

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2012-2013) OF THE TENTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN

55TH Sitting

Wednesday, 24TH April, 2013

Assembly convened at 2.23 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Article carried in the *Stabroek News*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have two announcements. The first pertains to a newspaper article in today's edition of the *Stabroek News*, Wednesday, 24th April, 2013, at page 22, which states as the headline, "Estimates for Region 7 passed with Opposition abstention" and it has a photograph of the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development.

I am assured by the Deputy Speaker that at no time when the vote was put for Region 7 expenditures, both current and capital, there was any abstention by any component of the Opposition or the whole. They may have been quiet but there was no vote taken to have deemed them to have abstained. I have since satisfied myself that quietness should not be misinterpreted for a refusal to participate in the vote because it does and would have sent the unwanted message that there was something wrong with the vote or the expenditures budgeted for Region 7. I thought that I should correct that.

Events pertaining to 23rd April, 2013 Sitting

Mr. Speaker: My second announcement pertains to the events as they unfolded last evening. I have since seen and heard statements, some of which are attributed to the Speaker and staff of the Parliament Office. I wish to state that unlike the rules of the High Court of Guyana and, in particular, Order 26, rules 11 and 12, which we lawyers use, there is no reference in the Standing Orders of the National Assembly of Guyana for a slip rule. The slip rule really is that if there is an error, the court or judge may make a correction to that and that is provided for in the High Court rules. These rules allow for errors to be corrected or they give a general power to the Court to amend. We have no such rules in our Standing Orders.

The business of making amendments to the nation's Estimates is a very serious and precise one and it must be approached carefully and clinically. In last night's instance, the vote was taken and then the point was raised afterwards by the Government's Chief Whip. After consultation with the Clerk, I ruled that it was not possible to go back to correct what had been voted on. I dealt with what was placed before this House and I applied the applicable Standing Orders.

If the figures were wrong, then neither the Speaker nor the staff can be blamed for that. The Standing Orders are clear that an amendment cannot be made for a sum greater than the amount budgeted. Also, based on my ruling of just last week that the Standing Orders must be strictly interpreted and applied, I was obliged to rule as I did. Prior to my ruling, I cautioned that the consequences of voting against the entire Programme would be the result that several other line items would be struck down and the vote was proceeded on.

Finally, I will take no responsibility for any mistakes and neither will sit back and allow myself, the Clerk or any member of the Parliament Office to be made scapegoats or pawns of convenience in this sordid matter.

Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

For Written Replies

NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION PASSED AGAINST REO, REGION NO. 8

Mr. Bulkan: Could the Hon. Minister inform Members of the National Assembly what actions he has taken in relation to the No-Confidence Motion that was passed against REO Harsawack of Region No. 8?

No reply provided.

PROTOCOL RELATING TO AN APPOINTED OFFICIAL OF A REGIONAL ADMINISTRATION

Mr. Bulkan: Could the Hon. Minister inform Members of the National Assembly what is the protocol relating to an appointed official of a Regional Administration committing the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development for the provision of goods and services and, in particular, if Mr. Harsawack is empowered to commit the Region in the absence of approval of the RDC?

No reply provided.

COMMUNITY SERVICES ENHANCEMENT PROJECT

Mr. Bulkan: In 2006, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and Government of Guyana initiated the project named at the caption and which had as its purpose/objective, to prepare four communities for their upgrading to municipalities, these being, Bartica, Charity, Parika and Supenaam.

- (i) Could the Hon. Minister provide the relevant details for the Communities Services Enhancement Project, which was initiated in 2006 and give information on its current status?
- (ii) Could the Hon. Minister say which other communities have been added to the four previously identified and for similar upgrading in status, if any?

No reply provided.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, last evening a Member of this House approached me with a desire to have a personal statement made, arising out of a letter he has received. After some discussion,

we have settled on an approved draft and so I invite Mr. Desmond Trotman, Hon. Member, to read that statement to the House.

Mr. Trotman: The Hansard will reveal that in the course of my contribution to the 2013 Budget debate, I made the following statement:

“Let me take this opportunity to offer some advice to the Hon. Minister of Finance of this minority Government. You should get out of your ivory tower and go on the streets. You will be surprised when you hear what people are saying. You will hear them saying to the majority that in the PPP/C we have a criminal cabal and a dictatorship to dismantle and dismantle it we must.”

It will be recalled that the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs, Mr. Clement Rohee, took offence at that statement and sought to have it withdrawn and struck from the records. Notwithstanding your ruling that I was only reporting on what people were saying and that the words were not mine and did not, therefore, trespass beyond the boundaries of parliamentary privilege, the following letter was sent to my office and given to me on 18th April, 2013. The letter was signed by the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs. I will not quote its content here, as I have attempted to circulate it to Members of the Assembly. But I ask that it forms part of the record.

Mr. Speaker, I will limit myself to pointing out that in the face of your ruling, the Minister’s letter raises the spectre of the abuse of power and threatens the fundamental rights of Guyanese, including the political opponents of the Government.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the Minister’s letter is clearly intended to intimidate me and to violate the privileges which you referred to in your ruling. I wish to use this opportunity to place on the record the following response to the Hon. Minister:

1. Under no circumstances will I be cooperating with the police in this charade.
2. If the Hon. Minister feels as strongly as he claims on this matter, I recommend that he institute charges and place me before the courts, but I assure the Hon. Minister that I would not be intimidated into silence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, article 172 of our Constitution is quite clear. It states:

“(1) Subject to the provisions of paragraphs (2), (3) and (4), Parliament may by law determine the privileges, immunities and powers of members of the National Assembly and the members thereof.

(2) No civil or criminal proceedings may be instituted against any member of the Assembly for words spoken before, or written in a report to, the Assembly or to a committee thereof or by reason of any matter or thing brought by him therein by petition, bill, resolution, motion or otherwise.”

It is clear to me that whatever may have been said, however unpalatable or uncomfortable, shall not and will not, for so long as I am Speaker, give rise to any prosecution against any Member. I will defend that right of that Member.

Mr. B. Williams rose.

Mr. Speaker: No, Mr. Williams, there is no debate on this matter.

Mr. B. Williams: I do not want to debate the matter.

Mr. Lumumba: I rise on a Point of Order. If this honourable House in the future...for example, if I am to receive a letter which names individuals – anyone of my peers, whether they be from the Government or Opposition side – which says that they are murderers and criminals, you are saying that it is allowed from now on.

Mr. Speaker: If you receive a letter?

Mr. Lumumba: Yes. If someone writes me a letter and I get up, like Mr. Trotman did, and quote it.

Mr. Speaker: You may say that you received a letter and you may read the letter.

Mr. Lumumba: I just want to know for clarification.

Mr. Speaker: If you say it, it is a different matter.

Mr. B. Williams: Mr. Speaker, on a Point of Clarification, might I respectfully refer you and this honourable House to a letter dated 13th April, 2013, under the hand of the Hon. Member, Carl Greenidge? At the outset of the consideration of the Estimates, the Hon. Member had indicated that he required your imprimatur in relation to revising the Estimates to bring them in line with the Constitution with respect to certain constitutional commissions. In particular, the last paragraph of his letter...

“The APNU seeks approval of the Speaker for this matter to be not considered until the Minister of Finance withdraws a proposal for appropriation and submits the request in a manner required by the Constitution.”

In other words, he is talking about the block vote requirement. We are wondering what the situation is as we are fast concluding the consideration of the Estimates.

Mr. Speaker: Your Chief Whip spoke to me about this matter yesterday. I thought she would have advised you. When last this matter was raised, it was raised with Mr. Greenidge and Mr. Ramjattan. Mr. Ramjattan had indicated that he would like some time to do some more research. When ready, he would approach me and I would entertain but I have not heard anything. I was hoping that someone would have said something to me but, in the meantime, I moved ahead with the Estimates. I remain open to hearing from Mr. Greenidge again. I had indicated in the past that I shared the letter, with Mr. Greenidge’s permission, with the Minister of Finance and I am sure that by now a response may be available. At no time was there any attempt to deny the opportunity to be heard. Mr. Ramjattan did ask for an opportunity for some time to do some research.

Ms. Ally: Mr. Speaker, I just want to draw to your attention that I think there are two separate matters that we are talking about. The matter of this letter – and I did raise it with both Mr. Ramjattan and Mr. Greenidge – which was referred to by Mr. Williams, is not the one that is engaging the attention of Mr. Ramjattan and Mr. Greenidge. It was a previous letter. I do not know if there is a mix-up somewhere.

Mr. Speaker: Is this not the letter in which I said I was giving my preliminary views when I came out last week and said that on the face of it, it appears to me that I could not instruct the Government on how it should prepare its estimates? Is that not the letter?

In conversation with Mr. Ramjattan, he said that he needed – that was my understanding – some time to do some research and he had not formed an opinion on it. If there was a mistake, then I would have to take responsibility but, certainly, I was of the view that we were *ad idem* on that – that we were speaking about the same matter.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Speaker, if you would just allow me, I thought that is the letter we are talking about too. There is another letter which was written sometime ago in connection with variations and a statement as to the implications of variations when they are supplementary and financial papers being brought and that they ought to come from the Ministry of Finance. I do not know if that is what Mr. Greenidge had in mind.

Mr. Speaker: I know about the fulsomeness of information that accompanied supplementary. That is what I have raised with the Minister already, separately. But the letter under the hand of Mr. Greenidge last week spoke about these Estimates and you did indicate to me yes, but you needed some time to do some research.

Mr. Ramjattan: Absolutely. I needed the time to research how it is supposed to be formatted and because of our almost full time into the Estimates, I have not done so as yet. I am asking for some further time.

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much for your explanation but I am left somewhat puzzled because we have before us an article in the Constitution which is very clear. The article requires that certain agencies be treated in a particular way and it is written in the most unambiguous language, as are the rules of the Standing Order that you quote. I understand that as the Chairman of the Committee of Supply, you have a responsibility to interpret the rules, as you do, fulsomely, in all of these sessions, so I find it a little puzzling that your decision in interpreting the rules could be withheld on such time as another Member of this House acts or does not act. Suppose the Member decides not to respond at all. What implications does that have? We are not looking at a matter of substance here. It is a rule and it cannot be the responsibility of another Member of the House to advise on that rule. I am sorry. I am unclear as to what has happened.

Mr. Speaker: My recollection is that Mr. Ramjattan was in your presence when he asked for that request. I am just as confused because, in your presence, both of you were before me, he said

that he needed some time to do some research and then both of you would indicate to me when you wish to raise the matter. I am as confused as you are, Mr. Greenidge. Believe me.

I am sending for a copy of the letter and I will make a ruling on it forthwith. I will make a ruling on the matter within the hour.

Ms. Teixeira: Two issues I would like to raise: one, I am not sure what we are dealing with. It is Personal Explanations. What item are we on? Two, on this side of the House, we are totally in the dark. We have no idea about these letters. We do not know what is going on and if there is going to be a ruling, we would appreciate being brought up to speed with what is going on.

Mr. Speaker: A letter was delivered to me, which I acknowledged last week. I asked permission of Mr. Greenidge to share that letter whilst he was on his feet. He gave permission. I had that letter photocopied and shared with the Minister of Finance. Mr. Greenidge raised the matter a few days afterwards and I believe that there was even some remark which came from your goodly self that the Government was not in a position to make a statement or give a response. I then said that I was not calling on one but there was, as a matter of courtesy, an expectation of, at least, an acknowledgement that this matter was before the House.

If it is that every Member of the House requires a copy, the Clerk and I will ensure that every Member gets a copy. As I said, we will make a determination on it this afternoon. If Members prefer to wait on that, we will, but, if not, I would like for us to proceed with the Estimates.

We will proceed and when the letter is circulated, we will return to it.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

MOTION

BUDGET SPEECH 2013 – MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2013

“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 2013 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 2013-03-25

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2013, of a total sum of **one hundred and ninety four billion, three hundred and forty three million, seven hundred and sixty four thousand, eight hundred and seventy three dollars (\$194,343,764,873), excluding fourteen billion, and four hundred and ninety six million, six hundred and seventy nine thousand, one hundred and twenty seven dollars (\$14,496,679,127)** which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in the undermentioned schedule, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to make further provision in respect of finance.” *[Minister of Finance]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will resolve ourselves into the Committee of Supply to continue consideration of the Estimates for the 2013 Budget.

Assembly resolved itself into Committee of Supply.

In Committee of Supply

Mr. Chairman: On today’s agenda, we have the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, Ministry of Housing and Water and Ministry of Finance. We are scheduled to go with these until 10.00 p.m. tonight and then, thereafter, there will be the appropriate Appropriation Bill and the second reading of the Fiscal Enactment (Amendment) Bill 2013.

Agency: 24 Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment

Current Expenditure

Programme: 241 – Ministry Administration - \$98,788,000

Mr. Greenidge: Can I be allowed to ask of the Hon. Minister an explanation for the increases shown under line item 6116 – Contracted Employees - and ask what categories of staff they are? There is an increase relative to the revised 2012 figure which moved from \$13,688,000 to \$38,395,000 and it does not seem to accord with the increases which I can pick up from the staffing details.

Minister of Natural Resources and Environment [Mr. R. Persaud]: In relation to the Hon. Member's question, it must be recalled that this Ministry is a relatively new Ministry and the allocation of \$13,688,000 covered salaries for just about nine staffers within the period of May to December of last year. The allocation of \$38,395,000 is intended to cover the full year's salary for a complement of close to 14 staffers within the Ministry, catering for increases as were awarded at the end of last year.

Mr. Greenidge: I thank the Minister for the explanation but I do believe that the Ministry was not that recently established. The 2012 figure requested in my copy of the Estimates is \$22 million. Presumably, if you were going to employ the nine staff members for 2012, that \$22 million would have covered them. In fact, you spent less than the \$22 million and now you are proposing to spend almost the combined amount of the budget and the actual expenditure of 2012. Please clarify.

Mr. R. Persaud: The Hon. Member is correct. We were not able to achieve the full complement, thus the expenditure stated as the revised 2012.

Mr. Greenidge: What exactly was the complement intended when the 2012 Budget was laid? I understand you to have said that nine were actually employed during 2012. What was the complement that gave rise to the figure of \$22 million as opposed to a figure of around \$14 million?

Mr. R. Persaud: The intended complement then was in the vicinity of 12 but we were not able to have those filled. But for 2013 and going forward, we have the complement of 14 under that line item.

Mr. Greenidge: In that case, Mr. Chairman, would you please ascertain from the Minister the different categories because the arithmetic, just off the top of my head, does not seem to be in sync? If nine staff members would warrant roughly \$14 million and 12 staff members would warrant \$22 million, I am not sure that 14 would give rise to the figure of nearly \$40 million that is here. The numbers just do not seem to mesh, unless you are speaking of two new members whose salaries are dramatically greater than the others.

Mr. R. Persaud: Just to give an indication of the staffers whom we are referring to and the approximate salaries, there are: accounts clerk III - \$47,605; two senior engineers - \$159,414 each; one compliance manager - \$388,500; permanent secretary - \$532,980; two forest rangers - \$50,360 each; policy coordinator - \$436,884; internal audit manager - \$126,594; stakeholder assistant - \$60,224; driver - \$44,408. That is a general breakdown of the staffers there and their earnings.

Mr. Greenidge: I am not sure the breakdown that you gave is for which year but, in any case, I do not think that I am able, on my feet, to determine whether the numbers that you have given are really consistent with the salaries. I would like to ask that you give a table comparing the different categories and how the totals were arrived at.

Mr. R. Persaud: That would be my pleasure.

Mrs. Lawrence: Minister, could you kindly say whether any of the nine staffers which you had in 2012 were doubling up on their work as pertained with the Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall?

Mr. R. Persaud: The staffers under this line item are very hard-working. They double and sometimes triple up but that is not necessarily reflected in their remuneration packages and for that I want to thank them for their commitment and hard work.

Mr. Greenidge: Line item 6281 – Security Services: a sum of \$12 million was requested for the budget of 2012. The actual expenditure turned out to be \$2 million and we have, again, for 2013, the sum of \$12 million budgeted. What has informed the resubmission of the same number for 2013 and what happened in 2012 which caused the figure to be so much lower than the request?

Mr. R. Persaud: In relation to line item 6281 – Security Services - the intention was for the Ministry to be housed at its own premises and be provided with its own security services and

hence the budgetary allocation. That did not turn out and the Ministry, in 2012, was housed within the Office of the President (OP) complex and, hence, the security charges were borne by the Office of the President and provided, generally, by the Office of the President because we were in the OP compound.

Mr. Greenidge: That is an explanation that, perhaps, one can live with. What then was the \$2 million actually spent on in 2012?

Mr. R. Persaud: While we were in the compound, the building that was being utilised by the Ministry had internal security arrangements in terms of access and using electronic alarm systems and those were installed in that particular section as the area utilised by the Ministry was not under active use at that time and there had to be some additional security infrastructure put in place, particularly electronic surveillance.

Mr. Greenidge: Would that surveillance equipment constitute goods and services purchased? Is it also reflected in capital expenditure or under the maintenance vote?

Mr. R. Persaud: Those security charges were covered not necessarily under capital expenditure, but they were procured via a tendering process.

2.53 p.m.

Mr. Greenidge: I am wondering about a classification issue. If you are purchasing security equipment for the office I am not sure whether it is properly placed here or whether it ought to be reflected elsewhere in these Estimates.

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman I am advised that the services we procured under this line item were properly classified.

Mr. Greenidge: In that case who owns the equipment that was associated with the services?

Mr. R. Persaud: It is a combination because these were outsourced. They were primarily provided by the MMC Security Service, and the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment would be the...

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Chairman permit me to try and close this off. The explanation is that an amount of \$2 million still needed to be reflected although the Office of the President was in overall responsibility for security because the premises the Ministry was using were premises that had not been occupied in recent times. Some part of the \$2 million would have been for services some part for equipment.

Mr. R. Persaud: Yes.

Mr. Greenidge: What has become of that equipment now that you have moved?

Mr. R. Persaud: If we appreciate how the electronic surveillance system works there is a combination of cables, sensors, keypads, smoke detectors, as well as the alarm itself. Elements of those would have been relocated to the new offices and some in the process of removal would have been damaged so they necessarily would have been left within the building of the Office of the President, hoping that the future occupants would be in a position to utilise same.

Mrs. Lawrence: Mr. Minister would you kindly indicate to us how many buildings you have under your control for this maintenance of \$3.6 million?

Mr. R. Persaud: What is the line item?

Mrs. Lawrence: Line Item 6242.

Mr. R. Persaud: One building, three flats.

Mrs. Lawrence: And line item 6231- the number of vehicles.

Mr. R. Persaud: The complement of vehicles currently stands at nine.

Mrs. Lawrence: Mr. Chair, in terms of the nine vehicles at line item 6264: could the Hon. Minister indicate which vehicle is the oldest?

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chair, I would not be in a position to give the exact age of the vehicle, but I can give you the number series. That would be in the PEE series. That information can be provided. I would think it is beyond nine years or there about.

Mrs. Lawrence: I would be happy for that Hon. Minister. And as we are on line item 6264 and you are talking about nine years and the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment doing a lot of work across the length and breadth of the country, I wonder whether this \$9.9 million is adequate to provide for the spares and servicing of those nine vehicles for the year.

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it is difficult for me to accurately forecast the potential wear and tear of the fleet. But one would anticipate that this would be in the vicinity of what would be required to have vehicle spares and services for the nine vehicles. I know it would look on the face of it to be an underestimation given the age, and I understand the Hon. Member's concern. However, certainly good management, excellent driving skills, and a general good attitude towards the state's property can, perhaps, take us very close within this budgeted figure. I do appreciate it does look as if it is under budgeted given perhaps the age of the vehicles.

Mrs. Lawrence: Thank you Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, a follow-up question: Hon. Minister, given the fact that you will be going into the interior regions of the country would you consider hiring a maintenance person so these types of information would be readily available for you to be able to address issues such as vehicles spares and servicing so the next time you will have that information for me?

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, the agencies under the Ministry which tend to plan and execute the outreaches, particularly in the hinterland, namely the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission, the Guyana Forestry Commission, the Protected Areas Commission, do have their own vehicles and arrangements including their own workshops and maintenance schedules. The Ministry tends to coordinate when these outreaches are held so there is no duplication in terms of the work of the Ministry in terms of providing policy and general direction, and in terms of utilisation of resources. There is an element of pooling.

Mrs. Lawrence: I am happy to hear that Hon. Minister. Could you kindly turn with me to line item 6271? I note the telephone charges have gone up by some \$1.5 million. Could you kindly explain whom you would be calling? *[Interruption]*

Mr. R. Persaud: I must say there is no call-in show planned. As with the situation that existed with the security charges, being housed within the Office of the President complex allowed us some facilities and prevented us, perhaps, from not paying some of the bills. Now that the

Ministry is standing alone the telephone services and charges required will have to be borne by the Ministry, hence the increase budgeted.

Mrs. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, line item 6282: would the Hon. Minister indicate to the House what type of equipment this department has?

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, the response to the Member's question at item 6282 would be the network infrastructure as well as some modifications to the infrastructure within the existing building. I am talking about the Information Communication Technology (ICT) network within the building.

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Chairman, I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line item 6241 – Rental of Buildings: for which there is no budgeted expenditure. I do not recall that last year the Ministry had acquired a building but the Minister said they moved to a new building. Is it a Government building you have taken over? Why is there no rental and no building?

Mr. R. Persaud: The Ministry is temporarily housed currently within the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) complex.

Mr. Greenidge: And the GGMC is making this available to the Ministry free of charge?

Mr. R. Persaud: There is an arrangement where there is an element of cost sharing because part of the building is being occupied and utilised by the GGMC.

Mr. Greenidge: That is cost sharing presumably pertaining to maintenance and utility charges. I am asking about the rental, is it free of charge?

Mr. R. Persaud: There is no existing rental arrangement for that building.

Mr. Greenidge: Is the GGMC authorised to simply make available its infrastructure to ministries free of charge or is it the special charm of the Minister that has been brought to bear on them?

Mr. R. Persaud: I am quite sure GGMC values the leadership of the Ministry.

Mr. Greenidge: I have no doubt but that was not the question.

Mr. Chairman, I see the Ministry has provisions for education, subventions and training. I wonder whether the Minister can give us an insight into what types of training he envisages undertaking this year.

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, in relation to line item 6302: the training activities planned include monitoring, evaluation within the mining sector, policy analysis, low carbon development strategy, management, project cycle management, environment resource education guides, geographic information systems training, sustainable development techniques as well as honing skills in managing and relating to issues such as climate change.

Mr. Greenidge: And is this training exclusively of your staff or of the agencies under you?

Mr. R. Persaud: It is a combination. Training activities are coordinated because there are some commonalities in needs and the skills that exist. Given the whole thrust of harmonisation training programmes do involve a number of agencies including the Ministry itself.

Mr. Greenidge: Is anything envisaged in the maritime area? I assume you have responsibilities in that area especially the legal and engineering side.

Mr. R. Persaud: The Ministry does not have specific responsibility for maritime. Our involvement in maritime is in the area of oil and gas, and in petroleum exploration as it stands. We have a very active coordination and collaboration with the maritime administration, Guyana Maritime Administration Department (MARAD). And currently, we are in discussion with the Marine Institute out of Newfoundland to have programmes geared towards building capacity in the areas of oil and gas exploration in the offshore areas. So, there is collaboration but there is also the building of specific skills with those technicians who are required to work in those conditions in those areas.

Mrs. Lawrence: Mr. Chair, may I go back to line item 6282. Could the Hon. Minister indicate of the \$1 million allocated how much will go to the network infrastructure and the modification of the ICT?

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, as it stands this is the budgeted number we have put in place based on the needs identified by our Information Technology (IT) staff. We will have to go

through a procurement process and at the end of that process we will see whether it is to the full extent or which part will be utilised specifically for that. But this was the budgeted allocation.

I know I also mentioned some other modifications within the building itself but that is minimal. The bulk of this is going towards the IT network, more than 80% of it. I must add in elaborating on this particular item, just in case the Hon. Member finds this figure a bit high, that we are currently working on a programme to centralise our Geographic Information System (GIS) system. Right now part of it operates within the Guyana Lands and Survey commission, the GGMC and the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC). Because of the integrated nature of land use and land management at times they do not see each other, and that itself could give rise to conflict. What we are doing is building a system where within the Ministry itself the three elements will come together and be able to view all three from one point, one portal. This too is involved in the programme.

Ms. Selman: Mr. Chairman, may I respectfully refer the Hon. Member to line item 6302. The Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge asked the Minister to provide categories of persons to be trained and he did. May I ask how many persons were trained in 2012 and how many persons will be trained in 2013?

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, usually the cohorts we have do not number more than 12 to about 15 for each of the categories I listed. What we plan is more or less a reflection of what we would have done last year. The other types of training needed in terms of capacity building would be provided through the Ministry of Public Service. There are also programmes through the Public Service that would have staffers going off to China, India, United States, Canada and other places for specialised training in terms of long term scholarships. What we have stated here is not the exclusive training programme. We also hope this year to launch the Guyana Mining School and that too will focus on specific areas regarding the extractive sector. We also have within the Guyana Forestry Commission the Forestry Training Centre which looks at training in terms of reduced impact logging. There is training in a number of in different disciplines; this is just some of the broader policy training activities that look at cohorts between 12 to 15.

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Chairman, can I ask the Minister if he would be so kind when he has, perhaps, taken the various training plans to an appropriate stage to make them available to the

House by way of an integrated training plan? Because I think this is very important. I am hearing of training schools and some of what I glean worries me a little, not because any element of it is perhaps wrong but I am not sure that enough attention is paid to existing systems or to an integrated programme of training. So it will be useful I think if we can have a look at that and the opportunity to discuss it.

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, in relation to that, through a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) programme we are currently developing a strategic development plan for the extractive industry both in natural resources and also integrating the environment. A component of that would address human resources, environment, training, development capacity building. That certainly will focus on how we can ensure we have the level of integration and harmonisation, building on what we have, and also identifying additional areas we will need to move the sector forward. That is being captured and given, as it were, some perspective within the UNDP programme that is being finalised. We are on the last, as it were, cut of that document. We were able to benefit from a consulting team that was procured from the UNDP out of Paraguay and we have some additional work being done to refine that and it would certainly speak to the specific issue raise by the Hon. Member.

Mr. Greenidge: And would we be able to see a copy at some stage? Would you make it available to the House?

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, in response to the Hon. Member, the intention is to bring the entire strategy to the National Assembly.

Mr. Sharma: Mr. Chair, line item 6242: Maintenance of Buildings has the sum of \$3.6 million. Can the Hon. Minister state if this building being rented is the new building that was constructed by GGMC? And if that is so why does it need maintenance?

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member is correct but any building that is being occupied and in active use would from time to time require some level of maintenance. The fact that we have several dozens of persons and the public also visiting, service is being provided, we have to cater for repairs, ensuring we have the necessary facilities in working order so we can be able to execute our mandate. That is what the provision made here is intended to do.

Mr. Sharma: Can the Hon. Minister state the highest cost for two of these maintenance works?

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, in the preparation of the budget issues such as ensuring windows, doors, sanitary facilities, different aspect... I think it is routine maintenance issues. *[Interruption]* I would not be in a position when I return to the office to tell you what has to be changed or maintained. But I am quite sure Mr. Sharma who worked in Government for some time would be in a position to plan those expectations too.

Mr. Sharma: Mr. Chair, the Hon. Minister did refer to my experience and I would like to say that maintenance budget is a very detailed budget; one can easily look at it and say where the money is to be spent. I would like to ask the Hon. Minister if the GGMC in constructing this building had indication that the Minister would occupy this building?

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, the building constructed was not custom made. It is a regular office building and could have been utilised by any government services including the Ministry of Natural Resources, the GGMC or any other department.

Mr. Sharma: Mr. Chair, maybe the Hon. Minister did not understand my question. My question is in constructing this building did the GGMC construct this building for income purpose, for rental purpose, or for their own purpose? If the Hon. Minister or his Ministry imposed their will on this agency what happens to the staff the building was constructed for?

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, as I pointed out there is no rental arrangement. I also pointed out that the building is being utilised by staffers within. There is no dislocation. In fact, adequate arrangements are being made for all staffers to be properly accommodated. I must say that this year eight mining stations are being constructed. In addition, we have been able to procure and have started to install 14 mobile stations for staffers. In terms of the central staffers based in Georgetown they are accommodated as they have been accommodated for a number of years.

Mr. Sharma: Can the Hon. Minister state when the Ministry will vacate this premise?

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, as soon as I am in a position I will so advise the Hon. Member or this House.

Mr. Sharma: Thank you Mr. Chair, line item 6281 – Security Services: can the Hon. Minister state the location and cost for security provided per each location?

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, in response to the Hon. Member's question the only location where security is being provided would be the office located in the GGMC compound in Brickdam.

Mr. Sharma: Mr. Chair, if indeed that is the situation is the Hon. Minister saying that GGMC does not have security of its own? Or is the security placed at the flat occupied by the Ministry of the Hon. Minister?

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, a visit to the GGMC compound would show that it houses several offices – the Guyana Gold Board, GGMC as well as the various departments within the GGMC. The GGMC security is currently, one can say, stretched. In fact the Guyana gold Board utilises the Guyana Police Force and a private security firm for its operations. It certainly will be an additional pressure to put (our security) on the existing security arrangement for that building. Also with the additional entrance open it further exposes the compound, hence the need to reinforce the security in that compound for that building and the other services.

Mr. Sharma: Can the Hon. Minister state the security provider?

Mr. R. Persaud: The electronic service is provided by MMC and the other service is provided by GEB Security Service.

Programme: 241 – Ministry Administration - \$98,788,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 241 – Ministry Administration - \$4,000,000

Programme: 241 – Ministry Administration - \$4,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

Current Expenditure

Programme:

242 – Natural Resource Management - \$107,727,000

Dr. Roopnarine: Mr. Chairman, can I ask the Hon. Minister to explain the steep rise in the subvention to the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission as listed on page 399? I noticed it has moved from \$72,187 million to \$107,727 million. I would like the Hon. Minister to explain the rise in this and then I have a subsequent question.

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, the increase in the allocation is driven by two factors. One is in terms of improved conditions, remuneration for staffers, and (two) to improve and enhance the capacity and capabilities of the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission giving increased demand.

Dr. Roopnarine: The Hon. Minister has anticipated to some extent the other question I had to pose to him which was (in connection with) the various weaknesses and institutional improvements indicated in the report that had been done on land use planning, which identifies areas that requires attention in the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission. My question is whether or not this additional funding is going to assist in addressing some of those weaknesses and deficiencies identified in the report.

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, in response to the Hon. Member's question the issue of land use planning in management is foremost on the agenda of the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission of the Ministry. In fact, we have just received the European Union (EU) consultant's report. Sometime tomorrow we begin discussions in terms of giving it legal teeth, looking at some of the gaps identified. And, yes, some of the allocations made here are intended to bring this document, some of the recommendations to life, particularly in terms of building our systems, modernising our approach to land use management, ensuring we have the full complement of staff, in terms of better coordination and collaboration and more or less taking us to a stage where we can say we have alive a land use plan in our country.

Dr. Roopnarine: Can I ask the Hon. Minister if he can, as is his practice, provide the recent EU report?

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, in response to the request there was a national consultation, and it is available on the website. I have no difficulty in making this available to the Hon. Members.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Chairman, I wish to ask the Hon. Minister what is being done to get the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission to, more or less, its finances equal to its expenditure like I noticed with the Guyana Gold Board. This is at page 599.

3.23 p.m.

A constant asking for \$107 million subsidy for... Is there anything being done to ensure that the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission can be a cost recovery kind of institution?

Mr. R. Persaud: Many of the services provided by the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission are subsidised. In many regards, the cost has to be borne by the Commission and supplemented by the subvention that is being provided, as we are seeking here today. We recognise that, as was the original intention of the Commission, to fund its way and to ensure that its activities do not become, as it were, a burden on the Treasury.

Starting this year and we have already advertised and interviews have been conducted for the head of a Business Development Unit, which will provide the services needed by the Private Sector and even some parastatal entities. Rather than going to private entities to have the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission provide these, they would become a source of income and hence, reducing its reliance on the Treasury, in terms of subvention.

More so, we have the problem of being able to retain and attract the number of surveyors and other technical staff so that we can have the right size and capable Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission entity.

It is to deal with two elements: the cost and being able to manage on our own, but also be in a position to attract and be able to pay for staffers as well have the types of equipment and resources, so that all of us can be proud of a Lands and Surveys Commission that is responsive to our National needs.

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Chairman, can I refer the Minister to the very to line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations: I am looking specifically at the group of entities under “Environmental Management”...

Mr. R. Persaud: We are at Natural Resource.

Mr. Greenidge: Oh sorry, my apologies.

Mr. Ramjattan: That would be the next page.

Mrs. Lawrence: Minister, on page 399, the subsidy to the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission: You have given them \$72 million last year and you are asking us to approve \$108 million. Could you kindly tell the House when was the last audited report for this entity laid in the House and for what year?

Mr. R. Persaud: In response to the Hon. Member’s question: Generally let me say that the entities within the Natural Resources and Environment Sector are in the process of ensuring that the annual reports and audited statements are current. You would have noticed most recently with the GGMC we were able to bring those reports... *[Interruption]* **[Mrs. Lawrence:** You have to answer me to this.] I am getting to those; it is always good to have a background... *[Interruption]*

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, if the Minister says he is answering and is giving a background, please allow him to proceed. *[Interruption]*

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, yes. In the context of ensuring that there is compliance, in terms of not only audited reports, but also the annual reports are completed. As regards the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission we are currently awaiting the finalisation of the audited report by the Auditor General’s Department to bring it up to current. The last report that was presented via the Office of the President of this entity and was formerly housed or fell under was 2010.

Programme: 242 – Natural Resources Management - \$107,727,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 242 – Natural Resources Management - \$20,000,000

Ms. Kissoon: Project Code – 3300300 – Lands and Surveys: could the Hon. Minister give some more details in relations to items 1 and 2 under this project, the anticipated cost of each item and to what use the vehicle will be put?

Mr. R. Persaud: The vehicle budgeted would be utilised in Region 9 so that we can be able to fulfil the demands of that very important region and the estimated cost is \$5.5 million. The intention is to have a vehicle that is suitable for the terrain.

Deputy Speaker [Mrs. Backer]: Just a follow up question: could I ask if it is an All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) or a 4x4 vehicle; what type of vehicle is it?

Mr. R. Persaud: The intention is to have a double cab 4x4 vehicle so that we can move staff and equipment.

Ms. Kissoon: Mr. Chairman, I asked for more details in relations to items 1 and 2 provisions under the project.

Mr. R. Persaud: The Cadastral Surveys will be done looking at a number of areas, including Port Kaituma and Onderneeming and that is projected to cost within the vicinity of \$4.5 million. Also, we have some geo-referencing and compilation of step plans in a number of areas in Region Nos. 10, 4, as well as Region Nos. 3 and 2, and some further work in terms of extensions, particularly along the Linden/Soesdyke Highway farming areas, that will cost in the vicinity of \$7 million.

Mr. Greenidge: Can I seek a bit of information here? Mr. Minister, surveys undertaken by the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission, are they normally treated as Capital Expenditure? Has this been done in the past?

Mr. R. Persaud: The intention, as a clarification to the Hon. Member, is to procure equipment so as to execute those surveys. Those are surveying equipment. I must apologise if I did not expand on that particular point.

Mr. Greenidge: Well perhaps let us not use so much as the Legend.

Mrs. Backer: The Legend is misleading.

Programme: 242 – Natural Resources Management - \$20,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Current Estimates

Programme: 243 – Environmental Management - \$400,159,000

Dr. Roopnarine: Mr. Chairman, I noticed that under line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations: the contributions to local organisations have gone up from \$230 million to \$400 odd million. I notice on page 399 that the allocation to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has risen from \$107 million to \$191 million. When I turn to page 600 on the budget of the Environmental Protection Agency, I notice that the other operating expenses have leapt from \$7,599,000 to \$19,992,000. Can the Hon. Minister kindly explain these rises?

Mr. R. Persaud: In response to the question. The Hon. Member would be aware that increasingly there is demand for the Environmental Protection Agency to be responsive to concerns; to be responsive to complains, whether it is dust pollution, noise pollution, in terms of expanded economic activities and threats. Hence, the capabilities of the Commission have to be expanded so as to be in a position to respond to those needs. Certainly the operating expenses of the Commission would be reflected in an increase in the operating expenses of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Dr. Roopnarine: Given the explanation offered by the Hon. Minister, it continues to be a source of some puzzlement to me that the environmental taxes that in effect is charged on the importation of plastic and so on does not go to the Environmental Protection Agency and thereby possibly relieving us of some of this burden that you have described.

Mr. R. Persaud: I think it is a universal principle whereby these resources in other countries where perhaps the taxes have been utilised goes to the CF. By virtue of this process that we are engaging here, where a request is being sought for subvention or contribution, one can say that the EPA indirectly or directly benefits from that particular tax by the allocation that would be made via the National Budget.

If you were to say that the resources are what the Minister or the sector would want, there is always room for improvement. That is not to say that it is on account of the fact that their resources goes to the CF.

Mr. Greenidge: I would like to ask the Minister about the same characteristics identified by my colleague. If you look at the Environmental Management item here on under agency code 24, you will see each and every one of them is requesting a substantial increase in their subvention, compared with a previous year. I wonder whether these increases are driven or informed by a change in policy or just a set of *ad hoc* increases or *ad hoc* initiatives arising from either the agency or from the Ministry. Could we know that please?

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, a very good question. First of all, as the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, I must commend the Minister of Finance for his generosity of sorts and consideration... *[Interruption]* Certainly, it reflects the overall Government and certainly the entire National Assembly orientation that we must give due regard and due resources to the protection and management of our environment. It certainly fits in to that wider framework.

We are a country whereby we have an expanding economy. We have increased extracted activities. We also need to ensure that we have the right balance in terms of management of our environment. The agencies and the entities that are so task, if we expect them to properly regulate, manage and service, they need to be resourced and certainly this is reflected in the allocation.

When we get down to some of the other agencies, such as the Protected Areas Commission and the National Parks Commission, we will recognise how critical those entities are in the wider context of sound environmental stewardship, all fitting into our commitment- our National commitment - towards the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). So there is the broader framework and then these are some specific steps, the resources that we need to give to these entities, so that they can fulfil that wider National Objective.

Mr. Greenidge: I wish to thank the Minister for a very glowing picture being painted there. Of course, we recognise that resources administered by the Minister of Finance are taxpayers' money and not the consequence of a generosity of the Minister.

The question I really getting at here is whether any of the explanations provided by the Minister explains why there is a jump in this year? Presumably there was a commitment to LCDS last year and to these other items. Why is there such a substantial jump? If in fact, it reflects a change in policy, a ramping-up in policy, we would like to see a document capturing that change. But to move from one year to the next with such substantial increases across agencies, I think requires no less. Thank you.

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I will be willing to certainly provide that larger prospective. But I may say at this point in time, several Members, during the policy debate on the National Budget, would have identified weaknesses, in terms of environmental management, take for instance the potential conflict between mining, the environment, indigenous communities, what we need to do to manage water pollution, land degradation, deforestation issues, also even along our coastal belt, the challenges that we face.

Also, as part of our global commitment, in terms of managing protected areas, as we know a new protected Area's Commission was established. There is a global target in excess of 12% of total landmass. In Guyana we are just in the vicinity of 8.5%. We have declared a number of areas we need to have the resources so that these protected areas in the national parks that we have are improved and managed to the level that nationally we are proud. We are satisfied with what it is that we have within our laws, but also we become a proud example in the international community, in terms of how it is that we treat our environment.

I would be willing to adumbrate, in terms of the particular areas and agencies, why it is what we have here, perhaps is not even sufficient to take us very quickly to the point. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Ramjattan: I notice, at page 601, that in relations to the National Parks Commission, which is seeking a \$165 million subvention here, that body now is also giving a subvention to some other organisation of \$45 million. What organisation is that?

Mr. R. Persaud: That other body is the Protect Areas Commission. This National Assembly in the last Parliament had passed the Protect Areas Commission Bill, now the Protected Areas Act. Within the Protected Areas Commission the Nation Park would fall. We need to harmonise the National Park Act with the Protected Areas Commission Act. However, that resource that is mentioned, the further subvention, is intended for the Protect Areas Commission.

Mr. Ramjattan: Alright, I just want to know. Are we giving that Protection Areas Commission \$45.9 million? Also, under that heading there at page 399, are we this year giving \$42.9 million and is that an additional sum, the \$45.9 million and \$42.9 million? Because under the Protect Areas Commission, which comes under the National Parks Commission it would appear that they are getting two sums; one under the National Parks Commission and one exclusively to itself. Is that an \$88 million thing?

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman no. The allocation that is being made to the Protected Areas Commission is that particular figure of \$42.9 million.

Mr. Ramjattan: However, under page 601, I notice \$45.9 million is being granted or do we have a little slip rule mistake here? Do you notice what I am talking about?

Mr. R. Persaud: Within the National Parks Commission, you have the Zoological Park and the Georgetown Park, but we also have the Kaieteur National Park as well as the Joe Vieira National Park. Those are the resources that would be dedicated to the Kaieteur National Park, managing the Kaieteur National Park, as well as the Joe Vieira National Park. That is what that additional sum is referring to, but that is separate and aside from the Protected Areas Commission.

Mr. Ramjattan: So can I make the deduction then that for the Zoological Park we will have about \$3 million for that, in addition to the Protected Areas Commission having \$42 million.

Mr. R. Persaud: No Hon. Member. You need to separate the allocation that is made to the Protected Areas Commission from this further allocation that you are referring to on page 601.

Mr. Ramjattan: That is right. How much of that is going to the Protected Areas Commission out of that \$45 million.

Mr. Persaud: The sum at page 601, which is the \$45.9 million, is dedicated to the Kaieteur National Park and the Joe Vieira National Park operations. That must not be mixed up, as it were, with the Protected Areas Commission allocation.

Mrs. Lawrence: I would like to pose the same question to the Minister with regards to the audited reports being laid in the National Assembly and the year of those reports for the

Environmental Protection Agency, the National Parks Commission and the Protect Areas Commission.

Mr. R. Persaud: In response to the Hon. Member's question, as I said it is our objective to bring those reports up to date and again we are awaiting the finalisation of the financial statements by the Auditor General's Department. We hope very soon to have the 2010 Report presented and very shortly have the others.

Mrs. Lawrence: Was 2009 presented for all?

Mr. R. Persaud: Based on the information that is provided to me, but I stand corrected.

Mrs. Lawrence: Thank you Mr. Minister. We are giving the National Parks Commission \$165 million this year, could you kindly tell me whether the National Parks Commission proposes to purchase animals, like an elephant, a tiger, a bear, et cetera, so that we can have a real zoo and not a zoo of snakes?

Mr. R. Persaud: We currently have lunched and I am quite sure the Hon. Member would have heard about the Three Parks Initiative. The Three Parks Initiative is expected to compliment the efforts and even the resources allocated here in the National Budget in terms of upgrading and making it much more, not only user friendly, but an attractive zoological park.

I must compliment the responses we have gotten so far from a number of international groupings and the local private sector. We have a new plan that is being made for the zoo, in terms of having various areas identified for different types of attractions, focusing primarily on the indigenous species that we have in Guyana, but also looking at other animals being imported. We hope to do that specific intervention through collaboration with other zoos in Asia as well as in the United States. We are currently finalising several memorandums of understanding with a number of zoological parks, where we will have exchange of animals, in terms of Guyana providing some of its animals and these zoological parks providing animals to our own zoo. But certainly, at an appropriate time we would be able to provide some more information in terms of the Three Parks Initiative and what it is we intend to do for the zoological park itself.

Mrs. Lawrence: Can you say Hon. Minister, how much of the allocation will go towards procuring these animals?

Mr. R. Persaud: We do not have specific allocations in this particular provision for the procurement of animals. In fact, we do not intend to expend resources or moneys on procuring any animal for the zoological park; rather we will do it through an exchange and in collaboration with other entities, including in Guyana, wildlife trappers and wildlife exporters themselves too, who have developed their own facilities and there is even a private zoo. Arrangements are being made to establish a private zoo whereby we will look in terms of collaboration. But specifically, there is no plan to spend any of the allocation on the procurement of animals, but rather we will be looking to attract other attractions to the zoo via other arrangements.

Mrs. Lawrence: Could you say whether you have a vet on board.

Mr. R. Persaud: There is a veterinary doctor assigned to the Zoological Park as we speak.

Mr. Scott: Mr. Minister, I only have one question in two parts. With the infusion of money, the \$191 million you have gotten, what plans have you got to put the resources into cleaning up the rivers that you have that are discoloured and so on? The second part is, what plans do you have for the Styrofoam problem in Georgetown that affects flooding?

Mr. R. Persaud: The mandate of the Environmental Protection Agency, as provided for under the Environmental Protection Agency Act, certainly looks at the implementation and also the adherence to the various regulations. If we look first in terms of water pollution, I think you are referring specifically to water pollution as it relates to mining, within the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission there is an Environmental Management Division. That Environmental Management Division collaborates very closely with the Environmental Protection Agency. In terms of carrying out routine tests; in terms of ensuring that operators comply and that we prevent water pollution and if there are instances, measures be taken to address that. There is also a system of constant monitoring, constant public awareness and if needs be or also, sanctions that are imposed to ensure that our water ways...

Just recently the World's Wildlife Fund launched a report on the Guianas. In that report they looked in terms of water pollution threats and measured Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana. Notwithstanding, the increase in mining and activities that are taking place in and around our fresh water sources, Guyana came in the lowest of the three, with just over 957 kilometres in

terms of water ways that are under threats, as compared to Suriname which was in excess of 2500 kilometres and even smaller French Guiana close to 3000 kilometres.

Whilst it is a problem and whilst it is an issue that we are giving paramount attention to, we must recognise too the efforts of our agencies and our staffers and also the local communities, particularly the indigenous communities in addressing this particular issue.

In terms of dealing with the Styrofoam problem, the approaches that we have looked at is ensuring that we look at measures of making the importation of Styrofoam uncompetitive against alternative materials, such as cardboard, which is bio-degradable. A number of measures have been discussed at the level of the Cabinet with the Ministry of Finance, as to what else we can do to make the importation of Styrofoam as other countries have done and certainly it is something we, here in the National Assembly, and other stakeholders, have to give serious attention to because, as we know, it takes over 500 years in terms of the degradation Styrofoam, in this regard.

3.53 p.m.

It is a problem. We are giving it attention. There are some short term and long term issues that we need to address. I hope that adequately addresses the Hon. Member's question.

Mr. Scott: Mr. Minister, when people die it is irrelevant whether they bring first, second or third. Are you satisfied that the efforts that have been devoted by the EPA in terms of cleaning our rivers, is that satisfactory to your exercise?

Mr. Chairman: I thought that you were going to ask about Le Repentir which need some urgent attention itself.

Mr. R. Persaud: I do hope that the Mayor is hearing you via the live streaming about the Le Repentir.

Mr. Chairman: That is a national monument in itself...

Mr. R. Persaud: It is also a national issue.

Mr. Chairman: Therefore I believe it transcends the municipality, quite frankly. That is another matter.

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, we have a resolution in this House; there is a broad based committee, there are some groupings that are intended to address those and some other matters so it is not that it is being neglected. In response to the Hon. Member's question, we are never satisfied and we have to constantly be on the alert; hence the need for additional resources. That is why we are putting a lot of focus on building capacity and ensuring that our agencies are responsive and would be in a position, in many instances, to mitigate against that situation. Not only to be in a reactive mode but also to be in a preventative mode.

Dr. Ramayya: I would kindly ask the Hon. Minister if there is in place recycling for plastic bottles and other elements. At one time I defined Georgetown as a plastic city so if we do have, as we can see overseas, 5 cents per bottle being paid for, as in the United States, we can avoid all of the mess that we have in drains and the trenches if we do have a recycling plant in Guyana.

Mr. R. Persaud: The issue of recycling is being pursued. The beverage companies have started a number of initiatives. In fact, there are also two private enterprises targeting plastic. Also we have Caribbean Container Inc. (CCI) that is looking at cardboard and paper. The Ministry of Local Government is currently in receipt of a number of proposals where a number of Ministries are currently evaluating to have a wider recycling business initiative. At the level of Cabinet the President has given clear instructions that this is an area that we should give adequate and urgent attention to in terms of our larger thrust in managing solid waste and also the solid waste bill that will soon come to the National Assembly will also reflect legislative teeth in this particular area. There is active discussion taking place to expand on the already existing initiative in the area that you have identified in terms of recycling for plastic but not only plastic.

Programme: 243 – Environmental Management - \$400,159,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 243 – Environmental Management - \$32,100,000

Programme: 243 – Environmental Management - \$32,100,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: I would like to thank the Minister and his technical officers for assisting the Assembly in being able to consider and approve these Estimates. Thank you very much.

Agency: 23 Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce

Current Expenditure

Programme: 231 – Main Office - \$497,596,000

Mr. Chairman: Minister, please indicate when you are ready.

Minister of Housing and Water and Acting Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce
[Mr. Ali]: Ready.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Mr. Chairman, I refer the Hon. Minister to line item 6116 - Contracted Employees and ask that the Minister give the designation and salaries of the top five employees in this Ministry.

Mr. Ali: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The top five employees would be the Permanent Secretary... Did you ask for the salaries too?

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Yes, thank you.

Mr. Ali: \$500,980. The Deputy Permanent Secretary – \$248,090, General Manager of the GICC – \$288,181, the Coordinator for National and Other Events – \$332,927, the Administrator of the National Exhibition Centre (NEC) – \$315,000.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Thank you. Line Item 6291 - National and Other Events: could the Hon. Minister indicate the events that are catered for under this line item and for which he is allocating \$34 million?

Mr. Ali: Some of the events would include Mashramani, Christmas Village, President's Gold Tournament, Diwali Nagar, various fam trips, Pakaraima Mountain Safari, Rupununi Rodeo, Bartica Regatta, Linden Town Week, Moruca Expo, the motor racing, Wakenaam Night, Mahdia

Expo, Jamzone Summer Weekend, Orealla Regatta, Rockstone Fish Festival, Leguan Night and Lake Mainstay Regatta.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Those are a lot of things, Minister. Is GUYEXPO covered under this amount as well?

Mr. Ali: No, GUYEXPO is not covered under here.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Could you indicate where that event is catered for?

Mr. Ali: GUYEXPO is self-sufficient.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Is the Hon. Minister saying that there is no money allocated by Central Government to this event?

Mr. Ali: The Hon. Member is perfectly correct.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, certainly there must be a start-up amount for mobilisation. Is there a fund? How does GUYEXPO...? Is it so automatic that nothing comes out of the Ministry?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman, GUYEXPO started some years ago and it has developed into a very self-sufficient activity of the Ministry now and no start-up capital is required.

Mr. Chairman: There must be a fund or something. There must be.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Hon. Minister, you have listed a series of national and other events – I will come back to GUYEXPO. For the Main Street Lime, for example, has there been an audited statement on this event for the last three years?

Mr. Ali: As it relates to the Main Street lime one would know that the private sector would normally pay charges for their booths and that resource is utilised to cover the expenditure for Main Street Lime. Last year, for example, we moved away from the Main Street Lime Event and we had an event that covered a much longer period, which was the Christmas Village. The Christmas Village, which was a new initiative, would not have benefited from the wide injection of capital from the private sector so that would have required some injection from the National Funds and that is why it is also reflected at the activity that will be covered under this year's programme also.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: You have indicated that the sums of money under this item here covers, among other things, the Main Street Lime so what I am asking you here for, Hon. Minister, is for a statement of the income and expenses for this activity for the last three years.

Mr. Ali: I did not say that Main Street Lime is covered under this list that I alluded to. I mentioned the Christmas Village. That is what is covered under this line item.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Could the Hon. Minister indicate to us those items which he listed and the amount of money allocated to each one of them?

Mr. Ali: I would not have the allocation by item here. The block allocation is given under this head. If I may give you an example, the "Regatta Committee" or the "rodeo people" would request assistance from the Ministry and it is from this head that we would seek to render some assistance in helping them financially. There is no breakdown as it is now but we can definitely share the allocation based on last year's figures with the Hon. Member.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: How do you intend to allocate this \$34 million that you are asking for?

Mr. Ali: It is based on the request made to the Ministry and the budgets presented during the course of the year when these various events are implemented.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Is this a block some of money that you have at the Ministry and you are just waiting for these entities to ask for money or is it that you have some indication as to what these sums would be and you have actually budgeted for it? That is what I am asking you.

Mr. Ali: We have some indications based on trend analysis. That is why I had offered to give last year's figures on which we based our assumption.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: That is simply what I am asking you for, Minister. Do you have it? Does the Hon. Minister intend to lay over that list to the National Assembly?

Mr. Ali: Most definitely.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Under line item 6281 - Security Services: I noticed that there was a variation for last year, however, for this year this is an increase

budgetary allocation. Can the Hon. Minister explain the reason for the proposed increase and the security service that will be providing such service? Thank you.

Mr. Ali: The Estimates are based on the contracts that we have in force at the moment. For example, at the NEC we have a contract with RK Security \$8,798,000 and at the Guyana International Conference Centre (GICC) there is Federal Security System at \$26,450,000. In June of this year these contracts will come to an end and at that time we will have to retender and, of course, the rates can vary or remain the same.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. May I follow up on the question posed by my colleague to the Hon. Minister on National and Other Events? The question of GUYEXPO: The Minister has made it clear that GUYEXPO does not receive any type of subvention from the Government and I noticed that you were as surprised as we were to hear that. The question I would like to ask is whether any government facilities are currently utilised by GUYEXPO and whether the management of GUYEXPO has a board and whether that board produces annual report that are audited.

Mr. Ali: GUYEXPO is organised by the management of the National Exhibition Centre. The compound of the National Exhibition Centre is where the GUYEXPO event is held. For the management and implementation of GUYEXPO a planning committee convened with stakeholders from the Ministry and the private sector and that committee oversees the management and implementation of GUYEXPO and indeed there is a report at the end of every GUYEXPO.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you, Mr. Minister. The question that I would like to follow up with is: The committee that manages GUYEXPO, how is it appointed?

Mr. Ali: The committee is comprised of members of the National Exhibition Centre, the Ministry and the private sector it is co-chaired by the Minister and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Small Business Bureau, Mr. Derrick Cummings.

Mr. Greenidge: Who appoints them? Where is it that the instrument for their appointment originates?

Mr. Ali: Most of the membership of the GUYEXPO for the purposes of the Ministry and the National Exhibition Centre... The persons with 'line' responsibilities normally fall under that committee. For example, we will have the national events coordinator; we will have the head of the National Exhibition Centre; we will have the head of the Guyana Tourism Authority; we will have a few of the event planners on that committee, the accounting officer and so on.

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Minister, I am not sure if you are clear as to what I am getting at. I just really want to know whether I can at any point in time anticipate the membership of the GUYEXPO board without having to come to you or anybody who is familiar with them. If the members are appointed by virtue of their office we ought to know that. The second question, pertaining to the accounts was not whether or not they produce a report but given that they are collecting revenues and they fall under the aegis of the Ministry, and one of its organs, whether they produce annual reports and whether they produce audited reports and if so who audits those reports. When were they last audited and delivered?

Mr. Ali: In addition to the line membership, there is no statutory formulation of this board in terms of identifying agency. For example, the entertainment aspect: The Ministry would write the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport and ask for a nomination and normally they would send the head of that section from the Ministry. We will seek nomination from sister agencies that have key and important skills for the management of GUYEXPO.

In terms of the financial statement and reports: Yes, there are reports. There have been financial statements but, as from the last GUYEXPO, we have instituted a system where those statements must be externally audited.

Mr. Greenidge: I thank the Minister for his explanation but if one has a set of line officers assigned to the board I think that you needed to perhaps bear that in mind when you answer the question as to whether they have state resources. These are officials who are presumably paid by your Ministry and the other one that you mentioned.

Mr. Ali: It is a committee, not a board.

Mr. Greenidge: Yes, I understand but the management input and the persons who do the work are paid from resources other than GUYEXPO resources as such. That is what I am

understanding from you. Secondly, the financial reports you say they prepare are audited by whom? Normally the Auditor General is required to audit entities such as this which fall under a Ministry or is related to a Ministry or the Auditor General appoints a professional body to do the auditing. Is that the case?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman, in the case of the staff I would say that none of the staff members are paid overtime to function on this committee. A lot of them volunteer their time on this committee. They are not forced to be on the committee and I must compliment the staff for the sacrifice and the time that they put into the organising of this activity. I need to compliment the staff. The other thing is that GUYEXPO also focuses heavily on volunteerism and in the days of the events we have lots of volunteers. A matter of fact, the University of Guyana students form a very integral part of that volunteerism spirit during GUYEXPO.

As I said for the previous GUYEXPO there was financial statement but not audited. As of the end of last year the financial statement was submitted and we are appointing external professional auditors to audit that statement.

Mr. Greenidge: Okay. I hear you as regards the audit arrangements but when you say “we are appointing” I understand that it is not supposed to be the Minister appointing such persons. Does the Auditor General play a role in this? Are you planning to? My understanding is that he as a responsibility in this regard.

Mr. Ali: As relates to the appointment, definitely we will have to bring on board the Auditor General and the Auditor General can appoint that external body.

Mr. Greenidge: Would the Minister be good enough, in any case, to let us have sight of a copy of the reports that have been prepared so far, whether or not they have been audited?

Mr. Ali: We have no problem... As soon as the reports are compiled - the last report - to share those reports with you.

Mr. Greenidge: You did indicated that some have already been compiled so the ones that have already...

Mr. Ali: Yes, definitely. Those that are compiled you can have.

Mr. Greenidge: Okay, let me also say that as regards the staff... The question – where you anticipated something which I did not have in mind – is not whether those who manage or contribute to the exercise were not doing so voluntarily and that they should be commended; of course one would commend them. I really wanted to know from where they were paid, given that you said that the state made resources.

Mr. Ali: No overtime.

Mr. Greenidge: It is not whether or not they were given overtime. It is where the emoluments come from. Thank you.

Mr. Sharma: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Line item 6231 - Fuel and Lubricants: can the Hon. Minister state the number of vehicles in his fleet and the ages of the vehicles?

Mr. Ali: Currently we have six vehicles: Nissan Versa acquired in December; 2012, a Toyota car, PHH 4372, which was acquired in 2000; two Nissan pickups acquired in 2006 and 2009 and a Toyota Camry car.

Mr. Sharma: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Can the Hon. Minister state if there is an intention to purchase any vehicle this year?

Mr. Ali: The Hon. Member is asking a very important question. One would recall that we are trying to come in line and to implement some of the recommendations of the Auditor General's Report, especially in terms of the use of taxies which is as a direct result of the lack of vehicles within the Ministry. We have written the Ministry of Finance asking for consideration, not to burden the budget, to be given some priority in terms of vehicles that are seized and disposed of by the Guyana Revenue Authority so that the entity can have access to some of those vehicles that would definitely aid our operation and address the concern raised in the Auditor General's Report in relation to the use of taxies.

Mr. Sharma: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Hon. Minister is pre-empting my questioning. Line Item 6264: can the Hon. Minister state the reason for the high maintenance cost, almost equivalent to the fuel that these vehicles consume?

Mr. Ali: One of the special conditions we operate under is our vehicles are required to go into the interior a lot. For example, during the safari and the rodeo and so on we had to send our vehicles into the interior and one would appreciate that when those vehicles return to Georgetown they have to go through what we call a general servicing/general overhaul as a result of the terrain they would have to traverse and that accounts for a lot of the increases you are seeing here.

Mr. Sharma: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Since Hon. Minister pre-empted the question can the Hon. Minister state what number of vehicles he is expecting from Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA)? What was the number he requested?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman, we made a request for three vehicles.

Mr. Sharma: Thank you. Line item 6272- Fuel and Lubricants: this is Programme 1, Main Office, and to be in the programme budgeted, being the Main Office, this amount for electricity of \$27.3 million is exorbitant. Can the Hon. Minister state why this cost is so high?

Mr. Ali: There is some additional equipment acquired by the Competition and Consumer Affairs last year and the use of this equipment would necessitate additional power requirement and energy requirement and, as such that additional power and energy requirement would necessitate some additional cost.

4.23 p.m.

Mr. Sharma: The Hon. Minister should know that this is programme 1, Main Office. Is this an office, a building or a flat? Basically, that is what I am asking.

Mr. Ali: This allocation caters for the Guyana International Convention Centre and National Exhibition Centre.

Mr. Sharma: Could the Hon. Minister state what is the amount allocated for each?

Mr. Ali: We do not have the allocation for each it is based on consumption but we will be more than happy to present to the honourable House the figures of last year.

Mr. Sharma: Line item 6281 – Security Services: Could the Hon. Minister state the location and the cost per location?

Mr. Ali: The National Exhibition Centre (NEC) and the Guyana International Convention Centre (GICC).

Mr. Sharma: The cost please.

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman, I give the cost earlier, the NEC, RK Security Services - \$8,798,000 and GICC, Federal Security Service - \$26,450,000.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Line item 6321 – Subsidies to Local Organisations: I would like to refer the Minister to the Guyana Tourism Authority board - \$116,208,000. Could the Hon. Minister state what this allocation is for and what does the board do?

Mr. Ali: This allocation, which we hope, as our tourism develops and advances and contributes greater the GDP, would increase dramatically, caters for the marketing, the product development, product enhancement of the tourism sector and of Guyana. For example, it would include printing of brochures. We are focusing heavily on community-based tourism. Some of the specific brochures, which we would have developed overtime, include the community-based tourism brochures, the Essequibo brochures, Rupununi, Berbice, birds of Region 4 checklist, the National Bird checklist and the many fan familiarisation trip that would be endeavoured in order to bring awareness and exposure to our tourism product.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Follow-up. When last did this board meet, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Ali: The last meeting was last month and the next meeting is scheduled for Monday.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: What is the composition of the board, please?

Mr. Ali: The board is chaired by Mr. Ramesh Geer. It has on it the representative from Tourism Hospitality Association of Guyana (THAG), Captain Jerry Gouveia, Mr. Peter Ramsaroop, Ms. Petal Ridley, Ms. Shareefa Razack and Mr. Frank Singh. I could get the other names.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Could the Minister get the list of names of the board members and lay that over?

Mr. Ali: It is most definitely.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Hon. Minister, is the Guyana Tourism Authority board responsible for licensing of lodges and resorts?

Mr. Ali: Yes. It is the Guyana Tourism Authority board that is responsible for licensing of resorts and lodges, also in licensing of operators and guides. Last year there was a public consultation on this matter in which the private sector and THAG, itself, were calling for the strict monitoring and regulating of the sector so that the Ministry can develop a standard and a system that would ensure compatibility across the board in different strata of the market. There have a number of agencies that would have already been registered and licensed by the authority.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: This Act came into being in the year 2008 and regulations were made since then. Could the Hon. Minister state how many lodges and resorts have been licensed in accordance with these regulations over the last two years?

Mr. Ali: There are, right now, 100 being registered, 19 unregistered and 85 facilities which are being inspected now.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: The promotion of Guyana as tourism destination, could the Minister state what if any sums of money have allocated for this purpose abroad and if whether this comes under the authority?

Mr. Ali: The Ministry has launched the “Rediscover Home” campaign and it is working very aggressively on this market. It is a very expensive exercise but it has been able to incorporate the support of the private sector. This year a very large delegation will be sent to have a specific tourism trade show in Toronto, and in New York. We are also exploring Barbados. There will be the CTO Caribbean week of activities in New York and London. Guyana will be also attending the bird fair and festival in London.

In addition to that, the Ministry has been able to negotiate, motivate many large media entities, many influential media entities, which would have required tremendous investment and payment, to come to Guyana to do documentaries, to do short films. That has brought tremendous exposure to Guyana as a market. What is done is to merely assist them in their

transportation and movement around Guyana, facilitate their movement and bear that cost, but the major cost is borne by these entities.

I may inform this honourable House that there were the Discovery Channel and History Channel; there were the *Making of Gold Rush*, *Wild Adventure* and BBC, all here, over the last year.

Mr. Chairman: I understand there is a magazine known as *Guns and Gardens* that also carries something. I was quite taken back by the title of the publication.

Mr. Ali: I would be more than happy to be educated. There is also the pride of Guyana being the number one watched television programme, of the United State of America, on Friday night, and that is *Gold Rush*. It is on as the number one watched programme, Friday nights, on Discovery Channel. The number two watched programme is the *Making of Gold Rush*, both about Guyana. We are very proud about this.

In addition to, because of the success of this one episode last year, that entity is now in Guyana completing the entire season. That is an investment of G\$2 billion in filming of that entire series, which will be aired later this year, on television, in the United States of America.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Could the Hon. Minister indicate how much money has been allocated to all of those things that he was talking about? It is if he can provide a list for us.

Mr. Ali: I cannot give a specific figure for all the items, as listed. What I can undertake to do is to present this honourable House with a detailed listing of all that we would have completed in the year 2012 and even for the year 2013 with the actual cost that would have been assigned.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, with all the advertisement free and otherwise that you are getting, how you measure your tourism dollar to say, "Well, this is what the net gain is"? Some of it is free, much of it is paid for, but most of it, I know, comes gratuitously, because people love Guyana and what they see. How can we tangibly measure all that you are doing is potentially going to deliver to the coffers?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman, I think your question is a very important question. Let me say two things. One, I want to clear a myth out there that the tourism arrival figures, which were given, when we said that there was \$180, 000 arrivals for tourism last year, do not include the resident

Guyana. It is all of the arrival cards with the exception of residents from Guyana. From this year, arrival at Moleson Creek and Lethem will be included.

The second this is that you are correct, Mr. Chairman. The Ministry of Finance, seeing the important role tourism is playing in the transformation of the economy and the expensing of the base of the economy... I think the Minister of Finance made this clear in his budget presentation that we will be moving towards the measurement contribution of tourism as a component of GDP, and that is on the card. I think, this year some work is going to commence on moving into that direction.

Ms. Ferguson: Line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contribution to Local Organisations: On page 399 I have noticed Guyana National Bureau of Standards (GNBS), some \$111 million was spent last year and there has been an approximate \$9 million and more for this year. Let me take you, Mr. Chairman, to page 594. Under the statutory body for this Ministry, that is, for the GNBS, there is a subsidy and contribution to local and international organisation. My observation here is that the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce is subsidising to the GNBS and now it is, more or less, subsidising to another organisation. However, what I observe further is that there was not a budgeted amount for last year but under the revised column some \$1.442 million was spent. Could the Hon. Minister shed some clarity on this item along with the increase in subsidies from the \$111 million to the approximate \$9 million and something for the GNBS?

Mr. Ali: In relation to question of the subsidy, which is given to the GNBS, I will give you a detailed programme as it related to the increase. In relation to the payment that GNBS makes to other organisation, it is not GNBS subsidising any other organisation. It is mandatory fees that GNBS must pay for its membership, for example, to the International Standard Organisation (ISO). All entities have to pay that standard fee to these international bodies and regional bodies as Guyana is a member of. The ISO, CARICOM Regional Organisation for Standards and Quality (CROSQ) are the two.

In relation to the increase of \$9,583,000 from last year provision, it will cater for the increase frequency of inspection to remote regions, this is air and river transport; there have been expanded operations in Region 3, 6 and 9 where new telephone lines have been put in; increase sensitisation, symposiums and public consultations, more training, because a organisation for

standards requires to constantly update its skills and compliance with new and emerging standards so that it, itself, would be in compliance with these standards, so that it can regulate other entities.

Ms. Ferguson: Follow-up. The Minister said that it is a mandatory fee that is being paid, but, if the column on page 594 is looked at, nothing was budgeted for last year but there is a revised amount and still yet nothing has been budgeted for the year 2013. Could the Minister shed some clarity where that is concerned? I think I heard the Minister made mention about Region 9, something about telephone lines. Could the Minister shed some clarity on that too?

Mr. Ali: What is it?

Ms. Ferguson: Could you say where in Region 9 will telephone lines be run?

Ms. Ali: We are setting up office within the regional administration office in Region 9.

Ms. Ferguson: I am still waiting on the explanation on my first question.

Ms. Ali: I am advised that ISO – is US\$11,600, CROSQ is around \$23,000 and Pan American Standards Commission (COPANT) is US\$1,700.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Minister, even though you have the figures there, still there has not been a figure budgeted for the year 2013. My concern is: Why is it that a figure is not reflected under this year's budgetary allocation?

Mr. Ali: I see the line the Hon. Member is speaking of. The international organisations, which I have mentioned, are those that the fees would have to be paid to. In terms of the specific line item, the Minister will definitely require some additional resources here later in the year.

We are sometimes early on the payment of the fees and sometimes we are late. and this is a problem facing the entire CARICOM, in terms of payment of fees to international organisations. You may have a situation where Guyana is paying its fees in November... [**Mrs. Backer:** I do not know that Barbados has that problem.] I can assure all of the Hon. Members here that this is a general problem facing the region as a whole.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: What about the allocation to Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO)?

Mr. Ali: In relation the Caribbean Tourism Organisation there is an allocation of \$17 million.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Is that also catered for under this head?

Mr. Ali: No. That is catered for under line item 6322, Subsidies and Contribution to International Organisations.

Mr. Chairman: It is a quarter to five o' clock and we are scheduled to finish this Ministry at 5 o' clock. We are still on the first programme, current expenditure. We did start somewhat late so I anticipate that we will take the recess at about 5.15 p.m. With that in mind, I ask you to please trim your questions.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Could the Hon. Minister state whether there has been an allocation under his budget for the heritage sites of Guyana?

Mr. Ali: When we come to the capital programme there is some allocation there for Fort Island.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Is it for Fort Island only?

Mr. Ali: Well, it is when we come to that.

Programme: 231 – Main Office - \$497,596,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 231 – Main Office - \$16,900,000

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Project 4100100 – Tourism Development, \$6 million: “Construction of booth, upgrading of Fort Island facilities and purchase of equipment.” Could the Hon. Minister say what is it that he contemplates doing with this amount of money?

Mr. Ali: There will be a construction of a 100-feet eight by eight feet visitor's information booth in central Georgetown to accommodate staff, disseminate information and to manage more effectively tourist and tourist information. There will be also the upgrade of Fort Island facilities

and we want to make that facility more visitor-friendly and put infrastructure in there that will ensure greater comfort of tourist and visitors alike.

In relation to the other heritage sites, Hon. Member, which you asked under the current expenditure, this, of course, is not under this Ministry. Heritage sites come under the National Trust, which is under the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport.

We are also hoping to develop a birding and heritage trail of 1610 metres, of 1 mile by 4 feet wide with proper signage, pathways, wooden bridges, and others.

Ms. Kissoon: Project 4100100 - Tourism Development: Could the Hon. Minister say whether any allowance has been made to include the Sonny Chapman Site as a tourist attraction? If not, why not, especially since this location is a tragedy of monumental proportion?

Mr. Ali: Historical sites and monumental sites might fall under the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, as Mr. Greenidge is advising too.

In terms of our tourism product and development, it is indeed limited to what I explained earlier.

Programme: 231 – Main Office - \$16,900,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Current Expenditure

Programme: 232 – Ministry Administration - \$65,667,000

Programme: 232 – Ministry Administration - \$65,667,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 232 – Ministry Administration - \$2,600,000

Programme: 232 – Ministry Administration - \$2,600,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Current Expenditure

Programme: 233 – Commerce, Industry and Customer Affairs - \$105,157,000

Mrs. Backer: Mr. Chairman, through you, Sir, to Hon. Minister, line item 6116, Contracted Employees. We see that 11 persons out of the staff of 16 are contracted employees. Could you share with us the designation of the 11 employees, two highest paid and the two lowest paid?

Mr. Ali: The two highest paid would be the two Senior Commerce Officers - \$166, 797 and the two lowest would be one confidential Secretary - \$56,270 and one Consumer Affairs Officer - \$69, 355.

Mr. Greenidge: I would just like to refer the Hon. Minister to line item 6116, pertaining to contracted employees, which he was dealing with before. The increase, which is showing here, is it associated with reclassification or there are substantial changes in the workload because the increase is not insignificant.

Mr. Ali: The increase here is just to cater for the 5% increase.

Mrs. Backer: Which 5% ?

Mr. Ali: It was of last year.

4.53 p.m.

Mr. Greenidge: The increase between the revised for the year 2012 and Budget 2013, as far as I am aware, should not reflect the 5%. The revision of salaries is reflected in the Ministry of Finance. Is that not it? Which 5% you are referring to, Hon. Minister?

Mr. Ali: This 5% has already been approved last year, which is now added to the salary.

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: That is elementary.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you Mr. Attorney General. I am glad that you can recognise what is and what is not elementary.

The other query, which arises from line item 6265, Other Transport, Travel and Postage, is where it seems to have jumped significantly. What is actually happening here?

Mr. Ali: The actual figure was 785 million, so there is an increase \$500,000. A lot more work is intended to be done, as I said, under the consumer affairs division in riverine and hinterland areas where the cost of transportation, as it is known, is quite substantial and as a result of that the Ministry will have air transport and river transport in addition to internal land transport within the regions themselves.

Mr. Greenidge: Minister, you are doing more works outside of the coast.

Mr. Ali: Yes.

Mr. Greenidge: Line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations: If I might ask in relation to Consumer and Competition Protection Commission. There is an increase here, again, that is quite substantial. I mean, normally when one looks at an increase of this magnitude one would expect that the agency is undertaken a new initiative of some sort or is faced by some exception of circumstances. What is it that underlies this increase?

Mr. Ali: The Hon. Member is perfectly correct. This Commission, the Consumers and Competition Affairs Commission, as it is known, is moving from a stage of conceptualisation to actual implementation now which will require, indeed, a lot of travelling and a lot of consultation work. Additional staff, for example, would be required. There are an Administrative Assistant and an Office Assistant. A Driver that will be required. The Ministry also, as it is known invested in a new vehicle and the cost of operating that vehicle for this very important Commission also falls under this head. In addition to that, having developed all these new guidelines, and so on, the Ministry will have to do a lot of capacity building all across the country, increase seminars, workshop for businesses, consumer, the judges and magistrates.

Mr. Greenidge: Are you training judges and magistrates, as regards issues relating to competition?

Mr. Ali: I would not be doing the training, Hon. Member, but definitely the Ministry will have specialised skills that will be coming in from the United Nations (UN) Council for Training and Development to give specific training in relation to this.

Mr. Greenidge: What exactly has been done by the Commission so far, in terms of reports, in terms of monitoring of the markets, and so forth? Is it only training? Does the Ministry have a

technical capacity within the Commission? What is the range of capacity and what has been the output of it?

Mr. Ali: The Ministry is doing the legal inventory study, right now, to ensure that what is here does not conflict with any other laws. It is working in very close collaboration with the Attorney General's Chamber. As I said, earlier we are now moving towards activism, moving towards the implementation of a lot of this.

Mr. Greenidge: Yes. Does the Commission have capacity? I mean, one of the biggest problems we have across the region is the relative lack of capacity in these areas. It is a big challenge; it is a complicated area.

Mr. Ali: It is a very fair question.

Mr. Greenidge: Let me finish, please, Minister. I know that you are so enthusiastic about answering. It is not a general question. I am really asking, what technical skills are there in the Commission? Are there trained lawyers? Is there an experienced economist or others in the areas of price and other competition?

Mr. Ali: Right now, there are a Director, a Competition Policy Officer, Consumer Affairs Officers, two Economist Analysts, in the consumer affairs field, a Legal Officer, a Financial Analyst, an Administrative Assistant and Office Assistant. Those are how are there in the complement now. However - if the Hon. Deputy Speaker would allow me - there is a very important question that was raised by the Hon. Member Mr. Carl Greenidge, a very scarce skill in the region itself, is in relation to competition and consumer law. What the Ministry is seeking to do also is, instead of outsourcing a lot of this work, to work on finding suitable candidates. Definitely, it will have a public advertisement in which it is going to work with, for example, the Public Service Ministry in finding candidates that it can be trained in this specific skills, that can be contracted to it, and help it through this phase, as the Ministry moves towards a body that would have the strong institutional competency as it moves forward.

Mrs. Backer: Hon. Minister, through you, Sir, the Legal Officer, does that person, he or she, has postgraduate legal training, specialising in that area?

Mr. Ali: The Legal Officer, there is now, has a first degree in law.

Mrs. Backer: Is that person a qualified lawyer or just a first degree in law holder?

Mr. Ali: The person is not called to the Guyana Bar Association, if that is the qualification. The person is not a lawyer at the moment and the salary so reflects that. For example, maybe, in your practice you call it a Legal Aid. That person or the legal officer gets \$150,000.

Mrs. Backer: Law is a very general degree, as we all know, that is why I am asking if that person has any particular... In studying for a law degree 17 courses would be done and perhaps Consumer Protection would be one of the 17, if any.

Mr. Ali: As we speak, this officer is undergoing training with the Competition Law Consultant.

Minister of Finance [Dr. Singh]: With the interest in this matter, may I clarify Sir, that in addition to the in-house capacity... Well, first of all, let me say, as the Minister Ali has already said, the Consumer and Competition Protection Commission is a relatively new Commission, relatively new constituted. It has a core staff which has been recruited, but it is also in receipt of institutional strengthening support from two sources. First, in collaboration with our development partners under both the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) supported competitiveness programme and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) supported Caribbean Aid for Trade and Regional Integration Trust Fund (CARTFund) programme at the Consumer and Competition Protection Commission. Under both of those programmes, special advisory has been provided to develop institutional mechanisms under which the commission will discharge its statutory responsibilities, and also discharge, and also equip the commission with technical capacity, and also do public awareness amongst, say for example, industry. In addition to this, I should add that the National Competition Commission is set up, in fact, within the framework of the CARICOM initiative. I see Mr. Greenidge nodding in the affirmative. He would no doubt be aware that within the context of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) there is, in fact, a regional endeavour to establish a regional competition architecture comprising national competition commissions. There is a regional agenda for developing capacity also from which we are benefiting. This is an ongoing process. I think the promise, we made, thus far, is to be commended, but I assure the House that we regard the progress we have made, thus far as literally work is in progress. I hope that clarifies the matter and puts it to rest.

Mr. Greenidge: I appreciate the complementary information that the Minister has provided along with that of his colleague. I was really asking the question so as to emphasise that it is a very technical area; it is something that we are going to be challenged to be able to either defend policies or to raise public awareness and ensure that people can fight for their rights. The explanations given so far, I think, emphasise properly the public awareness side, but as regards the technical skills, I would like to emphasise a point made by Deputy Speaker, that the Minister should really be seeking to deepen, as far as he can, the skill in a range of ways. To say that it is an economist or financial analyst means nothing in terms of the capacity. One needs to know what that person has, in terms of what experience and formal training are in those areas. The Minister may want to give some thought to perhaps assisting the university in this regard, so that some of its courses can be directed towards emphasising these skills which are solely needed.

Programme: 233 – Commerce, Industry and Consumer Affairs - \$105,157,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimate.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 233 - Commerce, Industry and Consumer Affairs - \$421,500,000

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Project 4501500 – Industrial Development: There is a provision here for industrial estates. The Hon. Minister in the reference in the case of infrastructure works to be done at Lethem and Belvidere. I would wish to ask the Hon. Minister whether any sums have been allocated for work on the other industrial estates, such as Coldingen, Eccles, and so on, and whether there is any truth in a report that parts of these industrial estates are now being used as house lots or are converted to house lots.

Mr. Ali: On the latter, I am not aware of any conversion of lots in any of the industrial estates that of housing. Indeed, the housing programme is a very accelerating programme that we will deal with a bit later. In terms of the industrial estates, which the Ministry will be looking at in the year 2013, the Hon. Member is correct. Those two estates will be the Belvidere Industrial Estate and the Lethem Industrial Estate.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: I am asking the Minister whether there is any maintenance or infrastructural work on the other industrial estates that have been established for a long time.

Mr. Ali: There is no budgeted provision under this head for other estates in the year 2013.

Mr. Ramjattan: In relation of the competitiveness, project e 4502500, I noticed in the project profile it is a continuation of that institutional capacity for competitiveness and there are five other headings. For this \$259 million, could the Minister say, for this year, where is that money going, directly under these six headings? I understand the majority will be for the number one heading. Could he verify?

Mr. Ali: The areas would be...

Mr. Ramjattan: I got the areas but I want the spending on each area.

Mr. Ali: “Strengthening the institutional capacity to formulate and implement the National Competitiveness Strategy” - \$26,906,300; “Enhancing the investment, export promotion and production standards through the strengthening of GO-INVEST and Guyana National Bureau of Standards” - \$3.612 million; “Support private enterprise competitiveness for export development” - \$894,693; “Strengthening tourism regulation and facilitation” - \$38,766,000; “Establishment of National Testing and Meterology Facility” - \$16,320,000; “Digitalization of property records at the Deeds Registry” - \$61,200. Then there is the support for the separation of Deeds Registry, Land Registry and Companies Registry - \$49,600,423; tax reform - \$8,160,000, implementation of trade transactions study, Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) \$1,080,000; support of Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CPCC) training equipment, public awareness raising, and so - \$2,200,000, consultancy to prepare a four-year action plan - \$634,848, consultancy to digitalise historical records and linkages, GRA...

Mr. Ramjattan: Is it a longer list than this that is here? I see six here. If there is a longer list, could the Minister just provide that?

Mr. Ali: Definitely.

Programme: 233 - Commerce, Industry and Consumer Affairs - \$421,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimate.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we have concluded our review of agency 23, Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce. I wish to thank the Minister and his technical officers for

assisting the Assembly in making its decisions and allowing us to be able to give approval. Minister - I know you are nicely dressed, I noticed, you and your colleagues - I see that you are indicating something. There is another Ministry which is to come.

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman, I just want to thank the members of this Ministry for the hard work and commitment over the year and to say that they have done an extremely good job.

Mr. Chairman: Well, I thank them, but you could perhaps hold a party for them at the end of the year.

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Speaker: I have prepared a ruling in the matter that was raised by Mr. Greenidge. It is being typed. It is not complete, but I have got the main parts of it. I have just spoke to the Minister of Finance to ask whether or not he wishes to say anything, because I had caused to send another copy of the letter to him, this afternoon. He has indicated to me that he does wish to be heard. Minister, I believe this is an appropriate time for you to state your Government's position on the matter raised by Mr. Greenidge, in his letter.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, first of all let me thank you very much for bring to my notice the letter written too you by the Hon. Member Carl Greenidge, dated 13th April, 2013, and indeed for very so kindly providing me with a second copy of that letter, today.

We have in Government studied in close detail the arguments made by Mr. Greenidge and permit me to say, Sir, that we, first of all, continue to be guided, as far as the matter of Budget 2013 is concerned, by your initial pronouncement on this matter and, that is, to say that the question of determining the format of the Estimates is one that falls squarely with the remit and preserve of the executive.

It is important to point out that the relevant constitutional enactments date back to the year 2001, in fact the insertion of the article 222 (A) and its associated third schedule, which are the relevant constitutional references in our extant Constitution, were the product of the very comprehensive 2001 constitutional review and amendment process. It is important to note that since the enactment of those constitutional amendments, the formats utilised for submission by the executive of the national budget, including of the budgets of those entities listed in the third

schedule, have for all material and practical purposes remained the same and have been examined by this honourable House, including, most recently, last year and the year before, and have granted, after close scrutiny and examination, the approbation of the National Assembly that itself we believe is instructive.

Having said that, our Government remains open, as, indeed, we always are, to examining new representation and arguments submitted, including those that have been articulated by Mr. Greenidge. While our current advice remains, advice that says the format utilised does not collide with the Constitution or any other statutory provision, I wish to assure you, Sir, that going forward we would be pleased to examine the matter - re-examine the matter rather - and to share with you, as we proceed beyond Budget 2013, perhaps for the purposes of a subsequent budget, the outcome for examination of this matter.

I hope that that assurance, at the current time, suffices for the purpose of concluding the deliberations on Budget 2013.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Greenidge, would you wish to be heard, in a rebuttal?

Mr. Greenidge: No thank you Mr. Speaker. I believe that I have given enough explanation on the matter.

Mr. B. Williams: Sir, it is just a point of clarification. Is the Hon. Minister of Finance saying that what we have under consideration in these Estimates are block votes, for example for the Supreme Court? Is that a block vote in the way the Estimates are presented?

Mr. Speaker: The Minister has given his position, the Government's position, that the Government is advised that at present the format does not collide. Whether he wants to go further or not, I do not know.

Mr. B. Williams: I understand, Sir, but we are saying the Constitution states that they must have block votes. All we are asking is that if the Minister of Finance is saying that what we are considering for the Supreme Court, for example, is in the format of a block vote.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me say that the Constitution makes no reference to terminology used by the Hon. Member Mr. Basil Williams.

Mr. Speaker: It states the words “lump sum”.

Dr. Singh: It does state the words “lump sum”. It uses the words “lump sums” and “subventions”.

Mr. Speaker: This is not going to be a question and answer session...

Dr. Singh: I have no intention to be drawn into this exchange at the current point in time. I will reiterate that our current advice is that the existing format does not collide but we remain open, as always, to examine.

Mr. Ramjattan: That is why I had wanted to be cautious on the matter and had indicated to Your Honour that I need to do some research. As a matter of fact, I had indicated a very important book, *The Budget Process*, by David McGee.

Mr. Speaker: I should say that I have spoken with the Clerk and we are making efforts to have several copies of that book made available to the National Assembly, so that all sides could have access to it. I think we have agreed on five copies. It is published by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. The Clerk, I know, is making effort to have copies acquired.

Hon. Members, we will take the recess and on our return I will make a ruling on the matter.

Sitting suspended at 5.19 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 6.39 p.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, thank you. Please be seated. Have my apology for the delay. I was finalising the ruling that I undertook to give and was trying to do my own typing. Without any delay, I would like to read the ruling and then we will, depending on the decision, decide whether we are going to resume Committee of Supply or not. This ruling is Ruling No. 5 of 2013 and it goes this way:

“April 24, 2013.

Ruling No. 5 of 2013

Request of Hon. Carl B. Greenidge, M.P. for the Speaker to Give Approval for the Matter of the Estimates of Expenditures of Entities Mentioned in Article 222 A of the Constitution Not To Be Considered Until the Ministry of Finance Withdraws the Proposal for Appropriation and Submits Same in the Manner Required by the Constitution.

By way of letter dated April 13, 2013, the Hon. Member Mr. Carl B. Greenidge, M.P., wrote me to point out that the format of the presentation of Estimates for certain constitutional entities were in error. (See letter attached) More specifically, Mr. Greenidge advanced the argument that except for the Ethnic Relations Commission and the Audit Office, the estimates for the Judiciary and other Rights Commissions were not presented as a “block or lump sum allocation”. This, in the opinion of the Hon. Mr. Greenidge, offends the requirements of Articles 222A, 122(2), 151(3), 226(7), 212 9(3) and 226(1) of the Constitution - both in letter and in spirit.

Without hesitation, I state that I agree with the Hon. Member Carl B. Greenidge, M.P., that the framers of these very important Constitutional entities intended that they all would be independent of, and insulated from, political or other direction and/or control. Further, I agree that the Estimates for these entities should be placed as a “lump sum”.

I have noted the assurances given by the Hon. Minister of Finance that these matters remain under active consideration by the Government of Guyana, and that the Government is equally open to examining new representations to be submitted; this notwithstanding the advice that says that the present format does not “collide” with the constitutional requirements. I note as well that the present format has been accepted by previous Parliaments and that several Members of the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Parliaments are also Members of the Tenth; and are familiar with the present format and in fact know that this is what has been in place for some time. Further, I am advised that this matter was raised in the inter-party dialogue in 2012 and that there is an expectation that it will be carried forth in the Constitution Review Committee.

I turn now to the request made of the Speaker that is contained in the letter as follows:

“The APNU seeks the approval of the Speaker for this matter to be not considered until the M.O.F. [Ministry of Finance] withdraws the proposal for appropriation and submits the request required by the Constitution”.

Article 218 states:

“The Minister responsible for Finance or any other Minister designated by the President shall cause to be prepared and laid before the National Assembly before or within ninety (90) days after the commencement of each financial year estimates of the revenues and expenditures of Guyana for that year.”

I am of the considered opinion that the power granted to the Executive to prepare and “lay” the Estimates of the Revenues and Expenditures of Guyana for any year is not absolute, but circumscribed, inter alia, by the requirements set out in article 222A that states:

“the expenditure of each of the entities shall be financed as a direct charge on the Consolidated Fund, determined as a lump sum by way of an annual subvention approved by the National Assembly after a review and approval of the entity’s annual budget as part of the process of the determination of the National Budget”.

Following an examination of the Standing Orders of the National Assembly in particular, and the practices, usages and conventions of the House of Commons of Great Britain and other Parliaments generally, I have come to the conclusion that the Speaker of the National Assembly has no power to determine, instruct, direct, compel, or inform the manner of the content, or format, of the Estimates or Appropriation Bills. However, I did find reference to an instance where the United Kingdom’s House of Commons’ Speaker declined to propose the question on a Motion that did not satisfy Standing Order No. 48.

[Standing Order 48 of the United Kingdom reads]:

“This House will receive no petition for any sum relating to public service, or precede upon any motion for the grant or charge upon the public revenue, whether payable out of the Consolidated Fund or the National Loans Fund, or out of money to be provided by

Parliament, or for releasing or compounding any sum of money owing to the Crown, unless recommended by the Crown.”

In the UK the Speaker declined to propose a question because Standing Order 48 had been violated.

“The National Assembly may decline to give approval to the appropriations for the entities that are entitled to be financed through a block or lump sum allocation, and which in this instance, are not. The Speaker, on the other hand, does not, and should not, have such power. Except in the case of a violation of our Standing Orders, the Speaker is without jurisdiction to act.

RULING

1. The Speaker of the National Assembly cannot compel the Government, or the Minister responsible for Finance, to prepare the Estimates and/or requests for appropriations in any particular format;
2. The Speaker of the National Assembly cannot give approval for, or express disapproval, for the consideration of the Estimates to be provided for, except that there is a clear violation of the Standing Orders. In this case, there is none.
3. The power to decline to consider the estimates and the appropriations to be sought rests solely within the body of the National Assembly.

That is my ruling. Thank you very much. I will make the necessary changes and have it circulated before the end of the evening. Hon. Members, whilst the constitution speaks of a format, it is not within the power or jurisdiction of the Speaker to determine or to give approval as to how we should proceed. The National Assembly, as stated in Article 218, can approve or not approve. As I said, the Speaker has no such power, and I hope that the Speaker never has such power. That is my ruling, and I return the matter to the National Assembly for its consideration.

Could we resolve ourselves into Committee of Supply, please? Thank you.

Assembly resolved itself into Committee of Supply.

In Committee of Supply

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, when we suspended, we had just completed the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce. We turn to the same Minister, this time wearing a different hat, the Minister of Housing and Water. I ask that we move to pages 166-167 as we consider the sum stated in the Estimates for Programme 451.

Agency: 45 Ministry of Housing and Water

Current Expenditure

Programme: 451 – Housing and Water – \$508,138,000

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: I would like to refer the Hon. Minister to line item 6116 – Contracted Employees. I wish to ask the Hon. Minister to give us an explanation for the increase of \$8 million in this line item and explain the fact that we have only had an increase in two persons from 2012 to 2013. How do you explain an increase of \$8 million for that purpose?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman, the increase is due to the five % increase. The two new staff are Cleaner and Housing Economist.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Could the Hon. Minister give us the salary of the Housing Economist and what is the work that the Housing Economist does, his or her terms of reference?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman, the salary of the Housing Economist is \$211,982 and the terms of reference can be provided.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Is this the total number of Housing Economists that you need, Hon. Minister, or do you have a requirement for more?

Mr. Ali: At the moment, this will fulfil our institutional requirement to ensure efficiency and reliability.

Mrs. Backer: Is it one?

Mr. Ali: Yes, one, o-n-e.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chairman, I know that this is a very important Ministry and the skills that are necessary for the work that has to be done on behalf of the people of this country... We have to ensure that this Ministry is properly staffed. So, I, myself, have had some interaction with the staff there and I am pretty impressed with the quality of their work.

Hon. Minister, let me take you to line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations. We go to the Central Housing and Planning Authority. That is, of course, my favourite place. Could the Hon. Minister state for this House what the purpose for the \$150 million subsidy which is given to this institution is?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman, the full sum goes towards the payment of salaries.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: The full sum goes towards the payment of salaries. Is that to say that this \$150 million caters for all of the salaries of the employees of the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA), or do you have additional sums which are required?

Mr. Ali: The subsidy covers approximately 67% of the total salary.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: What is the total number of staff of the CH&PA please and the designations of these persons?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman, we have 140 staff. We have the CEO, Director of Operations, Secretary CH&PA, Head of Internal Control and Audit...

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: List the top ten with their salaries.

Mr. Ali: They are the Director of Operations who earns \$376,511; the Chief Development Planner at \$377,118; the Secretary CH&PA at \$225,660; the Director of Community Planning at \$281,136; the Head of Monitoring and Evaluation Unit at \$268,311; the Chief Executive Officer at \$522,000; Director of Finance at \$365,789; Director of Projects at \$327,221 and the Senior Engineer at \$302,126.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Thank you. Hon. Minister, are these basic salaries or salaries inclusive of allowances?

Mr. Ali: These are the basic salaries.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: If we were to add the allowance to the first five, what would the figures come up to please?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman, only the CEO gets an allowance of \$10,000. There are no other allowances.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: In effect, what you are saying is that the salaries that you gave would be the full packages for these persons. Are there an organisational structure and a staffing requirement for the Central Housing and Planning Authority? If so, are you up to the level for your staffing?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman, yes there is an organisational chart, and we still have some vacancies in accordance with that chart. I would like to say that the level of skill that you alluded to in the Ministry has allowed us the opportunity to do most of our design and supervision in-house, that is, we do not now require the services of consultants. The direct savings this investment from our human capacity in-house has brought to the organisation and to the people of Guyana are in excess of \$1.2 billion last year.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Those figures are captured, I believe, in some document that you would have laid over. Is that so, Hon. Minister?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman, it was captured in my Budget presentation. A lot of the figures are captured in the annual report of the Central Housing and Planning Authority, in which the agency is up to date in its submission to the National Assembly and we hope that we will also be up to date with the constitutional deadline this year also.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Minister, could you state the reason, having regard to the fact that you have a requirement for changing skills sets, that for the last four years your subvention has always remained constant? Is there any reason why that is so?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman, the subvention is allocated by the Ministry of Finance based on prevailing economic circumstances and budgetary allowance that can be earmarked for the agency.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: So, in spite of all that is happening, you think the Minister of Finance, who is your very good Friend, has not been treating you well?

Mr. Ali: He has been treating us perfectly well.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Thank you very much. Minister, I would like to go to deal with a couple of issues under the Central Housing and Planning Authority...

Mr. Ali: Which head are you on?

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: I am on the same Central Housing and Planning Authority here, line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations. Some of the programmes that the Central Housing and Planning Authority superintends or supervises on behalf of the people of Guyana, in particular the programme for low income housing, I would like to know if the Hon. Minister can indicate to us what, if any, is the state of the provision of legal services within the Ministry, whether within the staff you have there a lawyer that does the legal work for the Ministry exists or is it that the legal services for the Ministry is contracted out? If it is so, could you indicate the name of the firm and the financial entitlement?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman, the legal services prior to about two years ago was completely outsourced. The CH&PA has evolved now to the extent that we now have our own Corporate Secretary who has been admitted to the Bar and is the company's Secretary. A lot of work is being done by her, bringing a lot of savings to the CH&PA. However, reducing percentage of her work is still being outsourced. In our strategic plan, which I shared with the Hon. Member, we have strategies through which we are developing the capacity to do all our legal work in-house within two years.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: So, Hon. Minister, would you agree that there is still some amount of legal work that is outsourced?

Mr. Ali: Yes, I said that.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: I am asking you then what the name of the firm is and the extent of the financial commitment to that outsourcing.

Mr. Ali: Luckhoo and Luckhoo is the name of the firm. I cannot give the exact figure now, but I can endeavour to deliver that to the House and the Hon. Member.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Thank you very much, Minister. Minister, I would like to ask you a question which I asked last year. I will ask you again because I did not receive that information last year. This is the question about the allocation of house lots. It is to find out whether there has been an audit of the number of house lots that have been allocated up to the end of 2012 and, if so, whether the Minister has a report of such an audit that can be shared with the Parliament.

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman, all allocations that are made and the entire allocation process and system are part of the audit by the Auditor General. That is also incorporated in our annual report and audited statement that we submit here.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Could you give us, therefore, Hon. Minister, for the last five years, roughly, the amount of house lots that have been allocated?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman, in the last five years, we have completed in excess of 28,500 allocations.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Of these – though you might not be able to give me an exact figure – how many of these house lots were converted into homes for Guyanese people to live in?

Mr. Ali: Our rate of transition in terms of occupancy is a period of two years. We started from 65% and in three years got up to as close as 70%. In some areas, within the first year and a half we can get up to 55%. An example is the new Eccles phase development. If you go there, you will see that in a year and a half we almost went up to 50%.

We have also incorporated a suggestion that came out of the debates last year, which was to extend the subsidy beyond land ownership to home ownership. What we have done is that the low-income earner would have received a subsidy of almost \$950,000 on a low-income lot, that is, \$100,000 less the cost of developing that lot. We used the cost incentives to build the homes. We have been able to give \$2.2 million subsidy for the house and the land. So, instead of having

a \$900,000 subsidy, we were able to deliver a house and land for \$4.5 million with a subsidy of in excess of \$2 million.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Okay. Thank you Minister. I would just like to separate these two things. First of all let us deal with the house lots, and then we will deal with the house lots with houses on them. Could the Hon. Minister indicate, since you took us to Eccles and the low-income houses at Eccles, the house lots there, what the criteria that the Ministry has used to determine the costs of these low-income house lots are and whether, in fact, there is a report of an independent quantity surveyor or someone of that skill set that would indicate that the price you are charging now is fair and reasonable?

Mr. Ali: Hon. Member, through the Chairman, I wish to assure you that the prices are beyond reasonable, to the extent that the private sector accuses the Authority of setting prices are inhibitive to the growth and development of their businesses based on the prices they are setting.

Let me say to you that we have a technical committee that includes a surveyor, an economist, financial experts, the Permanent Secretary and the Director of Operations, who would sit and calculate the differential values in terms of the different stratification and costing of the house lots.

Using the same example you gave, we were able to do the houses in that area for \$4.5 million, which the low-income persons are now demanding. They prefer to go towards the home ownership and get the land and the house for that price. So we had the low-income. We had the low-income with the house and the land. We had house lots ranging from \$200,000 to \$1.2 million. In addition to that, the qualification for the different stratification is based on the information submitted at the time of application. For someone to qualify for a low-income house lot, once he or she meets the criteria of earning less than \$60,000 per month with at least one child below 21 years old, that person qualifies for a low-income house lot. Those are the qualification criteria that have been developed in collaboration with the European Union (EU) Low Income Programme and the International Development Bank (IDB) Low Income Programme.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Have these criteria been tested in poor or challenged communities, these criteria about one child and \$60,000 minimum? We recognise here that there are people in

the Government Ministries who are working for sometimes \$35,000 and \$40,000 still? How did we get to that, Minister?

7.09 p.m.

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman, these criteria have been tested, tried and very successful. Let me also say this now: we have a different situation now. We have a situation at the Ministry where a lot of the persons who are qualified for the low-income house lot – that is the \$100,000 house lot – come into the Ministry and say, “We do not want to go into the low income area. We do not want to go there. We prefer you to qualify us for a low/middle income house lot.” And that is what is creating a big backlog for us now. Persons are now coming to us with a demand to move from the low-income bracket into the low/middle income bracket and this is something that the Hon. Member is fully aware of.

Lt. Col (Ret’d) Harmon: Well, I thank you. I am not there all the time. You have spoken about the \$4.5 million houses at Eccles. Could the Hon. Minister state who the contractors for this project are and has there been a public tendering for this?

Mr. Ali: All of the contractors were acquired through the public procurement process and they are: Ivor Alleyne, Cutting Edge, Shant and Sons, Zaffarally... We can submit the list.

Lt. Col (Ret’d) Harmon: Minister, is there, at the level of the CH&PA, some level of supervision of the quality of work of these contractors? If there is such an entity or person within the CH&PA who is so designated to do this, can we get the emolument of that person?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman, we do have persons assigned to do supervision of this work and such supervision is done, also, alongside the banking supervision. The salary is between \$258,000 and \$263,000.

Lt. Col (Ret’d) Harmon: Are these employees of the CH&PA?

Mr. Ali: Yes.

Mr. Ramjattan: Hon. Minister, I notice that the Ministry has a capacity to get some earnings, and this year it is projected to be \$73 million. What are the services and goods that are sold there to that...

Mr. Ali: Which head, sir?

Mr. Ramjattan: This is on page 615. Revenue from operation and sale of goods and services is \$73 million. There is the capacity to make some income. What are the goods and services that the Ministry sells?

Mr. Ali: At a subsidised rate, there are the transport fees, survey fees, building approval fees – remember that the Central Housing and Planning Authority also approves plans and there is the fee for the approval of plans and buildings – and the application fees.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Could the Hon. Minister say whether upon application there is a legal fee charged to the person applying or the recipient of and how much, if there is such a fee?

Mr. Ali: There is a legal fee for the transport, not for the application.

Mr. Nagamootoo: How much is that?

Mr. Ali: It is \$8,000.

Mr. Nagamootoo: As of course, would the CH&PA pay the registrar a fee for the conveyance of a transport?

Mr. Ali: We do not pay any fees to the registrar.

Mr. Nagamootoo: If I get the Hon. Minister right, in the last five years, if the Ministry has prosecuted 28,500 house lots, that should give a total of \$228 million. My good and learned Friend Mr. Ramjattan has just asked in terms of revenue. Would the \$73 million be part of this revenue earned by this agency? I have, roughly, \$228 million in the last five years alone.

Mr. Ali: The Hon. Member is not subtracting the cost of conducting the business. If that is deducted, the Hon. Member would see that it is a much reduced amount.

Mr. Ramjattan: Do you not make a profit on it?

Mr. Ali: No, we do not make a profit on it. It is not a revenue-generating business.

Mr. Nagamootoo: If it is not paid to the registrar, is there a fixed fee which is payable to the lawyer? [Mr. Nandlall: You worked for them.] I helped. The Minister would tell you that. It was \$2,500 per transaction. I would not go beyond that.

Mr. Chairman: Were you one of the lawyers, Mr. Nagamootoo?

Mr. Nagamootoo: I volunteered. It was not \$250,000, Sir. In cases where the old institutional lawyers failed, I helped him.

Mr. Chairman: It is good to know that you helped out.

Mr. Nagamootoo: It was for the paperwork. I worked almost *pro bono*, Sir, and he can verify that. I am not like Mr. Nandlall and others. The other day we were talking about a firm getting \$25 million a year. Be that as it may, we are talking about the expense. If a cane cutter who gets a \$700,000 house lot comes and pays \$8,000 and the registrar is not getting any of that, where is the \$8,000 of this cane cutter going?

Mr. Chairman: I think I heard the Minister say there is an opportunity cost. Maybe he needs to disaggregate and say exactly what happens with this money.

Mr. Ali: I can endeavour to give a full breakdown to the Hon. Member.

Mr. Chairman: You can give an idea. You may give a detailed breakdown to the Member but, certainly, the House is entitled to an idea.

Mr. Ali: The majority of this fee goes towards the lawyers and we have many lawyers who have worked with us over the period...

Mr. Chairman: One minute, please, Sir. I do not know if the other lawyers want to object but that did not sound too nice - "The majority goes to the lawyers."

Mr. Ali: The majority of the fees...

Mr. Chairman: Could someone please defend the profession?

Mr. Ali: Eighty per cent of the fees go to the lawyers.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Williams?

Mr. B. Williams: Not me.

Mr. Chairman: I see. The majority goes to a lawyer.

Mr. Ali: But, of course, we have the very nationalistic lawyers. Let us take, for example, the Hon. Member, Ms. Bibi Shadick, who has never charged us a cent for the processing of any transaction. There is Mr. Nagamootoo who charged \$2,500. There are some lawyers who charge \$3,000 and some would go as high as \$5,000.

Mr. B. Williams: I wish to ask a follow-up question on the low-income housing programme. Hon. Minister, I am trying to work out the \$4.5 million. A low income land owner comes to you. Do you give them a mortgage for \$2 million? What is your subsidy? What form does the subsidy take?

Mr. Ali: The cost of developing the land is approximately \$1.2 million per lot. That is to clear the land, put in drainage, and do roads, water, and electricity. The market cost of building the house comes up to \$5.6 million. The actual cost for the two is \$6.8 million and we charge \$4.5 million for the house and the land which gives a difference of \$2.3 million.

Mr. B. Williams: I understand that. Does the individual get that?

Mr. Ali: Hon. Member, if I may go a bit further, what happens is the equity value on the property is \$6.8 million. If the individual is going to the bank for a loan, the bank would hold the property at its equity value of \$6.8 million which has a lot of other benefits for the allottees.

Mr. B. Williams: How much do they get from the bank? That is what I am asking. What do they have to raise for themselves?

Mr. Ali: That is a relative question. It depends on how much they pay down – 20%, 25%, the age of the person, the duration of the loan. There is a lot of relativity.

Mr. B. Williams: You can answer my question then. How many persons are in that programme?

Mr. Ali: In this programme, so far, there are in excess of 350 persons. Those are persons who have already qualified for the programme. There are more than 1,000 persons who are waiting to

get into this programme, persons who came in to us and said that they do not want the land, they want to get into the programme; they do not want just the land; they want the house and the land.

Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon: Hon. Minister, you have given us the \$8,000 and how it is subsidised. Could you tell us what happens to the actual sum of money that a citizen pays for the house lot? The \$500,000, \$700,000 or \$900,000, where does that money go?

Mr. Ali: First of all, this resource is used to supplement the budgetary allocation to provide the services that we have to provide.

Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon: The question is: where does the money go first?

Mr. Ali: It goes into the housing fund. All of the resources go into the housing fund. I want to say this to the honourable House too: our policy is to complete final infrastructure upon 75% occupancy. I just mentioned that in most of the cases we get up to 75% occupancy in three years. The Ministry may have a billion dollars but in actual fact, a great percentage of the billion dollars has to be earmarked for the completion of the infrastructure three years from now.

Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon: Minister, is this housing fund audited by the Auditor General and, if so, when last was it audited?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that the housing fund is audited and it is an agency of exceptional performance. It has been submitted to the National Assembly...

Mr. Chairman: Who does the auditing?

Mr. Ali: The Auditor General does the auditing.

Mr. Chairman: The Minister said "exceptional performance". I do not know whether he is quoting or whether he is giving his opinion.

Mr. Ali: It is the opinion of the auditors.

Mr. B. Williams: For the low-income homeowner, what is the rate of attrition? Do these people hold on to these properties indefinitely or after a year they *feg out* and cannot sustain it? What is the situation with that?

Mr. Ali: We have not had any significant cases of people *fegging out*. We also have not had any significant cases of foreclosure. As a matter of fact, persons in the banking sector would tell you that the best performing loans within their portfolio are the low income, low/middle income and middle income loans.

Mr. B. Williams: Really?

Mr. Ali: It is a fact.

Mr. B. Williams: That is not how I understand it.

Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon: Hon. Minister, earlier you indicated that the subsidy that you are asking for – the \$150 million – is to cover about 67% of the salaries. Could I refer you to page 615 of these Estimates, Hon. Minister? Under Wages and Salaries, there is an actual amount of \$154,578,000 for 2011. Budgeted for 2012 was \$154,578,000 – the same amount. The revised amount for 2012 was \$194,414,000. Budgeted for 2013 is \$177,378,000. Those are your figures. And you continue to ask for \$150 million, as I said, over the last four years. Is there any reason for that?

Mr. Ali: The total that is given here is out of the total wages and salaries cost, the total employment cost of \$222,667,000.

Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon: Are you saying this is an accurate reflection of what the situation is?

Mr. Ali: Yes, Hon. Member.

Ms. Ferguson: On page 615, under the heading Other Operating Expenses, in 2012, the sum of \$25,808,000 was spent. However, in 2013, you are asking for a lesser amount. Can you explain why the increase in 2012 and why you are asking for a lesser amount in 2013? The other question to you, Hon. Minister is: can you explain to this honourable House the time span between application for house lots, the processing of these applications and the acquisition of the house lots once the persons would have paid up their moneys? I have another question, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, you have posed two. Allow the Minister to answer those and then you will pose a third.

Mr. Ali: The increase last year was a direct result of security services and sanitary facilities which were required for the revolving homes which were constructed in the areas I just spoke of – Eccles and Providence/Herstelling area.

The other question was in relation to the timeframe for the processing of applications. It is basically demand and supply. We are at different years in different regions. For example, Regions 3 and 4 are the regions with the greatest demand. Right now, we are processing applications and closing off 2009. We have recently placed an advertisement in the newspaper for any applicant who applied before 2006 to come in so that we can close those off. We are closing off 2009 and we have started 2010. In some other regions, for example Region 2, we are at 2011. In Region 5, we are at 2011. In Region 6, we are at 2010. In Region 10, we are at 2010. We are now closing off 2010 and we are trying to get land to move forward in Region 10, also.

One of the major difficulties that we have in Region 4 as to why we are still at 2009 and 2010 is because there are a large number of applicants who do not want to remove from the East Coast. We have a complexity because we are not in a position to acquire land along the East Coast corridor to expand the housing programme. As a result, there are some persons who may have old applications but refuse to process those applications for a house lot in Region 3 or on the East Bank. Those are some of the situations which confront us at the Ministry.

Ms. Ferguson: Why is it that residents in South Enmore who have smaller dimensions of house lots are made to pay the same amount of money as those who acquired larger dimensions of house lots? For instance, in South Enmore, a family has a house lot of 30 x 10 and he or she is made to pay \$100,000 and one has 40 x 100 and is made to pay the same \$100,000. Can you explain the reason for this?

Mr. Ali: May I humbly request that the specific case be brought to us? It is very hard to answer a question like that. I will give you an example. An Hon. Member last year raised the issue of a teacher in Region 10 who got a \$300,000 house lot and in the Hon. Member's opinion the teacher was qualified for a \$100,000 house lot. We asked the Hon. Member to supply the information to us so that we can check the system and we are still awaiting that information to do that verification.

Mrs. Backer: The person migrated.

Mr. Ali: I did not know; somebody should have told us.

Mrs. Garrido-Lowe: While I would like to commend the Government for its housing initiative, especially for the low income Guyanese...because I think there is enough land in Guyana for every Guyanese and I would like to see every Guyanese with their own home and land. You said that infrastructure takes three years to be dealt with. Why is that?

Mr. Ali: No, I did not say that.

Mrs. Garrido-Lowe: Did you not say that?

Mr. Ali: No, I did not say that.

Mrs. Garrido-Lowe: Let me ask you this: in Paradise Housing Scheme, people are living there. They got their house lots. They built their houses. Some of them are still building. They have no lights, no water and just one road. Why it is that infrastructure takes so long? They have to live there. They cannot take out a loan and pay rent and mortgage at the same time. I think the Ministry should really do something about roads, water, and light when people are given these house lots.

Mr. Ali: The specific area that you are speaking about falls under co-op society. We are having difficulties with a number of co-ops which received resources from the allottees and they were supposed to use those resources for the infrastructural development. I think the Minister of Labour is looking at some of these issues in relation to the co-op. The specific issue that you are speaking about is a co-op issue.

Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon: If one looks at page 615 which I referred to earlier... In fact, when one adds up all that was given to the CH&PA last year...the budget was for \$2.3 billion. We approved some additional sums of money which took the amount to almost \$3.8 billion. Yet, at the end of the year, there was a deficit of \$102 million. Could the Hon. Minister indicate to this House what the impact of that shortfall was on the programmes of the CH&PA for 2012?

Mr. Ali: The deficit that the Hon. Member is alluding to is the deficit under the current expenditure and this is the deficit that is covered by the CH&PA. This is the operational cost deficit which is covered by the CH&PA.

Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon: What impact did it have on the operations of the agency?

Mr. Ali: It did not have an impact because the deficit was covered by resources under the CH&PA.

Mr. Greenidge: I would like to continue the query on this very interesting matter of the low-income house lots which the Minister was kind enough to elaborate on for us. I listened with rapt attention to his exposition of how well this has unfolded. Can he give us an indication, as of now, of the total low-income house lots that have been distributed and the proportion of those that have had beneficiaries construct something on them?

Mr. Ali: I am advised that for applications up to and including 2011, there was an occupancy rate of approximately 65% in total across the country.

Mr. Greenidge: I am not sure about the meaning of this term “occupancy rate”. In what sense is it being used?

Mr. Ali: People building and occupying the lots and their homes.

Mr. Greenidge: You are saying that your analysis shows that 65% of the persons in the low-income category who received house lots have built houses on them.

Mr. Ali: I would like to clarify. I was speaking generally about all allocations up to and including 2011. It is approximately 65%. In terms of the breakdown, I can endeavour to deliver that information to you.

Mr. Greenidge: I do recall seeing a somewhat different figure from the Ministry of Housing two years ago. Let me just draw to your attention that the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), which has helped you with sites and services in the past, referring to the first programme that it funded, stated:

“Only half of the allocated lots had been occupied due to incomplete site and services infrastructure, limited access to financing for sanitary services and construction, and lack of stakeholder participation in project development.”

This is just the first IDB project. I believe that you have had two.

7.39 p.m.

Mr. Ali: Yes. Mr. Chair, Hon. Member, this indeed was in 2007 under the LIS One Programme. Under the LIS Two Programme you will be happy to see the report speaking to significant improvement, not only in occupancy but also in the delivery of infrastructure and services.

Mr. Greenidge: I thank the Minister, but I would just like to stress how important it is to try to make sure the reports are balanced, and also how important it is for the Minister to appreciate that there are specific handicaps that the low income groups may face even apart from the inadequacy of infrastructure. Because when I had looked at the report for housing it itself it pointed to the difficulty. If one is earning \$32,000 or \$35,000 a month it is hard to get a mortgage.. So whilst I think one can be appreciative of the good work that Central Housing and Planning Authority has done and the stress under which they work, I think we must urge that, perhaps, a more balanced presentation be made so that the Ministry can get not only the support of the Minister of Finance but the support of the House in understanding the challenges faced and be more accommodating in providing the resources and support. Thank you.

Programme: 451 – Housing and Water - \$508,138,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 451 – Housing and Water - \$6,475,525,000

Mr. Adams: Mr. Chairman, Project Code – 1402500: can the Hon. Minister be kind enough to list the communities that will benefit under this head. If it is too lengthy we can have that laid over.

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chair, these are multi-year contracts. We handed this over last year and I am willing again to hand it over. It is a very, very long list.

Mr. Adams: Project Code – 1900900: would the Hon. Minister say if all the roads in Westminster would be rehabilitated under this programme? And are the roads in Tuschen and Cornelia Ida included in this rehabilitation of existing scheme roads?

Mr. Ali: Hon. Member, the Hon. Member Mr. Harmon would tell you about the significant improvement we have in Parfait Harmony after last year. There are still a lot of roads that would have to be done. In Westminster, for example, we are doing three roads and the estimated cost is approximately \$75 million. Last year we did a lot of work in Tuschen also. Those are the works we are undergoing at the moment.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Mr. Chair, a follow-up question: I have been there and the Minister is quite correct in so far as the main roads but the connecting roads are the problem areas. In fact Westminster, as we know, is a very big community and it continues to expand. I am sure since this is also the Minister's political area he would want to see some additional work being done on those roads.

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chair, Hon. Member, for this Minister all of Guyana is my political area. However, let me say this, I am very happy that the Hon. Member recognises the area is expanding and growing in terms of occupancy. The field exercise is ongoing at the moment to get those roads where occupancy is 75% so we can develop that master list for the next tranche of resources in investment.

Ms. Kissoon: Minister, project code 2800800. How much money is allocated for Ituni and for Rockstone?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chair, Hon. Member, \$8.3 million for Ituni and \$13.5 million for Rockstone.

Ms. Kissoon: Thank you Hon. Minister. Project code 2801000, could the Hon. Minister layover in writing the estimated cost for each area under this head?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chair, Hon. Member, last year we submitted the total project document for Linden water. You would recall that. I have no objection in resubmitting that document to the Hon. House.

Ms. Kissoon: Project code 2801500, could the Hon. Minister describe in clear and unambiguous language the types of works for each item listed under this head. I see a list here but it is still not clear.

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chair, Hon. Member, in the full project description that is required, which will be resubmitted to this Hon. House, the full description would be there. Would you still like me to read through the full description now?

Ms. Kissoon: Lay it over, thank you.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister indicate under project code 1900900 whether there has been any sum set aside here for the regularisation of squatter settlements.

Mr. Ali: Hon. Member through Mr. Chair, we do have some allocation set aside for regularisation. We had 216 squatter settlements. We have been able to regularise 171 of those. We have now completed Cane Grove and are doing the infrastructure there also. We have approximately 17 of the squatting areas within the 216 that cannot be regularised. We have around 20 that are considered within the zero-tolerance zone, that is, on drainage reserves and so on. What we have to do in those areas is work on a relocation plan which is an ongoing process. The Hon. Member is aware that we are indeed colliding our interests in a number of these areas.

Mr. Chairman: Colliding interest.

Ms. Kissoon: Project Code 2800800: what is the cost Hon. Minister of each plant and what type of elevated storage?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chair, Hon. Member, again this question relates to the detailed project document which will be re-laid in the House for your benefit.

Ms. Kissoon: You could give me the cost now if you do not mind.

Mr. Ali: The two plants will cost \$1.6 billion inclusive of the elevated storage, ground storage and booster stations.

Ms. Marcello: Mr. Chair, can the Hon. Minister say how much allocation is being put aside for the construction of a trestle at Bamboo Creek?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chair, Hon. Member, 9.5 million.

Programme: 541 - Housing and Water - \$6,475,525,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: May I again thank the Minister and his technical officers for providing all information and for assisting.

I believe, Minister, it would be in order for me to extend happy birthday wishes to you in advance. His birth date is tomorrow and as we are not going to be here tomorrow I thought I had better do it now. Minister, I hope you have a restful day tomorrow.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Ali: So as not to be biased towards one sector I wish to thank the staff of the Ministry of Housing and Water and Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA) for the exceptional work they are doing for the people of Guyana.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members we turn our attention to the final agency. We have been at it since, as I was reminded last night, the 25th March. I see Mr. Allicock looking at me. You have had some fortunes and misfortunes. This has been an interesting period. Please turn to Agency 03, Ministry of Finance as I invite the Minister to have his technical Officers assemble.

Hon. Members we are slated to consider this agency from 8.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m. As is the norm we will not take the break, but I invite Members to attend the Members Lounge if they need refreshments.

I remind Members as well that there are facilities on the Mezzanine Floor, that is, the floor above the Lounge, for rest if anyone needs time for rest. Some Members have been inquiring so I thought I had better state it publicly.

Agency: 03 Ministry of Finance

Current Expenditure

Programme: 031 – Policy and Administration - \$16,720,710,000

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Chairman, might I start through you by asking the Minister to explain the movement shown under item 6116 - Contracted Employees: which seems to have declined from

\$230,578,000 to \$67,549,000. I have noticed that contracted staff has gone down perhaps by a smaller proportion than the decline in the request for this year. Could the Minister explain what has happened there?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, if I may, I am not sure if the Hon. Member is looking at the right programme because he called some figures. We are looking at Programme 011.

Mr. Greenidge: I was looking at Policy and Administration.

Dr. Singh: My apologies. In fact, through you Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member may have noted or may not have noted that there has been some amount of programme restructuring between Programmes One and Two of the Ministry of Finance. So you will observe in a number of the line items that there are significant declines in one programme and significant increases in another programme. Just to clarify - because this will probably pre-empt a number of questions that will be asked - previously the Ministry of Finance's programme structure was seen as all of the Ministry of Finance in programme one, except the Accountant General's Department in Programme Two. It was felt upon a comprehensive review of the programme structure and our constant efforts to streamline programme structures across government - and Members would have noted some changes in some other agencies - that a more appropriate programme structure will comprise policy and administration in Programme One, technical services and public financial management in Programme Two. Whereas previously in Programme Two there was only the Accountant General's Department now there is the Office of the Budget, the Accountant General's Department, the functions previously associated with what used to be called the State Planning Secretariat and other technical services like information technology, in terms of audit monitoring and evaluation. The new programme structure is, in fact outlined on page 22 of Volume 2. With that background it would be noted that what you observed is a significant decline in contracted employees in expenditure and contracted employees in Programme One but a corresponding increase in Programme Two. If you aggregate those two numbers the magnitude of the overall increase is in line with general increases granted. So it is more a reallocation from Programme One to Programme Two. You will find that in other lines too.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you Mr. Chair. I appreciate the explanation and I think it certainly has helped. May I move to item termed Revision of Wages and Salaries. This is one that is of special

importance to us in this House as the Minister knows. The movement last year in item 6141 – Revision of Wages and Salaries: is a reflection, presumably, of the 5% across the board paid to most of the Public Service. There is projected a movement this year, 2013, which seems to reflect a larger increase than last year. First of all is that correct? Second, could the Minister please give us an indication of who was paid across the board increases other than the 5% that was announced? Some agencies got different amounts, but across the Public Service as a whole, I believe, it was 5%. Could you give me an idea of what that was?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman through you, first of all permit me to explain, and the Hon. Member may be aware of this, that as a matter of policy we do not in any of the budget agencies budget for unfilled positions. In each of the budget agencies we would have considered thus far the amounts made available for employment costs would be those amounts required to meet the personal emoluments of persons currently in employment. What that means is that any new recruitment has to be funded from... and it should be reasonably obvious why we do that; that has been a practice enshrined in Central Government for a number of years. The reason why we do this, of course, is that it is difficult to predict which agencies will be recruiting, in what numbers and when, what levels and so on. The general practice has been to reside in the Ministry of Finance an allocation that will meet the cost of what is described in the service as new recruits. The “Revision of Wages and Salaries” allocation is an allocation which funds the across-the-board salary increase given to employees of budget agencies, that is to say public servants, teachers and members of the disciplined services. The cost of any new recruitment into any Central Government budget agency and the cost of any other employment cost shortfalls. Employment cost shortfalls can arise not only as a result of new recruitment but, for example, of reclassification if there are promotions in a particular agency. Then there is a greater call on the employment cost allocation of that agency than would have been anticipated at the time of the budget. So this “Revision of Wages and Salaries” allocation meets all of those employment cost shortfalls in budget agencies, new recruitment, and the across-the-board salary increase announced at the end of the year.

The Hon. Member also asked about the across the board salary increase that was paid in 2012. In response I would say that teachers received 5% across the board salary increases in accordance with the multi-year agreement that was concluded with the Guyana Teacher’s union (GTU).

Members of the disciplined services received 5% across the board increase at the end of the year and so did the public servants. Those were the salary increases paid in 2012.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you Mr. Chairman. Why do I have the impression that there was a report that some of the disciplined services got a month's salary or the equivalent thereof?

Dr. Singh: I am not sure where the Hon. Member first ascertained this but it was reported publicly and restated in the Budget Speech that the members of the disciplined service were give a one month additional salary at the end of the year. You are right, it was announced in the Budget Speech; at least the second time I would think. So the answer to that is yes, that payment was made. I did not include that in my response to the previous question because I did not consider it to be a salary increase as such. The Hon. Member asked which other agencies received increases, but you are right Hon. Member.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you very much Mr. Minister. Can I ask whether in any of the agencies there have been increases – I heard what you said about the disciplined services and the others – or is there any intention in the near future to link any of the increases to performance.

Dr. Singh: There has not been thus far a formal, rigid, nexus established increases and performance. And, of course, there are a number of ways. I am sure the Hon. Member recognises this is a very complex issue. It ranges at one end of the spectrum from assessing institutional performance and paying increases relative to institutional performance to the other end of the spectrum, measuring individual performance and linking emoluments to individual performance. I am sure the Hon. Member would agree with me that this is a task of some magnitude, devising and implementing right, robust, credible system for measuring performance, and even for observing performance in the first instance. In some agencies it is very difficult to define observable performance indicators are and then putting in place systems for measuring them. In some sectors it might be easy to do. In some others it might be incredibly difficult to do. I would say having recognised these difficulties we not been able to implement a rigid, formal, system for measuring performance and linking it to awards. We are in the early stages of implementing a stronger and more comprehensive system for monitoring and evaluation. And, hence, the inclusion of monitoring and evaluation as a unit within the Ministry of Finance programme structure. I believe reference was made to monitoring and evaluation within the context of

institutional strengthening in the Public Service in the Budget Speech. But the short answer is that recognising these challenges – and, like I said, I do not believe any Member of this House would be oblivious of the complexity of the task before us - we do not have in place a system for measuring either institutional or individual performance and linking it specifically to salary increases.

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Chairman through you, the Minister is indicating at least for the moment that there is no plan to move from that current situation.

Dr. Singh: I would not say so. I would say the work we are doing to strengthen monitoring and evaluation will better enable us, at least at the institutional level, to define performance indicators and measure performance. I think parallel with that we need to reflect how we can better integrate systems for measuring individual performance. I would not say there is no system, because I suppose in an informal way every day supervisors measure their employees' performance and determine eligibility for promotion, eligibility for elevation and transfer on the basis of those criteria. But I would say this is going to be a process. I believe the work we embarked upon in establishing a strong monitoring and evaluation system will take us through the early stages of that process.

Mr. Greenidge: I would like to thank the Minister. Mr. Chairman, can we now turn to the item 6321 which pertains to page 398. These are subsidies and contributions to local organisations. I will ask in relation to the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) a couple of questions. The Unit is in receipt already of nearly \$55 million and in the coming year they are proposing to spend roughly \$61 million. May I ask how many persons are employed by the Unit and what is the professional classification, the breakdown of staff?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, currently employed in the FIU are six persons, a Director, an FIU Officer, two Financial Analysts, a Data Base Administrator and a Legal Advisor.

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Chairman, does the Minister have a plan to change that mix of skills within the unit or is he satisfied that is sufficient to carry out the works to which they have been assigned.

8.09 p.m.

Dr. Singh: I would not necessarily say change the mix of skills, but I would certainly say that there is a recognition to enhance the capacity of the unit, which might involve recruiting additional skills and potentially also increasing the numbers.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you. Can the Minister tell us, since the agency has been established, how many reports they have actually produced and how many entities are they responsible for reporting to and overseeing?

Dr. Singh: The Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Act, which this House passed unanimously, includes a schedule that lists the entities supervised or the entities that are subject to the Act; entities that are described as, I believe, reporting entities falling under different classes of supervisory authority or supervisory agencies.

The Financial Intelligence Unit has ultimate responsibility as it relates to administering certain functions within the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Act, bearing in mind of course, that other agencies of the State also have responsibilities, including for example, the prosecutorial arm, the police and investigative arm and ultimately of course, the judiciary.

Amongst the entities that are reporting entities are licensed financial institutions, that would comprise banks, insurance companies, money transfer agencies, cambios, to name a few. In fact, if I may, I know that I gathered from the Deputy Speaker's movements that she is somewhat restless with my elaborations, but I am quite happy to elucidate on this matter.

Mrs. Backer: Mr. Chairman, on a Point of Order. The Deputy Speaker is being unusually quiet and steadfast today. I think everyone realised that. I have been unmoved by the Minister and I will continue to be unmoved.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, this is what confirm to me some discomfort on her part. I have never heard her so quiet.

Mrs. Backer: Well that is discomfort for you, not for me.

Dr. Singh: This is what confirms some discomfort on her part. But anyway, let me say in response to the question, amongst the entities that are subject to supervision by the identified

supervisory authority and ultimately by the FIU and other agencies that are involved, are agencies that are traditionally licensed are regulated, like the financial institutions that I mentioned, but there are other classes of reporting entities that are also subject to the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Act, like for example, dealers in precious metals and precious stones, real estate agents, automobile dealers, Friendly Societies, et cetera I will be happy to provide a complete list, but like I said the schedule to the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Act has this comprehensiveness, but I have no difficulty sharing it with the Member.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you very much Mr. Minister. I did ask about any reports prepared and released by the FIU.

Dr. Singh: My apologies. May I ask, in terms of reports, I am aware that the unit is in the process of completing its first report, which will come to this House. That is in the process currently of being completed.

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Minister, please refresh my memory. When was the unit established?

Dr. Singh: The establishment of the unit predated the most recent Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Act. It would be recall that there was a previous Anti-Money Laundering Act. The unit was established under that Act and continued under the most recent Act. The unit has been in existence for a few years. I really would not be able to say off the top of my head how many years it has been.

Mr. Greenidge: Well at least I am appeased to know that they are going to produce a report after a long period of existence. I hope that your plans to strengthen their capacity will go somewhere towards making sure that those reports become more frequent and more effective.

May I ask, in the light of the report of the Caribbean Financial Action Taskforce, which looked at the workings of the FIU, I think reporting in 2010 or 2011, whether the Minister and the agency have taken any steps to ensure that the information or reports they have received from their agencies that they oversee are in reasonably safe custody. Might I put it that way? I do not know if whether the Minister is aware that the Taskforce had reported and expressed a concern over the risk associated with the way that they analysed the reports they received? There were

some suggestions that that might be improved because they were outsourcing some of the work, so I am asking whether anything has been done about that.

The effectiveness of Anti-Money Laundering and similar legislation will turn of course, on the extent to which people feel safe and comfortable in providing them with information and that that information is not going to end up in the hands of those that are themselves to be the subject of investigations, so that is part of the reason I am asking.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, as the Hon. Member clearly knows, Guyana is a member of and participant in the Caribbean Financial Action Taskforce mechanism and indeed of the international Financial Action Taskforce (FATF) arrangement also. Indeed, emerging from the latest assessments conducted on our institutional architecture for fighting money laundering and for implementing the provisions of our Act, an action plan has been extracted to address the principle recommendations emerging there from, including certain legislative amendments. In fact, Members would recall that just one or two sittings ago, a Bill to amend the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Act (AMCFT) was tabled and is now before this House. Separate and apart, in addition over and above the legislative amendments, steps are being taken to address the institutional strengthening requirements too, including some of the issues that the Hon. Member mentioned.

I suppose in some way I would say that, emerging from the latest assessments the key recommendations have been identified and an action plan has been developed and work is being done, including in collaboration with some of our bi-lateral partners; I should say some of our development partners, not just bi-lateral partners, to address the key recommendations and to ensure that our capabilities for fighting money laundering are adequate and in keeping with international standards.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you very much Minister. Once more, within what time frame do you have this in mind? The report that I am making reference to is not, of course, last year.

Dr. Singh: The current action plan is responsive to the most recent report and as the Member would know, there are periodic reviews... *[Interruption]* As the Member would know there are annual reviews that are done and periodic updates that are prepared. The current action plan is a response to the latest assessment report that would have been done. The timeline for

implementation will of course vary with the respective actions, but they are generally in keeping with the recommendations made, including pay due cognisant to the time line suggested in the report.

Mr. Greenidge: Yes, but I wanted a feel, if you do not mind Mr. Chairman, for what that timeline is. We have just passed new legislation. Is it five years, ten years or a year?

Dr. Singh: No.

Mr. Greenidge: Some of the most critical things seem to be urgent.

Dr. Singh: Well our intention is certainly in respect to the legislation. We would certainly like to be able to pass the legislation before the end of May. We are hopeful that it would come up. It has been tabled already like I mentioned earlier and we are hopeful that it will come up for consideration, hopefully as early as the next Sitting of this House, whenever that might be.

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Chairman, within this agency code - 03, there is, of course, National Insurance Scheme (NIS) an amount of \$125 million is budgeted here. There is another amount provided for National Insurance, I am not quite sure whether I saw it under Capital Expenditure, but could the Minister explain how that fits in with the proposal he had in the budget for providing the subsidy to the NIS and how the moneys are spread between these different heads?

Dr. Singh: This allocation of \$125 million is, in fact, the allocation that is intended to meet the cost of the proposed Government contribution to the increase in the National Insurance Scheme's contribution rate, which becomes effective from the first of June, 2013. It would be recalled that in Budget 2013 an increase of a one percentage point to the contribution rate was announced. It would also be recalled that in the Budget Speech I indicated that Government will be meeting both the employers and the employee's share of the increase in contribution. That is to say the additional one percentage point, increase in contribution, payable with respect to persons' whose monthly income is not more than \$50,000 per month.

This allocation of \$125 million is intended to meet that need.

Mr. Greenidge: Am I mistaken or did the Minister in his speech make reference to \$200 million? I saw the \$125 million and that is precisely why I am asking.

Dr. Singh: Yes, in fact I did say \$215 million, but I said \$215 per annum. This increase is effective from the 1st June.

Mr. Greenidge: Can I ask additionally, in connection with the National Procurement and Tender Administration, for which I see an amount budgeted for 2013 amounting to \$45 million, does this entity or has it produced any publicly available reports on its work?

Dr. Singh: The NPTA established pursuant to the Procurement Act 2003 has, in fact, made publicly available, a fairly substantial volume of data and information on its operations, including through of course, the public openings of its tenders, which have now become the subject of popular reporting, including of course, the results of its awards process and including importantly, publication of these and other relevant details on its website. I would say in those regards that abundance of information on the Public Procurement process has been placed in the public domain.

As to whether there has been a compilation of all of these into a single report, I really would not be in a position to say at the current point in time, but there does exist like I said, vast volumes of information on an ongoing basis, in relations to ongoing transactions. Also, in relation to policy documents, standard bidding documents, evaluation criteria, bid process procedures, et cetera. All of that information is available on the website and therefore available for universal public scrutiny.

Mr. Greenidge: It would be useful if the Minister would reflect upon the utility of getting some analytical work done on these reports because they can be very descriptive and maybe not necessarily all that helpful.

May I turn to the fact that you have under this agency code two sets of utilities which receive subsidies from the Ministry, Linmine as well as the Kwakwani Utilities. Is there any reason why - these are subsidies to both companies involved in the distribution and sale of power - they are separate from the Office of the Prime Minister?

Dr. Singh: There is not a reason why they are separate from the Office of the Prime Minister except to say that what is reflected under the Office of Prime Minister is of course, the subsidies to the electricity company. I suppose it is a very subtle difference if there exist one really. I

would suppose the short answer is that the Linden and Kwakwani subsidies are really here more as a historical artefact than anything else. That would be the short and most frank answer.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you for being frank Mr. Minister. The Minister may also want to reflect upon the utility, of having them in one place so that perhaps one gets a better field for what is going on. May I take the opportunity to ask whether the policy regarding Linmine and its acquisition of power; from where does Linmine gets it power?

Dr. Singh: This description – The Linmine Community Power – really refers to the subsidy to Linden Electricity. I believe it is reasonably well known and I am sure there are many Members of this House who are much better informed on these arrangements than I am, that essentially this is electricity generated by the Bauxite Company, surplus to the company’s requirement and sold to the community. It is sold to the community at a subsidised rate; this is a matter this House is very familiar with. Government pays to the company the subsidy in order to facilitate the reduction of the rate to the final consumer.

Mr. Greenidge: Would the Minister tell us something about the formula for under which they acquired the power from Bosia Minerals Inc.? He said and I noted, “As I am aware, the power Bosia sells to Limmine is surplus to its own needs” almost a by-product if you like. What is the basis upon which the Bosia Minerals Inc., Linmine Power Company and Government of Guyana negotiation takes place?

Dr. Singh: I am generally loath to venture beyond the realms of my competence and I recognise a peril in that regard in response to this question. I believe the Hon. Prime Minister is willing to step in and answer the question though.

Prime Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs [Mr. Hinds]: Mr. Chairman and Hon. Member, the most recent arrangement began when Omai took shares in the Bauxite operations in Linden and a separate company was set up, the Omai Services Inc. This company generates electricity and a unit price is calculated and the electricity is provided. The quantities to the company and the community are measured and the pricing is the same on both sides. It is a separate company.

When Omai left or the owners of Omai decided to pull out and the Chinese came in, the same system has been continued. So there is a separate company that produces electricity and the price per kilowatt per hour is determined or the cost in each month is shared in proportion to the quantities of electricity that goes to the community and the operation.

Mr. Greenidge: Is the Prime Minister in a position to make available to us the figures underlying that cost? I am interested to hear how carefully you explained that you equate the prices on both sides, but the question I am trying to get an answer to is the bases upon which the price acquired at which the Government, if you like, acquires, or the subsidies you give to the company then, how is that arrived at? Is there a negotiation? What are the figures behind them?

Mr. Hinds: There was, at the time of Omai, some agreements reach on the pricing. What happens is, the Ministry of Finance pays the cost of generation each month. I do not have any of those figures with me, but we did paid, I sign off on it from Linmine when they paid.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you. I do not doubt that the Prime Minister (PM) signs off; I am not really questioning that. I am asking for the information that informs the setting of the prices.

Mr. Hinds: It can be provided; we are willing to provide it.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you very much. Okay, Mr Chairman, in that case you will be happy to know I have no more questions under this item.

Mr. B. Williams: I would like to ask the Hon. Minister of Finance questions pertaining to the conditions of service of Public Servants. Line item 6133 – Benefits and Allowances: could the Hon. Minister say whether these allowances includes travelling allowance, subsistence allowance, meal allowances, housing allowance, uniform allowance and could he say what is the present rate of those allowances?

Dr. Singh: This line would provide for allowances such as vacation allowance, travelling allowances, motor car, mileages and bicycle allowances where payable and uniform allowances. I would not have at my current disposal the applicable rates. I believe they might be a matter of public record. They would be enshrined in the Ministry of Public Service circulars and so on. I would be happy to make them available or I am sure the Minister of the Public Service would be

happy to make them available. I am afraid that I do not have the details of the individual rates for individual allowances at my current disposal.

Mr. B. Williams: A follow-up question: Is the Hon. Minister aware that travelling allowances was last increased in 1995?

Dr. Singh: My recollection coincides with that of the Hon. Member.

Mr. B. Williams: Also, subsistence allowance was last increased in 1995; uniform allowance last increased in 2001; meal allowance last increased in 1996...

Dr. Singh: Sir, may I ask if the Hon. Member has completed his list because I would rather not have to rise on too many occasions to confirm that my recollection coincides with his. It does though for those, but if he intends to ask me about other allowances, could I with your permission Sir, ask him to include all at one go so I will only have to rise on one occasion?

Mr. B. Williams: Could the Hon. Minister answer my questions?

Dr. Singh: I did.

Mr. B. Williams: Okay, we will continue. Is the Hon. Minister aware of the situation with housing allowance for public servants?

Dr. Singh: May I inquire what is the situation to which the Hon. Member...

Mr. B. Williams: Which year was it last increased?

Dr. Singh: Sir, like I said, I have not committed to memory the dates on which each individual allowance payable by Government to public servants was last increased. The Hon. Member clearly has in his possession details that confirm the relevant dates. I have no reasons to doubt the Hon. Member.

General speaking, I would say that my recollection does coincides with his, like I said the first time I rose to answer his first question of this genre, but I really could not say for each allowance which date it was increased. But, like I said I have no reason whatsoever to doubt the Hon. Member. I am quite happy to take his word at face value.

Mr. B. Williams: The difficulties of the Minister of Finance, could it be that that is because public servants conditions of service are a low priority to your Government?

Dr. Singh: Absolutely not; I would reject that assertion wholly and fully.

Mr. B. Williams: Does the Hon. Minister consider that increases in these allowances from last in 1995 fit and proper for the public service of this country?

Dr. Singh: There is of course a very thin line between questions that are conventionally asked in relations to the Estimates and issues that are conventionally raised in the general policy debates.

Let me say...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, Mr. Williams is tracking you as an excellent counsel. He is taking you somewhere. He is one of our better cross examiners, so I think you better... you are in the grips of Mr. Basil Williams. Let us see how you handle that.

Dr. Singh: Let me say Sir that it is the case with respect to each one of these allowances as indeed is the case with wages and salaries and all other personal emoluments types, benefits and conditions of service of public servants. This Government has an abiding concern for the well-being of public sector employees in general, public servants in particular. This is reflected in the fact that over the years we have given steady salary increases across the board, endeavouring constantly to make or achieve steady gains in the real incomes of our public servant employees, but of course, keeping a constant eye and bearing constantly in mind obligations of fiscal sustainability, implications for competitiveness and implications for inflation in the economy as a whole. This is the delicate balance that has to be struck.

In fact, I would love, as I have said elsewhere, to be the Minister of Finance who would be in a position to advise his President that we can award much larger salary increases, but I would have to ensure that I do that within a frame work that would not compromise real incomes by exerting inflationary pressures and that would not compromise affordability and fiscal sustainability. This is the delicate balance that has to be struck. I make that observation not only with specific respect to one or another allowance, but generally the financial terms and conditions that are applicable to public sector employees.

Mr. B. Williams: Might I respectfully refer the Hon. Minister to line item 6141 – Revision of Wages and Salaries: we continue to deal with the conditions and the plight of the workers of this country. Could the Hon. Minister say whether this provision over the 2012 position of \$3,741,000,000 and \$4,403,000,000 for 2013 caters for another increase of 5%.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, the records would reflect that this question has become somewhat of an annual ritual. My response in this regard would not deviate significantly and will bring no surprises to the Hon. Member.

I would not be in a position to say what percentage of increase will be accommodated within this allocation. It is provided there, like I said earlier to meet a number of obligations. When the Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge asked the question, I clarified that out of this allocation is paid a number of things, not only salary increases. A salary increases will be paid out of this allocation, but I really would not be in a position to say what magnitude that increase would be.

Mr. B. Williams: A follow-up question: would the Hon. Minister of Finance confirm that over the last decade or ten years at least, annual increases of wages and salaries for public servants have been confined to 5% or thereabout?

Dr. Singh: That fact is not accurate, I can think of a number of years when salary increases, in excess of 5% were paid. So the answer to that question is no. The most recent years might have been 5%, but I can think of a number of years where it was more.

Mr. B. Williams: I would not trouble the Hon. Minister because he would probably say about 7% in the Election Year; I think it was 2006. This is the follow-up question: would you agree Hon. Minister that increasing every year or imposing increases every year of 5% on Public Servant that there would not be any real increase in their wages and salaries?

8.39 p.m.

Dr. Singh: I disagree, in fact, Mr. Chairman, and I would submit that there have been real increases in public sector wages and salaries in Guyana over the years.

Mr. B. Williams: Are you aware that in your multiyear arrangement with the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) – you ought to be aware – that even in 2012 they were asking for an increase of 25%, which would be a living wage for the Public Servants in Guyana.

Dr. Singh: First of all, that number to which the Hon. Member refers is not a number which emerged from a concluded negotiation, and is not reflective of an agreed number. It reflects a submission made by one party to the negotiations and I am sure that the Hon. Member is not suggesting that that submission is to be regarded as the final outcome of a negotiated position. I think the point has been made. I believe that the Hon. Member has made his point and I have answered it as diligently as I possibly could. Like I said, and I repeat, this Government has endeavoured every year notwithstanding the most challenging of economic services. We have endeavoured every year to ensure that Public Sector Employees are granted an increase in wages and salaries.

Mr. B. Williams: The final question for the Hon. Minister on this point. Mr. Minister, would you not consider that you would be able to pay our Public Servants a living wage if you were to put it to hodge-pot the funds of the GGMC, of National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL), the Lotto funds, etcetera not put the Government in a better position to pay real salary increases to the Public Servants of this country?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, despite the evident political appeal in what the Hon. Member suggest and understandably I suspect that he is playing to the vast gallery that beholds the proceedings of this National Assembly.

Let me say that it is not sufficient to submit that a one-off transfer from any one entity to another entity that could perhaps fund a one-off payment in appearance would then form the basis for a sustained increase in real wages going forward and that fact would seem reasonably evident to me. The fact of the matter is that salary increase and the grant of salary increases are not only about looking around today to see whether there are funds to meet the one-off requirement of this year's or today's salary increases. One has, as a responsible Government, to be mindful of inflationary implications; one has to be mindful of competitiveness implications because our private sector is of course competing in the same labour market as the Public Sector Employer is. One has to be mindful of sustainability as well, as I said earlier, so we will resist the temptation

to follow a route that might seem, on the surface, popular but that in fact might leave our workers worst off at the end. This is what we have been endeavouring to do over the years.

Mrs. Backer: Hon. Minister could I, through you Sir, take you back to line item 6321 and that list can be found on page 398. I am looking at the Rights Commission of Guyana and there is a figure of \$66.649 million. Could I respectfully ask if I am correct in my assumption that the Human Rights Commission, the Women and Gender Equality Commission, the Indigenous Peoples Commission and the Rights of the Child Commission are all covered under this line item?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member would be correct to say that the Rights Commissions established under our Constitution, which are the ones to which she referred, are indeed the ones that are funded out of this allocation. That would be correct.

Mrs. Backer: Could you say, Sir, to get the figure that each one is entitled to if I simply divide by four or do they have different sums allocated to them.

Dr. Singh: They, in fact, have different sums allocated to them, Mr. Chairman, through you; not surprisingly, perhaps, because they are all at different stages in their respective work programmes and they have different work programmes – different activities planned. One could not simply divide by five or six in a straight line division and arrive at a budget for each one.

Mrs. Backer: There are only four. Could you then, as there are only four... If you had indicated that my first assumption was right... could you then indicate to me what the respective breakdown for the four is?

Dr. Singh: Certainly, with pleasure. Of the amount, I believe, of \$66.6449 million... Of that total The Indigenous Peoples Commission is allocated \$15.742 million; the Women and Gender Equality Commission – \$22.308; the Rights of the Child Commission - \$17.314 million; the Human Rights Commission, which of course has a sort of overarching responsibility, \$3 million and then because of the manner in which the administration of these entities are set up they share common services. We have a general allocation for administration of the Rights Commission Secretariat of \$8.285 million.

Mrs. Backer: Thank you. Hon. Minister, could you indicated to me... We have heard repeatedly from the Hon. Member Minister Ganga Persaud that the budget cycle starts in July; he said that on several occasions. Could you indicate to me whether... let us, perhaps, take the Women and Gender Equality Commission where I think you indicated that the figure was \$22.3 million; does this represent the full amount asked for by that commission? If not, could you share with us what figure the Women and Gender Equality Commission sought from the Ministry?

Dr. Singh: I would not, at the current time, have that information at my disposal.

Mrs. Backer: Hon. Minister, would you be prepared, for particularly the three that are actually up and running which would be the Women and Gender, The Indigenous Peoples and the Rights of the Child Commissions – those three – if you can, to provide to the honourable House the figures that were actually asked for, possibly along with the breakdown, not necessarily for every single item but the main heads and what they actually asked for?

Dr. Singh: Certainly, I would be pleased to provide that information. Like I said, I do not currently have it at my disposal but I would be happy at a subsequent occasion to make it available.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. May I refer the Hon. Minister to page 582? This deals with budgets of statutory bodies, details of revenue and expenditure. The Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC): I have noticed for last year, under Fuel and Lubricants, compared to the amount budgeted a lesser amount was spent; however, in 2013 there has been an increase. Can you say the reason for this increase? Thank you.

Dr. Singh: It would be fair to say that the amounts budgeted, in particular for fuel but in a number of other lines as well, would be reflective of the general anticipated level of activity by the commission.

Ms. Ferguson: Hon. Minister, can you say the number of vehicles the ERC currently has?

Dr. Singh: I do not have that readily but I would be happy to obtain the information and share it with the Hon. Member. I am told five vehicles.

Ms. Ferguson: Can you say to whom these vehicles are assigned?

Dr. Singh: I am receiving some of this information in real time and remotely as well so you will forgive me, Mr. Chairman. I am told that the five vehicles are utilised by the commission. If that sounds a little bit cryptic to the Hon. Member I will confess that it sounds a little bit cryptic to me too the information currently available is that the five vehicles are utilised by the commission but, like I said, the benefit of a little more time, I will be perfectly happy to obtain the information and share it with the Member.

Ms. Ferguson: I trust that you will do so at the earliest, Hon. Minister. Under Wages and Salaries, I have noticed that there was a decrease in 2012, however, in 2013 I have noted an increase. Can you explain the reason for the increase in wages and salaries?

Dr. Singh: I am advised that this reflects general increase in wages and salaries.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Transport, Travel and Postage: the amount budgeted last year... a less amount was utilised for 2012, however, in 2013 I have noted that there has been an increase. Can you state the reason for this increase?

Dr. Singh: The reason is the same as I tendered in relation to Fuel and Lubricants, which is the correlation with activity level.

Ms. Ferguson: My last question to you, Hon. Minister. Can you say when last an audited report was tabled for the ERC?

Dr. Singh: Once again I do not have that information readily available but I would be happy to refer either to my sources or indeed to the record of the Parliament Office for the answer to that question to be ascertained. I believe some staff members are checking.

Ms. Ferguson: Would the House be able to get a response this evening?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I am advised that an annual report was tabled for the year 2008 in relation to the ERC. This is the advice that I am currently in receipt of.

Ms. Ferguson: I did not get that, Hon. Member.

Dr. Singh: 2008.

Ms. Ferguson: For my last question let me just take you back to Fuel and Lubricants where vehicles are concerned. Can you say to this honourable House where these vehicles are located?

Dr. Singh: I am now advised that the five vehicles comprised of two, what are loosely called, pickups, one both in the pool...

Ms. Ferguson: Hon. Minister, can you provide the vehicle numbers? Thank you.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I would be happy to provide all of the information on the Ethnic Relations Commission's vehicles. I am advised, first of all, that the vehicles comprise of two vehicles of the type that is loosely described as pickups, both of which are assigned to the pool; there is a third pickup that is parked to be disposed of. I am not sure... that is a Hilux. There is a car that is parked...

Ms. Ferguson: Hon. Minister, as you are going through the list can you provide the vehicles numbers? Thank you. You said two pickups, one car...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, one second please. We are not in a confrontational scenario here. The Minister is answering. He is endeavouring to get information instantaneously, as he said, in real time. He has undertaken to give this information later on. He is doing his best to get it and as he is being passed papers he is trying to read. Hon. Members, allow the Minister to answer. When he has completed this round we will then say 'could you then do the numbers' but we are not in an adversarial conversational setting and I will not allow that. Minister, proceed please.

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. You clearly read my mind. The vehicle numbers are – I cannot at the current time tell you which one is the pickup and which one is parked and so on but we can get that information for you – as follow: PNN 1641, PMM 5053, PRR 1141, PJJ 7328, PJJ 4100. Those are the number that I have at my disposal. Again, Mr. Chairman, I did not quite anticipate that we would require this level of detail as it relates to vehicle numbers and so on of a particular entity but we have absolutely no difficulty providing that information once adequate time is allowed for the information to be compiled.

Programme: 031 –Policy and Administration - \$16,720,710,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 031 –Policy and Administration - \$24,760,071,000

Ms. Kissoon: Project Code 1900400: could the Hon. Minister say how much money is allocated to South Amelias Ward in terms of miles of road works will be done and which health facilities will be done in Linden?

Dr. Singh: An amount of \$20 million is allocated for the purposes of road rehabilitation in South Amelias Ward and I am told that the length of road involved is 680 meters. I seem to recall that the Hon. Member also enquired about works being done in Region 10 more generally under this programme and I am happy to say that, in addition to the road rehabilitation, construction works will also be undertaken... In fact I would say that in almost all of the other sectors that the BNTF traditionally worked in will benefit Region No. 10. Apart from the road in South Amelias Ward, an amount of \$16 million is allocated for construction of a day-care centre at Hururu. An amount of \$7.6 million for rehabilitation works at the Charles Rosa School of Nurses Hostel. In the area of skills training, environmental education management programme for rural communities, hygiene and sanitation training I think \$7.6 million will be spent on that. Water supply systems will be upgraded in Wikki, Kalkuni and Wiruni in amounts totalling approximately \$5.5 million. Work will commence on designing water supply system improvements at Number 58, Mabura Hill and Great Falls water supply – both of those are water supply systems – totalling, I think, \$30.8 million and an amount of \$10 million is allocated for ongoing works on the water supply system at Kimbia.

In addition there are general programmes like skills training programmes in areas like ICT training and so on, from which Region No.10 and all other regions will benefit.

Mrs. Backer: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Through you to the Hon. Minister, project code 2507400, Rights Commission, \$10.66 million, purchase of vehicle, furniture and equipment: When we look at the profile page it says the project includes purchase of vehicle. I am interested in the vehicle, Sir. I would not expect you to have the number as yet since it has not yet been bought but could you indicate to me whether this vehicle would be assigned to the secretariat of the commissions which I asked about just now?

Dr. Singh: That is correct. The vehicle is a minibus.

Mrs. Backer: Could you indicate, Sir, whether this will add to the fleet or if this will be the first vehicle in the fleet? You said that the ERC had four or five vehicles. We are buying one now for the secretariat. Is it the first vehicle or do they already have?

Dr. Singh: I am advised that this would be the first vehicle acquisition to serve the secretariat at these commissions.

Mrs. Backer: Just as a matter of interest, how is it that the Ethnic Relations Commission has all these vehicles – \$99. “something” million – and there are no Commissioners and we have three fully functioning with 15 members, the full compliment, and only... Well we heard the figures of 16 for one, 15 for one, 22 for one. It seems like a big disparity. We are not saying that the Ethnic Relations Commission should not have but it just seems that it is such an uneven playing field, so to speak. The works of those commissions are equally important as that of the Ethnic Relations Commission, I would want to posit.

Dr. Singh: I would agree with the Hon. Member, Mr. Chairman, that the works of all of these commissions are important. I, indeed, could not agree more. I believe the fact that the Ethnic Relations Commission is perhaps in possession of the number of vehicles that they have is probably reflective of the fact that they were constituted some years before so they would have had the benefit of a number of years of operation; as a result of which they would have, over the years, acquired equipment and be equipped. I am told, however, that from time to time one or more of the vehicles that are currently in the possession of the Ethnic Relations Commission is loaned to the Rights Commission for use in their operations but the point is taken that... I do not think that there is a contest between the commissions as to their relative importance. They are all important and the fact that the Ethnic Relations Commission has these vehicles really does merely reflect the fact that they were in existence for a number of years.

Mrs. Garrido-Lowe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Project Code 3401000 - Low Carbon Development Programme: can the Hon. Minister inform us about how much money has been released from the Guyana REDD+ Investment *Fund* (GRIF) to date and for what project implementation? Thank you.

Dr. Singh: The Low Carbon Development Programmes are of course funded currently under the historic partnership between Guyana and Norway and the release of funds happens at several different and distinct stages. If the Hon. Member is referring to the release of funds by Norway to the GRIF trust fund then USD\$115 has been approved for release by Norway to the GRIF trust fund and \$70 million has already been received into and banked in the GRIF trust fund. Another USD\$45 we have qualified for and that amount has been approved for release but has not actually yet been received. I alluded to that in my budget speech. Those funds having been received into the GRIF trust fund, the Government of Guyana then collaborates with partner agencies – that is typically international development agencies – in the implementation of individual projects. These individual projects are of course identified in the LCDS so they are subject to widespread consultation. They are overseen by a multi-stakeholder steering committee and the individual projects benefit from approval by the LCDS steering committee, which of course includes Norwegian involvement. Once a project goes through the approval processes – approval by the multi-stakeholder steering committee, approval GRIF/LCDS steering committee and approval by the partner entity concerned – funds are release from the GRIF trust fund to the partner entity for the purpose of implementing the process so if it is released at that stage that the Hon. Member is inquiring about then a total of USD\$12.8 million has been released from the GRIF trust fund to partner entities for the purpose of project implementation and the breakdown is as follows: USD\$5.94 million for the institutional strengthening project which is the project which is strengthening the institutions involved in LCDS administration so projects like the Office of Climate Change, the Guyana Forestry Commission, the Environmental Protection Agency. An amount of \$1.883 million has been released for the Amerindian Development Fund Project. An amount of USD\$5 million has been released for the Micro and Small Enterprises Development Project; giving a total of USD\$12.823 million.

Ms. Kisoorn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Project code 3401000: Could the Hon. Minister indicate which Amerindian villages in Region 10 are included and how much is allocated to each?

9.09 p.m.

Dr. Singh: In the first phase of the Amerindian Development Fund Project I see, here, that identifies one village in Region 10, which is listed as Sand Hills, Hitia.

Ms. Kissoon: How much is allocated?

Dr. Singh: I do not actually have the amount. This project involves funding the community development plans that were defined by the individual communities...

Ms. Kissoon: Would you lay the information over?

Dr. Singh: I would certainly provide that information. I do not actually have it inform of me, but I am sure it is available.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Project 4501100 – Youth Initiative Programme: Could the Hon. Minister state the names of the communities, the description of the projects and the sum allocated to each of these projects?

Dr. Singh: Under this Youth Initiative Programme interventions will be made in Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10. The specifics projects and their respective communities are as follows:

Region 2, in Pomona, construction of a sanitary block, in Affiance, construction of bleacher, rehabilitation of sanitary block and landfill, in Walton Hall construction of bleachers, rehabilitation of sanitary block and landfill; Region 3, Caria Caria, construction of community centre; Region 4, Beterverwagting and Thomas Lands, in Georgetown, construction of sanitary block; Region 5, Fairfield, rehabilitation of Youth Choice Centre, in Linchfield – Rehabilitation of community centre, in Ithaca, construction of a basketball court; Region 6, New Amsterdam – upgrading of playing field, including landfill of Bermine Ground, in Line Path, upgrading of playing field, including landfill of Burnham Park, construction of bleachers and sanitary block; Region 10, in Kwakwani, rehabilitation of fence and in Amelias Ward, construction of sanitary block.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Give the sums for these projects, please.

Dr. Singh: In the order in which I listed them: \$2.5 million, \$5 million, \$5 million, \$5 million, \$2.5 million, \$2.5 million, \$ 4.5 million, \$4 million, \$4.5 million, \$3.5 million. \$3.57 million, \$4 million and \$3 million.

I will give you the details.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: I figure that you wanted to do that.

Dr. Singh: I would be happy to.

Ms. Kissoon: Project 4400700 – Poverty Programme: Could the Hon. Minister say how much of this sum is allocated to Region 10 and which projects and support for the vulnerable have been identified?

Dr. Singh: This is an allocation that is used to fund poverty and community related projects on a demand driven basis. There is not an *ex ante* allocation to one region or another. The allocations to individual projects will be premise on requests received.

Ms. Ferguson: Project 4500800 – Guyana Revenue Authority: I notice \$570 million is being requested here, but last year, Financial Paper No.4/2012, we would have voted for a provision of \$310 million and a supplemental paper came back for some \$170 million in order to effect critical works at the Colonial Life Insurance Company (CLICO) building to facilitate the relocation of the GRA. Could the Hon. Minister give a breakdown, as for reference number 31, of the necessary works to be done and the cost attached to each? Perhaps he can lay it over.

Dr. Singh: I would be happy to provide the details. Let me say very broadly that of the total of, I believe, \$450 million of local resources, \$46.7 million relates to final retention payment from the year 2012 projects, such as the building works, and so on, civil electrical works, procurement of power, cabling, telephone system, air conditioning, addition to floor space and fire escape. Four hundred and three million dollars relates to new activities, including some additional works to the headquarters, training room, additional fire escape and some work on other locations, such as the Parika integrated tax office and perhaps more significantly a substantial effort of the upgrading of our tax management software. These are the broad categories, but I will be glad to supply the details to the Hon. Member.

Mr. Bulkan: Project 1900400 – Basic Needs Trust Fund – 6/7: If we look at the budgetary allocation for last year the sum of some \$910 million was allocated, of which less than \$640 million was spent or some \$270 million unspent. Would the Hon. Minister provide an explanation as to why the projects, which would have been identified to be funded under that project, were not funded?

Dr. Singh: The most general answer would be that the underspending relative to the sum allocated would have been the result of implementation delays. A more specific answer would go onto elaborate that, particularly as it relates to the education component of this programme, that is, the schools, construction of school buildings, there were issues with concluding the designs of the schools because Basic Needs Trust Fund (BNTF) is a programme administered by the CDB and it applies certain CARICOM standards, as it relates to school designs. There were a few iterations of discussions between those involved in designing the schools in Guyana and those involved in approving the school designs at the CDB. That would have been the principal contributor to the underspending, the delays, experience in concluding school designs in relation to projects. That matter has now been resolved and the contracts were subsequently awarded and so we anticipate that we should be able to pick up activity now.

Mr. Bulkan: Follow-up. I thank the Hon. Minister for that explanation. It does, however, seem to suggest that there may be an inadequacy on the part of the agency, that is, the particular Ministry, to execute these projects which, I note, span a number of Ministries. If we look at the project profile on page 22, and coming out of the year 2013, it goes across to education, public works, water supply, health facilities, day care, skills training and a number of other areas, the Minister may care to respond to that. My follow-up is that despite the spending of some \$270 million for last year's budgetary allocation, I note that the request for this year has gone up to \$1 billion and \$40 million, would the Minister be willing to provide an explanation as to the reason for this increase.

Dr. Singh: I do not necessarily agree with the conclusion that there is not adequate capacity to implement the programmes. If one were to say that there is room for improved capacity I would have, of course, agreed with that. I think that applies to every agency. It is a fact that Guyana has, actually, consistently, benefited from bonus allocations under the BNTF because of its outstanding track records in implementation. In fact, for a number of years we have actually been the largest beneficiary of the BNTF resources because of our success in implementing these projects. There were some particular issues that emerge because it was a new BNTF cycle, and there was this issue of the school design standard, and so on. Those hurdles, as I said, have been crossed. There is the no objection for all those awards. I think those awards have now been made

and so we anticipate some acceleration in implementation which would be the principal driver in the increased allocation being sought this year.

Mr. Bulkan: Follow-up. Would the Hon. Minister kindly inform this Committee of what might be the reason for these funding to be executed via his Ministry and not, for example, either the specific line Ministries to which the projects and activities relate to, or, in particular, local authorities and more specifically local democratic organs?

Dr. Singh: The reason for this is partially because of the institutional arrangement that governs the BNTF. When a BNTF allocation is determined for a country one does not, at that stage, know which specific projects will be funded because the projects go through a process of community identification. There is a BNTF steering committee that reviews the project and then the project subsequently goes to the CDB for ultimate approval. First of all, because of the process, one does not necessarily, in advance, know exactly which projects will be funded and in which amounts and in which agencies and locations.

Secondly, there is, evidently, a need for coordination. Given this, process and given the need for coordination on at our end, that is, the Guyana end, it is the coordination amongst Guyanese stakeholders involved in the project and then coordination with the CDB, the funding agency.

Thirdly, the fact that the Ministry of Finance is the principal designated interlocutor of the Government of Guyana with the CDB, it follows logically then that the umbrella allocation would be placed in the Ministry of Finance for the purposes of coordination and the other reasons that I have just outlined.

Mr. Bulkan: A final follow-up. Would the Minister seek to confirm that local authorities are encouraged and are aware that request for funding is under this programme?

Dr. Singh: I am advised that they can.

Mr. Ramjattan: Project 3401000 – Low Carbon Development Programmes: There is an amount of \$20 billion and there is a project profile that indicates a substantial portion of it for the purpose of the Amalia Falls Hydropower Project. Could the Minister kindly say if the IDB has given the green light to this project as yet or are it is still in the process of doing so?

Dr. Singh: I suppose, in a manner of speaking, that there is a succession of green lights which are granted. One of the most significant milestones to be accomplished - “green lights” to use Mr. Ramjattan’s phrase - would have been the issuance by the IDB of what is described as a mandate letter which essentially is a letter executed between the IDB and the developer of the project confirming the IDB’s commitment to support the project and outlining a number of actions to be taken by both parties as we progress together towards financial close. It would be recalled that this mandate letter was executed a few months ago, if I am not mistaken, at the end of the third quarter, I believe it was the last week of September, last year, when the IDB concluded with Sithe Global. That would have been a significant milestone accomplished.

As I indicated the mandate letter would then have identified a number of actions and undertakings by the various parties, including the undertaking by the IDB to conduct a detailed due diligence process. That due diligence process would have included environmental and social and other technical aspects, assessments, and the IDB is at an advanced stage of conducting those due diligence processes. There was a succession of teams coming to Guyana doing, as I said, technical assessments, environmental and other assessments in relation to the project. Once they would have completed their due diligence then the project formally goes to the IDB board for final approval and final approval would then be the occasion for essentially what would be described as the financial close.

The due diligence process is currently ongoing and is it at an advanced stage.

Mr. Ramjattan: Effectively then there has not been the green light from the board of the IDB in relation to this Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. If that is so, as I interpreted the Minister, how long down in this year does he see that green light being put on?

Dr. Singh: As I said, there is not a single green light that signals go or no go. If the IDB board and senior management were not in support of the project we would not have, in the first instance, got a mandate letter; we would not, in the second instance, had got to the stage of the due diligence being conducted, and so successive green lights at the appropriate time, at the appropriate occasion, have been signalled.

I suppose it is in a way as if one were travelling from Stabroek to Square of the Revolution, one might not have seen the green light at Vlissengen Road but one might have encountered green

lights at Camp Street and at a few other junctions and one would be proceeding steadily towards the Square of the Revolution. It is not because one has not seen the green light at the Square of the Revolution does that mean that one has not encountered green lights along the way and that one has not made progress towards one's ultimate destination.

In much the same manner, we have received green lights in relation to the mandate letter; we have received green lights in relation to commencement and execution for the due diligence process. We anticipate under the current timeline that the final green light – Square of the Revolution green light, if that was your final destination – the final board approval, that ultimate approval is currently projected to occur in September of this year, but I emphasised that the progress that has been made with the project within the IDB has been accomplished with the support of the institution as a whole at its various decision making levels.

Mr. Ramjattan: Would it mean anyway - I want to be clear here - that we can await then, September, 2013, to give approval for this equity into Amalia Falls Hydropower Project rather than now, because we may not reach the Square of the Revolution?

Dr. Singh: The national budget endeavours to project inflows and expenditure for the year. To the extent that this approval is anticipated to be achieved during the course of the year 2013, it is our responsibility, as Government, to include this project in the budget because it is anticipated to occur.

Mr. Nagamootoo: I just want to ask a few follow-up questions on the same line item.

There is a total amount of \$51,250,000,000 under, what is called, the Low Carbon Development Programme. Elsewhere it is referred to as the Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) programme. What I want to ask through, you, Mr. Chairman, for the Hon. Minister, to explain is that in order for the fund... This fund is not in Guyana; it is not coming here; it is going into a fund that is called the World Bank Trust Fund, or is it the REDD+ or the Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund (GRIF), or whatever name, and it is coming and certain benchmarks have to be achieved to trigger disbursement. Has the Amalia Falls Hydropower Project achieved the benchmarks that would require or qualify for the fund to be disbursed, the money that is now being sought into this project?

If I am not clear I can elucidate.

Dr. Singh: Can you please, through you, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Nagamootoo: We were told that we are selling some commodity, providing a service for this money, which is coming from the so-called Norway Fund, but that there are some benchmarks that Guyana has to satisfy for projects to be financed from the fund. I am asking that, in relation to the equity which we are asking this National Assembly to approve... Last year we wanted equity in excess of \$16 billion for this same project, Amalia Falls Hydropower Project but this National Assembly has cut the figure. I had wanted to ask before this, whether the Minister will tell us, actually, how much money was disbursed for all of the projects, last year. I saw that just over \$800 odd million was spent last year. The Ministry was asking for \$18 billion, but actually we saw an expenditure of \$828 million. We are looking at, now, a request, which is being made, for \$20 billion. I am asking the Hon. Minister to let us know whether we have reached those benchmarks, the qualifications for the money to actually be transferred for these projects, because there would be certain triggers that have to be met in order for the moneys to be disbursed, and particularly the one which has to do with the equity for Amalia Falls Hydropower Project.

Dr. Singh: I believe if I may refer back to the answer that I gave to Mrs. Garrido-Lowe's question, there are, in fact, triggers at various stages. There are triggers, first of all, to unlock the resources being disbursed by Norway into the trust fund. A succession of triggers have been accomplished as a result of which, as I mentioned earlier, US\$115 million has been approved for disbursement into the trust fund out of which US\$70 million has already been disbursed so those benchmarks - triggers if you like - have already been accomplished.

In relation to disbursements for a particular project those disbursements will take place, obviously, in line with the requirements of the projects and, indeed, as the Hon. Member Mr. Nagamootoo said, in keeping with benchmarks or trigger, whatever label he wishes to attach to them, in relation to each individual project. For example, in relation to the Amalia Falls Hydropower Project, the project has already been approved for inclusion in the LCDS, having been consulted upon with the multi stakeholder steering committee, having been consulted upon with Norway, but with respect to release of fund from the trust fund to the project or to the

partner entity involved in implementing the project, that actual disbursement would occur upon a particular benchmark or a particular trigger being accomplished. That might be, in the current instance approval by the IDB board, an accomplishment of financial flows, saying hypothetically. Once financial close have been accomplished or the approval by the IDB have been accomplished then that would be the trigger for the funds to be released from the trust fund, either to the partner entity or to the project, depending on the mechanism that is determined, and each partner entity has its own mechanism. Each project, because of its peculiarities, has its own mechanism, a mechanism that is designed in consultations between Guyana and Norway and the partner entity involved as well.

The Hon. Member is not inaccurate to say that there are benchmarks to be accomplished. Indeed there are. There were benchmarks to be accomplished for the release of the fund. I think the Hon. Member is agreement with that. There will be benchmarks to be accomplished, in relation to the disbursements for the purposes of this particular project.

Now, to take that to its logical conclusion, there are in fact benchmarks. This budget includes a number of loans and grants funded by development partners, all of which have conditions attached to their respective disbursements. There are particular things which need to be accomplished before disbursements are made by any development partner. Any one of the IDB projects, or CDB projects, or World Bank projects, which is included in the budget this year and, indeed, in any previous year, would have included benchmarks to be accomplished before the disbursements are actually made. Projecting that we will accomplish those benchmarks during the course of the year, projecting that the disbursement would therefore be qualified for, applied for and will be materialised during the course of the current year, those projected disbursements and associated expenditures are included in the budget. That applies to the loans and grants included in the budget for many other development partner and it applies for the LCDS, the GRIF inflow as well.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Mr. Speaker, I crave your indulgence because a programme, such as this, would not simply be an occasion for questions and answers. In as much as the Hon. Minister is saying that we need to be able to put funds into the programmes in order to precipitate closure, in anticipation of closure, this National Assembly also, in order to exercise the best of its discretion in a responsible way, must be able to afford those closure, must have certain certainty with which

it could be guided. It is not speculation and conjectures and expectations. We are dealing with money. Sir, through you, I want this to be sincerely communicated that we would not withhold money for the Amalia Falls Hydropower Project, unreasonably so, until we are guaranteed that these benchmarks have been achieved.

9. 39 p.m.

The only proof we will know, or may I put it the other way, a significant player in all of this, is the IDB. When the IDB, as we were told, will have its approval, the board will meet by September, we would know if it has approved this project based on its own due diligence. It is the ones which has the technical capabilities. We are politicians here and we have to be guided when by certain indicia, including, Sir...

Mr. Chairman: I agree but let us never make decision based on what a board in Washington sits and decides for us. It is either we get the capacities here. I agree with you that the benchmarks should be met, but we should not be basing our decision, as a sovereign nation, based on a board in another country. That is all I want to say. All of your reasoning, I agree with, about meeting benchmarks, and so, but we are a sovereign State.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Your Honour, I will never see the sovereignty of this Parliament nor of Guyana in anything particularly to deal with our access to the use of our natural resource. Here, I am asking these questions because last year we had taken an important and significant decision. It is my conviction, as an elected Member of this House, that had we voted for the \$18 billion and we have not achieved the benchmark, last year, and we had spent that money then our budgetary deficit would have been larger and we would have had to go and borrow to pay for that. That is how we, here, in this National Assembly, in approaching budgetary matters, have to think this way because we know that approving or not approving any financial allocation has repercussions and implications and these are for the people of Guyana.

I ask here, whether a projects, such as this, could not wait for this National Assembly, when there is strong indication of closure, that we can approve the sums for the equity funding, at that time, on a supplementary Bill that could be brought before this House. I so ask that we should not, quote and unquote, go to war on the basis that we are cutting or we are disapproving, but simply I am asking that we use our best judgement in this matter that, in this House, we are

given, here, a commitment of funding as soon as we know that the guarantee that we are looking for. I am not now say imprimatur from some foreign organisation.

Yesterday we were arguing about a loan from the Export-Import (EXIM) Bank of China and we went ahead and committed ourselves in billions of dollars even though we have not signed on for Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) project. We did not have the loan, but we went and signed on with a contractor to do a project and actually voted money that had never been disbursed at the time it was voted upon. I am saying this to the Hon. Minister that he has the assurance of this side, of the Alliance For Change, that we can do a deferral approval of the sums sought for the equity funding and proceed on the other parts of the programme.

Dr. Singh: I will endeavour to avoid revisiting the matter of the airport project and the processes involved in the China's EXIM Bank because I believe that those were addressed satisfactorily yesterday. I note, perhaps, with a dramatic effect, Mr. Nagamootoo raised them again, today. Let me say that we have a bit of chicken and eggs situation here. We, the sovereign Parliament of Guyana, a Parliament that I believe is unanimous in the support of the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project... In fact, Mr. Nagamootoo, himself, rose in this House and said that the project has the support of his party. The Government has engaged the parliamentary Opposition, both parties, on this project. At the most recent such engagement the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) was abundantly represented. We have a project around where there exists what ostensibly is unanimity in Guyana that it is a good project, and in this Parliament, amongst the representative of the people of Guyana, that it is a good project. Some of us, in the House, appear to be now saying that we do not want, notwithstanding our support for this project, to commit these sources until we see the external partners commit theirs. I wish to say that we need to be mindful of the signal that we send. This is a national project; this is our project. Just as we are watching to see whether IDB will put up its resources, I have no doubt that the external partners are looking to see whether Guyana will put up its resources. Our resources in this instance, is what we have earned under the Guyana/Norway partnership. I rather suspect that in the national interest we must, at the very least, be prepared to make bold and send the first signal, that this Parliament can speak unanimously that this project is good for Guyana.

Given the publicly expressed support for this project, including, as I said, by Mr. Nagamootoo himself, it was a support which I was deeply appreciative of. Not so long in this House, in fact

during the course of this budget debate, Mr. Nagamootoo said, unequivocally, “We support the project and we welcome that and we appreciate that.” We need to be careful, not as the Parliament of Guyana, to send a signal to the rest of the world that we are not prepared to approve this project until... Frankly speaking, we have the greatest interest in this project and we have the most to lose by its delay, the people of Guyana.

Mr. Nagamootoo said that there is no need to go to war on this matter. I agree with him. If the concern is if that project is approved but the inflows do not materialise then the project will go ahead anyhow, I would draw Mr. Nagamootoo’s attention to page 11 of the Revenue Estimates. It is just as how the capital expenditure Estimates include an amount of G\$20 billion, so do the Revenue Estimates, an identical amount with an identical legend: The Guyana REDD Investment Fund, GRIF, projected receipt of \$20 billion. What that means is that the national budget explicitly recognises the nexus. It is at page 11 and it is in the revenue Estimates. This is not a project that if it does not get funded by one source we will go off and be funded by another source. This is a project which the national Estimates clearly states to be funded by GRIF and the matching inflow is recognised in the revenue Estimates too.

As I said, without being drawn into a political contest and without descending the tone of the discourse in this House, I want to appeal to my friends, on that side of the House, to reflect in their vote on this matter support that they have already expressed. I wish to say that if the concern is if the GRIF inflow does not materialise because of the non attainment on some benchmark, I draw Mr. Nagamootoo’s attention to page 11 of the revenue Estimates where the identical corresponding inflow, just as in the year 2012, an amount of \$838 million was spent and is reflected in the capital expenditure so is an identical amount reflected in the inflow. The year 2012 revised revenue Estimates of \$838 million, an identical matching number because that is what was received and spent. The same applies to the year 2013, projected inflow of \$20 billion and expenditure of \$20 billion on these projects. The Estimates cater for that and allow for that.

I agree with Mr. Nagamootoo, and there is no need for us to lock horns and engage in a big political debate. I have endeavoured my best. This House knows that I am occasionally given to a heated political contest and to never want to shy away from one of those. I will resist that temptation this evening and I will urge my friends, on that side of the House, to express in their

vote the recognition that this project is good for Guyana and that this Parliament is bold enough to say to the global community we are prepared to put our votes in favour of the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, I just want to say as an observer that if I am to list the airport expansion project, this project and perhaps the project on the hospital, all three have been described in the national interest. Yet, in the context of the Tenth Parliament, the Opposition seems to be briefly consulted but there seems to be not in-depth attempt to have a buy-in. Certainly, if these projects are so important to Guyana we have to move beyond just cursory meeting at the Office of the President every six months. On certain critical national projects, my suggestion is, as an observer, that we should not come to this stage because these are so important. They are too important to this country to fail. There has to be some recognition – it is not a concession actually, but it is a recognition - that there is a different configuration in the Tenth Parliament that it is an imperative that the Opposition not be brief consulted. It must go beyond and there must be assurances that it feels as a part of the process. It is an inclusionary decision making as per article 13 of our Constitution.

That is my recommendation, as an observer, without a vote on some of these matters that are before us. I am not saying that Opposition should be involved in the governance but, certainly, at the level of these projects we should be able to walk together on them, walking together and seeing them from start to finish. That is what I believe. I hear your plea. I wish that your plea resonates. Both sides have spoken. The arguments on both sides have merits. As Speaker, I have to put the question. I will do so before 10.00 p.m., because we are approaching that hour.

Dr. Singh: May I, Sir, before you do so simply say [*inaudible*]? We agree with you on the momentous catalytic nature of these projects, the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, in particular, which is before us. Let me say that you are right that there is a need for engagement in the particular instance. It is important to emphasise that not only did we have those meetings as we have indicated but we did say very clearly, at the level of the President, that the Government would be happy to receive and answer any question asked. Now Sir, it would be difficult for us to answer questions that are not asked or to provide information that is not requested. It is not at this stage, when we met with the Opposition, indeed, at the first meeting, with no lesser person than the distinguished Leader of the Opposition, last year, the President said, “We are sharing a

copy of this presentation, we have made available at places disposed of our technical officers”. This was March, 2012. “We would welcome you going away to study this project in greater detail, consult your advisers and we will be happy to receive any further questions that you have.” I do not believe that we have received any such question

Mr. Chairman, this walking together is not something that can be accomplished by one side alone. I am struggling to see what else can be done beyond saying ask us any questions you have, request any additional clarifications you wish and we will provide it. We have said that. I would go further to say that the objective, to which you aspire and which, indeed, as I aspired and to which we aspire as a Government, should not be dismissed as unmet.

The mere fact that we have arrived at a point where Mr. Nagamootoo, the Hon. Member, feels comfortable to standing up to say that we support the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, and the fact that so many members of the APNU have also said, publicly and otherwise, that we support the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, suggests to me that it would be a fair assessment to say that we have not travelled any distance. If we had not, Mr. Nagamootoo would not have made bold as he did, less than a week ago, to say, “I want to say in this House that we support this project”. We have travelled that distance to have got to that point. If we have got to the point where Mr. Nagamootoo was comfortable last week, standing up to say that he supported this project and APNU members were equally comfortable saying they supported the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, then I think the matter of today’s vote is really a matter of the signal that we wish to send to the people of Guyana and to the international community.

Proposed Amendment to motion on Notice Paper number 181

Amendment to be moved in the Committee of Supply of the National Assembly for the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2013.

That the amounts shown in Column 4 for Agencies, Accounts Codes and Descriptions, listed below reduced by the amounts shown in column 5.

Page 414; 03: Ministry of Finance – 031/3401000 – Low Carbon Development Programmes \$20, 000, 000,000; reduction (Col. 5) \$19,000,000,000; proposed (Col. 6) \$1,000,000,000. [*Mr. Ramjattan*]

Mr. Ramjattan: I have a reduction that I want to prosecute, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, there is, as just intimated, a reduction by way of a motion placed on Notice Paper 181, date received 12th April, 2013; date for Order Paper, 15th April, 2013, therefore it is qualified in terms of the notice period. If we are to go to the Notice Paper the fourth row, page 414, 03, Ministry of Finance, 031/3401000, Low Carbon Development Programme, provided \$20 billion, reduction \$19 billion, remaining \$1 billion. Is that correct, Mr. Ramjattan?

Mr. Ramjattan: That is correct.

Ms. Teixeira: I have a question. Is it \$1 billion or \$1 million?

Mr. Ramjattan: That is \$1 billion.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you for the clarification.

Motion put.

Ms. Teixeira: Division.

Mr. Chairman: A division has been sought. Could we get the division bell please?

Bell rang.

Committee of Supply divided: Ayes 33, Noes 30, as follows:

Ayes

Mr. T. Williams

Ms. Marcello

Dr. Ramayya

Mrs. Garrido-Lowe

Mrs. Hughes

Mr. Nagamootoo

Mr. Ramjattan

Ms. Ferguson

Mr. Morian

Ms. R. Williams

Mr. Jones

Mr. Adams

Mrs. Baveghems

Mr. Sharma

Mr. Bulkan

Mr. Bond

Ms. Kissoon

Mr. Trotman

Ms. Selman

Mr. Allicock

Ms. Wade

Mr. Felix

Ms. Hastings

Mr. Scott

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon

Mr. Greenidge

Mrs. Backer

Dr. Norton

Mrs. Lawrence

Mr. B. Williams

Ms. Ally

Dr. Roopnarine

Brigadier (Ret'd) Granger

Noes

Mr. Jaffarally

Mr. Damon

Dr. Persaud

Rev. Dr. Gilbert

Dr. Mahadeo

Mr. Seeraj

Mr. Neendkumar

Mr. Lumumba

Mr. Chand

Ms. Shadick

Mrs. Chandarpal

Mr. Nadir

Ms. Teixeira

Bishop Edghill

Mr. Whittaker

Mr. Baksh

Mrs. Campbell-Sukhai

Mr. G. Persaud

Ms. Manickchand

Mr. Benn

Dr. Anthony

Mr. Ali

Dr. Ramsaran

Dr. Westford

Mr. R. Persaud

Dr. Singh

Mr. Nandlall

Dr. Ramsammy

Mr. Rohee

Mr. Hinds

Amendment carried.

Project 3401000 – Low Carbon Development Programmes amended to \$1,000,000,000.

Programme: 031 – Policy and Administration - \$5,760.071, 000, as amended, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimate.

Assembly resumed.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO. 10(1)

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, it is with a heavy heart that I propose that we suspend Standing Order 10 and continue our activities for this evening.

Question put, and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

In Committee of Supply

Current Expenditure

Programme: 032 – Public Financial Management - \$4,057,276,000

Programme: 032 – Public Financial Management - \$4,057,276,000 agreed to ordered to stand part of the Estimate.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 032 – Public Financial Management - \$35,500,000

Programme: 032 – Public Financial Management - \$35,500,000 agreed to ordered to stand part of the Estimate.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we have come to a very long and gruelling exercise in the Committee of Supply as we consider the Estimate of Expenditure for the year 2013. The Assembly will now resume.

Mr. Speaker: I take the opportunity to thank the Budget Director and all the staff of your Ministry, Minister, for attending and being with us for the last month.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I beg to report that the Committee of Supply considers the Estimate of Expenditure for the financial year 2013 and approved of them as amended.

Question put, and agreed to.

Motion carried.

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I move that Standing Orders 13(n) and 54 be suspended to enable the Appropriation Bill of 2013 to be introduced at this stage.

Question put, and agreed to.

Standing Orders suspended.

Mr. Ramjattan: I would like to rise on a Point of Order here, Mr. Speaker. Is it the Appropriation Bill, I see here, as amended?

Mr. Speaker: Believe you me, Mr. Ramjattan, that would not go unnoticed. Even if the Speaker attempted it, it would not go unnoticed. I call on the Hon. Minister of Finance to take us through the stages.

10.09 p.m.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with paragraph 2 of article 171 of the Constitution, I signify that the Cabinet has recommended the Appropriation Bill 2013, Bill No. 10 of 2013, as amended, for consideration by the National Assembly. I now present the Bill to the Assembly and move that it be read the first time.

INTRODUCTION OF BILL AND FIRST READING

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

APPROPRIATION BILL 2013 – BILL NO. 10 OF 2013

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to provide for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure (not otherwise lawfully charged on the Consolidated Fund) of Guyana for the fiscal year ending 31st December, 2013, estimates whereof have been approved by the National Assembly and for the appropriation of those sums for the specific purposes, in conformity with the Constitution.” *[Minister of Finance]*

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill, as amended, read a first time and taken through its remaining stages.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BILL – SECOND AND THIRD READINGS

FISCAL ENACTMENTS (AMENDMENT) BILL 2013 – Bill No. 11/2013

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Income Tax Act and the Property Tax Act.” [*Minister of Finance*]

Dr. Singh: I rise, Sir, to move the second reading of the Fiscal Enactments (Amendment) Bill 2013 - Bill No. 11 of 2013. Let me say at the onset that it is my intention to be faithful to my traditional brevity this evening.

This Bill very simply enacts three of the measures announced in Budget 2013, specifically it legislates the framework for the mortgage interest relief mechanism that was announced in Budget 2013. It reduces the rate of personal income tax from 33 ⅓ % to 30% with effect from year of income 2013, also known as year of assessment 2014. It effects the changes made to the property tax rates and valuation date as announced in Budget 2013.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that during the course of the general policy debate on Budget 2013, a number of these issues were addressed and ventilated. I do not intend to repeat that debate, except to say that the Bill has very obvious merits and I believe the nation awaits its enactment, anxiously, so that the benefits that will flow from the respective provisions can be enjoyed by the people of Guyana. I sincerely hope that the Bill will enjoy the unanimous support of this Assembly. I now move that it be read a second time.

Mr. Ramjattan: We, in the Alliance For Change, wholly support the Bill.

Mr. Speaker: Is there any other speaker or person wishing to address the Bill? If not, I put the question.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly Resumed.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I rise to report that the Fiscal Enactments (Amendment) Bill 2013 - Bill No. 11 of 2013 was considered in Committee clause by clause and was passed without amendment.

Permit me, Sir, as I am on my feet for the last time as we consider and conclude Budget 2013 – I do not anticipate that I will be speaking again tonight – to thank, first of all, you for presiding so graciously over our proceedings and for ensuring that we did not deviate excessively from a healthy debate, but one which I think was, by and large, civil and mutually respectful. Notwithstanding we might differ on some aspects of the outcome, I believe, on a whole, Budget 2013 remains good for Guyana and has much that is good for Guyana. I thank everyone who contributed to the debate.

Permit me to thank, like I said, all of the speakers who spoke during the course of the debate, all of the persons asking questions and answering. Permit me, in particular, to thank the Clerk and his staff for the hard work that they did - long hours. Permit me to save my last expression of appreciation and gratitude to my own staff and for my own staff for their phenomenal work, much of which is not seen in this House. The deliberations on the Budget in this House really represent only the culmination of a tremendous effort on their part. I wish to say that whilst much of this effort might not be seen, it is appreciated and felt throughout the length and breadth of this country. I wish to say on a personal note that I deeply appreciate the phenomenal work that they did and their support and them being here night after night, including and in particular tonight, to the very end of these proceedings.

Thank you very much, Sir.

I committed perhaps the gravest political error and did not save the most special thanks for the media of course. Thank you very much for the media who covered us so generously. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, we concur, we thank you and we believe that salutations are in order for everyone mentioned. I wish to now...

Dr. Singh: I am sorry, Sir, I did not actually move the third reading. I do so now.

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

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Members, that brings to a closure Budget 2013, commencing on the 25th March, 2013 and concluding on the 24th April, 2013. I would like to say good night.

I believe the Clerk wants to tell you that he has prepared light and heavy refreshments, but maybe he is a bit concerned now whether or not he should make the announcement. So, I make it on his behalf. For those of you who are in a celebratory mood, you may repair to the Members' Lounge. For those of you who wish to go elsewhere to commiserate or to consider the consequences of the nights' or days' events, you may do so elsewhere, or you may gather together and begin to repair any breaches or damage that may have occurred so that next year we do not go through this painful exercise again.

Hon. Members, I just wish to say thank you. It has been, for me, almost like keeping my hands on the head of a bull and ensuring that that bull does not break away, let loose and cause extreme damage. I know that there were moments of anxiety and concern, but I would like to thank everyone for their cooperation, most of all the Clerk and the very hard-working and professional staff of the Parliament Office for research done, for printing, excessive paper delivery and everything that they attended to; we are extremely grateful, and I hope that the Clerk will consider some rest and relaxation for them at an appropriate time and an appropriate place, hopefully away from this Chamber and from the Parliament Office, where they can relax.

Hon. Members, thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Leader of the Opposition [Brigadier (Ret'd) Granger]: Mr. Speaker, I would like to join in expressing the appreciation of the Opposition to the hard work done by the public servants outside of this Parliament Office and also inside the Parliament Office. It is very impressive, because we have seen since the 25th March how dependent the political element in the Executive

is on the professional element in the public service. This is why, on our side, we have pressed hard to have increased emoluments to the public servants. This important exercise that we have witnessed between the 25th of March and the 24th of April would not have been possible without the army of public servant who kept coming here every evening. We will continue to fight for the rights of public servants, both the parliamentary staff and outside.

Secondly, I do believe that this experience has brought us closer to a true tripartite budgetary process. At our initiative, the initiative of A Partnership for National Unity and the Alliance for Change, we met President Ramotar on two occasions in an attempt to ensure that this budgetary process will go more smoothly. At least one thing has come out of it; he has agreed that from the 1st July, 2013, he will initiate a process by which the Opposition is more closely associated with the preparation of the budget. We do hope, therefore, Mr. Speaker, that Budget 2014 will be much different in terms of its preparation and consultation than 2012 or 2013.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I would not be speaking to you again before we celebrate our workers' day, Labour Day, on the 1st May and immigration day, Arrival Day, on the 5th May, so I would like to take this opportunity to extend our best wishes to the working people of this country and to the persons who are descendants of the immigrants who came here from the different continents.

Last, on a question of human safety, I would like to ask certainly if my colleague, Mr. Trotman, could expect any visits from the ranks of the police who, I understand, might be despatched to question him. Can we get your confirmation that he will be allowed to rest in peace without being pursued? Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members, as I rise to move the motion for adjournment, I would like to join with our Minister of Finance, yourself and the Leader of the Opposition in expressing our appreciation for all who prepared for and contributed to Budget 2013. No doubt, this has been a Budget that has been different from others before it. My hope, Sir, is that we would all learn from this experience as we go forward from today.

I join also in extending happy holiday greetings to the people of our nation as we celebrate the traditional May Day, the tradition day for workers, and Arrival day on 5th May when we mark the 175th anniversary of the first arrival of immigrants from India to Guyana. The work continues and our nation goes on.

I move that we stand adjourned to Tuesday, 7th May, 2013.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we stand adjourned until Tuesday 7th May, 2013 at 2.00 p.m.

Thank you.

Adjourned accordingly at 10.26 p.m.