williams:** I am not saying that is the only reason, Sir.

**Mr. Speaker:** That is what I understand that you are saying.

**Mr. Williams:** No, Sir, I am sorry if I conveyed that impression but it is not the only one.

Here is a case where since 2002 this potential problem could have been nipped in the bud and prevented. When a certain report was received by me and raised at the level of the RDC, the Regional Chairman, at the time, clearly did not do what was required to address the matter. Now the same Regional Chairman, who is a Headmaster at a primary school and has



responsibility to supervise the same teacher, failed in his supervision of this teacher to the extent that the teacher has now perhaps permanently damaged a little boy. This is a very serious case and I am amazed that a grown man, who is a father, could giggle at something that serious.

The system is failing our children and we have to address the situation. I had reason to report this matter to two Ministers - the Minister of Education and the Minister of Human Services and Social Security - and I am assured by both Hon. Ministers that they are doing everything within their powers to bring some kind of closure to this matter. I hold the Hon. Ministers to their word because this is one reported incident of several others which have not been reported. Some of these have come to my attention for which I would also relate to the Ministers outside of the National Assembly.

When the Hon. Member Bibi Shadick spoke, she did not tell us anything about issues such as those that have I mentioned, nor did she tell us about the short-term roads and the discriminatory approach to the demolition of illegal structures on the region's reserve. We heard nothing about the state of the road in the many housing schemes across the Region. I invite the Hon. Minister of Housing to drive through, not perhaps with one of the big vehicles, but with a regular vehicle, so that he can feel what the ordinary citizens go through as they leave their homes to go to work and to return home every day.

I want to say to – I am sorry she is not here – the Hon. Member Bibi Shadick that when we speak in the National Assembly, try as we might, we cannot fool all of the people all of the time even though, perhaps, we might succeed in fooling some of the people some of the time. I want to say to the Government that no amount of “Getting It Right” on the National Communication Network (NCN) propaganda can cause the people in this country, who live in the real Guyana, to forget their own realities. Nothing can get them to waver from their commitment to remove this Government from office come elections 2011 - not even with the Ministry of Agriculture's weekly political outreach programme, funded by state resources, and the gravy train of provisions for roads. I put the Government on notice that “*lang time done, short time lef*”. The people will speak.

**Minister of Human Services and Social Security [Ms. Priya Manickchand]:** May it please you, Sir. I rise this afternoon with my colleagues to support the 2011 Budget.

I wish to place on record my tremendous admiration for Dr. Ashni Singh for presenting, not only a budget that brings everything, and brings much to many people in Guyana, but for doing so eloquently. Dr. Ashni Singh has proved himself over the years so that he has become known to the Guyanese public to be a son that we can all, irrespective of where in this House we sit, be proud of. I say to him, “Continue along this line”. I congratulate you very warmly for bringing to Guyana a budget that would see many changes for the betterment in the lives of all our people.

I wish to also congratulate Ms. Joan Baveghems who has been sworn in to this National Assembly as a member representing the PNC R1-G. I do not see her as representing a particular party. Ms. Baveghems is here representing women and I am extremely proud of that. I say congratulations Ms. Baveghems and all the best in your deliberations.

I would like, while I am on this stretch of congratulations, to also congratulate Mrs. Volda Lawrence for enjoying the confidence of her Party, as a woman, to stand here and be the first speaker of that Party, to represent them. This is a female in our country that has been given responsibility and I think that is remarkable. It tells us to where Guyana has moved. We are

advancing, closer perhaps, and I say the word “perhaps” cautiously, to a place where we can enjoy gender equality which can only bring good to all of Guyana, male and female alike.

We also see in this era, in this season, two women who have contributed much to Guyana over their lives, Ms. Gail Teixeira and Ms. Faith Harding running in a race... [Mrs. Backer: No. 5 Sir, I could understand why a man would say No. 5 but it bothers me that a woman would refer to one of her female candidates as No. 5.] We are in an environment in Guyana where we could see two women freely running for office, freely representing what they believe, and freely coming forward. That tells us that we are coming into our own as a country as it relates to gender equality. I say congratulations Guyana for bringing us to this point because it is the people of Guyana who have accepted these two worthy candidates. Win or lose, because on both sides only one person could win, they will go down in history as marking a time when Guyana changed and accepted women in leadership positions in a public way. I say to both of those persons, Ms. Gail Teixeira and Dr. Faith Harding and to both of their Parties, congratulations for putting them up.

This Budget has been peppered with the usual rhetoric coming from the Opposition. We have heard repeatedly, from the first speaker right down the line of the Opposition, all of the Members of the Opposition, that there is nothing for anyone; it is an “Election Budget”; it is unreal and out of touch; there is no provision for any job creation. If we were to check the budget presentations of all the years that I have been in here, which have not been many (four years), it is a repetition year after year of the same thing.

We hear this year, 2011, that when the country goes to a national election as a democratic country should do – something we all should be cheering on – that this is an “Election Budget” because there is an increase in how much is going to be spent on our people - the Guyanese people. We hear repeatedly (in 2011) that this is an “Election Budget”. There would be nothing wrong with that if it were true. I am positing in this National Assembly and I am placing it out there to the people of Guyana to believe that this is rhetoric and it can be disproved. Throughout the years for the budgets that I have been here – I do not want to speak about when I was not here – there have been increases in the budgets that Dr. Ashni Singh, the Hon. Minister of Finance, has brought to this House. The PPP/Civic (PPP/C) Government has, from 2007 to now, repeatedly brought to the people of Guyana more good things year after year after year. The percentages increased over the years speak for themselves.

In 2007, we had a budget that was \$110 billion; that is \$100 billion spent on Guyanese men and women and children. In 2008, we had a budget that was \$119.3 billion. There was a 9.3% increase. In 2008, three years away from the election, two years past an election, there was a 9.3% increase in the budgetary allocation in the moneys that will be spent on our peoples in Guyana. We have a 13% increase this year. Throughout the years we have seen a 19% increase, an 8% increase, a 10% increase, and this year a 13% increase, respectively from 2007 to 2011. What does that mean? It means that every year from 2007 - and that is the only period that I am looking at under review, albeit by my study - that these figures show that we have brought to the people of Guyana what we can give to them so that their lives can be better. That is what the PPP/C Government has done repeatedly.

We are in an election year and the Opposition would have us come here - simply so that we could perhaps look good - and bring a budget that is lower than the one we came with last year so that we can say that we are not “electioneering”. However, we would not do that to the people of Guyana because we are here to serve. We have been elected to serve, and serve

we shall every time we are given that mandate. This repeated increase over the years has brought service to people. We have gotten more children educated with a better quality of education. We have brought more health services to people. We have brought more social services to people. More persons are enjoying living in their own homes. More persons enjoy driving down smooth streets. More persons enjoy lights and water at their residences; and that is what an increase in the budgetary allocation means.

Last year we had pensions and public assistance, for example, at 12% and 14%, respectively. This year it has been increased. If one were to tell me that we should not make the increase because this is an election year, then what was the argument in 2008? In 2008 there was a 63% increase in old age pensions and there was no elections held in that year. I wish to lay to rest the suggestion by the Opposition that this is an "Election Budget". It is an election year and we have no apologies for bringing service to our people in any year.

We have heard too, like I said, the usual rhetoric: "there is corruption, there is nothing for any one", and the Hon. Member Mrs. Volda Lawrence said that this Budget is unreal and does not address the needs of the people. I wish to say that the Hon. Member did not understand the concept of the Budget. When we give a tax concession to business people that amount – if we are using last year's figures – to \$1.7 billion, what do you think they will use the \$1.7 billion to do? They will invest in this country, jobs will be created and our people will be served. I ask Members, particularly when they are analysing this Budget, to do so perhaps with advice. I am no economist and I say that here. I am a lawyer but I ask for advice. Ask for sensible advice from sensible people who have no agenda and come here and tell the truth. I am saying that anybody who reads this year's Budget and says to us - Mrs. Lawrence, the Hon. Member, speaking on behalf of the Opposition, leading off the debate on their behalf - we have nothing for job creation. I say that person does not understand this year's Budget. They have not read it and do not understand it. I wish to say about the rhetoric that says there is nothing for anyone, the \$3.6 billion that is being spent on housing, what is that? Is that not for the people who would receive housing? The \$24.3 billion that is being spent in the Education Sector-where is that going- space? This is for our children; something for all Guyanese children whether they come from Moruca, Corentyne or Linden. When we spend \$3.7 billion dollars on health, who is benefitting? These are all sums meant to benefit our Guyanese people.

Often we speak of our Guyanese people and sons of the soil and sometimes they remain faceless and nameless, but Hon. Member Kwame Gilbert told this House last night in a very graphic way what it means to ordinary people. These files here are files of the names of pensioners who received old age pension in 2010. These are not just files, not just names; these are people: Abraham Migan, Colin Adams and Azeze Abdool from Plaisance. These are all people- real people- receiving real service from the PPP/C Government. This is repeated in sector after sector after sector.

The corruption charge is easy to make, very sexy for the newspapers and the news agencies - very sensational- and is always made, but there is nothing to substantiate it. We had a Member standing in this Hon. House last night - this August Body, a place that our young boys and girls aspire to be - on the national television being exposed, holding up something, citing and quoting from it as though it is gospel, leading this National Assembly, including myself, down the path in listening to what appeared to be reasoning from this great study that was done.

It has been noted by the Hon. Ashni Singh and the Hon. Member Anil Nandlall on several occasions that the Alliance For Change (AFC) comes to this National Assembly, which I understand to be un-parliamentary, make their speech which cannot be substantiated by anything, anywhere and then they scurry away and do not come back to hear a response. They do not represent the people that they go out and tell that they are going to come here and represent them. So I am sorry Mrs. Holder is not here. I really do not believe in saying something behind someone's back, but I cannot force her to come and represent her people. The Hon. Member Mrs. Holder stands here and holds up a study, quotes and cites from it that this very sensational 'Manickchand is presiding over a Ministry that saw \$1.3 billion dollars in fraud last year' - in effect, calling me a thief. I have a sense of humour and that is why I can understand that. However, when pressed about the study, the Hon. Member confessed that it is a study that she conducted herself. And then when your Honour directed that the Member shared it out and the three page study, which is riddled with grammatical errors and strange mathematics, resembles an article written under the name "Peeping Tom" in a national newspaper. I am disappointed that we are being brought to this level in the National Assembly. I would be troubled and dismayed if I could simply stand here and say 'X' is a mad person who can be institutionalised, so says a study. However, when Your Honour asks which study is this, I say "mine Sir, I have studied 'X' for five years and I believe that". We cannot bring ourselves to this level in this National Assembly. The people whom we represent are worthy of more. The person, who did this, Mrs. Holder, is running for national office; she is running for Prime Minister in her Party. [Mrs. Backer: You did you not congratulate her?] Incidentally, I am hearing Mrs. Backer's heckling. But when Mrs. Holder was appointed, I did congratulate her. But the misrepresentations and dishonesty of last night, - which I will prove in a moment - really forces me to renege on those. It does not make me proud that a woman... [Interruption] That is why I congratulated her because there was another woman being put by her Party as Prime Minister. I am not proud of a woman like that, and I say that frankly. I say that this National Assembly is worth more than mere 'say so'; worth more than the kind of chat you would have, perhaps, in your Party's headquarters or in some bottom house discussion. I ask that we keep the level, we raise the level.

We heard repeatedly about the issue of corruption last night and that is what I was speaking of when I went off track. Last night while Mrs. Holder was telling us in this Assembly about her study that she got from the Peeping Tom, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, eyes wide, arms flaying, was muttering, "you see, you see, evidence of corruption". That is what we were hearing. We hear of corruption, and this is the kind of thing that allegation is based on. I ask the press, particularly, that when they are reporting to delve a little bit deeper; ask some more questions. Why are you saying this? Where is your evidence? [Interruption] I am not necessarily saying do not report on it; report on it but question where these persons are getting the information from. You, my dear media friends, owe the Guyanese people much more than a repetition of lies.

We hear that there is nothing for anyone and we have just showed how everything in this Budget is spent to improve the lives of our people; then we hear repeatedly, over the years, "corruption, corruption". It is based on foolishness, like the study presented last night. That is repeatedly what has been happening. No one has ever been able to prove that any of us on this side has been corrupt. And I say clearly that if you find that someone has been stealing or that someone is corrupt, let us know; that person has to go; they have to face the law. That is what we say repeatedly. It has been said by no lesser person than His Excellency President Jagdeo and I give that undertaking as a Minister in a Ministry, presently. I speak on behalf of all my colleagues on this side of the House. When we will sit here and listen to no job

creation, corruption and all of those other things that have become rhetoric over the years, I ask that we dismiss it out of hand because they have no basis in reality. The PPP/C Government has repeatedly and consistently brought service to the people of Guyana and we shall continue to do so.

Over the last four years, and the Hon. Member Minister Persaud put into perspective last night, that we on this side of the House have a social contract and have been working with the people of Guyana and working in the context of delivering, on our terms of that contract, the things that we said we would do. We work in a context and that context is our manifesto- the Manifesto that the People's Progressive Party/Civic took to the people of Guyana in 2006 – A Brighter Future for all Guyanese. (The PPP/C's 2006 Manifesto) In the pages of this Manifesto we told the people of Guyana briefly, as manifestos are by their very nature, this is how we will improve your lives in the next five years as we have been doing for the last thirteen years.

*3.15 p.m.*

We said to them, “Here is what we want to bring to you and we will bring this after listening to you, on walkabout after walkabout.” The people told us what they had wanted and we put them in here, after studies and careful consideration, then we would come back to them, year after year, and say that this is how we have delivered on the things that we told them that we would give to them.

Throughout the last five years, the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security has been staying true to the promises that it made to the Guyanese people in page 23 of the PPP/C Manifesto which promises a brighter future for all and which has delivered on that promise. Over those years, the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, where the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security has the responsibility for women and children, the aged, the vulnerable, the disabled and the indigent has repeatedly done things, instituted programmes and crafted policies that see all of our vulnerable people benefiting in a way that removes from them, year by year, bit by bit, their various vulnerabilities.

Over the years, the Ministry has dealt with the welfare of our children, the welfare of our women and the welfare of our aged or aging population. It has looked at particular issues affecting these particular sectors, such as violence against women, improving the life of our orphans and vulnerable children, changing the reality for people who find themselves displaced on the streets by giving them somewhere to go. It continued to do that in 2010. In 2010, in relation to women, we did many things. I heard the Hon. Member Ms. Cheryl Sampson said in her budget presentation that I have done nothing for women and I spent my entire four years passing laws – something that I am very proud of, quite frankly – for children. If that is the only bad thing that can be said about me, I feel very encouraged. I make no apologies for passing laws so that our children can be in a better position. The PPP/C Government will continue to do that in this and every other term that it has. We will create an environment, whether it will be by passing laws, building homes, or crafting policies which will make sure all of our children, all of them – the orphaned and vulnerable children, or more fortunate children - are in a good position.

In the year 2010, we passed many laws and established many policies for our children, but we also did much for women. In the year 2010 alone - it was represented to this Hon. House last night or yesterday that nothing was done for women - the Women of Worth (WOW) programme was launched. The Women of Worth programme is one where single parent mothers could access money, get finance to either establish or to improve on their business in

circumstances where prior to this programme they would never have been able to access before. The Women of Worth programme is a model and an example across the Caribbean. I am saying it here with confidence that no other country in our part has the same kind of collaboration or no other Government across the Caribbean has made the same changes to its legislation to create incentives for women to become entrepreneurs – small business people.

The five hundred people – and that is why I said we got lost in figures – who benefited from this programme last year are mothers with five children, fathers left, went away, never looked back as to how they were looking after their children...

Five hundred women, of those women, there are women who have been struggling with a stand in front of their residents selling and struggling to stock that stand to bring up five children that a very delinquent father left, never looked back at and never supported. They take their children to school. These are women who understand that the only way out of poverty is through an education. These are the women that this programme has been serving. These five hundred women are real people that the programme has been serving. I also heard last night from Ms. Sampson that it was only five hundred women that the Ministry has approved. Well, we are working in collaboration with a private entity – a bank, a very good corporate citizen, the Guyana Bank for Trade and Industry. The Ministry has sent to that bank in excess of eleven hundred applications, five hundred of which has been processed. It is processing the others. So from 4<sup>th</sup> June, last year, when this programme was launched, to the 31<sup>st</sup> of December, the Ministry has approved in an excess of sixteen hundred Guyanese single parent women so that they can improve their lives and that is what the Women of Worth programme is all about. That is what we have done.

It is a programme which has been launched and is successful in Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 10. I heard Ms. Vanessa Kissoon yesterday saying that nothing goes to Region 10. Nobody in Region 10 benefited. Well, I wish to say – we have the names; I am not going to call them here because I am not going to subject our single parent women to that – that the majority of women came Region 10 and that is not to say that we were favouring Region 10. We will serve people wherever people want to be served or wherever the need is and I say proudly that the largest number of women, mothers, benefiting under the WOW programme came from Region 10 and that can be substantiated. So again, we hear about discrimination and we hear how particular Regions and streets are not served. They are just simply not true.

Additionally, Ms. Sampson was saying that this is all we did. Last year, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April, we sat in this National Assembly and we passed the Sexual Offences Bill. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of May, President Bharrat Jagdeo made that Bill an Act and that is a Bill which serves our women, particularly, and our children. This is what we did for women last year. So how could it be said that nothing was done for women? It was last year that the Women and Gender Equality Commission was established. It was last year we established this Constitutional Commission which seeks to better the lives of our women in this country. Last year Guyana was invited to speak at Harvard University, at a Conference of the Women World Leader. That is a very elite kind of thing. We are recognised. I went, but it was not me that was recognised, it was Guyana which was invited to speak there. As a result of which, for the first time, Guyana is going to be benefiting from an intern who is going to come down here to spend time with us doing work for us, our people and our country. As such, these white zones which were established last year, the first time they were launched, where women can go outside of the various premises that Help and Shelter has or the Ministry has, can seek help. This is us working with the communities to help our women escape violence.

It was started last year and it is going to be launched shortly. It is the Men's Affairs Bureau, where we hope to work with our men holistically to address the issues of violence against women. These are all things done for women. Ms. Sampson is a very gentle lady and speaks very gently, very different from me, and so I am saying to her is that she is completely inaccurate and makes me sound like a bully. Ms. Sampson was completely inaccurate last night. There has been so much, only in 2010, done for women. Ms. Sampson is a very Hon. Member, a person who is aware of what is happening around in society, so is it that these things passed over her head when all other Guyanese took note? Or is it that she came here deliberately to misrepresent? I do not know, Sir.

This is my question and this is my concern. I do not go back. I know the Opposition, particularly the PNC R-1G, always tells us about how we are going back to twenty-eight years ago, and so forth. I do not want to go back that far. I am not going to go back to twenty-eight years. I am going back to four years ago. Four years ago, the PNC R-1G, as a political party, went to the people of Guyana and it said, "Look, we want your votes, all of you, men and women, all adults, and we are going to serve you." It presented to the people of Guyana, its manifesto and do you know how many pages...? Let us do not talk about pages. Do you know how many sentences, how many paragraphs, how many words address the welfare of women? None! Do you know how many paragraphs in here address...? I will lend it to whoever is speaking next, because it may very well be said that I read it and I did not understand. There are general things that may improve Guyana, but nothing addresses women. In our manifesto we spoke of starting a micro credit business; we spoke of violence against women; we spoke of passing the Sexual Offences Law. There is nothing in their manifesto.

Women are not important to them. Let us look at what they said about old people. Let us look at what they said about our aged population. Do you know what is said about the aged, about our senior citizens? Nothing! Maybe they have forgotten the old people and children—two non-important components in the country. People are not important. Let us look and see what they said about our children. What they are going to do for children? Do you know what was said in here? Nothing again! If we are going to work together, like this year's Budget theme, *Together Building Tomorrow's Guyana Today*, that is how come I came to look at this because we are finished with what we were supposed to do and did more. Let me pull out the good things from this manifesto that would benefit our people. I have found nothing. Nothing I could not have found.

Nothing that the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security addresses, none of the people - old people, children, women, disabled, homeless – and all the things that we are talking about over there, was addressed in here. Comrades, if the manifesto, even at the stage of promise, does not state anything, what do we expect?

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

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

*Motion put and carried*

**Ms. Manickchand:** Sir, I think those two bouts of blackout have minus a couple of minutes here. Thank you Hon. Prime Minister. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am saying that it is not the Opposition particularly..., and the Alliance For Change (AFC) is in the same situation. It could not have found its plan. It did not have a manifesto, it had a plan. If it is that it cannot plan here, then we invite it to come where we have vision and where we have plans, hold our hands and let us work for the women and children of our country.

The children of Guyana benefited also last year from the passage of many pieces of legislation, including the Protection of Children Act. Even though all of those pieces of legislation were subject to scrutiny at the level of the Special Select Committee, there are still mistakes. Now that they are being used, the Courts are finding mistakes. For many of them, we have to come back to this National Assembly to amend where there are mistakes and we do not have any problems with doing that.

I heard Mr. Mervyn Williams' point and while he is right that the Government cannot be blamed for what is happening to our children, I echo his point that we have to hold every person responsible. Where there is a school which has a teacher abusing our children then we have to work together to establish an environment where the other teachers and the Head teacher are going to speak up. The Government cannot do that. That is a societal change that we need. We have to call upon every person in Guyana, every partner, every Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), every church, every Temple, every Masjid to work with us to make sure that this happens. What we can do, on this side of the House, is to create the environment where that is possible and that is what we are doing. Together we can work to make sure that Guyana's tomorrow is secured by protecting, loving and looking after our children.

Having passed all those pieces of legislation, the Government, as part of our promise to the Guyanese people in our manifesto, sought to build the Family Court. We promised that we would have established the Family Court and the executive arm of the Government of Guyana through Cabinet, the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security and the Ministry of Public Works and Communications. Minister Benn and I supervised and built it with money that was allocated in last year's budget. That Family Court has been built and it is in the Court yard. It is a very pretty Court. It complies with all the architectural designs. We are disappointed, in the executive arm that the Rules Committee of the High Court, which is to make rules, is dithering with those rules. It has done nothing. Because it had done nothing, the executive arm was forced to contract someone to draft the rules. Mr. Rafeek Khan was the consultant who has drafted those rules. Mr. Khan has handed them over to the Chancellor who is the Head of the Rules Committee since October last year and nothing has been done. We called upon the Rules Committee to stop the sloth and get this Court established. We are very keen to look after our families that find themselves in difficult circumstances in the best way possible so that children coming out of these broken relationships or disputes can grow up in the most amicable atmosphere.

It is our call this afternoon, on this side of the House that the Rules Committee gets its act together and gets those rules adopted, whether it has to go and consult with the Bar Association about it or whatever. We want the Family Court to be passed.

I was speaking earlier of a report and this, Sir, Mrs. Holder yesterday, brought into disrepute many persons in this National Assembly... the Hon. Member [Mr. B. Williams: You know that the lady is not here.] Mr. Speaker, I am being heckled by the Hon. Member Mr. Basil Williams, my friend, who is saying that I know that the lady is not here. She got away. I cannot help that. This is a parliamentary sitting for which...



**Mr. Speaker:** Mr. Williams is probably refreshed from his sojourn abroad...

**Ms. Manickchand:** He looks so, Sir.

**Mr. Speaker:** ...and he is feeling in an upbeat mood.

**Ms. Manickchand:** This is serious, Sir. It was a joke that was not funny, but a joke that was designed to rob many people and so I wish to address it. I hope that I can do this with some sort of comprehensiveness because it makes me very angry and I should say that up front. Yesterday, what the Hon. Member Mrs. Holder did is that by her allegations in the Hon. House... Sir, do you know what struck me, before I get there? Here is a Prime Ministerial candidate, second in charge of her party, or however it works, and she stood up and spent her entire speech on the national debate – this as a huge thing for a country – on old-age pension and misrepresented everything that she said. If those things were true, I would have admitted that it is a serious issue that should engage the attention of someone running to be the Prime Minister of the country. However, when it is not true, to spend all her time allocated in this House where she is supposed to represent the people of Guyana on this one issue is very miniscule and may indicate to us, as a country, what her representation of us would be were she ever to assume that office. [**Member: Praise God.**] Praise God indeed. It would not happen.

Mrs. Holder stood in this National Assembly last night and spoke in a manner that disparages all of my staff at the Ministry of the Human Services and Social Security and all of the pensioners as a whole. Sir, I know you spoke earlier and you said that we are a small group and we are identifiable and pensioners are forty-two thousand persons, so perhaps they cannot sue. However, what this Prime Ministerial candidate ...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hold on, just one moment. Mrs. Holder said that there were phantom persons who were drawing pension moneys. She was not attacking existing pensioners and I did not hear her attacking the members of your staff.

**Ms. Manickchand:** I am going to tell you why, Sir. If I were to draft this it would be an attack and they can sue for liable, but she is covered by the skirt of the Committees of Privileges in this National Assembly. If you know the system, Mr. Speaker, to do what Mrs. Holder was accusing the Government of doing, the staff would have to do it. To say of a group of pensioners that seventeen thousand persons do not really exist but somebody is collecting the money for them implies that somewhere along the line we could distrust our pensioners and that is most disgusting.

Mrs. Holder stood in this National Assembly and in the usual rhetoric – I wrote it down somewhere – spoke about the massive corruption. Here it is. Let me repeat. She spoke of major discrepancies in numbers over the period 2002 to 2006 and that the amount of pensioners had raised mysteriously, and that there were serious deficiencies discovered in the system. She said that there was a haemorrhaging from the Pension Fund. She accused this Government, through me – and I take it personally – of not being able to account for \$1.3 billion. The Hon. Member went on and on. We have raised objections and she was standing. Sir, if I refer to the Hon. Member as “she” it is only because I am trying to get this through. I do not disrespect the seat that Mrs. Holder sits in and so I mean “Hon. Member”.

Hon. Mr. Ramjattan, sitting next to her, eyes wild, arms flinging, saying, “corruption, corruption.” He is the Presidential candidate and she is the Prime Ministerial candidate. She spoke of this study that found huge discrepancies and seventeen thousand six hundred and

forty people are getting pensions. She called them phantoms. She said it was haemorrhaging the system - \$1.3 billion.

This is her study. This is the study I that speak of. Every month \$116 million are being haemorrhaged. We cannot account for it. It is being diverted. I sat here in horror because I do not deal with the pensioners and the pension system. I was wondering which study is this that the Hon. Member got all that information on. Oh my God, something is happening in the Ministry. Then when pressed, when Ms. Teixeira said, "What study are you speaking of?" We asked her to cite her source, like we would, if somebody comes and says the *Times Magazines* states that the "Government is corrupt"; we usually ask for date, time, publication and page number. The Hon. Member confessed that it was she, herself, who did the study. The Hon. Member never told us and there is nowhere on the record which gives Mrs. Holder, that Hon. Member, the credentials to do any study like this. Nothing that Mrs. Holder said could have authenticated this piece of paper. I have seen the Hon. Member was backtracking in today's *Guyana Chronicle* in her post craziness on the corridor. She actually said that she knew holes will be borne into it because the Hon. Member knows that there is nothing in here that can hold water.

After she was asked to circulate this document, we saw how much we need remedial education in Mathematics for people like her. We saw how much we need remedial education in Grammar for persons who are grammatically and mathematically incorrect, and she comes to this National Assembly and seeks to rely on something like this. This is very unworthy of a Member who is of this National Assembly and our people deserve more.

Having looked at the Hon. Member Prime Ministerial candidate of the AFC's study - this was a study turned out by the Alliances For Change. From paragraph one, it misrepresents; we cannot use certain words here, deliberately to this Hon. House, the facts. Mrs. Holder said to us sternly, but after she said it is her study: "I gathered information from answers Minister Manickchand gave in this House and an audit study that the Auditor General did - the Value-For-Money Audit - and 2002 census." She did not mention "Peeping Tom" but I am sure that she also had regard for that article. This paragraph one of this study seeks to quote, she said, the Hon. Member, "how people are eligible for pension." Do you know why I think that this is more than just ignorance and it is more mischievous...?

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, please mind your language.

**Ms. Manickchand:** Sir, the word "ignorance" here is used as a lacking of information.

**Mr. Speaker:** There are certain types of words that are not permissible in this House. The word "ignorance" is one of them.

**Ms. Manickchand:** Sir, the reason I believe...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, will you follow my ruling?

**Ms. Manickchand:** I accepted your ruling, Mr. Speaker. I was going to change the word. The reason I believed that this paragraph was riddled with a lack of knowledge and deliberately and mischievously intended to mislead and misguide this Hon. House is because the very document –the Auditor General's Report – Mrs. Holder said that she relied on... Mrs. Holder said the criteria for eligibility is that one must be sixty-five years of age, must be living for ten years in Guyana and must have been resident here for twenty years. In the very document, the Hon. Member said forms her study, states, right up front, the eligibility criteria and it debunks all of what she said there. All that an individual has to be in Guyana to be

eligible for pension is to be a Guyanese and be living here for two years – it is said here, in the audit document.

This document was placed on the desk of every single Member of this National Assembly. Let me just say that this is document this is riddled with what we can do better in the Ministry. It is an audit.

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

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

*Question put, and agreed to.*

3.45 p.m.

This is an audit which was done by the Auditor General. He called it the “Value-for-Audit Report”. Let me say up front that this is not a Value-For-Audit report as far as I understand, but I accept the discrepancies and corrections that he finds in this report. We are very happy that there is this report in the Ministry. If anyone has an audit of a house - mine would not be the best because there are too many discrepancies - and if dust is being looked for, then it will be expected that the report will find the places with dust. If the housewife is good, then she will make sure she uses the report to wipe the dust. That is what the Ministry is using the report as – as a management tool. We are very glad for the things that the Auditor General has pointed out, but we do not believe that he is based on reality because he made - I say this with the greatest of respect - recommendations in the Report that would cause much hardship for the people of Guyana without having regards for the resources that our country has.

This is a report that was welcomed by our Ministry. Someone is asking me for one of the recommendations. One of the recommendations that the Auditor General made was that the pensioners in the Hinterland Regions should collect their own pensions. The people in those communities govern themselves and they have decided that they would get together and give their Toshaos the pension books; he will cash them and bring them their moneys. The people who sit at desks cannot understand that and so the recommendation is that the Ministry must not allow that. We are not going to do anything, on this side of the House, which brings hardship to the aged. We will never do that. However, there are recommendations made that will secure our system better and the Ministry is taking them on board.

Coming back to the study, the Hon. Member spoke of this and quoted a paragraph from this Auditor General’s Report, paragraph 2.7 which said that 24% of eligible pensioners in Guyana would not be receiving their pensions. How did the Hon. Member arrive at this figure? Let me tell this Hon. House. The Auditor General went to the General Registrar’s Office and he said, “Tell me the number of all the people who died between 2008 and 2009”, and the General Registrar gave him a number, saying 541. He then took that number and came to the Ministry. He took out 50 people from that list. That is the sample. The Ministry is dealing with 42,000 pensioners and the Auditor General took 50 persons from that list to see how those persons were represented on the Ministry’s database. He found that 50% of those persons that 25 of them, have been registered as case closed. The Ministry had known that they had died and took them off the register. Of those 50 persons, 26 had no notations next to their names, so the Ministry was not aware, as yet, that they had died. That does not mean that they were being paid. It means for that period they were not off the register. 24% of persons were not on the register which means they were not collecting

pensions. The number 12 out of 50 were not collecting pensions in this small sample, done for the benefit of this Report, cannot be extrapolated to a country with 42,000 pensioners. Mrs. Holder took this 24% and imposed it on the whole of Guyana and said that 24% of the elderly of Guyana were not collecting their pensions. That is just the most illogical, unscientific thing to do. It does not represent reality.

Let me stand here and say clearly that there is that likelihood – I wish to put that on record - that a pensioner could die in June after having received his/her pension book and some dishonest relative could continue to collect the pension. There is that likelihood, but that person will be caught in December, because pensioners are required to return in December to uplift their pension books in person. We know that there is that likelihood but will not punish the entire population in Guyana so that a couple of dishonest persons can be removed. That is how the AFC came up with this number, the 24% which were not receiving pensions.

The Hon. Member was not even straightforward with this Hon. House to say how she had arrived at this figure. That is how the Hon. Member got the 24%. What the Hon. Member said was that she looked at the 2002 Census and drew a straight line. Sir, I have to tell you that walking around Guyana are some very confused statisticians because they are trying to figure out where Mrs. Holder came up with those figures. Mrs. Holder said that the 2002 Census does not allow the Ministry to register 42,000 pensioners because the way she determined longevity was just to look at what would happen from 1980 to present and draw a straight line and decide that that was how persons were going to reach that age. That is how it was done. Scientifically, the fertility, migration, mortality rate and all those things which have to be looked at, I would stand here and confess that I know nothing about, but clearly, Mrs. Holder knows nothing about them either.

Two years ago the Guyana National Bureau of Statistics placed on its website - a website is a notice to the whole world, certainly notice to the people in Guyana - a study done by a United Nations expert demographer called Sonkarley T. Beaie M.Phil. It is a nine-page document written in simple English and in it, the expert tells how he arrived at his methodology. This is what he was projecting- the population figure for year 2010. “The projections are based on the Cohort Component Model...”, footnote, as scientists do it, Mr. Henry S. Shryock and Mr. Jacob S. Siegel, *The Methods and Material of Demography*, he is using this book to determine this, “...which involves the use of a known five years age group in conjunction with various assumptions regarding age specific mortality, fertility and net migration rates.”

I kindly ask you, Sir and my colleagues here to turn to page 9 - the Clerk was kind enough to photocopy this document and have it distributed for me. I specifically asked that it be given to the members of the media. This United Nations (UN) expert demographer said that in 2010 it was projected that there will be 43,539 persons eligible to receive pension. That means that in 2010, this UN expert demographer said that Guyana is projected to have 43,539 persons who can receive pensions. Let me tell you how it is broken down: for ages 65 to 69 there is likely to be 17,254 old-age pensioners; for ages 70 to 74, there will be 12,263 old-age pensioners; for ages 75 to 79, there is likely to be 7,954 old-age pensioners; and for ages eighty-plus, 6,068 old-age pensioners amounting to a sum total of 43,539 old-age pensioners.

Mrs. Holder, in her study on the last page, said that there are 17,640 phantom pensioners. In Guyana in 2010, the only number of pensioners, using this fictitious Mathematics that could possibly exist was 26,360 pensioners. At the best, this is mischievous. At worst, the AFC is trying to snatch from 17,000 people the thing that makes them happy every month that this

Government lovingly gives. I want to know from Mrs. Holder, through you, Hon. Speaker, who are the persons that she was going to scratch off of the list? Is it going to be the 18,000 old-age pensioners from Georgetown? Are those the pensioners that we are scratching off of the list? Is it going to be the people from Mabaruma? This here represents all of the persons last year who got pensions. It came from the Guyana Post Office Corporation audited by it, from the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, audited by us and the Ministry of Finance. This is subject to audit. I am inviting anyone who wants to view these records to come and do so. We could not have gotten the records photocopied between last night and today, but they are real persons that the AFC is trying to scratch off of the pension list. They are real persons that it is trying to take the old-age pension from and this is most unbecoming.

I expect... **[Interruption]** ...if Mr. Corbin is coming to look at it, I will be happy to give him. This is the Ministry's only copy so it will have to be photocopied. I am saying that with this information I expect the Hon. Member to do the decent thing and apologise to the persons who would have been hurt by the things she said. For the pensioners to get their pension books it is the hard working Social Workers who must go to every corner in Guyana and get this pension book.

Let me just say why the number of pensioners rose. There was a Means Test and that was by law, a person had to be working for under \$75 to be able to access the pension. When Dr. Jagan's Government came to power in 1992 it stated that it was going to abolish that. In 1993, it was abolished, and immediately all the persons who could have benefited came on to the system; it was not all, a large number. As such, that number rose significantly. In 2006, we changed the system in the Ministry and instead of having pensioners leave Plaisance and come to Georgetown, we went to them right in their backyards so that they would not have far to go -the records will show. When the system became easier, the record can be seen. In Mrs. Holder's study, it can be seen that in 2007 that there was a marked rise because people realised that in 2007 it was made easy and that they can go and uplift. In 2008, the pension sum went up by 62% and there are senior counsels and lawyers who are on the system and can testify - it is their rights – which they came on to the system and added to the numbers.

A few years ago another thing was introduced which was a wavier on the water rates. That became something that made it attractive as well for pensioners and that was how the numbers climbed. It is not mysterious. Those are real people and the Ministry is not going to take them off of the pensioners' list. Mrs. Holder's study needs to be in a proper place where it is worthy of the study.

The AFC is always telling us, righteously and self-righteously, about good governance and accountability. Mrs. Holder is an Hon. Member of this National Assembly and if she is going to misrepresent facts like these that were easily accessible, then Mrs. Holder must resign. You cannot call on the Government to be accountable and you cannot be accountable in what you say. I call for that if Mrs. Holder is not going to apologise for this. On behalf of the old-age pensioners, I call for her resignation. She can still stay in the AFC and run for president, we do not mind that but as a public officer, this is unacceptable.

We also hear said that we have no absorptive capacity to deal with this budget. This means that we cannot handle it. We cannot deliver on these which we are promising. The record of the PPP/C Government will prove otherwise. On that record across the Ministries, we have delivered what was promised and are capable of spending this budget in partnership with the people of Guyana. We had promised that we would deliver the Child Care and Protection Agency. We delivered it. We promised that we would pass the five children Bills – the

Adoption of Children, the Protection of Children, and the Status of Children Bills. We delivered those. The other two Bills; the Custody Contact and Guardianship Bill and the Child Care and Development Services Bill are pending before a Special Select Committee. We promised that we would have passed a Sexual Offences Act. We delivered that. We promised that we would expand Legal Aid Services. This was delivered. We promised that a micro-credit system for Women of Worth would be established. We delivered that. We promised that we will improve the pension amount and delivery system. We delivered those. We promised massive improvement at the Palms. We delivered that. We promised that we would be taking the homeless, and we are presently building a house. We delivered that. We promised that we would tackle violence, particularly violence against women and presently, we are doing that. We delivered on those promises. What makes us incapable of fulfilling or absorbing the moneys that this budget provides for?

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

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

*Question put, and agreed to*

**Ms. Manickchand:** We have a record in the PPP/C Government. We have a record that is evidence by reality- a record that is evident by the tangible things which were done on ground. All over Guyana you will find smiling faces on the old-aged pensioners, you will find children whose lives have been improved and you will find health services which have been delivered and are being constantly improved. The Hon. Member Dr. Austin told us that last night that there is constant work going on. There are persons receiving titles for their land and house lots daily. We are a Government which looks after our people and our people are the Guyanese people. We do not want to leave anyone back in this process and we believe that with the collaboration of the best in Guyana, better can be done for all of our people. We invite most of the Members of the Opposition to come with us, in this House, join our hands and help us to deliver service to our people, the Guyanese people, the people who voted for the PPP/C and the people who voted for the PNCR-1G, as well as the very small number of persons who voted for the AFC. We are saying, "Come with us and work with us so that we can secure Guyana's tomorrow". We are also saying that if persons come to this House with rhetoric and they do not really want to work, that the PPP/C will go at it alone and deliver the services to the people of Guyana.

Thank you Sir.

**Mrs. Backer:** As I start my two hours presentation, let me - Sir, that was not said to scare you - say, first of all, that I want to join in congratulating the new Member to this National Assembly, Ms. Joan Baveghems, and to say that with her assumption of office that the PNCR-1G which, according to the last Speaker, cares not about women; done nothing for women; continues to do nothing for women, brings its numbers to eleven/eleven in this National Assembly- the 50% as is recommended by all international agencies, but, of course, the PNCR-1G continues to do nothing for women.

I also want to recognise and pay homage to all persons of African descent as the world observes International Year for People of African Descent. I am amazed that the Hon. Minister in his three-hour presentation could not find one sentence to say, not even one thing, about that outstanding recognition that is due, as is due to many other ethnicities, and we are confident will come in time. But again, the PNCR - 1G is not amazed, nor are we amazed

that no allocation or subvention has found its way to any African organisation in this most auspicious year. We expect that in keeping with the PPP/C's way of doing things that a handout which will be accompanied by photo opportunities will come sometime a bit nearer to Elections 2011. But again, the PNCR – 1G is not surprised.

I cannot take the last speaker, the Hon. last speaker, who shall remain unnamed, seriously if the Hon. Speaker, who spoke just before me and who has charge of the Ministry Human Services and Social Security, could get up in this National Assembly and speak in excess of an hour and not tell this nation as she spoke about domestic violence and child abuse, of horrific murder of Nessa Gopaul. I dismiss her as completely out of hand, Sir. Before I go to my presentation... **[Dr. Ramsammy: Inaudible]** I am being corrected by Dr. Ramsammy. It was an hour and fourteen minutes. Thank you Dr. Ramsammy. **[Dr. Ramsammy: Me! It was on the "her" and "she".]** I said the Hon Minister who shall remain unnamed...

On the question of apology that has been called, I do not know, rightly or wrongly, the jury is out on that one, on the Hon. Member Mrs. Holder... Last year after my colleague..., the number fifth contestant, this is not said in a derogatory way, she is the fifth contestant, and when the last speaker who spoke just before me enters, she will be the sixth contestant, and Mr. Robert Persaud will be the seventh contestant. This is a numerical and chronological thing. It is not disrespectful. However, on the question of apology, when the dossier came out last year the Hon. Gail Teixeira was agitated and said that she would never ever speak to Members of the Opposition because they did not mention in it, the heinous murder of former Minister Satyadeow Sawh. When I got up and held a document, not produced by Mrs. Holder, the Hon. Member, but by a set of creditable persons and I drew to Ms. Teixeira's attention that Minister, the late Satyadeow Sawh, was listed at number 376 and called on her to apologise, she refrained from so doing. As a result, the jury is also out on who should apologise, when and whatever.

But let me go immediately to public safety and security which continues to be my remit. There is something called Groundhog Day and it is amazing that, as I said, Groundhog Day Mr. Neendkumar spoke. But getting back to Groundhog Day, it was a 1993 movie in which a weatherman was sent to Pennsylvania to cover the annual story about a weather casting groundhog. In case Mr. Neendkumar does not know what a groundhog is, it is a rodent. He covered the story of the Groundhog Day, went back to sleep and when he got up it was Groundhog Day again. The same thing happened. He went back to sleep and when he got up it was still Groundhog Day. He realised that he was in great threat of repeating Groundhog Day, day after day - seeing the same murders happen, the same domestic violence happens, the same carnage on our roads. He was trapped in Ground Hog Day. Having said that, I want to position my little presentation under the theme - *The sameness of it all*

When we say "the sameness of it all", Mr. Rodent, and that of course, Sir, is not you, but we know who, we are saying that there has been no positive movement in the disciplined forces, because there has been. There has been positive movement in the disciplined forces. When I say so I do not need to apologise, we are glad that that happened. There has been refurbishing, new stations, new fire service tenders, equipment and so forth. When we say the sameness of it all, we are not saying that the disciplined forces can only be said to have carried out their mandate when there are no murders, rapes and domestic violence. We are not saying that because we would love for that to happen, but the reality is that it will never happen. We will always have those things happening within any society.

What we are saying is that the “sameness” will, by and large, continue if the political directorate does not stay away from micro-managing of our disciplined forces. We are saying that the sameness of our public security will remain unless the Government takes its head out of the sand and accepts the enormity of drug trafficking and its known attendant bed fellows. We are saying that unless the disciplined forces deal, condignly, with officers, not all officers, there are many good officers, who refuse to adhere to best practices, we will remain forever locked in Groundhog Day. Unless more money is spent- significant money- to improve our scientific intelligence and complete the absolute reorientation of our most precious resource, which is the human resource in the disciplined forces, the Groundhog Day for public security, will continue. I am saying lastly, that until this Government stops being petulant - I think the last speaker, my honourable friend epitomises that word - and stop being non-receptive to recommendations, constructive or else, that emanate outside of Freedom House and the Office of the President, proper security in this country, using the words of the late great Bob Marley, “Will remain but an elusive dream to be achieved but never attained”. We need to ensure that we get out of Groundhog Day.

Let us go to murders. In the year 2010, 139 persons within Guyana were killed, murdered, as opposed to 117 in 2009, an increase of 22 persons or approximately 19%. Of those 139 murders, Minister Rohee, the Hon. Member, at his Friday January 19<sup>th</sup> of this year press conference, stated that, “Disorderly murders which are defined as murders that are committed during domestic disputes or following arguments with neighbours or drunken citizens were in the highest category.” Due to the nature of disorderly murders, suspects are usually, quite haply often identified. The police do not have to have too much scientific knowledge for that because people would either confess or the neighbours would see them and all of that. Charging the people cannot be enough, the State must go further and ensure that there is properly prepared cases which will ensure convictions. That is what we have to do; we have to take it to finality. The State cannot be caught up again in this petulance and cursing this judge and blaming that judge. It has to have qualified persons so that it can ensure convictions. It has to have persons who will stand up to the likes of Senior Counsel Bernard De Santos, but a flea cannot be sent to deal with a hammer. I am not trying to say the Hon. Member is a hammer, but we have to have qualified persons who will probably present cases which will lead to convictions on the part of the State. This is what we have to do.

The Ministries of Home Affairs, Human Services and Social Security, Education and other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) need to engage in innovative ways to curb anti-social behaviour. I know that the Hon. Minister, Mr. Robeson Benn, will agree with me because we have spoken on a few occasions about anti-social behaviour. No one can doubt... **[Interruption]** No this is serious. We have spoken on that and he feels strongly about it and I agree with him because at no time in our history has our society been so violent and brutish. The appalling murder of Nessa Gopaul will for a long time remain a stain on this entire country. We can allow this, all of us, not just the couple of neighbours, it is a stain on all of us sitting here, including, not confined to, the Hon. Member who spoke before me. But it is a stain on all of us.

*4.15 p.m.*

Execution style murder seems to have resurfaced. There was almost a hiatus in 2009 – two people. Last year it was eleven. The sameness of this type of murder is that they are invariably never solved unlike the domestic ones and the disorderly murders. There is often anecdotal evidence sometimes coming from no less a person than the ample Commissioner of Police or the Crime Chief that this is a result of some activity gone sour. When the five



persons were executed at Cummings Lodge, the Commissioner of Police had a lot to say. They were looking at Jupiter; he was on the radar; they knew that he was involved in extra-legal activities; he was a strong man and all of that. The question we have for the Commissioner of Police is: what was he doing with this information? The information he must have about other people, we do not want to know because of security reason, but we would want to be comforted in the fact that he is doing something about these things.

There is this issue about domestic violence that for some reason the Hon. Member, my predecessor, in terms of speaking, wants to seek to ignore and I want to return to it. I am strengthened in my position about the acuteness of this crime when I can quote from no less a person than the Hon. Ralph Ramkarran on the issue of domestic violence, not as an abused or abuser, but as someone who is concerned. There is quite a debonair picture of you, Sir, speaking on the issue of domestic violence. What you have said dovetails exactly into what the PNCR-1G believes and has said publicly. This – in case my predecessor asks me about where it is from – is from the *Stabroek News*, May 23, 2010, the only paper that I can afford. In that paper, Sir, you called on your Government - and that takes courage - to seek out cases of domestic violence. Sir, with your leave, I just want to quote one thing. You had mentioned it in 2008, then, you were forced, almost, because of its continuance. This is what you said:

“It continued last year...”

Meaning, it was in 2009.

“I did not think it could get worse. To my shock and horror, the violence against women as a result of domestic abuse has degenerated this year into a monstrous obscenity and ought to be treated as an emergency by the Government.”

We share these views. The Hon. Minister did say that things were being done, but the Hon. Minister must be honest and say, “We are doing things but we do not seem to be winning the battle. Members of the Opposition, NGOs, are there any ideas? Could you join hands with me while we try to stamp out this nationwide obscenity – this monstrosity?” This is what the Hon. Minister of Finance said. He found space for this one on page 2 of his very nice presentation. Paragraph 1.8: “We have also revamped the legislative protections afforded to women and children.” This is the interesting part: “...waged an unprecedented war against such social ills as domestic violence.”

What the Minister should have said for completeness should have been, “We have waged an unprecedented war against such social ills as domestic violence which social ill continues to rise.” That is what he should have said for completeness. When one looks at this, he/she gets the impression that we are on top of things, but we are not on top. We can only get on top if we join hands on this issue. This is not a woman’s issue. You have said so, Sir, by coming out. This is a national issue and this is what the CARICOM advocate for gender justice, Dr. Rosena Wiltshire, said. She calls for a, “dramatic shift in awareness” - Hon. Minister Priya Manickchand - and a, “healing process in society noting that there is a link between domestic and societal violence.” I hope that Justice Wiltshire’s call for societal shift will not be met by the Hon. Minister Priya Manickchand with the kinds of things that she said, the Hon. Member, when the Hon. Member was not pleased with the Trafficking In Persons Report. I quote here from Tuesday, June 15, 2010, “Minister, Priya Manickchand said angrily that it was based...” - this is the Trafficking In Person Report - “...on share ignorance and eye pass.” She labelled it “crap”. That is what the Hon. Member said about Trafficking In Persons. I sincerely hope that she does not say that this call for a societal shift in how we

deal with interpersonal relationships is “crap.” [Mr. Nandlall: What is your explanation?] I will talk to you later. We have to keep domestic violence on the front burner in terms of getting rid of it.

I want to talk about drug smuggling and its bed fellows. The story of drug smuggling is the classic Groundhog Day phenomenon because for the last decade we have been doing the same things. My mother – God rest her soul – always said to me, “Debbie, if you keep doing the same things the same way, you are going to get the same results.” That is what has happened. This is what the *United States 2010 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, released on the March 1, 2010 states - this is true for the years 2010, 2009, 2008 and going back, as I said, for a decade, and I am reading from *Stabroek News*, Tuesday, March 2, 2010:-

“Guyana continues to be a major trans-shipment point for cocaine destined for North America...Government counternarcotics efforts remain hindered by inadequate resources for and poor coordination among law enforcement agencies and overburdened and deficient judiciary and a lack of coherent and prioritised national security strategy.”

Not surprisingly, the Minister came out – at that stage it was the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs - and he, too, dismissed it. He did not use the inelegant word of “crap”, but he basically said that it was not right. He said it was, “downright deceptive and misleading.” He is saying that what the Report is saying about weak border and inter-agencies is downright deceptive and misleading. He also said that 92% of the programmes under the 2005 – 2009 National Drug Strategy Master Plan had been achieved. I am going to come to that just now. The reality is that the Hon. Minister can give us any kind of statistics. He can say 101% of the National Drug Strategy plans have been achieved. The reality is that - even if that is true, then it means something is fundamentally wrong - cocaine continues to flow in and out of Guyana. Do you know what is surprising, Sir? I do not know of any incident where we have caught cocaine coming in. We do not produce so it is coming in, but we have never found it coming in. We were not able to prevent it. Sometimes we do find it going out, but for it to go out it had to come in. That is what the US State Department is saying: “our borders are weak”. The Hon. Minister said that it is deceptive. The pink suitcase case in January – 50 lbs; another suitcase, colour unknown, in June – 40 lbs; cocaine in cooked rabbit; cocaine in milk tins; cocaine in wigs; cocaine within people...it is no wonder that a group of innovative Guyanese with our strange sense of humour are in the middle of working on a production called “carry-on cocaine”. I hope that the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, in an all-embracing ways, will give support to this production. In fact, we may even find some actors over there. We have to accept this. The Hon. Minister must not see it as an indictment on him. We have long borders and I am going to come to that. The reality is that narco-trafficking is big business. It is huge business. [Mr. Nandlall: What is your solution?]

I am coming to the solution. Therefore, it is not difficult to see why people are prepared to risk limbs, life, their whole family; they put their entire family in harm’s way to participate in this business. We accept that they come and the PNCR-1G accepts that this Government, in fact, it will be difficult for subsequent governments to completely man our borders. That is not going to happen, but at least after a decade of knowing of this problem, what we have to ask is, has this Government done sufficient? That is the test, Mr. Nandlall; it is not if it has eradicated it. Has this Government done sufficient?

No planes! Imagine, when the Hon. Mr. Gajraj was a Member he spoke about an air wing for the Guyana Police Force. Well he winged his way to India, but there is no air wing as yet.

Sufficient planes! I think the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) has a couple of planes and a sky van that is always doing commercial things; insufficient All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs); insufficient court control; foot patrols – that does not need too much money, just build up the police force and the army up to strength. The irony is that the area which has to have the most, if not the only security, is the Cheddi Jagan International Airport - poor Dr. Jagan cannot be resting peacefully – which continues to be porous. Usually when it happens, there is usually hand wringing. Nobody knows about it, but the Hon. Minister Rohee says, “We have meetings monthly.” The - I do not think porosity is a word. [Mrs. Riehl: It is porousness.] Thank you - porousness of the Cheddi Jagan International Airport continues to haunt us all the time.

This Government guards, very jealously, its sovereignty. We have no problem with that, but how could this Government speak about its sovereignty when planes, boats and ATVs, and who knows else what, come and leave this country at will without any real chance of detection? Minister Rodrigues, where is our territorial sovereignty? Where in this \$161.8 billion budget, the largest, is there adequate provision, or any provision, for aircrafts or air surveillance? Where is there anything providing adequate provision for the acquisition of all-terrain vehicles and high powered boats? While attacking the *United States 2010 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, Minister Rohee – they are good with attacks – saying that they need information from the local population. This is what they said, you can always depend on him to lively up a debate, *Stabroek News*, Saturday, March 6, 2010:-

“From time to time, we receive information from the local population about over flight, planes landing at illegal airstrips and other forms of information.”

This is where the Hon. Minister was doing the honourable thing and accepting, but this is the part:-

“However, when asked if information has resulted in seizures and interdictions, the Minister said, “Well, we may not see that, but the fact of the matter is that you have to keep trying”.”

That is what he is doing with his information. He keeps trying. At least he is trying and we are going to give him some marks for that later on. Does this Government not understand that if we intensify – we are not saying completely do it because we cannot do that – the manning of our borders it will lead to a reduction, not only in the movement in and out of illegal drugs, in smuggling if alcohol, fuel, cigarettes, gold, diamond and other commodities which will then result in greater revenue for the country and, perhaps, the Value Added Tax (VAT) may be reduced from 16%? It is not just about drug trafficking, but other forms of illegal trafficking that come through our porous borders. In addition to that – the Hon. Minister Persuad will be happy to hear this – will not the manning of our borders assist our fisher folks who continue to be at the mercy of pirates or, as the Hon. Minister Rohee elegantly described them a couple years ago, bandits who operate at high seas, not man our borders protect those people?

Since April of last year, the Hon. Minister Rohee said that the Government of the United States had given Guyana a list of suspected dealers to watch. For security reasons, we do not expect the Minister to give us names but we hope that that watch is still in effect and that it is still ticking, and that the watch will tell the right time which will lead to the interdiction of some major drug trafficker. We have not been able to do that.

I want to fast forward to the end of November, 2010. Here my good friend, the Hon. Clement Rohee, I understand his middle name is James, C. J. Rohee, saying - remember this is the Hon. Minister who said that 92% of programmes in the National Drug Strategy Master Plan has been achieved. He said that in March, but here is the Hon. Minister in a moment of truth on 2<sup>nd</sup> December speaking about a conference at November, 2010 - "...multiple threats posed by the drug trade and the country is now building an appropriate institutional structure and capacity."

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

**Mrs. Riehl:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that the Hon. Member be given fifteen minutes to continue her presentation.

*Question put, and agreed to*

**Mrs. Backer:** Here the Hon. Minister is saying that 92% of his drug strategy, in March, was finished and in November saying that we were now – I do not want to misquote him – "...building an appropriate institutional structure." He said that in December. After I heard that, I became convinced, as he is convinced, that goat has not bitten the Hon. Minister. It must be some far more dangerous member of the animal kingdom. It cannot be goat.

Internal problems faced by our disciplined forces - Corruption and Misuse: **[Hon. Member:** You are misquoting.] I cannot be misquoting because I am quoting from the quota. As he demitted office - I am talking now about internal problems within the belly of our disciplined forces, particularly, the police force - acting Commissioner Paul Slowe, with 37 years of distinguished service, bemoaned the fact that blatant corruption, not only in illegal activities, was out of control. Well, needless to say, some people went raved and had to be calmed, I understand, by Dr. Ramsammy who himself had to be calmed by some other doctor.

Mr. Slowe's statement is just the icing on the cake because we all know that. I do not know why the Government becomes so defensive. The disciplined forces have bad eggs; the legal profession, Mr. Nandlall, has bad eggs; the religious fraternity, Rev. Dr. Kwame Gilbert, has bad eggs; medical doctors and there are bad eggs all over. **[Mr. Neendkumar:** The PNCR-1G have bad eggs.] The PNCR-1G has bad eggs and the PPP/C's whole basket of eggs is bad, excluding you, Sir. There must be no defensiveness, as I said. Corruption and bad practices run a gamut. They run from the known ones as demanding money and the menaces when they stop you, to incarcerating well-known people and saying it was a mistake, as was the case of "Jumbie Jones" - he was mistaken for another Jumbie - and to torture, or I will use the agricultural term- "roughing up"- to extrajudicial killings. The internal problems in the police force run a gamut and we must not be afraid of them. We must confront them; deal with them and improve them. That is what we have to do.

I am glad the Hon. Minister of Governance – I still see her as a Minister – is back. The 13<sup>th</sup> September, 2010 was a dark day in the annals of our country's public security. That is when the Hon. Member Gail Teixeira, accompanied by the Hon. Member Carolyn Rodrigues, looking very elegant as usual- they both do- went to lay the response to the United Nations Periodic Report. In so doing, the Government of Guyana whose lead person was Ms. Teixeira rejected, categorically, recommendations 70.44 and 70.45. Recommendation 70.44 called for Guyana to establish an independent commission supported by international experts to investigate human rights abuses, including murder and extrajudicial killings for the years 2002 - 2008.

They also rejected the establishment of an independent inquiry committed by the phantom squad from 2002 – 2008. They also did not accept the need for another inquiry. The *Stabroek News* newspaper put it nicely. It states: “Which inquiry have we had? Surely it could not be the inquiry by the Crime Chief?” One cannot enquire into him/herself. I know the Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira, well, when she gets up in her nice animated way which never gets abusive unlike certain other people, will say to all of us that there were 112 recommendations and we accepted 75. However, the reality is that the ones all Guyana is really interested in were rejected. That is a dark day in the annals of the history. She still remains number five. We are happy that the report on Guyana, despite the rejection by our delegation, that the UN kept it in its report. The report was adopted with those two recommendations were included. We are happy and very pleased that the Universal Periodic Report which is one of the things we use to judge the PPP/C is there on the record and it cannot get to it.

Should I mention the recent collapse of the torture case? Dolai and Lall on Friday last; that quashing of that because there was no case to answer, again, was a disgrace to the entire nation. I am not putting the blame on the Government. The blame is on all of us. The question is: was there political interference? Was there police interference or was it just a familial interference – the family said, “We are not able with this thing; we might not get justice”? What is it that led to this travesty at justice? We have to understand that we cannot allow this to happen. The people have to feel...

**Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Ramson]:** Cde. Speaker, may I take this opportunity - I had intended to dilate upon it in my presentation which shall take place later this week – to say that I find it difficult to continue to sit here and allow matters that are *sub judice* to be argued in this House or conclusions are made which, having gotten to the newspapers, may very well prejudice the cases that are currently in Court. As my memory serves me and if it serves me correctly, and I am in charge of that part of the work, there are two cases pending in relation to that very same matter, two matters of some constitutional importance. The Hon. Member Anna Ally got away with a lot of it yesterday the case of Mrs. Whyte-Nedd. There is a matter before the High Court and I would have thought good sense would have prevailed by now for them to have reflected on that kind of aberration or violation of these rules. The parliamentary rules are quite clear.

**Mr. Speaker:** I imagine you were talking about the criminal case.

**Mrs. Backer:** Yes Sir.

**Mr. Speaker:** I understand there are also some civil cases.

**Mrs. Backer:** Yes, Sir and I think that I have made my point. Everyone is up and about.

Internal problems facing the forces at the absence of Standard Operation Procedures: There are some policemen who feel that they can do anything at anytime, and it is that breach of Standard Operation Procedures that led to the death of sixteen-year-old Kelvin Fraser in June, last year. It is that breach of Standard Operation Procedures which leads, on a regular basis, to our citizens being violated in terms of how their houses are searched. We are not talking about the fact of searching, but how they are searched. In fact, recently, eighty-two-year-old Gloria St John succumbed shortly after a search and her relatives – I do not know if rightly or wrongly – are saying that this death of their grandmother, coming so soon after the horrendous search, brutalising her, pushing her out of the way, pushing a big gun in the eighty-two-year-old lady’s face, helped her demise. This very week there was the recent

arrest of a teacher in Region 5 by Commander Merai himself. We are not saying that the person must not be arrested, but I do not know that a Commander of a division goes personally to arrest and handcuff somebody – Standard Operation Procedures. They keep breaching Standard Operation Procedures all, all, all... [Mr. R. Persaud: If a teacher had sexual assaulted your daughter you would have been happy if the Commander went and arrested that teacher.] You are not listening, as usual. Sir, we cannot help him.

I want to go to some recommendations, but before I go there I want to touch very briefly on the non-contentious issues. Those problems are perennial and, in fact, listed in our recommendations which are fire, prison, traffic, birth certificate and so on. Rather than going through them, I am going to list them in our recommendations. The Hon. Member Nandlall was asking for recommendations – what were our recommendations. Here are some, not all, because we have been recommending since “Noah was a child”, but this Government, once it does not emanate from Freedom House, would not take us on. Before I go to recommendations, I want to remind all Guyanese about this fact - facts cannot be washed away, whatever your opinions are. This is a universal truth - that it is the primary responsibility of any government, not the PPP/C, to provide a safe and secure environment for all of its citizens combined with the ability to investigate crimes and to enable the successful prosecution of those who commit them. It is a two-fold thing. We believe that all citizens have a duty to enhance the security in a country in which they live. We believe that, and that is why we are going to share, again, our recommendations, although we are confident that none of them will be taken on board. What do they include? We are saying:

- Bridge the divide of the actual strength of the Guyana Police Force and its authorised strength.

The Commissioner of Police keeps saying that the Guyana Police Force is 20% under strength. How are stations being opened? That is good, but what are these stations being manned with? When at Aurora, according to a recent letter, a man went there and said that he found one young female constable. He went to make a report and ended up keeping the young lady company because she seemed afraid.

*4.45 p.m.*

That is what he said in his letter. He is not a PNCR1-G member. He said that. Then recently a man went “station hopping”, as he called it. He said that when he went to the Kitty police station, there was one female person there. We have to get our strength up.

“E” and “F” Divisions have to be delinked. We have been saying that all of the time. Those are the Hinterland Divisions and their Headquarters cannot remain in Rabbit Walk. I do not know if people feel that because the name of the location is “Rabbit Walk” that it is somewhere in the Interior. Rabbit Walk is on the seawall. So “E” and “F” Division, which is in the hinterland, have their Headquarters in Rabbit Walk. Many times when they have to go in for a crime they do not have airplanes, the impress is not there, they cannot get money and all kinds of things, so we have to deal with that. We have to find money, if not to buy adequate or sufficient, to buy more, at least a plane or two, fast boats, more All Terrain Vehicles and we also have to enhance our foot patrol.

We have to do a comprehensive reform of our disciplined services, particularly in the area of human resource transformation. For us, that is what will lead to a kickoff. We have to reorient the police and the political directorate, or disciplined forces that theirs is a service to perform. It is not a Force, it is a service! The Former Commissioner, Mr. Fraser, made a good

point when he was complaining about something that was happening. He said that when someone comes into a police station he/she must be treated as a customer. That is what it is. You must treat that customer well Minister Rohee, so that the customer will want to come and report things he sees with his neighbour and so on, but if when the customer comes he is being told, “Sit down deh!” “Shut ya mouth.” “Wuh you doin here?” He will not come again. We have to treat our citizens, who are customers accessing that service of protection, correctly. They are not our enemies and if some of them are, we have to make them our friends. We do not have to increase our enemies. We have to increase our friends within the public. We have to rename the Police Force.

The Minister of Home Affairs has to relinquish control and dominion over the Community Policing Groups – control and dominion. The membership of the Community Policing Groups outstrips, by almost 100%, our authorised strength of the Guyana Police Force and those Community Policing Groups are directly controlled, the Minister himself said so, by his Ministry. The Discipline Forces Commission spoke about legislation for Community Policing Groups so that we can know what their mandate is, what their limits are and we again call for such legislation.

We have to enhance the salaries and conditions of work. All of that comes with the transformation of our human resource- the policeman and policewoman. They are our main resource. We have to decentralise the issuing of machine readable passports. My good friend from Region 2, the Hon. Member, the other night said that they could get passports in Region 2. I do not think that he really meant to say that. They cannot get the machine readable ones. Do you know why? When the Hon. Minister was asked he said, “Security reasons”. Could you imagine that the police themselves are in control, the Minister’s policemen and women, and he is saying to the public, “I do not trust my members to give them control of machine readable passports.” Something is wrong. Let us have mobile units that go into areas. The person at Paramakatoi, the person at the Corentyne and Orealla cannot feel that the immigration office in Camp Street is there to service them. It cannot service them Minister. You need to look at that.

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

**Mrs. Riehl:** I ask that the Hon. Member be given 15 minutes to conclude her presentation.

*Question put and carried*

**Mrs. Backer:** Sir, we have to aggressively pursue agreements with forensic labs in sister CARICOM countries. We are happy to see that they are bidding for the forensic lab now, but that construction which is under the Citizen Security Programme will take a while and when that is finished, we have to then equip it. What is wrong is that there are so many regional agencies – security being the fourth pillar of CARICOM. Surely the Minister of Home Affairs can get some of our sister countries to have short-term arrangements with us in terms of D.N.A. testing.

This will not affect you, but with cases to do with paternity, there is agreement at the Magistrate Court level that they are going to have D.N.A. sampling done. They go to Eureka, sampling is done, they send it to Trinidad and within two to three weeks D.N.A. results are returned. We had Sheema Mangar horrifically run over in September of last year, four months ago. The police initially told her parents that the fabric samples found were sent to Trinidad. As she was supposed to go to visit the Commissioner of Police, they released a statement saying that it went to Barbados, but not to be out done on the 14<sup>th</sup> January, this

year, the Hon. Minister corrected both of those stories and said that in fact the fabric samples were sent to the U.S.A. What faith can Sheema Mangar's parent have that her daughter will ever see justice? What faith!

We call on the Minister of Home Affairs to provide enhanced stewardship for the disciplined services. I want to be kind and I am being very kind. I am not saying to provide stewardship. I am going to accept that he is providing stewardship. I am not going into the quality. We are saying "Provide enhanced stewardship." The Hon. Minister got up very glibly on the 15<sup>th</sup> January and this is what he said – I am reading from the headline and am not being disrespectful, – "Rohee – Political D.N.A. has kicked in..." and he is ready to be the Presidential Candidate. That is what the Hon. Minister said. I want to be helpful. He said as he was eating his cornflakes one morning and I have a box of cornflakes here and I am prepared to give him because what I want to ask him is that if he can take his D.N.A. tomorrow, when he is having the cornflakes donated by the PNC R 1-G, and tell us that when he speaks tomorrow, whether his D.N.A. tells him that he is providing enhanced stewardship over our Security Services. That is what we want to know. We do not want to know about his political D.N.A. We are not interested in that. We want to know about his stewardship D.N.A. We already feel that we know what the D.N.A. will say. D.N.A. is remarkably accurate so he must be cautious. We are going to leave that for him as a gift.

As I conclude... [Mr. Ramotar: Why did you not buy Kellogg's?] I could not afford Kellogg's. I am like the Rev. Kwame Gilbert. I only get \$100,000 a month. Even when he said that, there was a darkening of the dark clouds outside, but he is a decent man; a man of the cloth. In conclusion, there are ideas floating out there. We do not have all of the ideas. The PPP/C must understand that they do not have all of the ideas. The best ideas may come from "Mr. John Public" if we interface with him, as the Hon. Minister Manickchand said. Sometimes the best ideas and the best solutions come from there. No one must be excluded in this search for enhanced public security in this country. If we want to just have these little lurches of progress we will continue in this myopic way that the Government of Guyana has, but if they are serious about transforming our public security landscape and removing it out of Groundhog Day, they will not leave any stone unturned as they seek, in true partnership, to move this forward. Public security cannot be gotten with politics. Public security affects all of us. We all will be consumed if we do not get onboard. We are ready to get onboard once the Minister is taking that D.N.A. test. Is he ready to get onboard with us? I thank you.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Members. I think that this is an appropriate time for us to have a brief suspension.

*Sitting suspended at 4.56 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 5.48 p.m.*

**Minister of Foreign Affairs [Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett]:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make my contribution to the 2011 Budget Debate and, in so doing, let me first congratulate my dear colleague, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, and his team for providing us with yet another Budget which, like its predecessors is fully influenced by the needs of all our people and takes us many steps closer to realising the vision for Guyana.

I would like to refer briefly to my Parliamentary Colleague, Hon. Member Backer on just a few issues. I want to refer to her comments on domestic violence and it appears that her view is that we are not doing enough in this area. If I can speak about my dear colleague Minister Manickchand, it goes without saying that Ms. Manickchand has brought this issue of



domestic violence to the floor where the national conversation on this issue is now more visible. I think that when we see in the newspapers and on the television people reporting on domestic violence, we feel that people are listening and, I think, are more willing to speak about it. This is due to, in no small part, to her work – Minister Manickchand. It takes the entire society. We do not have a magic wand here. It takes the church, it takes the parliamentarians and it takes every single person to help. It is for this reason that we were disappointed when we invited the PNC R1-G to be on the television programme together with Ms. Manickchand to speak about this issue to show that, as Parliamentarians, we are at one on this issue. They did not show up. I think that that is very regrettable. I do not think that there is any reasonable explanation one can give for not wanting to come to discuss an issue that affects our entire society.

On the issue of Trafficking In Persons, the Hon. Member took issue with the description Minister Manickchand gave the United States' Trafficking in Persons Report. I want to pose this question: If a country from some far place comes and write a report about your country and they say to you that you have 984 children working as child-labourers and you ask them to provide evidence or say where we can find them, we would want to address it. If that country refuses to provide you with that evidence, or even some of it, tell me what description you will give to a report of that nature? What we need is for the PNC R1-G to join with us in denouncing such reports or calling for the evidence to support such kinds of statements.

On the issue of illegal drugs, like the PNC R1-G, we recognise that this is a major problem, not just for our country but indeed for the entire world, but more so in this hemisphere. Mrs. Backer was questioning the resources that we are putting into this area and the answer is that we would never have adequate resources to fight drugs. We have miles of borders so that if we take every Guyanese and line them up around the border we would still not have enough people to protect our borders. It is for this reason that we have to seek to cooperate with likeminded countries and this is the reason why we were so supportive of the establishment of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) Council on Drugs. We know where the demand is and that is in the United States of America. They have spent millions and billions of dollars on this problem and they have not been able to reduce the demand or to deal with it in any comprehensive way. I say this because when we speak about the matter at home here, we have limited resources and sometimes governments have to make some decisions as to whether we are going to take those resources to build schools, increase pensions and those kinds of things as opposed to spending it to fight drugs. It is a competition for resources and I hope that we accept those realities and the challenge that we have before us but we would continue to cooperate with other countries. On the 9<sup>th</sup> February my dear colleague, Hon. Member Rohee, would be meeting with the Venezuelans to further discuss cooperation in that area.

It is equally important for this budget to be viewed in the local context as it is in the international context. Many countries have not yet recovered from the global financial and economic crisis; both developing and developed countries. You would recall, Mr. Speaker, that in 2009, when Guyana realised positive growth, eleven of our CARICOM countries did not. Some of these countries are still recovering. In the United Kingdom I was just reading something that was released on the internet from the Prime Minister, the distinguished Mr. David Cameron. He was speaking about the measures his country has to take because of the effects of the crisis and that includes the raising of the retirement age among other methods. He was actually lobbying the European Union to keep the increase in their budget to around 2.9% because of the difficulties that they were still having. Many countries are right now

facing, once again, increased food prices, which in the not so distant past caused serious disturbances in countries near and far. We are very fortunate in Guyana to be a net exporter of food.

On the international scene, again as we are meeting here for Budget, we still have a situation where the completion of the Doha Development Round remains elusive to the detriment of many of those countries that need development. Right now countries in Africa and the Pacific are vociferously asking the European Union to rethink the Economic Partnership Agreement since they stand to lose if they accept the proposals that are presently being made by the European Union, and I will come back to the Economic Partnership Agreement (E.P.A.) a bit later. The progress that Guyana has made over the last Budget year, and indeed the years before that, must be viewed in this challenging international context. In such circumstances, it takes sensible and pragmatic management of the Guyanese economy for us to not only have achieved positive growth in 2010 but, more than that, to make the provisions we have made in this Budget for all of our people. We must be grateful and we must thank Minister Ashni Singh and his team for going into such detail in ensuring that this Budget touches the lives of all Guyanese.

Turning to the area for which I have responsibility, let me reiterate as the Minister said in his speech that Guyana's foreign policy continues to be underpinned by the preservation of sovereignty and territorial integrity and the promotion of economic and social development. Even as we do this, we are mindful of the need for adjustment to the evolving international and regional context marked by globalization, trade and financial liberalization, deepening regional integration and the rise of emerging markets. We continue to have a vested interest in this strengthening of multilateralism and of the role of small states in global affairs. Our diplomacy continues to be executed in various theatres at the bilateral, regional and global levels and, of course, through engagement with our large Diasporas.

In terms of the protection of our sovereignty and sovereign rights over our maritime spaces, this Assembly would recall that in May, 2009, the Government of Guyana provided preliminary information to the United Nations Commission on the limits of the Continental Shelf. The information was aimed at securing Guyana's entitlement to an extended Continental Shelf beyond 200 nautical miles and pursuant to Article 76 of United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS). We were, by virtue of that Article, required to consult with neighbouring states, which we did. Our exchange with Trinidad and Tobago in particular assisted both of countries in our individual efforts to strengthen our respective submissions. Guyana is therefore poised to make its full submission on the Continental Shelf; the completion of which was delayed because of the acquisition of new data that significantly will bolster our claim.

Members of this House would also recall the passage of the Maritime Zones Act in this Parliament and I am happy to say today that because of that Guyana's exercise of its rights in the Maritime Zones beyond the 12 nautical miles from the territorial sea is embodied in this Act. Guyana can, today, boast of having the most modern maritime boundaries legislation in this part of the world.

In 2010 there were no threats, if I can say, to our security and territorial integrity. As a Government, as a people and as a state we remain fully cognizant of the claims to our territory that still exist. However, we cannot allow borders to be lines of separation and discord stunting our development and dividing our people. The commonality that exists now among Guyana, Venezuela and Suriname is that we all want a better life for our people and

we do not intend for borders to keep us back. We must therefore find ways and areas of mutual interest so that the benefits can redound to our people, and as such, seeking closer relations with our neighbours remains a priority for our Government.

That being said, there are a few developments that I must outline. Both the Governments of Guyana and Venezuela are now in receipt of declassified information that confirms that we were both manipulated by powers external to these shores that sought to protect their own interest while dividing us. We have always known this to be so, however, both of our countries are able to have it now in black and white. There is a strong will by both of our countries that we must not let history dictate our relations now and in the future.

It is ironic that today we are being lectured about democracy when democracy was the first casualty in Guyana as those powers sought to keep our people divided in order to achieve their own selfish goals. We live in a different era now but we must not underestimate what those policy and machinations have caused us and cost us. Remnants can still be found. We must vow to never again – all of us – allow any power near or far to manipulate us for the detriment of our nation.

Even as we pursue the search for a solution to the historical Venezuela position that the arbitral award of 1899 that definitively established the land boundary between Guyana and Venezuela was null and void we now have been able, our two countries, to realise the appointment of Professor Girvan as the United Nations Secretary General's personal representative and I had updated this House earlier last year. This is extremely important.

Our improved relations with our sister country, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, is not by chance and, in fact, it is the best since Guyana gained independence. We believe that there is more to be gained when we put our people first, as reflective in the multiplicity of cooperation agreements that we are now implementing, including Petrocaribe, the sale of rice, the construction of the homeless shelter and the agriculture projects that are all being implemented right now.

The relations between Guyana and Suriname have improved markedly. Since September of last year there have been three exchange visits at the presidential level between Guyana and Suriname that have resulted in agreements for further cooperation between our two countries in the areas of health, combating crime, agriculture, information technology. I am also pleased to say to this Hon. House today that the bridging of the Corentyne River is now a priority for both of our countries. Discussions have advanced to the extent that we are speaking about the site of the new bridge and we have already perused initial designs. This piece of infrastructure will, no doubt, see increased movement and understanding between our two peoples and increase trade as we have seen with the Takatu Bridge...

*6:07 p.m.*

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## BRAZIL

Guyana has continued to enjoy very good relations with Brazil. I know in diplomatic parlance that is, probably, a cliché. I just want to point to some of the tangible things that Guyana has been doing with Brazil which are signs of the strengthened and improved relations that I speak about. In keeping with Government's commitment to upgrade its representation in Boa Vista, I would be travelling to Brazil tomorrow to commission the Consulate there. We have appointed a Consul General in the person of Ms. Leila King. Apart from ensuring the necessary Consular services, this would no doubt help to facilitate investment opportunities in Guyana, among many other things that can be achieved.

The Ministry has also started working with the Brazilians on the geological mapping of the Guyana/Brazil Border. Members would recall that Guyana signed an agreement with Brazil on the occasion of the commissioning of the Takatu Bridge. I know that sometimes people say that so many agreements are signed but what do they really bring. I am pleased to report that this is actually very much alive and the Brazilian authorities and authorities from Guyana's Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (G.G.M.C.) are working on this project which should end in April, 2012.

All of us in this House and Guyanese, in general, would like to see the upgrade of the Linden Lethem Road tomorrow. Guyana continues discussion with its Brazilian counterpart in this regard. The Hon. Member Minister Benn would surely tell this House about the feasibility study which should be completed early this year. That would guide us on the way forward. Guyana is also in discussion with its Brazilian counterpart on hydro-electricity as well. I am very sure that in the not too distant future Government would be able to update this House a little bit more.

In terms of developments in the region, our continued focus on South America was punctuated with the assumption of the Chairmanship of UNASUR and Guyana hosting that Summit. Regardless of which side of the House Hon. Members sits, I am sure it was a proud day for all of Guyana. The major outcome of that Summit was the Democratic Clause. Coming from a Continent, which only a few decades ago, was permeated with military and, indeed, other dictators, to one where we can now "legislate our commitment to democracy" and what should happen if democracy is threatened, must not go unnoticed.

As Guyana continues its Chairmanship of UNASUR, it will be focusing on putting measures in place to have the general Secretariat, which is supposed to be headquartered in Ecuador, up and running. Guyana also has the task of coordinating with member States for the appointment of a new Secretary-General following the death of Secretary-General Kirchner. In this regard, Guyana will be convening a meeting very shortly in Peru in the margins of the Africa/South America Summit to discuss that issue. There would be several other meetings in Guyana at the level of Consul of Delegates and, at least, one meeting at the Foreign Minister's level as Guyana forges ahead with its UNASUR agenda.

## CARICOM

While Government continues to focus on our South American aspirations, its commitment to CARICOM is solid. As the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh said, the Government has to prove the doomsayers wrong. Government sees Guyana's strategic position at the intersection of the Caribbean and South America as an advantage not only for Guyana but for CARICOM as well. As I mentioned some time ago in this House, a recent study conducted among member states of CARICOM confirmed that Guyana has taken its obligations seriously as it has, to a

large extent, met those obligations. Government is, however, not oblivious to the sustained commentaries casting uncertainties on the functioning and future of the organisation. It ignores them at its peril. The truth is that there appears to be integration siesta or tiredness in the region which could be attributed, in part, to the many domestic challenges that countries are presently facing, not least, the effects of the global economic and financial crises which, ironically, are what should be bringing us together even more.

Even as Members await the review of the CARICOM institutions, because as you are aware, the Heads of Governments have asked for a review of the CARICOM institutions including the Secretariat, members have to be clear where they want these institutions, including the Caribbean Court of Justice (C.C.J.) and other institutions to go. Integration is partly driven, to a large extent in fact, by people and their ability to move freely. Paradoxically, the very smallness of our CARICOM nations and their limited space and resources that should be bringing us together as a community has also necessitated, in some countries, the adoption of stringent immigration measures and setting us a bit apart. Perhaps, the water between our member states and the fact that we have not yet been able to fully overcome the issue of transportation amongst our member states have served, in part, to delay the accomplishment of our integration goals. I am not aware of any other integration movement with 11 of its members being island nations.

On the multilateral scene, the global challenges facing the world community demands stronger and more effective multilateral action. Countries must act together in order to address the major challenges of our time. Those posed by climate change and the global financial crisis, those occasioned by the need to have secure food and energy, those associated with growth in transnational organised crime and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, those relating to peace and security and, of course, those relating to the protection of human rights and fundamental freedom.

Guyana, today, plays an active role in international effort to address these and other challenges. President Jagdeo's leadership on Climate Change and the role of avoided deforestation in addressing it is well known. This leadership is supported by our ambassadors and Foreign Service officers at home and abroad in their multiple engagements with officials from other countries. I must report that an Officer of our Mission to the United Nations (U.N.) spearheaded the negotiations that led to the adoption of the General Assembly Resolution 64-265 which called for a high level meeting of the General Assembly to discuss non-communicable diseases. This meeting, I am happy to say, will take place on 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> September at the UN Headquarters, New York and is in keeping with a mandate from CARICOM Heads.

Guyana favours a constructive and cooperative approach to Human Rights, as far as possible, and opposes the political manipulation of this issue and the application of double standards. The Hon. Member, Mrs. Backer, referred to the Universal Periodic Review (U.P.R.) process. Indeed, that process provides an important vehicle for improvements in the Human Rights situations in countries. I want to say that the fact that Guyana submitted the Report, went there to be grilled on the report, accepted many of the recommendations in the Report has put our country at another level on the international scene and our commitment to human rights in a good light. Indeed, Ms. Backer, our image as a democratic State was enhanced and, as a Guyanese, you should take some credit for that too.

Guyana has also ratified two major international Human Rights Instruments and Members of this House would recall the protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Children in Armed Conflict and the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.

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

**Mr. Hinds:** Mr. Speaker I move that the Hon. Member be given 15 minutes to continue her presentation.

*Question put and carried*

**Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett:** Guyana is now party to all the major U.N. Human Rights Instruments governing the rights of children and for this, Guyanese must be proud. In the implementation of one aspect of our foreign policy strategy, which is to ensure effective representation by Guyanese on relevant bodies of the U.N. System with the aim, of course, of influencing the relevant processes, the Government of Guyana submitted the candidature of Mr. Bertie Xavier, Toshao of Wowetta Community, to serve as a Government nominated expert on the permanent Forum on Indigenous issues. I am pleased to say to Members of this House that Mr. Xavier was elected to serve for a three year period commencing this month and is the first Guyanese and CARICOM national to serve on the Forum.

Since this is the first time I am speaking in the National Assembly since the Government of Guyana decided to formally recognise the State of Palestine as a free, independent and sovereign state based on its 1967 Borders, I want to say a few words in this area.

This decision, for Government, marked a further confirmation of the long standing and principled solidarity and support the country has given to the Palestinian people. This solidarity dates from the earliest days of our independence and is one that has been shared across the political spectrum in our country. I was pleased to see that the Opposition, P.N.C/R – 1G, agreed with Government's decision to do this. I think that the AFC did also, but said that they wanted consultation which I did not understand because this has been our position from way back and it was only the natural thing to do. Guyana will continue to support and contribute to all the efforts by the international community aimed at finding a just and durable solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

In 2010, Guyana experienced much improvement in trade at the regional and extra regional levels. In terms of CARICOM, the country saw its trade grow both in import and export terms. This improvement was not only with respect to our traditional exports of sugar and rice, but also with respect to non-traditional exports such as fresh fruits, farm produce, seafood and rum. I would like to say through you, Mr. Speaker, to Mr. Mervyn Williams that some of the assertions that he has made with agriculture is actually different to the reality because Guyana was able to increase its exports in these areas to the CARICOM region. Guyana also its saw intra-regional imports increasing from \$236 million to \$409 million in 2010. What does this say? It says that more money is circulating in our community and our private sector is taking these opportunities that exist in our CARICOM region, head on.

Looking south, Guyana has strengthened its trade opportunities with neighbouring Brazil. Increasingly, our business people are taking advantage of the Partial Scope Trade Agreement and sourcing their manufacturing inputs, including building supplies and various machine parts, from Brazil. Approximately half of the actual imports benefitted from the duty free concessions under this Partial Scope Agreement. Our imports have increased from \$2 million in 2004, when the Partial Scope Agreement was implemented, to over \$4 million in 2010. Of

course we would like to see our exports increase. Unfortunately, that is still very low but there is still an increase from just \$US¼ million in 2004 to about \$US½ million in 2010.

Guyana would never be able to trade with Brazil on equal terms because of its sheer size. Both countries have recognised this reality and during the last quarter in 2010, Guyana was able to complete negotiations with its Brazilian counterpart, and it was able to add 60 additional tariff lines to that Partial Scope Agreement. This was in recognition of the huge trade imbalance with Brazil.

#### ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT (E.P.A)

Some of my colleagues have spoken about the implementation of the Economic Partnership Agreement. The House, as the Hon. Minister Dr. Ashni Singh mentioned, is aware of our principled concerns which were adumbrated prior to the signing of agreement. Government takes its responsibilities seriously and it is for this reason that it has put all the measures in place to implement that agreement. That being said, I am very much aware that Caribbean Forum of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (CARIFORUM) is the only negotiating group in the seven groups that has actually signed a full E.P.A. I am further aware that the concerns Guyana had with the E.P.A are the very concerns that our African counterparts have. They have engaged the European Union and, so far, the European Union has said it is willing to be flexible and Guyana is waiting to see what that flexibility means. Whatever they are able to negotiate Guyana has to be prepared, when the review comes up in two years, to put its cards on the table.

I would also like to let the Hon. House know that as a country that continues to play an important role, notwithstanding its smallness on the international scene, Guyana would like to see its representation in various parts of the world improved and increased. Because of scarce resources, which are not only a problem for Guyana but others as well, the country has had to be very strategic. Mr. Speaker, you are aware that Guyana has now established an embassy in Kuwait, Ambassador Odeen Ishmael arrived in Kuwait and that would be our first embassy in that part of the world. We are hoping that this would redound to the benefit of Guyana and, hopefully, it would be able to see more investments. The Australian Government has also requested that it establish a Honourary Consulate in Guyana and Cabinet has approved that that Consulate be established. Again, Government is very happy to have Australia represented in Guyana. The Argentine Republic will be establishing an embassy in Guyana shortly as well. Government has received requests from a few other countries and when they have been considered, certainly, this House would be made aware.

Before I close, I want to refer to a few things that I have heard during this Budget Debate. Countries are judged based on the provision it makes for its people, especially it's young and vulnerable. Governments are elected when the people are convinced that the programme that they have been presented with, can work and they are elected when that programme has been delivered. Sitting on the Government benches is by no stroke of luck. The PPP/C Government have been consistent in its delivery to the people of Guyana and this Budget is a continuation of delivering on our promises.

When one looks at Budget 2011, the numbers are there - 40,000 pensioners receiving an increase in their pensions, 9,000 public assistance recipients, children benefitting from school uniforms and school feeding programmes. Over the next two years 90,000 families will be benefitting from laptops, an educational channel will be established by April and there is allocation for land demarcation in Amerindian Communities. Can persons find fault with

these? No, persons cannot find fault with these. All of Government's programmes are geared at reducing inequity wherever it exists.

I am one of those persons who subscribes to the view that talent is universal but opportunities are not. I do not believe, for one single moment, that the child in Achiwuib is less capable than the child in Georgetown. However, what makes a difference would be what opportunities are provided to these children and this is what our Government is committed to doing. That can be a general statement but if one looks at the programme Government has with Cuba, I am proud to stand here and say that there is now a child, a resident, a daughter of Kamarang who is now the doctor in Kamarang.

My Hon. Colleague, Mr. Neendkumar, spoke about Ms. Doretta Wilson, one of our athletes from Aishalton who would be representing Guyana at the Inter-Guiana Games. If one looks at the bottom of the newspaper article, one would see that Ms. Doretta Wilson would be coming with her physiotherapist. Who is this physiotherapist? It is one of our indigenous sons from Region No. 9, trained in Cuba, who would be coming with her. I know that Government has a lot more to do, but the point that I am trying to make here is that we have been working very hard over the years to bring equity and equality to all of our peoples.

When one looks at the one laptop per family programme, Members in this House can go down to discussing fine details and that is good but we must see the big picture in all of this. Our country would be doomed if it does not get on with the Information Communication and Technology (ICT) programme. What is Government doing? Government is not saying that it will put laptops in place; it is saying that it is going to give it to the poorest 90,000 families. I am sure that the children of many of the Members in this National Assembly probably have a computer at home. I think that many of them would know what would happen if that computer is absent in that home. What Government is trying to do is to put all children in a position where they would have access to I.C.T so that they would be no different to the ones who are rich.

I am not unaware that the truth can sometimes hurt but I have heard an alphabet of negativity from the Opposition. "A" is appalling, "C" is corruption and "D" is discrimination. Let me say that Members on this side of the House cannot sit here and say that every single Guyanese who is performing in one of the offices of Government and every single Guyanese receiving a service is not corrupt. No country can do that. After all, the PNC/R - IG members sometimes say that Government behaves as if this country started in 1992. Mr. Norton said that yesterday. I listened to Mr. Norton and reflect a little. What happened is that all of our people were made criminals when certain food items were banned in this country. By virtue of some of our government officers having to turn a blind eye so that people like me could have eaten some flour in Region No. 1, they too, were criminals. They are talking about corruption. These were the realities.

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

**Mr. Hinds:** I move that the Hon. Member be given another 15 minutes to conclude her presentation. **[Interruption]**

**Mr. Speaker:** Order please, Hon. Members.

**Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett:** As the Government commits itself to rebuilding this country and for the rule of law to prevail, I submit that it is the responsibility of every single one of us in this House to bring evidence of corruption forward so that Government can deal with it. If



they do not bring the evidence forward, they, too, would be guilty of not representing the people.

Mr. Speaker, I told you that we have a lot of declassified documents now and yesterday when someone was speaking, I was looking and found one such document that I would like to read. It is from the Assistant Secretary of State for the Inter Affairs, Mr. Charles Meyer, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 1969 and it is going to the 303 Committee. The topic is, "*Proposal for support to the People's National Congress Party of Guyana.*"

"Mr. Broe briefed the Committee on a request from Prime Minister Forbes Burnham for a \$5,000 monthly subsidy for two years to support his efforts to build the PNC into an effective permanently organised party.

6.37 p.m.

He noted that Burnham had twice before built effective political machinery for election purposes but had let it lapse thereafter... Mr. Johnson mentioned that Prime Minister Burnham is now siphoning off something better than 28,000 annually from sales from flour mill to finance his political activities.... Mr. Johnson wondered if Burnham might be persuaded to cease this practice upon receipt of the proposed \$5,000 monthly subsidy. Mr. Broe stated that Burnham could be told that as a condition to his receipt of the \$5,000 monthly subsidy he would have to stop milking the flour mill."

I could see why there is a close affinity to corruption; this is what is there...

**Mr. Speaker:** There is too much noise in the House, Hon. Members.

**Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett:** ...but I think, that the Guyanese people will judge, and there will be an opportunity for the ultimate judgement of how we have done later this year. I am sure that come next time the Opposition Members will be in our company, again, on the same side. Thank you.

**Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Rohee]:** Mr. Speaker, may I ask, through you, to have the document that Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett quoted from circulated to Members of the House?

**Mr. Scott:** I would like to begin by offering congratulations to Mrs. Joan Bavegens, who has brought to the House over 40 years of grass root political work. She illustrates that in the People's National Congress- Reform Party there is room for those at the top as well as those at the bottom to play a meaningful role in the development and history of our country.

It is a bit disappointing that my very good friend- the Hon. Priya Manickchand should have thought to make comparisons with the manifestos of the two main parties, as well as the Alliance For Change, in this House. What is missing in her analogies is that a manifesto is generally just a guide as to what we will be doing in the year coming. When she claimed, for example, that the PNC-R1G's manifesto has nothing for the youths, the aged and women, she is incorrect. In that very manifesto there is a very large picture of the party's leader with a young person explaining the 'Yes' programme. In addition to that, beyond the manifesto we also have the plans and the programmes which in done in continuity one year after the other. The PNC/R1G, you must admit, has a lot of work with women, the Conference on the Affairs and Status of Women in Guyana (CASWIG) is one example, and with the aged where they first started to visit the Palms and other old folks home giving supper. It is also the PNC R1-G that brought about social security; something that was resisted seriously, at first, by the

People Progressive Party (PPP) Government. The PPP, later, realised its value and the sugar worker more than any other section of society have seen the value of and has profited greatly by the functioning of the National Insurance Scheme. It is my hope, however, that the National Insurance Scheme (N.I.S) will continue to function as well as it could.

There was a time when housewives and workers looked to our trade unionist to negotiate a meaningful rate of pay at the time of our National Budget negotiations and consultations. Excitement was in the air and all were optimistic that the resulting increases would make life, somewhat, easier. Not so today, instead we are dazzled with a big spending picture of billions of dollars: \$100B in 2007, \$119.3B in 2008, \$127.8B in 2009, \$142.8B in 2010 and now \$161.4B in 2011. Each year supplementary request for more money follows, sowing seeds of distrust at the initial request and leaving pertinent questions about soundness of the plans and projects for spending.

The style of this type of Budget is based on great infrastructural spending rather than the full improvement of life for the ordinary man. Forgotten is the necessity for wages and salaries to at least keep pace with the cost of goods in the market. The cost of living outstrips the take home pay of the small man. I do not see the brighter future the PPP/C's manifesto for 2011 promised, I see the nightmare of workers just living to exist day to day.

Trade Unions are impotent and their relevance have largely been under-determined by the annual imposition of the 'take it or else' 5% addition on wages and salaries. They are no longer consulted on wages, and when they attempt representation is now threatened with de-recognition by both a former workers Government and by private employers who are only too happy to follow the Government's pattern. The time is now for the movement to reassert its militancy as workers, the life and blood of this country, have been reduced to a small percentage of the macro-economic needs of the country. Now is the time workers must unite.

The Finance Minister promised of a brighter future for all Guyanese. Indeed, would have been bright if all Guyanese would accept roads that fall into disrepair in six months, stelling they cannot operate, wharves that float away, pavements in the city where the pregnant and the blind dare not walk, and the delivery of services to the poor remain poor, very poor indeed. But Guyanese are not like this, they expect a living wage, security at home, delivery of an education that at on the end of their primary school years would equip them to be literate and numerate and, thus, able to compete competently for equal employment opportunities. This is where the Government is yet to deliver and time has run out for them. They have failed the population in ways that directly impact on the poor man's living standards. The housewife is aware that today's average monthly wage of \$35, 000-\$40,000 buys less at the market than the monthly wage of 2008 use to buy. My colleague Mrs. Judith David-Blair adequately illustrated this in this House yesterday. The ordinary worker prayed for a reduction of the 16% Value Added Tax (V.A.T), but that prayer would not be answered. Being told that he would not have to pay tax if he earns less than \$48,000 per month, but this gift is meaningless to him. He would be happier to earn \$75, 000 per month, pay reduced VAT and be taxed as part of his national duty and still be able to take home a living wage for his family. This failure to deliver a means for the workers to live with dignity will not be forgotten. The bauxite and the sugar workers will not forget. They have experienced the dissipation of hope of 1992 and have come full circle, where a drug culture now permeates many villages, university graduates cannot find jobs, murders are unsolved, crime is high and wages are low, and the Government has no clue how o retain skills in the country, in spite of the many training programmes that they have mounted. The workers have now turned with conviction and trust to the shared governance platform of the PNC-R1-G and other forces to

chart the new Guyana that they gave their blood and sweat to make a reality. The time for change is at hand.

The PPP/C touted in their 1992 manifesto: tourism has been able to provide a ready source of foreign exchange and embrace employment prospects. We all agree with the sentiment. They promised to encourage local and foreign businessmen, either alone or in partnership, to invest into the tourism industry. Over the years we have seen efforts made to bring this sector on stream. We recall, in 2008, the excitement of the Hon. Minister of Tourism flapping his wings about birding and making Guyana the safe harbour for yachts. The hotels were to be filled for the world cup, the big lime and the entertainment at the stadium. Instead, it seems the birds have flown, the yachts have not arrived and many hotel beds are unfilled. The Finance Minister, in 2011 while acknowledging the importance of tourism to the national agenda can only point to the number of arrivals. He tells us of 141,281 arrivals in 2009 and 150,141 in 2010. What he failed to tell us is how many of the 150,141 were foreigners/ tourist attracted here to spend and to see our country, not a Guyanese coming home to bury his father, staying at his family's home and is classified as a tourist.

The sector was featured in 2001-2010 National Development Plan as the International Development Bank (I.D.B) funded Tourism Economic Impact Study which indicated that “tourism will become the third most important economic contributor to the country's economy” in 2011 what percentage of that 150,141 arrivals contributed to the economy through purchases of craft, art and visits to historical sites, etc. Offer Guyanese overseas a one week tour package stay on these islands. In spite of the offer of tax concessions, not many businessmen are investing in tourism. In spite of the high liquidity banks are not offering loan packages for tourism investment. In fact, many resorts and night clubs are closing and the foreign investors are still to come. Cruise ships rarely come to these shores; we do not attract enough airlines to our country, and the cost to fly to Guyana is not competitive. Kaieteur Falls is not enough to sell the world. In fact, last November a couple from London had their moneys refunded at Ogle as there were not enough people available to make the trip to Kaieteur. Although, some money for benabs for the number 63 beach was allocated; we are still to see the number 63 beach as a tourist destination. A lot of opportunities for the development of this section abound, millions of dollars have been invested in impressive advertisements and websites, but yet the sector has failed to take off. We are not referred to in the same breath as Kenya when it comes to attracting people to our shores.

All is not lost, however, all parties and interest groups are willing to help if included. We must re-orient our plans, first by thinking of all Guyana as a big tourist market. Regardless of the type of tourism, tourist see Georgetown first; not a pretty sight. Let us, therefore, build a new capital away from the coast, rehabilitate what would now be the ‘old Georgetown’-commission statues and paintings of national figures along with their history and position them in avenues, for example, Camp Street, Hadfield Street etc., remove the zoo from Georgetown to a protected island in the Demerara River ensuring that animals are closer to nature. Develop the Botanical Garden where all heroes from Cuffy, Damon, Critchlow and Rodney will be reburied, together with facilities for students and leisure seekers to see and listen to films and speeches about them. Revitalise street theatre, promote best village competitions on a half yearly basis... [Mr. Benn: You said relocate the whole Georgetown.]

I said to relocate the capital. Have the old Georgetown be redeveloped and have a new Georgetown. Develop a boat building industry so tourist can hire boats and canoes to cruise the rivers. From Corentyne with their historical estates, bridges, Cuffy revolution site and activities to holiday resorts lodges on selected islands on the Essequibo,

mountaineering, hiking and cycling all offer jobs for Guyanese and a new spirit of adventure to the tourist.

Offer weekend bus, boat, air trips to local companies for their employees at reduced rates. Develop Jonestown in the North West district as a tourist attraction like Germany has done with its Holocaust victims, and make Port Kaituma an air and boat entry point of take off for the trip, thus, enabling the residents an opportunity to sell their creations to visitors. Rehabilitate the LeRepentir cemetery- one of the most beautiful and peaceful cemeteries in the world where visitors can enjoy the beautiful trees and aligned avenues where poets like Joyce Kilmer got her inspiration to write the poem Trees; I do not think I have read a poem as lovely as Trees. That area inspired that kind of feelings. Loved ones would be able to spend time with their departed in peace. These are some of the ideas that will facilitate craft production, micro industries, hospitality and tour guides, and will reignite interest in developing all of Guyana to the world. Yachts will come, bird watchers will come, and swimmers to ride the rapids will, also, come. A wonderful future awaits us if we can think collectively.

While the current climate does not signal that the country is ready for tourist, the Government can begin by putting in place improved systems for good governance. Let us bring closure to weeping families by holding inquiries into events from 2002 to 2009. Let us have police reform, justice reform, an even playing field for contractors, fair appointments to teaching positions and fair wages for a fair days work. Happy with their new tax concessions now is the time for the private sector to invest in the building holiday lodges, boats, buying small planes. If they do this then the \$150M allocated, though small, will demonstrate a genuine partnership does exist between the two parties of Government and the private enterprise, and herald a new beginning security, positive enterprise that will see tourist coming in greater numbers.

A business place opened last Christmas, sold a defective computer and refused to take it back; the buyer had to settle for a smaller cash refund. A Consumer Protection Act, though passed but not yet effectively enforced would have prevented this outrage. This Act was first attempted in 2000 under the Ministry of Shrachan, in 2004 it was revised under the Minister of Labour Manzoor Nadir; now in 2011 we look forward, under Mr. Prashad, to see a reality of this Act of protection in place. Many electrical and electronic items of poor quality are sold to consumers with no recourse to effective remedy. The private sector has remained quiet. No prodding of the Government to ensure quality tyres are imported, adequate spare parts are made available, but today they loudly rejoice at the reduction of corporate taxes. Let us hope they will find a voice to support the call for a reduction of the V.A.T which impacts directly on the buyer. Now is the time for their voices to be heard. The \$171M allocated for works on markets tarmacs at Plaisance, Buxton, Haslington and the Mahaica market speaks volumes to the criminal neglect of Kitty market over the years, the leaking roof at Bourda market, the need for attention to the LePenatence market and the need for more space at Ruimveldt market. When will they get the much needed work done? Will it be in 2012?

The Cottage industry has always been vital to the growth of the economy. As such the single parents who will get small loans under the Women of Worth (W.O.W) programme is a good start. These single parents of the W.O.W programme need additional training in business management from the competitive strategy unit which will help them to become more competitive in the way they do business. This is good. This unit was set up under Cecil Rajana in 2010. He completed the legal work but to this day we are still awaiting the tabling of this legislation. **[Mr. Nandalall: Which legislation?]** The competitive strategy that

Mr. Rajana did, this strategy, however, is still to demonstrate in what way Guyana has become competitive in the way it does business, how much less time it takes to complete a transaction at N.I.S, customs, the law courts, etc. And how much protection is offered to the most vulnerable of our country. What are the returns from the setting up of the Art and Craft Producers Association founded in 2008? Apart from praises what profit and growth can we point to in 2011?

The National Bureau of Standards is still under staffed and is not able to fully examine goods imported for consumption by citizens. Our own wood product industry is getting smaller with the closure of Precision while poor quality furniture is allowed to compete on the market. Small businesses need to be facilitated to gain access to more overseas markets in order to expand and to grow.

In conclusion, many of the goodies offered this year could have been offered two years ago. For example, the income tax relief, wage increase, promises of laptops and other packages. That we only get relief at election time indicates that the Government is thinking more of its survival than of the people. Our quality of life has not improved. Now is the time for a change. Thank you very much Mr. Speaker

*7.07 p.m.*

**Minister of Education [Mr. Baksh]:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to offer my support to the 2011 Budget. I must commend the last speaker, Hon. Mr. Scott for the long list of measures that he has identified. Regrettably, many of the things he has said are already being implemented by the Ministry of Tourism. A lot of those things have already been implemented. It is very good to know that he is thinking along the same line of the Government in trying to boost tourism in Guyana. It shows that he is a patriot.

Guyanese returning do make a tremendous contribution to this country, they spend their money. They contribute to the foreign reserves of this country. 141,000 arrivals, we want to increase that. We are working towards increasing that number significantly.

This Budget, as other budgets, aims at modernising Guyana both from the point of view of developing its infrastructure – we have heard a lot of that, including the airport, more importantly the high-speed fibre optic cable which is coming in, and the one laptop per family. This is all meant to thrust Guyana into the digital age, and must be commended. It cannot be criticised. The sound management of this economy is very clear when we look at the indicators. I will just list a couple of them: the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) \$453 billion, growth; external reserves from 2006 to 2011 have almost tripled, there can be no criticism of that; the stability of the foreign exchange only depreciating negligibly by 0.12 %. Look at the situation in Trinidad and the devaluation that has taken place, or neighbour, and Columbia and other countries in Latin America. Growth was 3.6% percent last year and is projected at 4.6% this year. When this is compared to the rest of the Caricom Economic commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (E.C.L.A.C.) has predicted a growth rate of 0.5%. Compare that to what we are presenting here in Guyana at 4.6%.

As a point of comparison you can see that Guyana is progressing, it is developing, and the economy is growing. In doing all of that, we are holding inflation rates. Inflation rates is being held and projected at 4.4%. All of these are very good indicators that there is growth in the economy and that we are progressing. It is not only for the infrastructural side of the budget, but also for the – and the Minister has said it well – the 2011 Budget and the allocation, not only to education but to other sectors is an investment in our people. We must

look at the people's side of the budget. We have heard so much about the increases in the public assistance, the old age and the personal income tax and the threshold. We are taking care of our people. If we increase the threshold further they will still ask for a further increase. If the threshold was increased to \$50, 000 a month, they will demand \$60,000 per month. It is coming as the economy grows. More is in store after would have won the elections, the PPP/C Government will continue to give more and more to the workers of this country. You cannot satisfy the political opposition. It is their right to make their reservations and increases, but we have a country to develop.

The Government has consistently, over many budgets, made an investment in its Human Resource developments and Education in particular. There is no doubt, the kinds of increases we are seeing is unparalleled in Guyana's history. [**Mrs. Backer:** What?] ...the kind of percentages in the budget- 15% of the budgetary expenditure is for education, and 7% of the GDP. When you look at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Reports across the world you will see – I want to point out to you the commitment of this Government to its people – throughout the world when you look at the comparison you see Guyana standing tall; one of the top countries in terms of expenditure and percentage of the budget, and as a percentage of GDP. There is a commitment. We see the investment in human resources – I am coming to the value just now – it is an investment in our people. It is in our people that we are going to ensure the transformation of our country.

We have heard from the Hon. Member Ms. Ally. I really do admire her style, I must say it was very forceful and very dynamic, but her credibility is lacking. I will set about to show that. We have heard her talk about corruption. Every speaker on the other side has been talking about corruption. I would like the Hon. Member to point out one case, a single case of corruption in the Ministry of Education.

**Mrs. Backer:** The Auditor General's Report.

**Mr. Baksh:** That is not corruption and I will come to that just now. She spoke about poor management and discrimination and cited one case of alleged discrimination. I would like to deal with them upfront. It gets out there in the media; this case of discrimination. I want to now talk upfront about the case of the Hon. Member Dawn Hastings. The Hon. Member Dawn Hastings is the Head teacher of Jawalla Primary School and was seconded to the education department of Region 7. I will have to educate the opposition members on what the system of decentralised education management is because this is a decentralised system and there has been a lot of misunderstanding on your part. The Hon. Member as Head teacher of Jawalla Primary School was seconded by the Region, not by the Ministry of Education, but by the Regional Administration. You know the Regional Administration is not under the control of the PPP/C Government. This is the fact, not blame shifting, a recommendation had to be made to the Teachers Service Commission, not to the Minister or the Ministry of Education. They have made that recommendation the Teachers Service Commission. The Teachers Service Commission acted and they approved. I have a letter here of the secondment and for her to act as District Education Office 1 at the Department of Education. Teachers Service Commission acted and they made a mistake in the Letter of Appointment. Instead of making the appointment 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2009, it was made 28<sup>th</sup> January 2010. So, the Region wrote a letter, not the Ministry of Education, to rectify this. The point is this, the Teaching Service Commission will now have to amend this letter and then the Region will write to the Public Service Ministry for her to be paid a responsibility allowance. I can see

that this will happen shortly. She will get her deserved moneys. This was never drawn to my attention. It will be rectified.

There has been no discrimination, as such. I would like you to understand that. You can see it is a boggy word that is being used about discrimination. I hope that I have clarified that. It was a mistake [Mrs. Backer: It was a discriminatory mistake] The Minister of Education had no role in all of this as in many other things which I will mention. As long as you appreciate the decentralised education management, you will understand some of the things that I am saying.

The Hon. Member Amna Ally further said and made two statements, “No progress in education” and, “education at its lowest level”. I can take the blows, but not too low. I prefer the blows higher up so that I can defend myself. The Member further said, this is a question of comprehension, if the teachers cannot comprehend, how then will the students comprehend. She said that the Minister in the 2010 Budget debate stated that he had set a target for the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (C.S.E.C.) at 70%. We did set that. You said 70% and... [Interjection (*inaudible*)] If you are clarifying the point, yes. In the strategic plan there are stated goals- clear goals to be achieved and we are moving to achieve those goals. We said that we will move the C.S.E.C. grades 1 to 3 from 56% to 70% and we got 66%. Is that not progress? Never before in the history of this country, for C.S.E.C. have we achieved, in the years 2009 and 2010, such a high percentage pass. That is progress. When you look at the thirty subjects taken here you are only hundred percent pass rate in Guyana... [Mrs. Backer: In what?] ... If you ask me for one of the subjects I will give you. I will come to English and Mathematics last. 100%, 99%, 88% and 85%; Guyana has been holding its own across the Caribbean. It is a credit to all our hardworking teachers in this country. They have heeded the call of the Ministry of Education to come onboard and I really want the opposition to come onboard as well. We have done well.

In the strategic plan we said that by 2013 we will move the English A (Language) from 40% to 50%. We already have 59%, is that not progress? In Mathematics we said by 2013 we will move the pass rate from 23% to 40%. We are at 35% in 2010 for grades 1 to 3. For the decade, from 2000 to 2010, marks in English and Mathematics have been the best ever. It has been progression of all the time. At the grade six assessments we have been doing well- the best we have done in 2010... [Ms. Ally: How many of them have attended lessons?] At grade six they do not go to lessons.

**Mrs. Backer:** Oh, they go before.

**Mr. Baksh:** I do not know if at your school you allow them to go to lessons.

**Ms. Ally:** I do not have any school now.

**Mr. Baksh:** Your previous school.

**Mrs. Backer:** Did you forget that you fired her? You have fired so many people that you do not know who have fired.

**Mr. Baksh:** The Hon. Member retired. As long as we can get her empirical data correct and do our research, we are ready to rehire. We have to take her through a course at National Centre for Education Research and Development (N.C.E.R.D), a refresher. If she needs a refresher course, I will arrange that.

The Hon. Member and I said that if her school had done well we could have achieved a better grade six assessment result.

**Ms. Ally:** That is so poor. Imagine you are talking about one school. Talk about the whole country.

**Mr. Baksh:** But we have done well. The progress is there for all to see. Let me tell you that for the grade six assessment, the percentage of students gaining 50% and more in Mathematics have increased from 21% in 2009 to 34% in 2010. It is a low base, but we are moving. In English, we have moved from 27% in 2009 to 34%. In Social Studies, we moved from 32% to 34%, and in Science we have moved from 23% to 33%. That is progress. We are moving up; we are getting there.

There are reasons for underperformance; we recognise that. One of the reasons is the attendance rate of our students. We have to do much more to get our parents to send our children to school. We cannot put all of the blame on the school system; that is the fact. Even at the Redeemer Lutheran School; their attendance rate was 75% out of 100% attendance rate and in other schools it is in the seventies. We have to be partners in this and we have to move the N.G.O.s and the Religious Organisations to get the children into the schools. There is only so much that the teachers can do. How will they cover the curriculum?

When the Hon. Member spoke about violence and praised the ten-point action plan of the Ministry, she mentioned that the school welfare department must be more proactive. What can be more proactive than over 200 truancy campaigns across this country last year and 37 persons taken before the magistrates? We have appointed a coordinator of field operations and we are getting results. I must tell you that in some of the regions we have already seen an improvement in the attendance rates. In the Redeemer Lutheran School, I do not know what was done to encourage the parents. I know there were a lot of parent/teachers meetings; it was not effective, and perhaps it is the leadership. We are not getting the students to attend the schools. That school could have done much better. All and all, we are moving ahead.

The speaker from Region 10 made a statement which I really could not understand. She said that that the education system in Region 10 is dysfunctional because of some furniture problem. When you look at the results, Region 10 is one of the best in the country. Region 10 has 80% trained and graduate teachers- the highest for any other region in this country. We have an in-service teachers' training centre there. It is no surprise to me that Region 10 has overall been doing reasonably well. At CSEC, in terms of the overall pass rate, Region 10 was number four in the country. They are doing well. When the Hon. Member spoke about the Regions doing poorly, she is not asking for data. She is not analysing the data. This is what is worrying me because Region 9, in terms of the pass rate at CSEC, has now brought third in the country. It shows that in terms of equity, we are improving in this country and narrowing the gap between rich and poor; we are doing that. Look across all of the Regions and you will see that they have been performing well.

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

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

*Question put and carried*

**Mr. Baksh:** Look at the recent pass rates and see the equity. Georgetown and all of the Regions except Region 2 have improved in the CSEC performance in 2009 and 2010.



Georgetown moved from 73% to 77% pass rate. Region 4 came second at 71% to 73%. Region 9 brought third moving from 48% to 70%. That is the kind of performance that we want to see throughout this country. Region 10 moved from 67% to 68% -very high. In Region 7 there was a decline and the reason for this – the Hon. Members stood up and spoke about violence, teenage pregnancy and abortion as though the Minister of Education is responsible for these things. **[Interruption]** You did not say it, but it is implied. We are working, our school welfare department is very active in the area now, and we have to do something. This has to be a community effort; it cannot be an effort on the part of the school system alone, the Education Department or the Education Ministry. Come on board and encourage the communities to ensure that they work on the parents to send the children to school.

## LITERACY

The Hon. Member said that without having any empirical data, that in the 80s there was a 96% literacy rate. Where is the evidence? You do not just speak and say that you had 96%. You have not quoted. I would like to quote what it is now in 2006. I want to preface this by saying that we are not satisfied – there is no complacency on the part of the Ministry. There can be declines from one year to the other because if you do not a survey regularly, you would not know. I want to get that clear. That is the reason why we have so many interventions in the school system now. This is the Human Development Report for 2006 and it is quoted here in the *Stabroek News*, in the editorial, where there have listed a literacy rate of 96.4% in the year 2006.

We have recently of 2010, the World Bank report as well, and I quote from the *World Bank Report Towards Educational Reform in Guyana*, Summary of Case Studies Conducted Over the Period 1999 to 2009 by Walter Phillips for the World Bank, “Guyana’s official literacy rate is 96.5%, one of the highest in the English speaking developing world”. You have to conduct a survey. You have to get a survey for which we intend to conduct at a future date. I am quoting the international agencies in this. As I mentioned, we are not complacent. We have a lot of interventions at the primary school levels and the Hon. Member Ms. Amna Ally and the Hon. Member who is a Head Teacher at Jawalla Primary School have recognised that we will be introducing a grade four literacy certificate in 2011. Already, there is intense remediation in the school system. When I talk about that the Hon. Member blowing hot and cold in her 2010 presentation, the Hon. Member stated that there must not be words, but there must action if you are institutionalising a remediation programme and we did that. You did not give us a single commendation for that. For the first time in 2010 we took 9,000 students who completed writing the grade six assessment and put them through a three month remediation programme. They have gone through it. I am not saying that it was 100% perfect -I would never dare say that. Whatever weaknesses there are, we will improve on it. We had remediation during the summer, both for primary schools and secondary schools. We are doing an evaluation on that. She forgot to mention the fast tract literacy initiative where we are spending \$200 million, 273 literacy educators and over 200 centres to be able to sustain and maintain our literacy levels and improve on it. We are seeing some results now from the various examinations and assessments.

7.37 p.m.

The Hon. Member glibly referred to automatic promotion. She stated that we should have changed the policy. I had meetings with hundreds of school managers over the last three weeks and all of them are behind this promotion policy that we have with strong remediation.

It is conditional, with strong remediation. They have all put up their plans of what they intend to do to ensure that remediation takes place. How would you feel to have your 15, 16 or 17 year old child in Grade 7 in a Secondary school? We have taken a bold decision, but it is subject to review, Mr. Robert Corbin, Leader of the Opposition. **[Interjection]** No, he mentioned something about a review. All of our programmes are subject to review because we do have a strong culture of evaluation and assessment at the Ministry of Education. All of the policies and programmes are reviewed on an annual basis and so it must be in the education sector.

I deeply regret that the Hon. Member singled out the TVET Programme, one of the best programmes being run by the Ministry of Education. The Hon. Member talked about the TVET Council not being progressive and so forth. Members of the TVET Council come from GUYANA ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS (GAPE), the University of Guyana, and the PNC R1-G and the PPP/C have representations there. They are making very good contributions.

She said no training is taking place. Look at the training: 1- national system for competency based education and training workshops being held; 2- manuals for the organisation and management of workshops; laboratories and technical and vocational education and training institutions - these were all executed by the TVET Council as well as a manual for the maintenance of standards and quality at post-secondary institutions. And they did so much more work: testing and certification of post-secondary institutions; and above all they have prepared a draft TVET policy for Guyana which has the blessings of the international labour organisation. We are on the move with TVET in this country.

She failed to mention the School Completion Certificate Programme (SCCP) Programme whereby 500 students graduated from that programme last year. It is a competency based programme. Those who fail can now take their time and continue until they obtain certification. As I speak there are 2,200 students in our technical institutions and when they graduate, they will all contribute to skills development - a variety of skills/trades - required for the growth of our economy. We are on the move.

In terms of the technical teachers training programme, the Hon. Member failed to recognise that there is a technical teachers training programme from which 99 persons have graduated. We are upgrading that now with assistance from the same Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies (CANTA) which she said we do not have a relationship with. CANTA is helping us to upgrade to a diploma level. We are working with their guidelines. They are advising the TVET Council and you are unaware of these things.

In terms of the Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) qualifications, we are not yet an approved CVQ country; it is a fact. There are certain conditions. And the TVET Council, under whose ambit it comes, is working so that we can become a CVQ certifying country at the earliest possible time. I have confidence that with the new staff that we have given to them, including assessors from Industry - unlike what the Hon. Member said - we are moving in that direction. We will be introducing a new course on entrepreneurship this year. It is now being designed by the TVET Council. They have a key role to play in all of this. The Hon. Member really picked a wrong area to raise her objections on.

I am proud to say that SCCP is now at the school in Waramadong -I made that commitment last year- North West Secondary, St. Ignatius Secondary, and the Bartica Secondary school. We are moving these programmes, more and more, into our hinterland communities. Right

now we have 35 schools and 10 Practical Instruction Centres (PICs). We have to get 70 by 2013 and as such, we have a big job on our hands. We are moving.

The Inspectorate, in as much as there is glee from the fact that the Inspectorate comes under the Office of the President, is the new trend. Over a decade ago in the United Kingdom there was the Executive Officer at Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), an independent body inspecting the schools. Closer home we have an independent body in Jamaica. The Government decided that we should have an inspectorate which would not report to the Ministry of Education and there are good reasons that it should come outside of the Ministry of Education. As such, reporting will go to that body in which there will be no fear and favour in the reporting process. Therefore it is a good move and it has been tested as we go along. We are acting on some of the recommendations coming out of the Inspectorate. As you rightly know - because Monitoring, Evaluating and Reporting Developmental Unit (MERD) visited your school also and I know that you are pleased. The MERD Unit has been set up within the Ministry of Education and reports on a daily basis to the top managers, and then we take corrective action. I think that the Hon. Member would have benefitted from some of that.

The Government has re-introduced, two years of now, the National School-Feeding Programme. I think most of the Opposition Members really appreciated this. And we thank you for that because the School Feeding Programme is producing results in terms of increased school attendance in the hinterland areas, reduced stunting and there is better nutrition, better behaviour of children in the classroom and so forth. We do not have data on improved performance which will be more for a longitudinal study. We did an assessment on the School Feeding Programme. There were problems in the early days of distribution but we have been able to iron out those things. But how the Hon. Member spoke, it was as though these things are currently happening. They happened a year ago. So she is living in the past. Relatively, I am not saying there will not be hiccups from time to time with the suppliers. This happened in the *El Nino* period. We had problems with the production of juice.

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

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

*Question put and carried.*

**Mr. Baksh:** With the School Uniform Programme, there were some reservations. It has gone smoothly. There is not one case that I know of as Minister - I am not saying it may not exist - where a parent has complained of not having received a uniform voucher - not one. As a matter of fact, the closing date for the distribution of vouchers was 15<sup>th</sup> October and we extended it to the 31<sup>st</sup> December. Some vouchers have been returned from the regions to the central Ministry of Education. If there is any one case, you should let this Minister know about it because it has not come to his attention; we checked with all of the regions on that. It has gone smoothly this year.

On the matter of the retirement age, we do recognise that many teachers who are in their prime at 55 years old are ready to go. We have recognised that fact to such a large extent that I have reintroduced in critical areas re-employment of retired teachers in the school system. This is happening. We have re-hired as I have said. We will continue to do so because I feel that our retired teachers have a contribution to make, though this may not hold true for all of them. There are certain conditions - references and health must stand out. When I look at the

Hon. Member I can see that she needs no medical examination. There is no need. We will continue to do that. I think that the time has come for us to increase the retirement age which is 55 years. What makes it more aggravating to me is that teachers can opt out of the system at age 50. We need to keep them longer in the system so that they can contribute their very important skilled resources to our country. We have to look at our policy in terms of the retirement age. I hope that the Hon. Member has taken note of that.

## THE AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT

What the Auditor General's report stated was public knowledge long before it came here. This is not corruption. Let me tell you that there are many cases where the contracts are for measured work done and there has to be agreement for visits to the sites between the Ministry's engineers and the Auditor General's engineers. They have to visit the sites to agree on the measurements. When this Report was written, they were still in the process of doing that and so it came into the Report. I am happy to report that I have ten cases where, after verifying the measurements, the contractors paid moneys back to the Ministry of Education. They paid back; I have a listing here. In some cases, the verification was in favour of the contractor and they did not have to pay back anything. The Auditor General had to certify that. In some cases, as the Hon. Minister Webster had stated, we had taken and will take them to court to recover any overpayment. **[Interruption: inaudible]** The \$32 million dollars you mentioned is in the courts already. That is in the court awaiting a hearing - the \$32 million for President's College where there was an overpayment. I want that to be known. It is in the court already and we are awaiting a report. There are about three other cases which we have taken and will take to the courts so that we can recover moneys. **[Interruption: inaudible]** That is not corruption. It is overpayment which occurred. It is not corruption. Corruption is defined by transparency international. She was right; there are cases and we have taken corrective measures to rectify the situation. These things are happening.

Education and the modernisation of this country is a matter for all of us. I have gone out there over the past year and many of you would have seen that I have been appealing, calling for the involvement of all, parents also more importantly. One of my colleagues at the back of me just gave me the *Times* supplement. They did a poll on "What will improve student performance the most." This has relevance in the US and to us too. That is why I am quoting. They say that 52% of the persons stated, "More involved parents". If it is 52% in the US, it should be more in Guyana. That is showing how important it is for parents to be involved. Students reward- 6%; more effective teachers- 24 %. They think more effective teachers will bring about better student performance.

What will improve teacher effectiveness the most? It is not only salaries. 11% stated salaries but 30% stated better training in universities. And that is what we have done here in reforming teacher education in Guyana with the Associate Degree in Education, moving straight on from the Associate Degree to a Degree in Education through E-Learning approaches and so forth.

I would like to see in the shortest possible time that we move from the 20 % graduates in our school system to 50% graduates. I cannot put a time frame on that, but clearly research in other countries is pointing to that. And we are on the move. We have modernised teacher education in this country and we have the World Bank loan that will ensure that we can do that at the earliest possible time.

As I said, 11% stated higher salaries. With our teachers, we are trying as the economy grows, to improve on their salaries, wages and conditions of their service. There is a total

compensation package for them. We have to look across the sectors. You cannot just say you want 15% and believe that will serve as magic overnight. It will not and the research from this poll shows that it will not be so. What we want to do is to engage the Guyana Teacher's Union (GTU) and come up with a reasonable compensation package depending on the economic performance of the country and what other critical sectors are enjoying. There must be a comparative approach to all of this - the nurses are there, the security forces are there - but we will continue to do that.

President Obama in his State of the Union address last night spent, I would say, nearly 30% to 40% of his time speaking about the education agenda in America. I am happy to note that here in Guyana, there is a good debate going on. This is how it must be. Nobody must feel that the Minister of Education or the Government is against purposeful debates. No, I want to engage in debates on the education agenda in Guyana. That is important. I am happy in the year 2010 that we had 52 editorials on education, some positive, some negative, some in between. That is healthy for the education debate. That is the reason why we listen; we consult, because we believe in the partnership. The Hon. Member was there at several forums at the North Ruimveldt School when hundreds of teachers were there and we consulted with them. We are consulting. In all of this, what President Obama said, and which this Government, this Ministry of Education, has been preaching all the time, he said:-

“We must all work together to ensure that each child succeeds in schools.”

That is our mantra as a Government for the last decade. And that is the reason why we are putting so much investment in education for the last decade. This did not begin two or three years ago. That is the reason why we have the remediation; strong and consistent remediation. That is the reason why we have all of the workshops and the reform in teacher education as well as all of the interventions and the policy initiatives because we want to ensure that each child... **[Interruption]**... it is the responsibility of all of us. All of us must be involved in the programme of ensuring that each child succeeds. We have been calling for that. You called it, “No child left behind” but we do not call it that. We say that the school system must cater for the needs of each and every child so that they come out of the school system with an acceptable level of literacy and numeracy. That is our mantra. That has taken hold across this country now. **[Mrs. Backer: Automatic promotion]** There has been automatic promotion in the Primary schools of this country for ten years now - if you do not know about that - it is working.

I heard what the Opposition Leader said last year and it kept ringing in my ears. He said, “We are with you providing you that have positive policies and programmes”. I appreciate that because education is a concern for all of us. We will not succeed unless you all come on board. Therefore, I end tonight by appealing not only to the parents, not only to the Principals and Head Teachers of the schools, and the school teachers, not only to the communities, but to the political opposition to come on board; and especially to the Hon. Member, not to be so negative in her presentations. I have not mentioned all of the other programmes that we have. I did not go into the Performance Enhancement Programme [PEP]. I did not go into the ICT programme which the Hon. Member Carolyn Rodrigues mentioned. I did not go into that. We have ten other programmes which I have not mentioned and they are working. **[Mrs. Backer: Tell us the names. Do you want me to give you the names of the ten programmes?]** Suffice it to say there are so many programmes in place here now. We have the SCCP programme which is in force and working. You did not mention that. Last year you conveniently forgot to mention the success. We have the Performance Enhancement Programme (PEP) where we are looking at the poorest performing schools across this country

and we are working with them in a supportive way. We have the Grade 4 Literacy Certificate Programme; we have the Fast Tract Literacy Initiative Programme and after school remediation programme. We have the sixth year programme introduced in Secondary schools and that is a very important programme. We have the Non-Graduate Certificate in Education programme to boost Mathematics and English – our weak areas. At NCERD we have a programme for special education needs. We have that too. **[Interruption]** Do not let me come to that. When I talked about modernisation, again the Leader of the Opposition supported it. I must say that he did support the education television broadcast. I am quite sure that all Members of the Opposition recognise that...

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

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

*Question put and agreed to*

**Mr. Baksh:** The education television channel which will be coming before the end of this quarter will be in all communities. It will bring a dramatic change in the way education is delivered in our country. When you couple that with the high speed fibre optic cables to bring internet facilities and the One Laptop Per Family Programme, there is a strong nexus with what is taking place in the education sector and the One Laptop Per Family Programme. We are involved in that. We are training the teachers. We have already completed training 1,000 teachers in ICT. This has been done with the Commonwealth of Learning, the Commonwealth Secretariat and Microsoft. There are various modules. We lead in the Caribbean in training in ICT. We have an ICT competency framework document prepared for us by these international agencies. We want to ensure that all of our teachers, and under the World Bank project, in the Teacher Modernisation Programme, a huge laboratory will be put up at Cyril Potter College of Education. Every trained teacher that comes from there must be able to use the technology to mediate teaching and learning in the classroom. We are not taking things for granted. We have thousands of teachers out there who are not computer literate and therefore, we have started and are regionalizing the training now - Region 6 and Region 10. We want, over the next year, for another one or two thousand teachers to be trained so that all schools will have them. We want to triple the numbers that are taking IT in the CSEC exams. This is another programme, the teacher training programme. We have all of this. **[Interruption: inaudible]** I think you may have to be the next shadow minister because of the negativity that is coming from that end.

Mr. Speaker, I end here with the appeal for all to come on board the education train for the benefit of our country; for the modernisation of Guyana; and for future generations. I thank you.

*Sitting suspended at 8.05 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 8.40 p.m.*

*[Mdm. Deputy Speaker in Chair]*

**Minister of Health [Dr. Ramsammy]:** As we continue our Budget 2011 debate, our colleagues on the other side have generally focused on what they see as our shortcomings and what they see as our failures. This is not an unexpected thing and in some way, this is what they are here for. It is their role and responsibility to scrutinise and identify our failures and

deficiencies as they see them. I do not have any objection to that approach, if it is what is expected.

We are not a perfect country, not as yet, and there is no country where faults cannot be found with its Government and implementing agencies. There would always be issues. There will always be matters that the Opposition can find good arguments and stories to tell of shortcomings, failures, poor implementation and of less than effective policies. This would be true, in fact, for the best democracy in the world. It would be true for the richest countries in the world.

Of course, we on the Government's side will tell the story of development, of our successes, our story of developing Guyana and its citizens. The truth is also, the truth to be told, is that the PPP/C Members of Parliament, the Government Members, have much to talk about. We have heard them talk so much in terms of development story because the story is a robust one, and as much as we would want to deny the truth, the Guyanese people and the world know that we have grown significantly as a nation in the last two decades. The world has acknowledged this because Guyana has come from a low income country to a middle income one, and it is not just us saying this.

No one can deny that the Opposition comes here to tell its story and it does so with gusto and passion, but we also cannot deny that it does so with a fair share of embellishment. I am certain that, on the other side, it says we do too, that we have exaggerated the story, as you have heard – the Ministers are not telling the truth; the numbers are not correct, and so forth.

While all of this is true, and it is the nature of debates, we will tell our side of the story, there is an inherent responsibility of all Members of the House to be fair and to try their best not to misrepresent the facts and not to be untruthful, and, as far as possible. Tell the whole truth, not only a part of the truth. The fact is that too often the Opposition Members have not been fair and they have sometimes misrepresented the facts, seek to tell stories, leave out the facts and skewed the truth. The thing about truth though is as the Rwandan proverb which states this: *“the truth passes through fire without burning”*.

Take a case in point. I am sorry that my colleague, the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, is not here but he read and spoke of the words in a book written by a man called Collier. He read those words as if Mr. Collier was writing about Guyana. I looked up the book and in no single paragraph did Mr. Collier specifically talk about the situation in Guyana. But if one had listened to the Hon. Member, he/she would have thought that Mr. Collier wrote specifically about Guyana. Yet, Mr. Ramjattan, the honourable man as he is, must score points and he rather skilfully told a story that is not Guyana's truth-not quite the truth. We have too much of that.

Take the fact that almost every Member of the Opposition spoke with persistence before the debate when they were making comments on this budget, and throughout the debate, so far, they keep making the charge that the Hon. Minister of Finance, and the Government, prepared a budget that is “an election year budget.” In an election year, that is not an unreasonable charge. It is a legitimate issue to raise. After all, here in Guyana and I remind us of the 1992 budget, and in virtually every country, the temptation in an election year is to present what one can call “an election year budget” and that temptation is an enormous one. The Hon. Leader of the Opposition, in fact, before the Budget was read, accused the Government of busy preparing to present “an election year budget.” That is, indeed, always an expectation and I was not surprised. Now that the Budget is before us, however, we are

required to analyse it to see if the expectation of “an election year budget” was presented by the Minister.

Up to now I have heard only one argument, and if I am wrong you tell me that, and that one argument is that: it is the “largest budget ever.” That is the argument that it is “an election year budget.” Yet, the Guyanese people know that every budget presented by this Government happens to be the largest budget in our history. The fact is that that the PPP/C Government has now presented nineteen budgets, and an analysis of these budgets would reveal that there has been a straight line going upwards when we look at the size of the budget, almost a perfect straight line. In fact, Minister Dr. Ashni Singh, this is your fifth budget. Is that right? Mdm. Deputy Speaker, it is his fifth budget, and in every budget speech, there is one line. I want to read that line. “I am proud to present the largest budget ever in our history”. Five times he has said that. But guess what, he does not have the distinction of being the only PPP/C Government Minister of Finance to say that, all the other Ministers had said the same thing. The fact is that when the budget is analysed against a set of benchmarks that would allow one to characterise the budget as “an election year budget,” the Budget before us would not qualify as “an election year budget.” I can give one example: the fiscal deficit in this Budget is one of the smallest in the history of this country since Independence. So it cannot be “an election year budget” and Minister Nadir did a good job before the debate and during this debate, and Minister Manickchand also mentioned some good points.

What about this Budget? This Budget, as all other PPP/C Government budgets, has some consistent hallmarks:

- This Budget tells a story, as all of the other budgets, of development – economic development, building our physical infrastructure, building our political and social development as we build our country. It tells a story of a Government and a people modernising their country. It tells a story meeting the social welfare needs of the people as we build our democracy and create space for participation of all of our citizens.
- In the second point of this budget - a budget creates a work plan that takes into consideration our ability to finance it so that we do not leave a heavy, unbearable mortgage for future generations to carry as we had to carry from the last one. We have always been mindful of the fact that our budgets must seek to finance as much development as possible, while not carrying with it unsustainable fiscal deficits that force us to borrow at unsustainable levels that only impoverish our future generations.
- What about the third characteristics of our budgets? The Budget addresses the needs of our communities, of our people, children, and women, elderly, the disabled, our workers - addresses their needs everywhere.

These are what our budgets are. We do not have to wait for a budget year. We, every year, address the fundamental needs of our people. We have never awaited an election year; we do this every single day. We treat every budget as a developmental instrument, and this misrepresentation – I was going into some of the things that my honourable friend and colleague the Hon. Member Dr. John Austin raised, but he tried to be fair, I must say that. I do not really want to go into that because in fact the 20% growth under the PNC R1-G’s administration, God knows where that came from; I have to mention one thing, I have heard all kinds of explanations about the absent of audited accounts. However, Dr. Austin, I have never heard that one. Mdm. Deputy Speaker, we all know the Hon. Member, Dr. Austin, as



you would notice he always sits quietly there and he never smiles. The first that I have seen my colleague and friend smiled was when he said that - gave all that explanation.

I have heard from several of my colleagues, not only in this debate, but at other times raising our deficiencies and failures in the health sector. I heard, my sister, Hon. Member, Ms. Vanessa Kissoon. I heard my brother, Hon. Member Fernandes from Region 1. I have no doubt that some of the situations that they have talked about are real. Those stories humble and drive me. We have so much more work to do to create the perfect health care system. There are times when we have not been able to provide all of the medicine which we need to provide, and, yes, humanity has not yet, through the centuries and in the very best jurisdictions today, been able to prevent deaths in hospitals. But I humbly posit to all of us here, to my colleagues and to our people that it is unfair to select a few instances and seek to make people think that this is the situation all the time and that every time someone comes to the hospital or health sectors that there is no medicine and that the only result we have in our hospitals is that everyone dies. However, I know that my sister had gotten emotional. Probably, she did not mean to call anybody a murderer.

Both the Hon. Members, Ms. Kissoon and Mr. Fernandes spoke about the unavailability of medicine as a major problem. They spoke about incidences in a manner that gave the impression that we have, most of the time, no medicine in the system. Now, I cannot vouch that each time someone goes to the health centre or hospital that there is enough medicine to give that person. It is one of our persistent, but reducing deficiencies. It is a deficiency which exists even in the most advanced health system in the world.

It is important that we equally acknowledge the tremendous achievement in that we provide all of the essential medicines in accordance with, and going beyond, the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommendation, most of the time, in all of the health centres and health posts. It is a major accomplishment of this Government. We have shifted from an era, and this is not being said to make a comparison between political parties, but we all know the truth, where there were sadden disgraceful days when most of our medicines – we know, the years of 1989, 1990, 1991 – in our hospital were gifts of expired medicines. Let us try to deny that. That is the truth. Let us take diabetics. The diabetics were getting different medicines every week depending upon which gift came in. That is the truth.

Here is the true story of Guyana, of accomplishment under the PPP/C Government. Guyana is today one of very few countries in the world where all medicines in the public sector are free, and for some of these essential medicines, they are also free in the private sector. Outside of Cuba, I am not aware of any country which provides free medicine, absolutely free to its citizens. In some countries, some of the medicines are available to some people for free. In Trinidad, there is a programme now which allows senior citizens to access diabetics and hypertensive medicines. Similar programmes are now developing in other CARICOM countries. Even in Africa and Asia, people pay for medicines and even then, there are very significant problems with reliability of supplies, with stock outs amounting to 50% and 60% of the time.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, colleagues, in the year 2011, more than \$3 billion will be spent acquiring medicines for our people. We will, in fact, spend another \$1 billion on top of that for medicines that result from our partnership with global fund and other agencies. In the year 2011, we will spend approximately \$5,333 or US\$26 per capita on medicines alone. Just to put that into perspective – Mr. Scott, you are listening, right – in 1991, the per capita expenditure on the total health care system, not just on medicine was US\$6, we are spending

today four times more on just medicine, not on the health sector. For a country like ours, that is major achievement. We should be proud of what Guyana has done, even if some of us cannot concede that as an accomplishment of the PPP/C Government. For when we stand here and are bragging, it is a good reason. We have done an excellent job on behalf of our people. That in no way is a recommendation that the Members of the Opposition should not come here and highlight those instances areas where we failed to deliver medicine. Indeed, it is our promise that we will meet the medicine needs of our people every time, everywhere, always saying, right now, is that it is an unfolding story and we are rapidly getting there. Thus, the instances when we fail to provide medicine are a legitimate issue to raise.

As impressive as our achievement in the provision of medicine is that we must recognise that in order to meet the total demand that we will need to spend at this time in our health development, some \$5 billion to \$6 billion per year in order to meet that demand. But as we add more doctors- as we add more specialist doctors - and as our diagnosis are made earlier, as various forms cancer cases are diagnosed earlier and better, and as our diagnostic capacity improve, we will have to face the challenge of an increasing bill for medicines.

For example, in 2010, we distributed and dispensed more than \$300 million of medicines for just diabetes and hypertension. There are some 40,000 persons who receive treatment for these conditions in the public health sector – diabetes and hypertension. People pay hundreds of dollars for these medicines, in other countries. In Guyana, they obtain these medicines for free these days almost every time they go to the health centres and hospitals. As our Standard Treatment Guidelines for these illnesses are used better in the health centres and district hospitals, services such as the Foot Care Programmes extends across Guyana and unfortunately for Minister Dr. Ashni Singh, the financial bill for the chronic Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) medicines will escalate. At the stage that we are at right now, the Ministry of Health has estimated that in 2011 there would be the need for \$500 million for diabetes and hypertension alone. This is a heavy burden to carry for any country. This burden is going to significantly increase in the years to come. It is a challenge that the Government must confront.

Let me illustrate an example further of this challenge. In terms of people with heart diseases, diabetes and hypertension, or persons are at risk for these diseases, there are about 75,000 persons in Guyana with these conditions, and there are about 15,000 of these persons who can benefit now from treatment with cholesterol-lowering medicine – the Statins. No country in the world has Statins as part of the essential medicine list. That is medicine outside of the list and if there is any kind of insurances, it has to be paid for. Presently, the Government of Guyana supplies 1,500 people with Statins - this very expensive medicine. These persons are the ones at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation and some at the Regional Hospitals. Our goal is that soon we will be able to make these medicines available on a universal access model.

Indeed, as Guyana joined other countries at the Summit to the United Nation in September, it is countries like Guyana which are pushing the envelope that Statins must become part of the essential medicine list.

In the years 2009 and 2010, the Government of Guyana, in order to meet the needs of those 1,500 persons, spent \$75 million on the Statins alone. If Statins is going to be supplied to 15,000 people, \$1 million will have to be found for one medicine. This is the challenge we face and that is the policy - the challenge that is confronted

So while the Members of the Opposition can truly identify times when we were unable to supply medicines at our facilities, the truth is that few countries today can say that they provide as many medicines for free to the population, and the fact that we provide all of these medicines most of the time is a tremendous success story worth talking about. I hope that my good friends, Dr. Norton, Ms. Ally and others, Dr. Austin and the Hon. Member Mrs. Lawrence, all of the Hon. Members at the back there, will give the message to the Hon. Ms. Kissoon because she raised the point that Region 10 does not get medicine. I just want to tell you that in 2010, Region 10 requested \$160 million worth of medicines and the medicine supplies it received was \$130 million that is 81% of the request which was made. Region 1 requested \$54 million and it received \$40 million, about 74% of its request. So one can now extrapolate – Hon. Member Mrs. Holder, do not get in trouble extrapolating – that 20% of the time the people did not get their medicines. That is not true because the reason why it is 80% which is being delivered is because the Regions usually asked for more than they need. Minister Ramsaran knows that a lot of time they asked for so much, that it expires on their hands. We usually look at their consumption and modify their requests.

#### THE TRUTH ABOUT CHILD MORTALITY

I want to address this issue of child mortality because that comes up and I am not avoiding maternal mortality. That is why tonight I am not fighting with anybody. I want to talk so that we can hear the story. Let us talk about child mortality for a bit. I know that everyone of us here cares about our community and our children. I have no reason to think that anyone of us would not want the best for our children. The fact is that last year around the world nine million children died mostly of preventable causes. That is the truth. Even in America children died because of preventable causes. But, countries such as Guyana, like many other countries, have come a long way. There is no country that has reached a stage where preventable deaths still do not occur. At the WHO, in fact, there is a proposal to work to eliminate preventable deaths among our children by 2025, around the world.

But in 1991, if all the deaths are taken – I am doing this carefully so that we all understand – in Guyana, total deaths, and look at the age group that contributed to those deaths. This is not about politics. This is something that we all should be sad about because in 1991 17% of all the deaths in Guyana were of children under the age of five years.

*9.10 p.m.*

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

**Mr. Hinds:** Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

*Question put, and agreed to*

**Dr. Ramsammy:** Thank you very much Prime Minister and Mdm. Deputy Speaker. We have endured the embarrassing situation in Guyana, which saw between one hundred and one hundred and twenty deaths of children out for every one thousand. In the year 2010, we were able to reduce that to twenty deaths of children per every thousand deaths. If all the deaths in 2010 were to be taken we would see that less than 4% were in children under five years old. It used to be 17%; it has dropped to 4%. We are keeping our children alive more, yet we are not satisfied, because twenty deaths of children out of one thousand deaths are still too high for us. However, we are rapidly gaining on our target because this Government has set a target of sixteen per one thousand deaths by 2015. It is at twenty deaths per one thousand

deaths and we will meet our target of sixteen per one thousand deaths, and will do better than that.

One of the major reasons for this dramatic turnaround is the immunisation story. Guyana today spends about, out of the \$14 billion that we talked about, \$400 million to its immunisation programme. In other countries where persons would have to pay hundreds of dollars to get vaccines, this country provides fifteen life saving vaccines to our children absolutely free. We are reaching the children because up to 98% of our children are vaccinated and yet we want to find the 1% or 2% that we are missing.

Recently, a new vaccine was added. In 2009, a vaccine called PCV 7 was added because one of the major causes of deaths in our children today is Acute Respiratory Infection. The PCV 7 is a vaccine that fights against the pneumococcal bacteria and there are about one hundred of them which cause diseases. About fifteen of which are deadly. In 2009, the new vaccine which came out, the PCV 7, was introduced but that only protects against seven of the almost one hundred pneumococcal bacteria, but it is seven of the fifteen which are deadly. Late last year scientist came up with the PCV 13 vaccine which protects against most of the deadly pneumococcal bacteria and last week the PCV 13 was introduced for all of our children in Guyana. Last year also a rotavirus vaccine was introduced and by April, for older children, for the girls ages eleven, twelve and thirteen years old, the Human Papilloma Vaccine will be introduced because that is the vaccine that protects against the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) which causes about 85% of the cervical cancer in our country. It is a Sexual Transmitted Infection (STI). It is now being introduced to the eleven, twelve and thirteen year old girls, hopefully catching them before they become sexually active, and protecting them against the HPV. Later on, this Government - we will win the elections again, of course - will also be introducing it for the boys. Do not think the girls get it from nowhere. They get it from some place so it will be introduced. That is one of the major reasons for the turnaround, in that our children are no longer dying of rubella, measles, whooping cough and polio. That is the big difference from 1990 to now.

#### MATERNAL MORTALITY IN GUYANA

A lot of my colleagues would think that I would avoid talking about maternal mortality. It is a painful story for all of us; it is a painful story for me; it is a painful story for the health workers, because in 2001 we had set a target that we would reach a maternal mortality rate of eight per ten thousand deliveries. In 1991, 57 pregnant women died in Guyana. The maternal mortality rate in 1991 was thirty-two per ten thousand deliveries, and there were 57 deaths. Since then, we have made significant strides in addressing this issue. In 2005, the rate dropped from thirty-two to 12.8 per ten thousand. In 2008, for the first time in our history, it dropped below ten to 9.8 per ten thousand. In 2009, our 2012 target of eight per ten thousand was achieved. It was eight per ten thousand in 2009, but the trick is, could we maintain it? As such, we were looking with anticipation and excitement to 2010 that we would have three successive years of below ten, and, indeed, up to August it appeared as if we were going to reach that pace.

But alas! The health workers were shocked, as the nation was shocked, in the last four months. Even though we had not returned to the old days, there was a reversal of that nice declining line. So for many years we were bringing the rate down and looking forward to continuing that trajectory. However, we saw the reversal, 2010 was genuinely a setback for us, and I am hoping that 2011 would see us returning to a trajectory of a decline in the way forward. But ... [Mrs. Backer: What was it in 2010? Give us a figure.] It is fifteen per

ten thousand... [Mrs. Backer: Well, then you should say so.] I did not mean to. I have that to say. [Mrs. Backer: Or have you forgotten?] No. I am still talking about the issue... [Mr. Ramotar: I thought you were sleeping, Mrs. Backer] Well, Mrs. Backer did not get to talk too much as yet. It is withdrawal symptoms.

In this House, on both sides, in the public, justifiably, there were concerns and some even called for blood. Many called for the punishment of health workers, but I must remind us all that those are the same health workers who have reduced the mortality rate from thirty-two to eight and who must endure the embarrassment now, the humiliation and the pain that the 2010 reversal brought us. Throughout all of this I have sought to be quiet. We have indeed let the people down and we are willing to take the punishment that our country thinks we deserve. The guillotine is ready... [Mr. Patterson: Resign.] I did not hear Mr. Patterson and the Hon. Member talked about it when the rates were going down. I did not hear anyone talked about it and acknowledged and gave credit to those health workers. Yes, we have failed this time around, but the successes of a sustained period must be acknowledged. We must acknowledge it. So as we prepare the guillotine for the health workers that we want to punish, I would stand with them. [Mr. Franklin: Will you put your neck?] Yes. The events of 2010 really hurt us, but we look forward to returning to the trajectory of declining rates of maternal death and we hope that all Guyanese would give the support and encouragement to those health workers who everyday are in the trenches working for our people because all of us want the same results - a healthy baby born to a healthy mother without complications.

#### LIFE EXPECTANCY

Because of these things - child mortality has been reduced; maternal mortality has been reduced; the prevalence of killer diseases such as HIV has been reduced and the deaths from it - the life expectancy have been increased in our country. Again, some of the debates from yesterday and today, Minister Manickchand very passionately talked about certain things. As we entered the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Guyana was on the verge of dropping below sixty years for its life expectancy. In 1990, boys at birth had a life expectancy of fifty-eight years. It has steadily increased through the 1990s and today it is seventy years for boys, and 71.5 years for girls. Guyana is still catching up, because in Barbados it is seventy-eight years and Guyana's target is seventy-five years by 2015. But for those who doubt the calculations, let me give another statistics. [Mrs. Backer: We want to see Mrs. Holder's calculations.] Well, this is why Mrs. Holder understands now.

#### PROPORTION OF OLDER PERSON'S DEATH

I have talked about these children but let me tell you about all the deaths in this country. In 1991, 12% of all the deaths were of people of sixty-five years and older. 50% of all deaths in 1991 were of people below the age of fifty years. As I said, 17% were below five years old. As such, it was a population that was slanted towards the younger side. There were not many older people to die of the chronic diseases. In 2008, 22% of all of the deaths were sixty-five years and over. In 2009, 31% were sixty-five years and older. In 2010, of all of the deaths in Guyana at 39% were at sixty-five and over. This is now showing that even the projections of 2002 for the age group of sixty-five years and above, which was estimated by the experts as 43,000 persons, is actually an underestimation of the truth. Most of those persons are dying because of chronic Non-Communicable Diseases such as heart diseases, cancer, diabetes and hypertension. This is how we are changing our country - better health, making people live longer and healthier lives.

## PATIENTS' CHARTER

Yesterday the Hon. Member Mrs. Sheila Holder talked about the need in our country for a Patient Rights Charter. Several countries now have that and in fact, one was developed by the Ministry of Health to ensure that every Guyanese, regardless of age, gender, religion, national origin, social class or geographical...

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

**Mr. Hinds:** Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given 15 minutes to conclude his presentation.

*Question put, and agreed to*

**Dr. Ramsammy:** This has changed... the fact that we would have a Patient Rights Charter, is because we want to ensure that people have rights to access health care services and their rights while in the care of health professionals. The Ministry of Health is committed to upholding, promoting and protecting this right and, therefore, proclaims that a Patient Rights Charter as a common standard for achieving the realisation of this right. This is now going through more extensive consultation and in 2011, the Ministry will introduce it on a voluntary basis in the health sector and hopefully with the changes made, we will statutorise it in 2012. I hope that answers your concerns.

## HEALTH INVESTMENT

I do want to deal with the investments. Thanks to Ministry of Finance and the Government of Guyana because with a \$14 billion we now account for 10% of the total current expenditure of this Government. And by any standards, that is taking a large pie of the budget. It is consistent with the Government's commitment, a PPP/C's commitment, whether in Government or out of Government that the social welfare needs of our people must always be up front and centre of our development programme. We will now have \$18, 666 per capita or US\$95 per capita expended on health, compared to what it was in 1991 at \$6, but we have a way to go. Barbados spent \$1000, Suriname spent \$140 and Rwanda spent \$14 while Tanzania spent \$10. Guyana is better off than some countries. I do not think that that is the major statistic that we want because equity is one of the pillars on which our development programme is built. So where is this money going? I thought today I would just give some numbers as to what the Regions received because sometimes we confuse it. I am giving 2010 figures right now:

Region 1 received per capita per health \$21,126 (US\$106)

Region 2 received per capita per health \$15,956 (US\$80)

Region 3 received per capita per health \$12,238 (US\$61)

Region 4 received per capita per health \$26,697 (US\$133)

Region 5 received per capita per health \$13,441 (US\$67)

Region 6 received per capita per health \$16,033 (US\$80)

Region 7 received per capita per health \$29,241 (US\$146)

Region 8 received per capita per health \$32,137 (US\$161)

Region 9 received per capita per health \$24,298 (US\$121)

Region 10 received per capita per health \$36,393 (US\$182)

In addressing all of the health issues that we have in our country we try not only to invest nationally, but try to distribute the resources equitably around our country so that every citizen benefits.

It would be asked: Why those Hinterland Regions, without a major hospital such as the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, get more money? This is so because, for example, vaccines which cost about US\$30 per child on the Coast cost more than US\$200 per child in the Hinterland. That is why more has to be invested in those communities.

The truth is that the health of our people has been improved and the development of our country has also been enhanced, and for all of our people. I can indeed tell many stories of this success. But the truth is that I can also tell the stories of challenges, constraints and of disappointments like the 2010 maternal mortality rate.

I have to balance the hard work and success of the health workers with the disappointments and in the end, I believe that I can stand here, look everyone in the eyes- look at the Guyanese people in the eyes- and say that the Guyanese health workers have done us all proud.

Should we demand more of them? For sure we can, we should and we are demanding more. We should also be bold and courageous enough to stand with them just as we stand with them in times of glory, we must stand with them in times of difficulties. I stand with them and even though there might be some blame to share among them, the blame is equally mine. If you want to fire all of us, all of the health workers and me, we are here.

I do believe that there are certain things that the health workers must do better and I quarrel with them. I do believe that some of the things that we do in the health sector as to how we treat people, how we speak to them and sometimes the way some of the nurses deal with persons. In this room right now there is someone who has a relative in the maternity department of the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation who can tell of the unacceptable manner in which the nurses behave. And they deserve it when we quarrel with them. However, we must not think that this is all that happens. For every time that they do something that we should stand up and point our fingers at them, we must remember that there are hundreds of things that they do right every single day in this country. Remember that last year seventeen thousand babies were born safely to seventeen thousand mothers who went home.

We must remember that the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, a million times per year, sends persons home. We must remember all of those who came almost dead. Recently, a doctor called me to speak to the family of someone because they did not think that that person was going to make it. It was somebody that we all know who was in a road accident. He is home today feeding his baby. Those things happened everyday in this country and so when I speak passionately in defence of our health workers, I also acknowledge that we have shortcomings and we work at them.

I should not distance myself and we should not distance ourselves from the professionals who work hard. I stand with them through the thick and the thin as well as in the midst of rough waters- I will not stand apart.

Together we can make this country better. Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I know you know this song, Mahalia Jackson sung, *Lord give me strength not to move mountains but to climb them.*

In the continuing story of how we as a nation try to create a just and equitable Guyana, we have not yet attained our dream of eliminating poverty, of creating a society in which equity and social justice have been fully realised. In this our Guyanese story, lessons have been learnt and we all understand that the only true road to achieving a society where poverty does not persist and where social justice is our gift to every child born, is by working together.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, sisters and brothers, in the next few years, not as an option, but as an imperative, we need to climb some mighty mountains, mountains that will test our resolve and mettle as we intensify our efforts to eradicate poverty and make Guyana the El Dorado that had always been its destiny. I believe that we have the capacity and ability to climb these mountains. We must climb these mountains because it is for children everywhere; it is for our parents and grandparents. It is for us all. It is for a better Guyana. It is for a better world. It is for a kinder and gentler country in which people everywhere can live long, productive, disability-free lives and have a chance to pursue their lives' potentials.

This is my Guyana. This is our Guyana. This is the Guyana that we must build. Thank you.

**Ms. Hastings:** Mdm. Speaker, Hon. Members of this House allow me to make my contribution to the Budget 2011 under the theme, *“Together Building Tomorrow’s Guyana Today.”* I must commend the Hon. Minister of Finance for coming up with such a timely theme, but is this really true in Guyana today? Are the commitments made by the Government being transformed into reality? I am convinced that the way forward, indeed, is to deliver a brighter future for all Guyanese as is defined in the PPP/C’s Manifesto. However, this does not seem to be manifesting in the Upper Mazaruni, Region 7.

Allow me to refer to my maiden speech which I presented on 19<sup>th</sup> February, 2010 at the 115<sup>th</sup> sitting on Budget 2010, where I brought to this Hon. House the recommendations that would help to curve the problems faced by the people of this part of Guyana.

I had recommended that a School’s Welfare Officer or counsellor be placed at the education office at Kamarang, to this date there is none. I also asked that a resident nurse or a matron be placed at the overcrowded Waramdong Secondary School to this date, there is none. I had also recommended that the lone secondary school be equipped with a science laboratory and a Home Economics department to this date, there is none.

When yours truly was instructed to return to her school in which she humbly did, the Education Office at Kamarang was left without an officer in charge, except for the District Sports Organiser who had to carry the duties of the District Education Officer for the period of March to July. Hence, monthly reports and requests made by the various schools’ Head teachers were delayed. The Grade Six Assessment papers arrived late and as a result, were delivered late to schools.

9.40 p.m.

I must inform this House that it was not a matter of being seconded to the Department of Education. There was a vacancy after the District Education Officer had been promoted to be the Regional Education Officer for Region 1 but I will not go into that in this House. Fortunately, however, the District Education Supervisor who had recently completed his training at the University had returned in July and has now taken on the responsibility to perform the duties of the District Education Officer, Schools Welfare Officer, Typist Clerk



and sometimes Sweeper/Cleaner since there are no vacancies created for these jobs even though the office is housed in a separate building.

The supervisor is expected to visit all eleven schools, but to this date, the department has no boat and engine to traverse the rivers.

#### FURNITURE AND EQUIPMENT

This continues to be a dire need for the primary and secondary schools. I am happy that this year's budget, again, has allocation for furniture and equipment. However, I will like to ask the question: Will furniture be included with the extension of the Paruma Primary School? The nursery classes there do not have the required or suitable furniture- those are chairs and tables. Those children are forced to sit on the dual-type benches and, sometimes, with their feet hanging above the floor. This also goes for Jawalla, Chinowieng and Waramadong villages, just to name a few schools where there are not adequate teachers' tables and chairs, which are basic furniture that each classroom should have.

I now refer to the estimates for 2011 which has allocated moneys to build a sanitary block for Jawalla Primary School. The staff, parents and students gladly welcomed this project since this was a priority need documented in our School Improvement Plan for the past two years. However, from my past experience, substandard works continue to be done by contractors and to be specific, for example, at Kwabanna Primary School where toilets are not in operation since the school was completed three to four years ago.

#### KAMARANG SANITARY BLOCK

On the completion of this block, the workers in charge went to my office and asked that I verify that the works were completed so that they could have gotten their payments. I told the contractor that I cannot do that because I will have to go and see if the toilets are functioning. With my common sense, I did go ahead and do that. Upon arrival, I asked them to flush the toilet. They told me that water is not in the tank so I instructed them to fill a bucket of water and flush the toilet so that I can see that the toilet is in operation. They did that and it did not function; it did not flush. I said that I cannot verify that this work is fully completed. It was delayed without being used by the school for quite some time until that was rectified. Therefore, I would make a special request that when these projects are being allocated sums of moneys that value for money is done. Many times the requirements, as stated in the non-academic standards or norms which give the number of students and teachers to the amount of toilet, are not adhered to. Toilets are built without taking into consideration the size and enrolment of the schools. Hence, one size toilets are often built for all the children.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, permit me to read line three of paragraph 6.1 on page 60 of the Budget speech:-

“That notwithstanding, Budget 2011 makes provision for the implementation of certain other specific measures designed to benefit the vulnerable in our society, the elderly, the working people of our country, and our rapidly growing private sector.”

This Hon. House needs to know whether this is truly reflected in the lives of the Government workers living or stationed at Kamarang, Kaikan or Imbaimadai. For example, a teacher or community health worker earning \$40,000, or less per month, has to survive where a pound of chicken costs \$670 - \$700; \$15,000 - \$16,000 is for a cylinder of cooking gas; \$2,400 is for a gallon of kerosene; \$2,300 is for a gallon of gasoline, just to name a few items. Tell me,

how does this reflect a brighter future for these persons when no announcement was made for increase in salaries? One can sit and envision what will happen to the old-age pensioners who solely depend on their monthly pensions.

## HEALTH SECTOR

This year's budget boasts of \$14 billion being allocated for the sector. I am pleased to inform this August House that the people of Upper Mazaruni are proud to have produced a young medical doctor who recently returned from Cuba. She is now placed at the Kamarang District Hospital. However, must we be made to believe that the mere presence of a medical doctor will prevent or bring to an end the common diseases such as malaria and diarrhoea, as well as an end in the many referrals that are still being made to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation? It would have been more meaningful if the Minister of Health had a vision to upgrade the Kamarang District Hospital like the ones at Lethem and Mabaruma so that the doctor can function efficiently and effectively to the satisfaction of the people. Instead, what is happening is that the doctor continues to do referrals. I, therefore, strongly recommend that the hospital be upgraded as early as possible. As a result of this, we will know too that more jobs will be created for the young people. There are aspiring young people who would like to be medical lab technicians, microscopists, etc.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, could you believe that there are still health centres without a microscope? Jawalla Health Centre, even though Jawalla is the second largest village in the Upper Mazaruni and even though persons know to themselves, from the symptoms, that they are suffering from either vivax or falciparum, it makes no sense to visit the health post since the midwife will say to them, "I cannot help because there is no microscope or a microscopist, and I am alone."

## HINTERLAND DEVELOPMENT

When we talk about Hinterland development, we must look at this area holistically. If this Government is so serious about its mandate to develop its hinterland, why is it that it still continues to give handouts here and there to our Amerindian brothers and sisters and boasts that this is development? For example, Paruma and Jawalla were beneficiaries of the solar panels, one small battery and two bulbs distributed to almost, but not to every home. As usual, the people complained that consultations were not done to find out exactly what their needs were. Instead, the Government felt that supplying them with two bulbs, a solar panel and battery were all that the people needed. However, I am thinking that if the people are now to receive a laptop, will there be another phase and will more moneys be spent for transportation of bigger batteries and installation of points to supply power for the use of the laptop? There are persons with televisions and a few with laptops, but they cannot access the internet. The solar panel that was distributed cannot give power for a television or a laptop.

## TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT

The people have been crying ever since this Government came into power about improving their communication services. Yes, a few radio sets were distributed, but I wish to inform this Hon. House that it is time that people in the Upper Mazaruni have access to the internet and cellular phones. If I can highlight the present situation: for me to make direct contact with any of my colleagues to confirm the sittings of the National Assembly, it will cost me \$600 per minute on a satellite phone. Presently, there is a businessman who has set up an internet system where he charges \$200 per minute. I wish if the Government can find some way or the other to set up internet services at various villages.

## AGRICULTURE

I would like to invite the Hon. Minister of Agriculture... [A Hon. Member: He did not come.] His colleagues will tell him... to visit Paruma where one would find the largest plantain, cabbage and organic fruits and vegetables. I know that this is an area that can also create jobs and generate income for families there. I am inviting him to come and have discussions with the people up there so that they can venture into non-traditional crops, aquaculture and different areas that he speaks about in this Hon. House.

## YOUTH AND SPORTS

For the past years, the youth clubs have been struggling on their own to facilitate football tournaments, cricket matches and other sporting events. The Minister of Amerindian Affairs made a little input which was not adequate. Presently, the under-13 football game was introduced into six of our primary schools and this is encouraging to see the youths showcase their potentials and being engaged in meaningful exercise. Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, we need your support. We need your support to supply gears and upgrade our sports grounds which are at Kanapang, Waramadong, Paruma and Jawalla. We must show that we have interest in these young people.

## INFRASTRUCTURE – ROADS

I am very pleased to inform this House that works have begun at the Kamarang airstrip. My friend, Mr. Ramotar, indicated that it is a unique place because when he went to visit there the pilot asked him where he wanted to go. It was the first time that a plane could have taken him wherever he wanted to go. I am pleased that works have begun and I am hoping that they will be done to the value of the moneys spent.

## THE ROAD FROM KAKO TO KAMARANG

Moneys have been spent last year so that the road could have been passable for persons to use. To this date, I wish to inform this House that the road has not been put to use and that the bridges are already deteriorating. I have also read in the 2011 Estimates that the Government has plans to build a health centre at Wax's Creek. I am happy, but I wish to inform this Hon. House that after listening to the speech made by the Hon. Minister of Health that when these health centres are built, especially in far-off places like Chinowieng, Wax's Creek, and Philippi, they need to be furnished with equipment such as refrigerators because I heard the emphasis on vaccines. Yes, vaccines would come to Kamarang but sometimes transportation is a problem to take them to Philippi and, as a result, the vaccines are expired half-way and are not put to use. I am recommending that those distant health centres be furnished with a refrigerator so that if the parents cannot bring their children to get vaccines one day, they can go the other day.

In closing, I have a responsibility to represent the people of my Region, therefore, their expectation and hope is that the Government will listen and act on these matters presented in this Hon. House. Time will only tell if this will be done or not. Let this Budget 2011 be measured by the positive impact it makes on the lives of the people in the Hinterland.

Thank you very much.

**Hinds:** Mdm. Speaker, I beg to move that Standing Order No. 10 (1) be suspended so that we could continue this sitting unto the end of the fifteenth speaker.

*Question put, and agreed to*

*Standing Order suspended*

**Mr. De Santos:** This is very likely to be the last budget debate in which I will be engaged and having gone through a number of them, I rise to give my support to Budget 2011 with some degree of nostalgia.

I have listened very intently to my friend, the Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, outlined the Government's plans for this year in his own simple style, devoid of etymological niceties, but brimful of easily understandable facts and figures. It was as if he were speaking to the entire population of our country rather than to us here. Indeed, I am sure he was doing that because I am confident that a number of our citizens were glued to their television sets to hear what Budget 2011 had for them. The Hon. Minister did not disappoint them at all. From large companies and their directors, big business to old-age pensioners, they each heard of the benefits which this budget bestowed upon them.

Some people think that better salaries are the criteria by which the budget proposals can be judged. Everybody wants larger salaries - even I do - but a budget, in the words of my friend, the Hon. Minister of Health, tells a story. It is a finely woven fabric in which various aspects of governmental activities are put together and woven into a fabric which tells the complete picture of what the Government proposes to do in this period. How can we look at it without looking at the moneys to be expended on health, water, housing, agriculture and including massive expenditure to keep us from being drowned by the sea? There are so many aspects to which this budget speaks and the size of the budget is being explained in terms of being "an Election Budget." I find this as a great contradiction because, on the one hand, the Opposition says it is "an Election Budget" which I take to mean that the Government is handing out goodies as bribery for the election and then it says that the Budget has nothing for anybody. It seems to me that this is a massive contradiction in the argument of the Opposition.

There are those who will argue that the Government should do more, and I agree. I think that the Government agrees. My grandmother, the wise old lady that she was, used to always say, "*Yuh musn't hang yuh hat where yuh hand can't reach.*" Right now, there he is looking down on me, the father of this nation who warned, many, many moons ago, that one cannot live a "Rolls-Royce" lifestyle on a donkey cart economy. This Government has moved this economy successively since 1992 to now from a donkey cart economy. I am not going to argue that we are at the "Rolls-Royce" stage, but we are, at least, at the "Toyota-Nissan" stage. At this moment, his spirit, I know, is somewhere looking down on us and saying, "Very good, very good. I am proud of you."

How can we be detractors when at this very moment thousands of our citizens who, years ago, had no hope of having their own roof over their heads now sleep in comfort of their own home? They could not have even had the ambition and hope for it. It amazes me because the land which this Government is giving out to its people did not fall from heaven. It was here prior to 1992. Yet the earlier incumbents in governmental office had emasculated the Ministry of Housing - built a couple of hovels about and called them housing schemes. Look today at the kind of housing schemes that exist. Let them go to Parfaite Harmonie and all of the other housing schemes which this Government has set up and they will see orderly buildings with improved infrastructure, all improving the lives of the people.

We have, indeed, come a far way but there is far more to be done. This Government has never sat down and will never sit down feeling content with what has been achieved so far.

The progression of the budgets, over the years, bespeaks to the incremental improvement in the lives of our people – better water supply, better health facilities, and so forth. All of these things contribute to a better way of life. It is not about a man who is going to get a better salary and amen. It is about a man who is going to get free education, free medicines, old-age pension and all other facilities which this Government offers. I am glad that Minister Manickchand was able to get the comparison between those two manifestos because one manifested nothing and the other not only manifested what the Government proposes to do, but she was able to argue, I think persuasively, that the Government did most of it. There was delivery to the people of this country on the promises which got us here. And do you know what? It will bring us back here again because people are neither blind nor deaf. The Opposition cannot hope to convince people that this is a “lame duck Government” like it had.

*10.10p.m.*

The prosecution... **[Laughter]**...you will forgive me for 45 years of it. I think my colleagues on the other side would prefer to be called the prosecution rather than the defendant so they will forgive me.

In seeking to achieve this improvement, it is good that we hearken to the theme of this Budget, “Together” For me that is the operative word. For me that words has played humbug over the years and if this Opposition is willing to be patriots, which they claim to be, and would want to advance the welfare of our people then they can only do so – from that side of course – if they join hands with the Government and pursue the policies which are worthwhile and which will advance the welfare of the people of this country.

Success must be anchored in unity. With all of the challenges which today’s world offers, a country needs unity. It does not need division. Our people deserve it and we expect it. I do not expect that there should be no criticism of the Government. The Government does not always “get it right”, and Dr. Bheri Ramsaran would be the first to agree that the Government does not always “get it right”. Constructive criticisms from the Opposition are in keeping with their duty and in keeping with what they ought to do for the betterment of the country.

One of the things that has struck me, and I have been in this House since 1992, is that the Opposition was putting forward myriads of criticisms but have never brought to this House a single piece of legislation which could enhance some area of Government. There may be explanations. I do not know what they are and I do not think that they can be very... **[Mr. A. Norton:** When PNCR1-G brings a motion, PPP/C goes against it.] I am not talking about motions. I am talking about legislation – making the law of this country.

Other speakers before me have gone into the minutiae of the Budget. They have gone into it in detail and I do not propose to regale this House with it again. What I wish to say, however, and to emphasize, is that I would want my children and my children’s children and their successors, and I am sure that I would want it for the children and the children’s children of every Member of this House, to enjoy successively over the years, a better standard of living but I must emphasize that this cannot be achieved in its fullness unless we get a national unity of our peoples. That unity should start right in this House. If it starts in this House, it is likely to be reflected in the communities and it is only so that the programmes and projects devised by the Government maybe refined by suggestions from the other side, can give rise to a maximization of the fullness from which each Budget can achieve. I think that we should stop just complaining. Nothing is achieved by that. We should work hard, we should be honest, we should be forthright and if we combine all of those qualities, we are sure to succeed. This little Guyana can lead the way in many areas; not only in the Caribbean. Other speakers

alluded to our international impact. We can be heard and seen in the international arena and make a greater impact than 83,000 square miles can achieve.

Before I close, I just want to make a few observations on certain things said by other speakers. One of them was said on this side by the Hon. Priya Manickchand and that is that the Rules Committee has done its work but nothing is being done. Well, that is not entirely accurate and I think that inaccuracy has come because Ms. Manickchand is not within the profession directly. What has happened is that, his Hon. the Chancellor, has already sent out copies of these rules to be studied because, as Ms. Manickchand could appreciate, the rules cannot be dropped one morning to the lawyers with it being said, “These are the new rules. You will have to abide by them now.” They will have to be studied and there has to be some time before it can be implemented. [Mr. Nandlall: Those are the Family Court Rules.] Pardon me. [Ms. Manickchand: Family Court Rules.] Well I thought they were all included in the set of rules that I got because it was a large document.

Mrs. Backer has been talking about hammers and flees as if the blame should fall on the prosecutors who are bringing to court their cases. That is not wholly true. Hon. Speaker, you would have had some experience in these matters much more than I would. The prosecutors present the case which is given to them by an investigating team on paper. On paper, every case is open and shut for the prosecution, but we who have been on the defence side for many years know that the investigators of today do not have the calibre of the investigators 25 years ago. What happens is that the poor prosecutor, who may be inexperienced, cannot make bread out of stone. What is given to them is what they have to put forward. Then when the witnesses go into the box, the witnesses fall down. As such, this big case collapses like a pack of cards and then the prosecutor gets the blame, the judge gets the blame, even the hammer sometimes gets the blame; all of it undeservedly. There needs to be – and Minister Clement Rohee will look after this, I am sure – insurance that the investigative arm be strengthened so that the presentation of the cases will be far better before it reaches the prosecutors.

With those remarks, Mdm. Speaker, I just wish to exhort my colleagues to join hands with the Government which, by the very theme of the Budget, offers its hand in partnership. Together we can do it. Thank you.

**Mr. Seeraj:** Thank you, Mdm. Speaker. I learnt the 12 times table in school long before I could have spelt that first name so you are not alone in appreciating how difficult it is. [Mrs. Backer: I know the tune for the 12 times tables.] You can sing it outside on your own time.

Mdm. Speaker, kindly allow me, like some of my other colleagues, to convey my salutations to all of our African brothers and sisters on the naming of 2011 as the International Year of People of African descent. Further, I wish also to join my other colleagues in congratulating and, at the same time, welcome our newest addition to the Chambers, the Hon. Joan Baveghems.

On Monday 17<sup>th</sup>, the Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, presented to this National Assembly a remarkable Budget crafted to bring betterment and improvement in the lives of every Guyanese. Whilst the Hon. Minister just took under three hours to make the presentation, we must acknowledge the hard work and the thousands of man hours that were put in... [Mrs. Backer: What about “woman hours”.] It is implied in there, Hon. Member, but if you want I can put it in easily. “Women and men hours” put in by the staff of the Ministry of Finance and others in compiling this document and, at the same time, to express our appreciation for their hard work.

If one looks at this Budget in isolation of the others, we will not have a full appreciation of what it is that the PPP/C Government over the last 4 years, going onto 5 years has been trying to achieve. I think it is that because our colleagues on the opposite side did not take time to appreciate what is contained in the Budget that they sought to label it as an “Election-year Budget”. However, the Budget when looked at in the context of the other budgets is simply a continuation of the trends of the patterns and a continuation of this Administration to fulfill our promises to the people of this country; to improve their lives and bring betterment in every aspect of those lives.

I wish to comment on a few points that were raised by some of our colleagues and the Hon. Member Jennifer Wade, one of my favourite persons in this House because she is a rice farmer. She is my very good friend; almost like family. Mdm. Speaker, the Hon. Member raised some points which I think needs some clarification in this National Assembly. One of those points had to do with the drainage of lands south of the main canal within the M.M.A. Scheme. I wish to point out that in 2009-2010 the M.M.A. constructed a new channel from Belladrum to the Abary Bridge at Profit. Recently a contract to the value of \$139.6 million was awarded to Courtney Benn Construction Services to build a new sluice at the end of that channel that will drain water into the Abary. This will take care of the lands south of the main canal and if my good friend would have sought some clarification, which I readily give at all times, she would have known about what was being done.

Secondly, channels at No. 8 and No. 9 Villages, West Coast Berbice, the B.D. 3, 4 and 5 were mentioned in the Hon. Member’s presentation. I wish to state that in 2010 there was complete rehabilitation of the entire secondary system in the Abary/Berbice area. That project was started in 2008. The channels referred to, that is B.D. 3 to 5 in the villages of No. 8 and No. 9, were done since early 2009 and put on contract maintenance. In addition, the entire village’s residential drainage infrastructure was refurbished in 2010 under the Community Drainage and Irrigation Programme. Contracts were given to residents as had become the norm under the present drive to maintain drainage and irrigation canals. I can easily call a couple of names of those residents: Alvin Pluck, Troy Cuello, Wilbert Jolson and Harpal Bissoondyal. The Catherine-Calcutta Villages in the Mahaicony Area... **[Interjection: inaudible]** We do not manufacture “Smiths”. They have to be there. We do not deal with phantoms. In 2010 the M.M.A. completely refurbished the infrastructure in these villages. The cooperation and participation of the villagers during those works were exemplary and praiseworthy. Currently those villages, like others, are under regular maintenance by persons from the villages – Lyle Melville, Howard Crawford, Fredrick Crawford, Carlton Anderson, Gordon Odell, Cupid English, to name a few – and these persons can be easily contacted.

In the area of rice, I think that my very good friend, the Hon. Ms. Jennifer Wade, got the numbers upside-down. One has to wonder why it is the Hon. Member was surprised that, although it is not correct, she mentioned that 70% of exports of rice were by foreign companies and also the Guyana Rice Export Board (G.R.E.B) was named as being efficient in exporting rice, but why was it so disorganised. GREB is no longer there. Firstly, I want to clear the air as regards the amount of rice exported by foreign companies last year. It is not 70%, not in the least. Foreign-owned companies exported, of the total amount exported, 31.35% which amounts to just about 105,000 tons. Noteworthy, last year the Guyana Rice Development Board was instrumental in supervising exports to the tune of 85,759 metric tons, or 25.55 of the total. That would have been mostly rice going to Venezuela.

Here is a little bit about GREB: When one examined the record, it would have been successful only in selling out the assets of the people of this country. We have had, prior to

the solution, the Guyana Rice Marketing Board and it was felt that in order to create jobs for friends and card-bearing members under the P.N.C. regime to establish three entities to do the work of this one Rice Marketing Board. GREB is one of them – the Guyana Rice Exporting Board. Then there was GRAMA – the Guyana Rice Milling and Marketing Authority. Then there was NPRGC – the National Paddy and Rice Grading Centre. For these three entities one could have found some bit of justification for their existence when the Government was in control of mills at No. 70, in Black Bush Polder, Ruimzeigt, Anna Regina, Summerset, Berks and Wakenaam, but all of these were sold out. There were “Darling Deals” I think because the contact person at that point in time who was spearheading the divestment of the rice sector was Mdm. Darling Harris. These assets were sold out, but they still maintained this top-heavy bureaucracy, like waiting around for the rest of farmers in the country. That is why I was a bit surprised that the Hon. Member would have sought to mention that the Guyana Rice Export Board was efficient at marketing our rice. They were only efficient in selling out our assets.

We do not even have the records now to show if they were given away, sold for a pittance, whether or not payments were made, because the Rice Board was conveniently burnt down. Most of the problems that farmers are encountering now, relative to payment of farmers, stemmed from the foreign ownership of these very same people of Guyana owned rice mills that were given away by the previous administration.

I was also surprised by what the Hon. Member, Mr. Fernandes, had to say about an unfortunate incident that involved the sliding off of an excavator from the platform that it was working on in the village of Tobago in Region 1. The Government was responding to calls from the people of Region 1 and, in particular, the people of Tobago Village to be a part of the agriculture diversification programme and they requested that the excavator be taken there to provide assistance in developing the infrastructure to allow for, not only, the planning of crops but also for aquaculture. That was exactly what made me surprised that the Member would mention such unfortunate things. It was against the wishes to hold until it is much drier, their requests were accommodated, the machine was placed on what we call “mats”. It was working, under slippery muddy conditions. It slipped off and sank. That was very unfortunate. What was fortunate was that there was no loss of life and efforts had to be made to retrieve that machine. We would not have sent people there with shovels and forks to dig up the machine. We sought to send another excavator in to retrieve this one. Incidents like these are not unfortunate when you are working in the kind of conditions that we experienced in Tobago.

We could recall when the M.M.A. Scheme was being developed, Ballast Nedam lost a bulldozer behind Waimuri Area at Simatu Creek; lost it completely because they were working in similar conditions but we were able to retrieve this piece of heavy-duty equipment. I recall and I am certain the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Robert Corbin, will note too that in the early 90s we retrieved a bulldozer from Old England, an area on the left bank of the Demerara River, just above Wismar. So you know that in working in some of these conditions, these are challenges that one is faced with from time to time, but the fact of the matter is that this Administration was not daunted by the challenging conditions and we will persevere and ensure that we provide the kind of infrastructural development that will get all of our citizens involved in their desired area of activities.

I also wish to mention briefly a point that I was “ticked off” whilst the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan was talking. He did not say much for a presidential candidate, but I think that we have to appreciate the difficulties that Members of the Opposition are faced with in trying to



criticise the Budget. It is impossible and I think even the late Hon. Member Winston Murray would have found great difficulty in finding points to criticise in this Budget. One must not see the ineffective response by the Opposition to the Budget as necessarily a breakdown in their ability to criticise, but one must see it in the context of addressing a document that basically is flawless and that they got bamboozled when trying to do something which is almost impossible to do.

Case in point, Mr. Ramjattan in addressing the reduction in the Corporation Tax of 5% at the beginning said that this means little or nothing and wondered how companies can benefit from only 5%; it should be more than that. Then, immediately afterward, he said, "But you know the telephone company was not given this 5%." Suddenly, the 5% is a big thing. It does not mean anything for those who have it and for those who did not get it, it is a big thing – they cannot create jobs, they cannot expand, they cannot do this and they cannot do that. All of the points that were made by the Minister of Finance that the 5% reduction in Corporation Tax from 45% to 40% for commercial companies and from 35% to 30% for non-commercial companies was nothing. It really boggles the mind as to how it is our Members can argue in a clear manner against this Budget.

*10.40 p.m.*

The Hon. Member, Mr. Mervyn Williams, sought to really criticise the rice sector and then went on to sugar, coconut and cassava sectors and was making quotation of convenience. He even quoted from the Annual Report of the Guyana Rice Development Board and I wish to quote the same sentences that he conveniently quoted from and sought to portray to this House that what the Chairman said that was at odds with what the General Manager said. What did the Chairman say?

"Farmers have achieved yield 7 to 8 tonnes per hectare or 45 to 50 bags per acre from the G.R.D.B. 10, a variety that was released some time ago, while the G.RD.B. 9 produced yields of 6 to 7 tonnes per hectare which is 40 to 45 bags per acre."

The Hon. Member then quoted the General Manager as saying:-

"These new varieties have yield potential of 45 to 50 bags per acre under good management practices."

Here is where the Chairman was saying something and drawing an average and, on the other hand, the General Manager was saying what the yield potential of the two varieties was. The Chairman was going at an average variety, one by one, and the General Manager just mentioned the yield potential of the two varieties in the same sentence. I do not know what more I can say to enlighten the Hon. Member. There is a famous saying, "Those who express a desire to live in their ignorance, should be allowed to." [Ms. Selman: You are making that one up Mr. Seeraj] It is my right to. I can make up my own quote.

Again, I wish to refer to a little bit of history in correcting some misconceptions of the Hon. Member. He was speaking about rice production and he said that Guyana has not really come far and is still producing about 300,000 tonnes of rice. The country did not produce 300,000 tonnes of rice. Last year, it exported 336,000 tonnes of rice. The Hon. Member mentioned that in 1964, the country produced 300,000 tonnes of rice, too. What he failed to mention and what he probably is not knowledgeable of is that in 1964 the management of the rice industry was under the PPP Government. After the PPP was removed, and we all know how it was removed... [Mrs. Backer: Why do you have to talk about that?] He opened the door.

Even without looking at who was governing the country at that time, if one looks at the production statistics, especially in the agriculture sector, one can draw clear lines as to where the first P.P.P. Government was thrown out of office and when it came back in. This can be done by simply looking at the numbers. Hon. Member, Mr. Mervyn Williams, the rice industry did well in 1964 because the PPP Government was there and ensured that it did well. It took us a number of years to correct the mistakes that were made in causing us, a net food exporting country, in 1989 to import rice to satisfy domestic consumption.

The Hon. Member spoke about sugar and I wish to quote from the Budget Presentation what the Minister of Finance had to say about sugar. What he said was very revealing. It is not a case where this Administration is covering up what happened with sugar, unlike what the Hon. Member was trying to allude to. I wish to quote from page 20, item 4.7 – Sugar. [Mrs. Backer: Where are you quoting from?] The Budget Presentation themed “*Together Building Tomorrow’s Guyana – Today.*”

“Mr. Speaker, to say that 2010 was a disappointing year for the sugar sector would be an understatement of considerable proportion.”

This is a loaded statement.

“The blow to agriculture GDP by sugar was substantial and it will take us some time to recover.”

However, recovery is on the road. The Minister of Finance went on to list some of the causes of this performance – irregular weather patterns, limited availability of water irrigation at times, poor labour turnout was reflected, traditional labourers being offered alternative employment opportunities pursued by existing work force. These are alternative working opportunities that do not demand that they pay their taxes and so on. They were moving ahead. This was also a factor that influenced the mechanisation of the sector in the turnaround plan and it is specifically to address that issue.

The turnaround plan was examined in great detail by the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services and I also wish to mention, too, that the Committee on 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2010, visited the Skeldon Sugar Factory. In an article in the 30<sup>th</sup> April issue of the *Kaieteur News*, two days after the visit, some comments were made by the late Hon. Member, Mr. Winston Murray. For our information, I want to quote from that article some of the issues that were raised. At the beginning of the article it states:-

“According to the Government Information News Agency, Teixeira said that GuySuCo has always been a major concern of the Committee since it is a major contributor to the country’s Gross Domestic Product.”

Further into the article, it says:-

“Some of the major issues raised included health of the workers and their families, the Turnaround Plan of GuySuCo and the benefits of land layout. The functions of the international technology of the factory have also impressed PNC/R - IG’s Murray who believes that the current strides in that department auger well for the future of the factory. The visit, he stressed, was prompted by the need for a first hand view of the factory and its prospects for the future. While touring the facility, Murray also congratulated the technical team for the hard work done.”

The article quoted what the Hon. Member said at that time:-

“I believe that the project has a number of very competent technical people manning it and that is good. They have to ensure that they maintain that factory because it is so digitalised or computerised that you really need a high level of technical skills to oversee and man it, but what impressed me was the honesty and commitment of the people who are manning the project. He stated that the factory incorporates some of the best technology from the world of sugar manufacturing to provide a high efficiency manufacturing process that makes the best recovery of the sucrose and energy from the raw sugar cane.”

This, Mdm. Speaker, was the late Mr. Winston Murray, a seasoned economist, a seasoned Member of Parliament and a seasoned member of the Economic Services Committee. Some of the issues that were raised had to be settled and this is one case in point.

The Hon. Member also went on, without any basis, to talk about unplanned approach to agriculture. If it is unplanned, how is it that the country can record these achievements in years that have proven defining and challenging? Take the sugar sector for example. One would know that because of the changes in the price structure, the gradual removal of the preferential prices and so on, some of our neighbouring Caribbean countries have not been able to cope and have had to go out of sugar production. The Government of Guyana has put forward a turnaround plan that is based on realistic predictions and numbers to ensure that this sector, that is so critical for economic well-being, stabilises that trend in low production and then move on. I am certain that if Members are desirous of checking, they would note, on page 20 of the Budget Presentation, some of the measures that are being proposed to ensure that in 2011 production of 300,000 tonnes will be achieved. That will be an increase of 80,000 tonnes over the production for 2010 which stood at just about 220,000 tonnes.

In all sectors of agricultural development, there have been conscientious moves, in consultation with the stakeholders, to ensure that the country moves forward in a manner that will ensure sustainability. Even this morning, I had cause to meet with farmers, members of the Water Users Association, Managers of the Boersarie Conservancy, the Regional Democratic Council Chairman and the Chief Executive Officer of the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority to discuss irrigation time run in Region No. 3. It is part of the work that is done on a day to day basis in the other areas. It is because of this inclusive approach, in a planned manner, that we have been able to avoid any disaster and achieve record growth in the agriculture sector. I am certain that I would have, in a very efficient manner, clearly debunked and set the record straight on some of the misconceptions.

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

**Mr. Hinds:** Mdm. Speaker I move that the Hon. Member be given 15 minutes to conclude his presentation.

*Question put and carried*

**Mr. Seeraj:** Thank you Mdm. Speaker. Thank you Hon. Prime Minister. Let me assure you that I do not need 15 minutes but thank you much the same for your generosity. The measures that are pronounced upon in our Budget that seeks to build a better tomorrow for Guyana's today will ensure that we achieve those targets. I wish to commend to this National Assembly, the unanimous adoption of Budget 2011. Thank you.

**Mrs. Punalall:** Thank you. Mdm. Speaker, tabled before this National Assembly of our dear nation is the 2011 Budget. It is before us for debate and passage, thereafter authorising the

Government to expend these sums in the various sectors. The budgeted amount for 2011 is \$161.4 billion. Many are of the view that with this increased expenditure across our nation, things will improve somewhat. We all know that every year's budget has been bigger than the previous year. However, there has not been a corresponding general increase in the standard of living of our citizens over these years. More money in the hands of a person does not automatically mean an improvement in the life of that person. It depends on who that person is and how he spends. More money in the hands of the wrong person can very well bring destruction as he falls to the enticements and allurements which surround him. This is also true for a nation. It is very probable that if the present trend in spending continues, poverty will continue to abound in our land. There are many conditions which prevail in our society and which contribute to the ongoing poverty - conditions which are not adequately addressed in this Budget.

#### FACTORS WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO POVERTY IN GUYANA

I first refer to ignorance which is a lack of information or a lack of knowledge. In 2010 a sum of \$21.8 billion was expended in the education sector. This year \$24.4 billion has been allocated. Various details have been given as to how this money will be spent. However, there is the burden of extra lesson fees which the average Guyanese family has to deal with. Depending on the number of subjects taken by a CSEC student, this may cost between \$20,000 and \$30,000 per month. Any family which earns around \$50,000 per month cannot afford this and there are many such families in our midst. Coupled with this, there are other expenses such as travelling, food, clothing, textbooks and stationery supplies for school children. These expenses make education something not so easily assessable, especially, to the lower and middle class earners. The Government's provision of school uniforms and snacks for some students is a very feeble effort in alleviating this problem for we know that not every student who have these needs can or will be helped by the Government. There is an old truth which says, "Knowledge is power". Therefore people without knowledge lack power and struggle in poverty. Poverty places the poor at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to education.

There is a second lingering factor which causes people languish in poverty and it is called dependency. Dependency results from being on the receiving end of charity. In the short run, as after a disaster, charity may be essential for survival. In the long run charity can contribute to the possible demise of the recipient and, certainly, to ongoing poverty. Most people in this nation depend on remittances to survive and on the Government of the day to provide certain basics. The 2009 Report of Human Rights Practices in Guyana, as put out by the US State Department said:-

"The minimum public sector wage was \$34,055 per month. There were minimum wages for certain categories of private sector workers including retail cashiers, clerks, printers, drivers and conductors starting with a minimum wage of \$4,120 per week. Although enforcement mechanisms exist, it was difficult to put them into practice and unorganized workers, particularly women and children, were paid less than the service sector's legal minimum wage. The legal minimum wage did not provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family."

The case of security guards, some of whom watch our schools and other valuable buildings worth millions are in point here. They are contracted at a rate of \$100 per hour. Sad to say, many of these guards are women who single handedly raise their children. This Budget is

silent on the minimum wage issues. Simply stated, the dependency on remittances and the State will continue here, thus ensuring that the poor remains poor.

On the subject of dependency as it contributes to poverty, I make reference to the Low Carbon Development Strategy (L.C.D.S.) which is so widely spoken of in this House. We will benefit a great lot as a nation if we do receive the LCDS money promised by Norway. But with the same breath, we must admit that we will become dependent on foreigners. Just as how there is dignity in a person earning his/her daily bread, so is there dignity in a nation which relies on its own resources and sweat. Whilst it is important for us to consider global matters, we must, more importantly, consider what is going on at home.

Dr. Phillip Bartel, writing on the subject of community development, said:-

“While we think globally, we must act locally.”

There is a third factor which contributes to continued poverty and that is dishonesty. I refer, here, to resources that are intended to be used for community service or facilities and are diverted through corruption of persons in position or power. My colleague, Hon. Member Khemraj Ramjattan, spoke in great detail of this scourge. However, I will briefly quote from the 2009 Report on Human Rights Practices in Guyana as put out by the US State Department:-

“The World Bank worldwide government’s indicator reflected that government corruption was a serious problem. There was widespread public perception of serious corruption in the Government including law enforcement and the judicial system. Low wage public servants were easy targets for bribery.”

There is a fourth factor which contributes to continued poverty. I speak of the struggle of the Neighbourhood Democratic Council. The National Democratic Councils (N.D.Cs) across this country are literally choked by Central Government to the point where they can hardly execute the smallest of projects without Central Government’s approval. Up to a few months ago, NDCs could have spent up to \$250,000 on projects without the Subject Minister’s approval. This ceiling was recently drastically reduced. At the present time, NDCs will have to seek the minister’s approval for any expenditure above \$100,000. This means that little things such as the purchasing of a brush cutter or the purchasing of a truck load of stone or the repainting of a building cannot be undertaken without ministerial approval. This is almost saying to us that there is no need for the Local Government structure in Guyana anymore. No Government can do it all. This arrangement will further hinder the development of our towns and communities.

Fourteen billion has been allocated to the health sector in this year’s budget which is \$0.6 billion more than in 2010. Mention was made that a storage bond in Diamond will be completed in 2011. Whilst it is important that we build new structures, it is equally important that existing facilities be properly maintained.

I will use the example of the Diamond Diagnostic Centre (D.D.C). Late last year, during a visit to the DDC, which is a fairly new facility, it was found to be in very poor shape because of poor maintenance. Stagnant water, with a lot of mosquito worms, was found at the base of the water tank supplying the facilities. There were broken gutters, exposed electrical wires and non- functioning toilets. Staff had no proper lunchroom. The living quarters of the Cuban doctors were in poor condition. There was no proper system in place to fix a flat tire for the ambulance. This is just to name a few.

The Ministry of Health is often assisted by donors, especially, migrated Guyanese. Donors assist hoping that their countrymen can benefit from their generosity. Unfortunately, what they give is often left to fall apart. I will cite two examples. The first relates to an ambulance which was donated by a family in London about 4 years ago and designated to the Beterverwagting (BV) health centre. It worked well for a few months and, thereafter, was laid up for parts. It is still there idle - a sure sign of neglect. On the issue of an ambulance for the East Coast Demerara, the Regional Democratic Council was forced to remove ambulance, PGG 3150 because of bad condition. At the time when this vehicle was grounded, it was in a worse condition than condemned minibuses which are converted into cargo vans. This ambulance is in the same condition at an east coast workshop for anyone who is interested in taking a look.

The second example relates to the Health Centre of Mora Point, Mahaicony River. This facility was upgraded through the help of a few migrated Guyanese from the area just less than two years ago. A few months ago, the brother of one of those families, who happened to be a diabetic, suffered a slight injury whilst fishing and went there for medical help. There was no nurse there to help him so he went to the Mahaicony Diagnostic Centre where he was treated for three days. Despite the treatment, his wound worsened and he had to be taken to the Prashad Hospital where emergency surgery was performed to save his leg from amputation.

*11.10 p.m.*

His bill had to be paid by his relatives who live in New York; the very ones who assisted in upgrading the Mora Point health centre. Upon his return home to Mahaicony River there was still no nurse at the health centre to dress his wounds. This was very discouraging news to those who helped to upgrade this facility. Up to the time of this presentation there is was no permanent nurse, doctor of medic present there. Medical personnel only visit this facility occasionally.

## TOURISM

It is reported in the 2011 Budget that visitor arrivals rose by 6.3% over the previous year. Let no one be misguided into thinking that Guyana has become a tourist attraction. Most of those who visit here are migrated Guyanese who came back for a needed occasion; maybe a wedding, a funeral or just to check on their estate left here. They are not people who are of foreign parentage who flock here by large cruise ships. With all the garbage around, with serious crime on the rise, and with dangerous roadways who is interested to come here. Note this travel advisory from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office:-

“Driving in Guyana can be dangerous because of poor road fence, of road users, frequent hazards, poor lighting and poor road conditions in some areas. Drive defensively. Driving at night should be restricted at much as possible.”

A lot more has to be invested before Guyana can become a tourist destination and the 2011 Budget offers very little in this regard.

## AGRICULTURE

There are two important points I would like to mention with regard to this sector. They are rice and sugar. Regarding rice, it is reported that in Regions Two, Three, Four, Five and Six thirteen drying facilities were constructed in order to reduce spoilage of paddy. It would have been so much better if these drying facilities were modern inventions but, unfortunately, they

are not. They are just open concrete floors which can only be used during dry weather conditions. Farmers who use these floors will have to dry their paddy the same way their great grandfather did decades ago. When there is an overcast they will have to speedily remove their paddy whether it is dried or not. The greater need for farmers is drying facilities which can help them during inclement weather conditions. The Government, here, should take the example of the Philippines where the Government has an extension service called the Bureau of Post Harvest Research and Extension. This extension service provides farmers with access to grain facilities as a public investment. These flat bed driers can reduce moisture content in grains from 31% to 14% within six to eight hours. These driers have an indirect firer multi fuel bio mass furnace which uses rice hull and corn cob as fuel. In developing a country the choice has to be made between the good and the better and sometimes between the better and the excellent. It is good to have thirteen more drying floors but is time we move on to the better and to the excellent.

In the Finance Minister's remark pertaining to a disappointing year for the sugar sector, the Hon. Minister Dr. Ashni Singh said:-

“Poor labour turnout was reflected in 52% crop attendance by cane harvesters as compared to 62% and 72% in 2009 and 2008 respectively. This is partly reflective of the structural changes in the labour market induced by alternative employment opportunities being pursued by the existing work force.”

There was a time when estate advertised for 50 labours and 200 would gather at their gates. Those days are no longer with us. Cane harvesters who could not find work here moved to Suriname, Trinidad, St. Kitts, Barbados etc. where they receive a better pay. Some have returned after a few crops and invested their moneys in profitable areas; others never return. For the Guyana Sugar Corporation to really turn around it will have to create conditions to re-attract man power into its employment. The 2011 Budget assumes that this will somehow happen but nothing happens in a vacuum.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

It is a well know fact that ingress and egress to the Hinterland remains a tedious, dangerous time consuming and costly affair. There is little provision in this Budget to improve this area. If Guyana is to move forward its hinterland must be opened. Trails must become proper roads, proper bridges must replace makeshift crossings over creeks and rivers, safe and comfortable rest stops must be built along roadways, and proper security measures must be in place at strategic points. In August 2010 my husband and I narrowly escaped death at Mango Landing on the Essequibo River because of lack of proper infrastructure.

## MIGRATION

I just mentioned the lost of our came harvesters to our neighbours. However, people from all walks of life have left Guyana and many who have not left as yet are waiting on the opportunity to go even if they have to endure some initial hardships to go. In the 24<sup>th</sup> January, 2011 edition of the *Stabroek Newspaper* one of the staff wrote:-

“The migration of Guyanese to Barbados is largely the fault of the Guyana Government to create work for the people, provide decent security and social services, to respect human rights, and ensure equality. The lack of these conditions has caused Guyanese to flee in droves.”

On its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the United States (USAID) on 4<sup>th</sup> June, 2005 reporting on the development challenges facing Guyana warned:-

“Guyana currently faces a multitude of development challenges. A weak economy, rising crime, poor security, continued migration, the specter of HIV and AIDS, and a political climate that threatens its ability to consolidate democracy. The country has been losing its educated professionals. The loss of human capital undermines the Government of Guyana’s capacity to provide quality health, education and social services, impedes Government Administration and management and fosters dependence on donors. The private sector also suffers from these human resource constraints.”

Between 2005 and the present time we are in many ways worst off. There are those who argue that folks come here to reside. However, this is a tiny fraction compared to those leaving. In any case those who come here are not the ones who opt for the sugar cane or rice fields. They head for the gold mines or enter into some business ensuring that they lead a profitable life and even have something to send to their homeland. One has to be a fool to believe that the Brazilian gold miners declare all their gold to Guyana or that the numerous Chinese businesses do not remit funds to their families in China. These are hidden losses to our economy which we can ill afford.

We must address the pull and push factors that cause migration. There should be more in this Budget to cause our people to want to remain here. What are some of these pull and push factors prevailing here?

1. Lack of scholarships will cause our young academics to move further afield.
2. If people do not feel safe they will leave for other lands where they can enjoy peace.
3. If our high taxation remains as it is folks will leave for other lands where taxation is more relaxed.
4. If folks can do better economically elsewhere they will not remain here in poverty.
5. If people continue to be overcrowded on the coastal plain where 90% of our population dwell on 10% of our land. They will go some place to other countries where there is not so much pressure for space.
6. If political and racial conflicts continue here, folks will leave.

In the interest of transparency and accountability, I request that the Hon. Minister Priya Manickchand publish the names and addresses of all 42,000 pensioners over age 65 on the Ministry’s website. Surely the Ministry has such a record. In this way members of the public will have an opportunity to know how many names are phantom and how many are not. This is the E-Government era; this is something the Ministry will have no difficulty in doing. It is time, also, for the Freedom of Information Bill to be before this House and passed so that the public will have access to the information they need.

In closing, I quote from the Holy Bible Ephesians 4:25 and 28:

<sup>25</sup>“wherefore putting away lying (untruth), speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

<sup>28</sup>“Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that is good.”

Thank you.



**Mrs. Sahoye-Shury:** First of all I would like to welcome Mrs. Joan Bavegens to the club of Parliament. Congratulations Mrs. Bavegens.

As I said, many times before in this Parliament, Budgets are estimates- a projection of spending but when the Government comes back during the year for supplemental provisions it hears all sorts of nonsense.

I am indeed pleased to rise, today, to support the 2011 Budget of \$161.4 billion. The Budget was crafted by an excellent son of the soil Dr. Ashni Singh who in his presentation reported the achievements of 2010, also, explaining that the country has travelled the most perilous global and regional crisis in living memory; circumstances which are still to be unwound completely and from which many around the world still reel. Today, the Minister's dedication and alacrity so using his gigantic skills as a master economist in five years has produced a Budget superseding all other in a fashion dealing with all sectors of the country. To say, therefore, that it is an election Budget is far from the truth. When a master advances his knowledge and skills, who in the world could deny the truth and the facts of today? Not too long ago, in 2006, when we launched the monthly drainage and irrigation programme to clean the drains and parapets what did the opposition say? "It was an election ploy". Why then do we maintain it? The programme continues and has increased.

Come on PNC R-1G wake up and smell the roses! The Guyanese have heard this song already and it is an old one; be innovative colleagues and concoct another song with lyrics that could help you in your present dilemma.

## EDUCATION

I would like to now deal with education. When the PPP/C took office in 1992, education and its facilities were disastrously inadequate. [**Mrs. Backer:** What?] Yes. I do not have the time tonight to deal specifically with the schools. Conditions in the classrooms, furniture, washrooms, water and electricity are massively different today. Our children are taught in ambience that is conducive to good learning; not a classroom under a tree- I have been here for a long time. Let me tell you more about education. There is not a single housing scheme established by this Government where adequate preparations were not made re: our schools to educate our children. Where there were schools an assessment was made and we enlarged these schools. In other areas, the Government built new schools taking into consideration the technological age giving our children a desire of wanting to learn; instilling in them their responsibility for tomorrow's Guyana. Government also upgraded teacher education so improving quality and efficiency of teacher education delivery and also improving the capacity for more effective teaching and learning.

## HEALTH

There are two elements in any country throughout the world that assist in their development: Health and Education. It is being asked why so much money is spent in health. [**Member:** Who asked that?] You the Opposition asked that. Let us get down to... [**Mrs. Backer:** Memory lane?] ... the basics. Not memory lane as yet. If a child is sick he/she cannot learn. If the teacher is sick she/he cannot teach; if the worker is sick he/she cannot produce. What does this say? A collapse of the system and structure, is it that we do not deserve a healthy and educated nation? Why only a privileged few? What about the nearly 60% of the population that is in need? This PPP/C Government is answering the wishes and aspirations of the people because we are a caring Government, dedicated and determined to give not only hope but offering a constructive solution.

## ROADS

Let me deal with roads a little- I am cutting my speech because I know that it is late- the idea of destroying the railway was short-sighted and speaks loudly and clearly that there was not any constructive vision for an advanced Guyana. Where more money... [Mrs. Backer: You had liked that train ride, did you not?] “Yall did wrong man”; confess it. ...where more money has to be spent on highway roads and their tributaries, streets and farms to the market roads. When a Government, in its haste, spends money irrationally without assessing what works then Guyana is in trouble. This is exactly what happened during the 28 years of the PNC.

Throughout the world, and many of you have travelled, trains are an important factor in the development and the wealthy countries kept their trains. [Mrs. Backer: Why does the Government not bring trains back?] If you sold them then give the Government the money that got from the sale and we will bring them back. It is cheaper to ship by train because the upkeep is cheaper. What is the Government’s thrust to continue to build state of the art main roads etc? Improving farm to market roads, giving proper access to the farmers since Guyana is an agricultural country where we could not only supply our needs but have adequate supply to many countries of the world.

## HOUSING

A pattern of behaviour and a dastardly attack seems to exist, not only on the Minister of housing but also, on our housing policy. Let me give the House a little history. Why did the PPP Government decide, when we took office in 1992, to implement a Ministry of Housing? It was because we realised that:

1. The population was growing;
2. There was a need for acquisition of land cheaply and;
3. The children would have to have adequate shelter.

Did the Government meet these needs? I must say, emphatically, yes! 4,334 house lots were given out in 2009; 6,331 were given out in 2010 and for 2011; it was 7,500. But what happened before this? In Wisrock, Region 10, the residents were asked to build cooperatively helping others but the PNC failed to give them titles to their lands. What a shame! The PPP/C Government gave out titles to these poor Guyanese. The Opposition has the nerve to speak of discrimination.

Let me, for one moment, take you down memory lane. In Sophia, Patterson, Turkeyen, Sections A, B, C, D, E, F and R 80% of the resident are black. What about Caneville? What about Rasville? In Rasville, the PNC, while in office, sent the resident to farm without proper documentation. When the PPP/C came into office the residents claimed that they owned the land because it is what they were told. This Government went there, and over a two year period regularised Rasville so that the people now have titles to their lands.

23.40 p.m.

When they speak of discrimination in this House, the PNC will have to pull their act together. We forget that Mrs. Burnham was living on a land at the back and requested a title for the land, and she was refused, and the PPP/C gave her a title for the land. I have the documentation here of Housing venation. The documentation is here, that in their 28 years although they had a document of feeding, housing and clothing the nation, all of the units they gave out in 20 years was little over 4,000 units.

I am an old warrior at this, and you know that. I sat here and listened with sadness in my heart, and it was an insult to the senior citizens of this country when painfully and disgracefully they claim that over seventeen thousand seniors are bogus, “phantom”. Is it that we are degrading this Parliament? Do we not want to keep the standard of Parliament? We are degrading Parliament. It is not place that you can sit intelligently and constructively assess and discuss a situation? When you are going to come in this Parliament and the newspaper carries it all over the place – I wanted to say a different word – which our senior citizens are robbing the situation, and wants to blame the Minister for this. This is what is actually being said, that she is not accounting for over how many billion dollars. Come on.

I heard a couple of people speaking about shared governance. Let history tell you and the young ones that were not here – Mrs. Backer, knows what I am talking about...

**Mrs. Backer:** I am not young, but I know I look good.

**Mrs. Sahoye-Shury:** You know what I am talking about. I was Deputy Mayor of this city Georgetown, and the PPP/C tried their best to have that cohesion and shared governance at the City Council level. A meeting was held between the PNC and the PPP, and the President of the day (Dr. Cheddi Jagan) said that he was not prepared to accept a gentleman agreement. Shared governance has to be on trust. How can we trust you? The second thing you remember is that the elections commission sent a document to Parliament. It was voted for unanimously, and what did the PNC do? They took us to Court. How could you, the PNC.... **[Interjection: inaudible]** You all try to have short memories. If you are going to vote for something unanimously in this Parliament then your word is not your bond, and therefore we cannot trust you.

**Mrs. Backer:** Mdm. Speaker, on a Point Of Order. I believe that the name just called “Ester Pereira” that there is an ongoing matter in the court. When the Hon. Member said PPP, PNC I did not seek to intervene, but there is an extant matter with Ester Pereira, so she would be refrained. She is prevented from speaking on it. I think my learned friend Nandlall knows that that matter is still pending in the Courts of Guyana.

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, if the matter is *sub-judice*, I do not believe that you should mention it by name.

**Mrs. Sahoye-Shury:** I did not mention any name. Come on, listen carefully, I never mentioned name. Very wicked, just as she was when she was in the City Council.

Mdm. Speaker, I will conclude. Once man understands his plight he will try to break out from the cocoon that has held him down so long. One then realizes that the cocoon has had its uses, but its time of its usefulness is over. He becomes ready for his flight into a new life of freedom. This flight takes into its ambit that Guyana has developed and is developing under the PPP/C Government. This is why together we are building tomorrow’s Guyana today. Only the PPP/C could accomplish this task and will be onward to victory. Thank you very much.

## ADJOURNMENT

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, this brings us to the end of a long day.

**Mr. Hinds:** Mdm. Speaker, I move that the House be adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m.

*Question put and agreed to*

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** The House is so adjourned.

*Adjourned accordingly at 11.50 p.m.*