

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2006-2011) OF THE NINTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN

141ST Sitting

Monday, 24TH January, 2011

The Assembly convened at 2.08 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following paper was deferred for a future sitting:

The Customs Duties (Amendment) Order 2011 – No. 1 of 2011.

[The Minister of Finance]

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

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO. 71 (2)

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

AND WHEREAS it is anticipated that the five days (5) allotted by Standing Order No. 71 (2) would be inadequate for the debate on the motion for the approval of the 2011 Estimates of the Revenues and Expenditure;

BE IT RESOLVED:

That Standing Order No. 72 (1) be suspended to enable the debate on the motion for the approval of the Estimates of Revenues and Expenditure for the year 2011 to be extended to six (6) days. *[The Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communications]*

Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communications [Mr. Hinds]: Thank you Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members, I want to move the motion standing in my name here. Essentially it allows for us to have six (6) days of debate on suspending Standing Order No. 71(2) so that it can happen.

Question put, and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

INTRODUCTION OF BILL AND FIRST READING

The following Bill was introduced and read for the first time:

FISCAL ENACTMENTS (AMENDMENT) BILL 2011 – BILL NO. 2/2011

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to amend the Income Tax Act and the Corporation Tax Act.”

[Minister of Finance]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

BUDGET SPEECH 2011 – MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2011

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

AND WHEREAS the Constitution also provides that when the Estimates of Expenditure have been approved by the Assembly an Appropriation Bill shall be introduced in the Assembly

providing for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet that expenditure;

AND WHEREAS Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of Guyana for the financial year 2011 have been prepared and laid before the National Assembly on 2011-01-17;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

“That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2011, of a total sum of **one hundred and forty-six billion, eight hundred and seventy-nine million, six hundred and fifty-four thousand dollars (\$146,879,654,000), excluding fourteen billion, five hundred and fifty million, five hundred and two thousand dollars (\$14,550,502,000)** which is chargeable law, as detailed therein and summarised in the undermentioned schedule, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to make further provision in respect of finance.” [*Minister of Finance*]

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now proceed with the debate on the budget for the year 2011. For the budget debate and for consideration of the estimates by the Committee of Supply, we will, in respect of sitting time, follow our usual practice, that is we would have our break from 5.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m. and we will continue thereafter.

Leader of the Opposition [Mr. Corbin]: I am not sure, strictly, Sir, what Standing Order this rests under, but I am sure Your Honour does not want to perpetuate the kind of discriminatory reporting that we have had from our people’s own media. It is clear, from the set up of the media in this National Assembly, that there is no intention to adequately cover the presentations made in this National Assembly by the national media station. I would not have objected or made this point of note, even though you may not have the power to control or to direct the media, but I think it should be noted that I had cameras in here from my organisation fixed on that side of the House so that they could have captured the front view and I was advised that there were certain objections that the cameras could not be there. So now we have a situation where the national media is obviously discriminating in a manner which clearly shows they intend to carry out the practice that they have done over a number of years. I just drew it to your attention, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I would direct the Clerk and Mr. Corbin to get the media operatives and talk to them with a view to ensuring equitable coverage.

Mrs. Backer: Thank you Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Our first speaker is Mrs. Volda A. Lawrence.

Mrs. Lawrence: I am humbled by the responsibility thrust upon me to open this debate on Budget 2011 after the three hours presentation by the Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, on Monday last. The length of the presentation and the assertion that the \$161.4 billion budget is the largest ever gave the erroneous impression that these facts alone make the budget an excellent one. Several times over, we have heard of the largest budget ever. What does this mean? Will we use the largeness to pay the workers of Guyana a decent living wage or a public assistance increase that is truly meaningful, alternatively, to ensure that old-age pension levels are adequate? Will the largest budget deal with our most important problem of unemployment, energy prices and reliability, flight of skills, and, most of all, the tax burden?

Most Guyanese use other relevant indicators to determine the excellence of a budget, for example: Whether it offers them a better quality of life and guarantees a better quality of service; whether the sums allocated will be properly spent; whether the taxpayers will get value for money; whether there will be a greater level of transparency and accountability; whether there will be serious efforts to stamp out corruption; whether more jobs are likely to be available; whether there are sufficient policies and incentives to stimulate investment and promote economic growth; whether the national debt is being properly managed to ensure no unnecessary burdens to future generations. These, Sir, are just a few indicators to judge a budget.

A preliminary assessment of Budget 2011 will reveal, however, that while there are a few election sweets such as the raising of the income tax threshold, and the increase in pension and social assistance for the citizens, they are all illusions as no real attempt has been made to reduce the burdensome Value Added Tax (VAT) or give any substantial increases in wages and salaries to enable the worker to cope with the rising cost of living. In effect, Sir, the increase in pensions, while welcomed, will mean for the pensioner only a loaf of bread and for the social assistance recipient less than a loaf of bread per day. The harsh truth is that we still pay a monthly pension

that cannot even pay for a basket of a one-week supply of nutritious food or pay the return fare from Bartica to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation.

Similarly, the raising of the income tax threshold is of no relevance to the thousands of workers, like the security guards and many workers in the public service and private sector, whose take-home pay is less than forty thousand dollars per month.

This Budget 2011 appears to be more of a political management tool. It is a camouflage of figures intended to dazzle and bemuse. The most obvious, blatant abandonment of consultation as part of the preparatory process for the budget cannot go unnoticed and must be condemned. The Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, declared the theme of this Budget 2011 as *Together Building Tomorrow's Guyana Today* with no evidence of any attention being paid to the meaning of the word "Together". Instead, what we witness is the Government always seeking to monopolise everything in an attempt to give the PPP/C and its President credit for actions that should have been routine rather than signs of magnanimity and prescience. The truth is that "Together" has never been a part of the PPP/C Government in action. We have a society that shows clear signs of division. There is regular debate over the Government's deliberate marginalisation of some communities, and, recently, criticism of the Government's attempts at hijacking the United Nations (UN) Year of People of African Descent.

The Minister made a wide-ranging presentation, even reporting on the performance of this National Assembly, but nowhere, Sir, in the budget speech is there any mention of measures to bring redress to this situation. Lip service by the Minister to principals has not stopped the deterioration in many areas such as crime, school dropouts, etc. One needs only to look at the indicators in Appendix 1, on page 64, the increases in Crude Death Rate: 6.2 per 1,000 in 2009 to 6.4 in 2010; Infant and Under five Mortality Rates: 19.8 in 2009 to 20.5 in 2010; Number of Nurses per population: 10.8 per 10,000 in 2006 to 10.1 in 2010; Low birth-weight of babies: 10.1 in 2009 to 10.9 in 2010, to name a few. Not to be left out is the high intolerance of critics or those who dare to express views different to the Government's. This intolerance of critics has also led to an unprecedented loss of many of our exceptionally skilled people and capital flight.

The huge capital expenditure announced in the budget, Sir, does not mean better schools. The reports of substandard works and corruption have been well ventilated in the media. More

moneys have been spent on crime and we are going through the worst criminal era in our long history. Paragraph 1.8 of the Hon. Minister's presentation speaks to waging "an unprecedented war against such social ills as domestic violence," but the country's record in this area over the last year is not inspiring. Despite the huge budget, however, the rising local and foreign debts do not support the theme of *Together Building Tomorrow's Guyana Today* since it is obvious that great burdens are being placed on future generations. The theme is, therefore, questionable in the context of the rising local and foreign debt. For these and other reasons, I will later address it.

The PNCR – 1 G is correct when it described this 2011 PPP/C election budget as "nothing to shout about". The PNCR – 1 G believes that Guyana's economic viability can only be realised if every group, representative of all the segments of our Guyanese society, is involved in the decision making process and are beneficiaries of the economic gains. It is the only way that all Guyanese can claim ownership and thereby, "Together," truly "Build Tomorrow's Guyana Today".

I would, therefore, like to turn my attention to a few specific areas of the budget to examine how we are allegedly building tomorrow's Guyana today.

National Economic Performance

We welcome the growth in real Gross Domestic Product, (GDP), recorded in 2010 and that is projected for 2011, notwithstanding that the accuracy of these figures have become the subject of debate at home and amongst the international agencies. So whether it is 3.6 per cent as reported by the Minister or 2.5 per cent as projected by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), early last year, it is of no significance. The Minister takes credit, though, as if this was the doing of the Ministry or the Government. A close examination would reveal that it is largely the private sector, particularly our rice farmers and gold miners who, despite the many constraints, excelled in production. They ought to be commended. The area of total state control, that is, the sugar sector, failed miserably and despite the lofty projections for 2011 it is doubtful that they could be achieved.

Congratulations to the rice farmers and our gold miners!

Increased expenditure in the social sector for 2011, though, in our estimation, is not enough, is always welcomed by the PNCR – 1 G.

General World Economy Review

I turn now to General World Economy Review. Sir, even as the events on the world stage suggest a recovery from the recent financial market crises and indicators suggest a recovery in 2011 at 7.1 per cent in the developing countries, “caution” must be the watchword of any Government.

Sir, we are witnesses to the great financial turmoil which resulted in plunging equity markets and the severe decline in both business and consumer confidence, coupled with contracted economies and wide scale unemployment in several developed countries.

Protectionism has become a growing phenomenon. Governments of major economies, which formerly supported globalisation, are now staunch advocates of protectionism, as many nations opt for direct and indirect trade barriers. Towards this end, Sir, Guyana must review this new trend by many of its trading partners, and note that it is now a necessity to look carefully at those markets as well as the special conditions which some of them try to insist must be included in trade agreements.

National Debt

I turn now to paragraph 3.31 which states:

“Public enterprises recorded an overall deficit of \$4.7 billion as compared to the surplus of \$1.2 billion in 2009...”

Sir, this is a case in point where the people must pay a high cost for the Government’s inefficiency: four hundred per cent increase in the deficit, resulting from mismanagement and the lack of transparency.

The next paragraph, 3.32, states:

“Over the year 2010, new disbursements of project loans were the main contributor to the 12 percent growth in the external debt stock to US\$1.0 billion at

the end of December 2010. External debt service payments amounted US\$28.8 million by the end of 2010 as repayment of the principal owed to several creditors including Venezuela and the International Monetary Fund commenced.”

Appendix, on page 70, “TOTAL EXTERNAL DEBT”, noted at the top of the schedule, shows some worrying trends. The debt stock is estimated to increase by forty-two per cent from 2008 to 2011, when Appendix II (B), page 66, shows, on the other hand, estimated Gross Domestic Product rose over the same period by only eleven per cent. This rise in debt stock has been faster than both Gross Domestic Product and exports.

Noted is also the rise in obligations to Non-Paris Club Creditors, Venezuela, China and India, among others. This is a reflection of the unrestrained borrowing which will continue to add burdens to future generations. It is a misrepresentation for the PPP/C to claim that it has reduced foreign debt without, at the same time, admitting that total write-offs of foreign debts which included both pre and post 1992 borrowings were US\$2.127 billion. In effect, therefore, the total foreign debt is a burden created by the PPP/C since 1992. In effect, the PPP/C has borrowed, in its eighteen years, more than the PNCR -1 G has ever borrowed in its time in office.

There is also no doubt that the rise in domestic debt has to be carefully watched. Fore example, domestic public debt rose from \$75.19 billion in 2008 to \$100.50 billion in 2010. There is no point in reducing the external debt if that indebtedness is merely to be replaced by the domestic debt.

The increase in the debt stock projected over these three years is definitely excessive and not sustainable, because neither Gross Domestic Product nor export earnings can be expected to increase by the rate of forty-two per cent as indicated by the Minister.

Growth

The Hon. Minister, at paragraph 5.1, has projected “...continued growth in 2011, by 4.6 percent, with the non-sugar economy projected to grow by 2.8 percent.” This growth is primarily based on sugar, rice, gold and services. But are these projections realistic?

The 4.6 per cent growth is based on a sugar production target of 298,879 tons, which is 35.3 per cent over the 2010 level of production. The question, Sir, is can this be achieved since the factors

which contributed to the fall in the production of 2010 have not been dealt with? The only measures outlined in the budget for this achievement are Government making clear to the industry its "...expectations with respect to the implementation of the plans..." and the industry giving "certain assurances". See paragraph 5.2 of the budget.

It is doubtful whether expectations and assurances could turn around the sugar industry unless the fundamental problems affecting the industry such as management and labour are addressed. Is the Government to refrain from interfering with GuySuCo's management? Will it give full autonomy to the board including depoliticising it, beginning with the removal of the General Secretary, the Hon. Member Donald Ramotar?

What are the Government's plans to deal with Guyana Agricultural General Workers Union (GAWU) and its strikes? Is the Government willing to pay higher wages to GuySuCo's workers? Is the Government going to pay higher incentives to GuySuCo's workers than workers in the Bauxite and other industries? How, then, Mr. Speaker, can the Minister achieve this 35.3 per cent production level above the 2010 level?

The Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh, states that the manufacturing sector, driven by an expansion of two per cent, is targeted to grow by 7.7 per cent as against 0.3 per cent increase in 2010. This projection is attributed to the alleged significant progress in the legal and regulatory frameworks, thus making doing business transactions in Guyana much easier. May I remind Dr. Ashni Singh that in November, 2010 the Chairman of the Manufacturing Association stated that:

"There should be a reduction in the time and cost to complete a trade transaction in Guyana. That attention should be paid to the relatively high costs and frequent unavailability of electricity, coupled with the lack of pertinent investment policies and effective investment of existing copyright, anti-smuggling and tax evasion laws among many other hindrances."

We, therefore, submit, Sir, transacting business in Guyana remains too high. In our view, the reasons are: the arbitrary and selective manner in which Government grants concessions to potential investors whereby there is disparity in the treatment meted to businesses. Concessions, Sir, appear to be dependent on the sponsoring of those whom it favours, rather than on objective criteria.

It is submitted that even with the emergence of new industries there cannot be any significant growth in 2011 given all the challenges with which a new project is faced and the set up time will consume most of the year 2011. One must conclude, therefore, that such projections are premised on sugar production which, from all present indicators, is unachievable.

Growth is based or dependent on investment levels and these need to be maintained at a high level over many years in order to generate sufficient jobs to absorb a significant proportion of the ten thousand students leaving school each year and entering the job market annually. Ironically, the largest figure admitted on employment was around two thousand jobs annually.

In order to deal with the problem of the working poor, Sir, we need high productivity jobs. These are often found in the manufacturing and service sectors, hence, the need, therefore, for continued foreign and local direct investment which brings new technologies and processes, new products, advanced skills and work practices as well as modernisation to our economy.

2.38 p.m.

It is noted that projected growth is scheduled to take place in the traditional sectors: sugar - 35.3 per cent, mining - 2.8 per cent, livestock - two per cent and forestry - 1.4 per cent.

On page 57, paragraph 5.7, the Hon. Minister referred to the emergence of this latter sector, "Service", in the "... shifts in the relative importance amongst sectors..." This is interesting, because one of the criticisms by the Government of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was the inclusion of this sector when Guyana saw no future in services. It is good to see the Minister has come around; we hope he will bring others with him.

The rest of the region has advanced far ahead of us in relation to financial and other services. One thing is clear, that is, for this sector to expand sustainably, there needs to be resources devoted to training, stretching from our embassy staff to immigration staff, and in our schools. Guyana has not yet developed an excellent record in the provision of such services, but this challenge is certainly one that with effective programmes we can overcome.

Modernisation and Diversification

I move to the agenda for 2011 as set out by the Hon. Minister entitled, “Transforming the Economy”, (a) “Modernising the Traditional Sectors”. In economic terms, “transforming” embodies new things, new industries and new products, while “modernising” speaks to mechanisation and introduction of new technologies such as computerised equipment and techniques which will engender high output and value added products. Moreover, rehabilitation is not modernisation. Modernisation refers to quantum jumps in productivity, arising from the introduction of new production processes and technologies. In perusal of this section of the budget, the Hon. Minister makes very limited references to any such changes, other than in the titles which meant to catch the eye of the reader. The expected changes of this nature are restricted to gold. Paragraph 4.14, themed “...infusion of new and transformative technology...” in the gold sector together with some research in agriculture, and two new rice varieties mentioned under this heading...

The reality is that greater emphasis is placed on maintaining the various sectors, rather than modernising them, for there has been no indication or hint of new products, except for the Enmore Sugar Packaging Plant soon to be made operational.

In the very paragraph 4.8, the Hon. Minister said,

“In addition, the process of mechanising the operations of the company will advance, with the acquisition of additional mechanised harvesters, cane loaders, tractors and haulage units.”

The Minister referred to the same old machinery which has been in use for some time. How does this represent modernisation? Rather, it emphasises more of the same.

With regards to rice, the PNCR – 1 G would like to congratulate the rice farmers who, despite the many challenges, recorded the highest production yields and exports for the year. The Hon. Minister mentioned that two new varieties were introduced. This may be so...

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

Mrs. Backer: I rise to move that the Hon. Member be given fifteen minutes to continue her presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Please continue Hon. Member.

Mrs. Lawrence: This may be so, but this is negligible and there is much more that needs to be done in the area of research to facilitate even greater productivity by our rice farmers. In order to influence modernisation, there is a need to move away from the traditional exporting of rice only, and move to the production of new products such as rice with added high nutrients and better quality, or rice cereals, products for which larger and more lucrative markets exist. This is what value added means.

Bauxite

The PNCR - 1 G is happy to note that in this sector there will be the introduction of a new product – mullite. While this is commendable, mullite is not really, in a strict sense, a new product, as it was produced before by the bauxite company. It should also be noted that mullite is a lower grade of ore which has implications for value added prices.

This is definitely insufficient and inadequate. [**A Hon. Member:** It is mullite.] Whether it is mullite or *millite*, or whatever lite you want to call it, we must seek to attract foreign investors who can transform the large amounts of overburden into various by-products as is done in other countries. One of the many by-products derived is high quality paper. The use of this product has high environmental benefits and can add to Guyana's advocacy on the world stage of saving the forest, and more than ever provide the much needed jobs for the residents of Region 10.

Gold

Once again, the PNCR – 1 G notes that the mining sector contribution to the revenues collected by the Government has been outstanding and, like the rice farmers, it congratulates the miners. It has enabled the economy to have growth in 2010. At paragraph 4.14, the Hon. Minister refers to the infusion of transformative technology into this industry. This technology, however, is based on the premise of substantial investments in the future. The PNCR – 1 G strongly believes that the Government should produce incentives for investment in transformative technology now, so that small and medium scale miners could benefit and operate in an environmentally friendly manner. Through this intervention, the indigenous communities' concerns can also be addressed;

their rivers and waters can once again be safer from pollution, and they can enjoy a healthier lifestyle. The PNCR – 1 G, therefore, submits that the budget really addresses maintenance and falls short on modernisation.

Paragraph 4.15 makes mention of agricultural diversification based on fruits and vegetables, livestock and aquaculture, but no programmes of any consequence or investment in processing, or production and productivity, are mentioned. Perhaps the Minister in his response will enlighten us.

At paragraph 4.19, the Hon. Minister made mention of large-scale agricultural investment. The Hon. Minister, however, failed to indicate when the Government will lay in this National Assembly a sound land policy. This will ensure that secret deals are not made in return for political favours or mileage, as the touted secret deal with Simpson from Barbados on the acquisition of four hundred acres of land in the Rupununi. A level playing field, Sir, must be created.

Despite the shortcomings under the “Modernisation of Traditional Sectors,” the PNCR - 1 G wishes to caution the Government against taking its eyes off diversification. To do so would be a mistake, one made by developing states. Each time commodity prices rise, they turn back to producing more unprocessed commodities.

Information and Communications Technology

The PNCR – 1G recognises the need for Guyana to enhance its Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in view of world trends. The international market is technologically oriented, hence the need for developing countries such as ours to import this technology so that they do not lag further behind. We recognise the Government’s investment in the fibre-optic cables. However, with the advent of technology comes the exchange of ideas and expression of opinions. It is incumbent on the Government, therefore, to create a platform whereby criticisms – constructive or negative – can be voiced without fear of repression or reprisals. How would Guyana advance technologically if dialogue and opinions cannot be entertained, but is rather stifled or silenced?

Transparency

There is need and will continue to be need for transparency and accountability in these matters. For example, over the last weekend we have heard of the launch of a ninety thousand lap top project. Where is the document that would inform how this project would be implemented? What criteria would be used for the phased distribution and who would determine it? What is the cost of each of these computers, and was there a competitive bid? I believe that the Government owes this House an obligation to bring a document so that this House is properly informed of this project, so that it can be monitored to ensure that it is not used for political purposes in this election year.

Other Institutional Reforms

On “Other Institutional Reforms”, at paragraph 4.118, the Minister indicated that, due to the “...strong regulatory and supervisory framework established for the financial sector... with the exception of Clico”, other financial institutions were unaffected by external events. What the Minister failed to inform the House was that it was not the absence of a regulatory framework, but the failure of enforcement that led to the Colonial Life Insurance Company’s (CLICO’s) debacle. It illustrates, therefore, that the presence of regulations alone are not enough, but the willingness to enforce them. The PNCR – 1G believes that financial sector reforms should ensure early signals to avoid future debacles like CLICO. Unlike the words of the Hon. Minister, in the absence of proper regulatory mechanisms and competent and fearless regulations, we are destined to relive the experience of CLICO’s.

One notes the dissatisfaction of policyholders, some of whom are still unsure of whether they would be reimbursed or not, and may I remind you, Sir, of the Jiffy Lubes case in which the proprietor’s wife was challenged by CLICO upon the request to honour the insurance policy, and whose matter is still pending. Hence, the urgent need for the Government to review these regulatory frameworks in a comprehensive manner.

Corruption

Like in 2010, we, one year later in 2011, bear witness to the Hon. Minister of Finance’s avoidance of the word “corruption”, in his budget speech, as if it were the plague. The extent and breath of the malaise in Guyana is overwhelming and a studied avoidance of any reference to this legacy of this administration does not make the problem disappear. In fact, with the presence of a

chapter of Transparency International, in Guyana, every facet of corruption, at every level is now being recorded and internationalised. Guyana's corruption is now on the international radar.

Throughout the world, more and more regimes are under close scrutiny and those who believe that time is an amnesia for the disappearance of misdeeds committed by them must take note. Only last week ex-President "Baby Doc" Duvalier was charged by Haitian prosecutors for corruption while in office as President of Haiti. The day of justice is coming. That day of justice is coming for all those whose administrations were characterised by corruption, and Guyana is no exception. As the saying goes, "You may run but you cannot hide!"

Apart from corruption being a drain on the national economy, it has become a corrosive cancer that has spread throughout our society. The Hon. Minister needs to be reminded of several events and irregularities which have taken place under his watch so that he may give the House the undertaking that they will never happen again, or be repeated. For example, QAII investment, where concessions that were not catered for under the law were promised, the MoU for Buddy's investment, the National Archives, the Kingston Hotel blackout, the Fidelity probe, and now, Sir, the GuySuCo's fiasco. Mr. Minister, corruption will not go away unless you and your Government address this important matter.

We will continue to be placed on indexes such as the *Economic Freedom World Rankings*, where the country is ranked 151 of 180 countries, with a freedom score of 49.4, showing a positive change of +1.0 from the 2008 Report. However, Guyana continues to be in the repressive category. Neither will the figure of \$99.151million in overpayments to contractors disappear, nor the procurement of drugs by the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation without the system of competitive bidding as required under the Procurement Act... Neither will the refusal to place the lotto funds revenues into the Consolidated Fund and the refusal to transfer the balances held in eleven special accounts totalling approximately \$4.6 billion... Seven of the accounts reflected static balances totalling \$1.6 billion over the last six years. Just to name a few which conflicts with the spirit and the letter of our financial regulations.

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

Mrs. Backer: I rise to move that the Hon. Member be given fifteen minutes to continue her presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mrs. Lawrence: All of this was experienced under both the Ministry of Finance and the Government under the Minister's watch, Sir.

In concluding, it is standard practice that underlining a budget and its discussion is the macro-economic situation. However, the question is asked of the Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh: Will the budget stabilise the economy in terms of prices, interest rate, the fuel price and basic needs basket?

The PNCR – 1 G cannot determine if this budget is complete since tables 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7 of *Volume 2 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of Guyana* beg several questions. Given the increases in 2010 and 2011, is the Government underestimating the revenue in the budget? Given the trend of 2009 and 2010, is “Other Current Revenue for 2011” inflated? Why is there a reduction in the revenue for tourism, when we are told, over and over, again, that Guyana as a tourist destination is attracting more and more visitors? What is the reason for the high increase in “Non-Tax Revenue”? Is the high increase in “External Grants” due to a specific activity, Sir? Should this amount not be realised, it can have implications for financing and projects.

“Transport and Communication” shows an approximate \$5 billion increase. Is this window dressing, or simply incomplete projects? Based upon the Minister of Finance previous track record the projection of a thirty three per cent increase in capital expenditure is unrealistic, even though it is a well known fact that he proposed to increase, significantly, expenditures in this election year to boost the PPP/C campaign in a bid to raise its popularity in areas that it has neglected for years.

Why is Parliament Office showing such a huge decrease in its capital expenditure when, as we look around, there is so much to be done, and the Office of the President is having an increase of some \$3.4 million? Does it have anything to do with an elections year?

Why is Region 4, Demerara/ Mahaica, the largest Region, in terms of population, only receiving \$20 million more than it received in 2010, unlike other Regions which have less population?

As I conclude, the Minister of Finance said that investment and expenditure will rise, but the fiscal balance will remain the same. Normally, the PNCR – 1G would regard that as great.

However, because the Estimates do not reflect all the relevant figures, it is unable to say whether that stability will be achieved, especially on the expenditure side. We will not know the real financial deficit until we see the Supplementary Provision starts rolling in this House.

The lack of consistency between the capital programme resulted in floating wharves, bridges which collapsed soon after construction, and election roads, to name a few.

In this budget we are told that capital investment will rise by thirty-three per cent and current expenditure by ten per cent, when over the previous years capital expenditure declined from \$47 billion to \$46.7 billion. Is it likely that it could rise to \$62.1 billion in the following year? Yes, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, there is a problem of absorptive capacity - the ability of the economy to use funds allocated due to skill shortages and limitations of management capacity, as well as political interference and incompetence. Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, you can tell me, because, although the theme of the budget is *Together Building Tomorrow's Guyana Today*, unlike our own intent, it does not go far enough towards inclusiveness. The PNCR – 1G continues to work towards providing all of our people with the opportunity to be a part of the decision making process and embrace the economic gains of our country.

No doubt, after a week of debate, the PPP/C will pass this budget unaltered, regardless of what is said. However, the people of Guyana will be the judges, particularly in this significant year of redemption - a year that will bring an end to all the corruption, marginalisation and lack of accountability which have occurred over the past eighteen years. I have no doubt that the people of this country have had enough and when the time comes they will resolve unanimously to bring about positive change, indeed, for tomorrow's generation. A people united can never be defeated.

Thank you Sir. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Before I call on Minister Nadir, I would like to just mention that the National Communications Network (NCN) has four cameras in the Chambers. There is one which takes the Opposition Members from the front. There is one here which takes the Government Members from the front, and there is another camera which sweeps. So the charge of discrimination in the allocation of cameras at this session is not accurate.

Mr. Trotman: Mr. Speaker, on a Point of Order. Are we to assume that NCN will be airing the debates in totality - that means the Opposition Members contributions?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the press has a responsibility to represent the debates, and I would assume that that includes the pictorial aspect of the debates, in an unbiased manner. If they do not, that is contempt of the Parliament. Unfortunately, I cannot follow all the press, and if anybody draws anything to my attention I will deal with it. I want to caution you: please do not draw minutia and small issues to my attention. If there is a big case – a large case - of discrimination in the presentation of reports in the National Assembly, that is worth talking to the press about.

3.08 p.m.

Minister of Labour [Mr. Nadir]: I am honoured as the first, among equals, to rise in support of my colleague, the Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, on his fifth annual budget. I am also privileged to offer our congratulations, on the entire Government side, to him on a very eloquent presentation and on this brave budget entitled, *Together Building Tomorrow's Guyana Today*.

We just heard a presentation from the Hon. Member, Mrs. Lawrence, who tried to paint a picture that the Government has mismanaged this economy, especially the Minister of Finance. His numbers are unbelievable: that there continues to be discrimination in the allocations; there continues to be arbitrariness in the concessions, and literally, it is like writing a story. One goes to a shelf and pulls down the stereotypes, because they have said this year after year, after year. What the four consecutive budgets that Dr. Singh has produced, along with the many years previously, have done was to defy their predictions of doom and gloom and built an economy that is seeing the distribution of fruits of which is the most even in this part of the hemisphere.

The issue of income disparity has been measured and Guyana has come out as among the top countries. In fact, I think it is number two. Ms. Teixeira has the numbers which state that in terms of income disparity in Guyana, the economic pie is well split between the top echelon and the lower echelon. The equity is there. As Mrs. Lawrence tried - tried as she did - I must say, failed she also did to discredit this Government, and the performance of this Government, especially over the past four years.

This debate has a lot to do with the health of the economy and programmes for the future. This particular budget not only consolidates on very strong economic performances over the past four years, but also indicates the transformative things that will be embarked upon today - delivering tomorrow to Guyanese today.

In fact, today, in terms of the economy, we are the healthiest we have ever been in our lives. I could not help but agree with the Hon. Minister of Finance on page 1, in paragraph 1.4. [Mrs. Backer: What did he say?] We should read it to remind Mrs. Backer especially.

“Today, the Guyanese economy is stronger than ever before with gross domestic product (GDP) now measured at \$453 billion...”

It is almost US\$2.2 billion. The healthiest!

What we have to do is to go back a bit because this performance over the past four years is coming out of a period when Guyana faced its toughest times. I do not want to go back to the Greenidge's years. I am going back to the years from 1998 to 2005, and that was what the administration had to face. It was perhaps the most testing time the country had to face. This is what that period comprised: it comprised political instability with six months of marches after the 1997 elections; it comprised civil and industrial unrest; we saw the instigators from the political elements' hands in the public service strike of 1999; and an in absorptive award in terms of the public service when there was the Armstrong Tribunal.

That period also saw eighteen per cent devaluation. When we had that award in 1999, the Guyana dollar depreciated by eighteen per cent and the records are there for everyone to see – eighteen per cent devaluation in the Guyana dollar. When we talk about absorptive capacity, we must look at this: when the eighteen per cent devaluation hit, the inflation that accompanied that not only hit the increases in workers' wages and salaries, it hit all the wages and salaries of all the workers of the country. The devaluation eroded not only public service wages and salaries, but all of the wages and salaries of all the workers in the country. When I calculated, in effect, when one looks at the one-third payment of income tax and the devaluation, those workers were worse off in real terms.

That period also saw the continued boycott of the People's National Congress from the National Assembly - again, frightening away investment. I would say that the young President Jagdeo, at that time, was severely tested, and, as like Chanderpaul, the young President withstood the test, held the wheel firm as a helmsman and guided us through that period for five years of unprecedented economic growth.

That particular period also saw the very heavy hand of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), and it was very rough, Mr. Speaker, when one is a borrowing beggar. We look at the crime wave that started with the jailbreak in 2002, and that was compounded with the flood in 2005, and the heavy impact of high oil prices. 2006 saw us maturing as a democracy, and in that period to now, as the Minister of Finance said, we have seen annualised growth of four per cent - four per cent in real GDP terms.

I said, this debate is a lot about the health of this economy. We have seen those who complained that the numbers presented in this budget by the Hon. Minister of Finance are unbelievable. They said, "He expects us to believe." The computation of national statistics, and, in particular, national accounts, is a very serious science, and very few of us, certainly not the last speaker, have been trained in that particular science. Not only that there are very qualified professionals at the Guyana National Bureau of Statistics, but we also comply with international standards in terms of the preparation of these statistics. Mr. Speaker, you do not have to believe what the professionals at the Guyana National Bureau of Statistics have said in terms of economic growth, in terms of the containment of inflation, in terms of the amount of Direct Foreign Investment (DFI) that have come into this country, and the Minister of Finance said that US\$692 million is being invested by almost one thousand new companies in Guyana in this period. [Mrs. David-Blair: Name them.] I am going to name them shortly for you - but as I said, you do not have to believe what Dr. Ashni Singh said. Let me tell you what the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said after it ended its visit here on 19th November, 2010:

"An IMF mission visited Guyana from Nov. 8 – 18 to conduct the Fund's yearly review of the Guyanese economy. Despite external and domestic shocks in 2010, the Guyanese economy has exhibited resilience, registering a fifth consecutive year of robust growth. Real domestic product is projected to grow by just under four per cent..."

We finished at 3.6 per cent and the non-sugar economy grew at 4.3 per cent. [Mr. Ramjattan: What about sugar?] Sugar is 3.6%. I go on.

“...supported by increased activities in gold and services sectors, notwithstanding downside risks, including the global environment and concerns in sugar. The team expects growth to continue...”

The IMF team!

“...on a steady path supported by expansion in mining and construction.”

Even if the IMF did a minority report, and even if the IMF wanted to say some nice things about the sincere Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, I will say let us turn to what Republic Bank (Guyana) Limited stated in its Annual Report, quoting Mr. John Alves, the Managing Director. He said:

“In spite of the contagion effects of global financial crisis, developments in our country’s economy enabled the bank to deliver strong returns to shareholders.”

It is “to deliver strong returns”.

“As a result, an overall balance of payment surplus of US\$34.6 million was recorded, while the Bank of Guyana increased its external reserve position from US\$628 million at the end of 2009 to US\$677 million at the end of June, 2010.”

Mr. Alves went on to say this in terms of future outlook. He said:

“Republic Bank (Guyana) Limited takes confidence...”

He said it “takes confidence.”

“...in the performance of the economy which has been commendable despite the setbacks in sugar and the global economy.”

The man who is the custodian of the single largest stock of wealth in his hands is saying that, here, about the performance of the Guyanese economy, and our friends in the Opposition cannot see that this economy is growing and is delivering goods and services to our people in a more efficient way - in a better way - and improving their standard of living and quality of life.

That brings me to the point that the last speaker made about the issue of the CLICO situation being a lack of monitoring not legislation, and saying that the CLICO crisis happened because the Government did not exercise enough diligence over the insurance sector. In 2005, there was one attempt in a financial institution, and insurance, until last year, was not dealt with as a part of the banking sector which the Bank of Guyana monitored. That was changed last year, but when there was the first attempt in Globe Trust, in 2005, the legislation was immediately amended to ensure not only that there will be good monitoring, but that there will also be the prosecutions of directors and of managers involved in the mismanagement of people's hard earned savings.

The last speaker has been a bit out of her depth when she spoke of most of the things. She touched on a bit here and a bit there as if it is writing a little précis and putting in a few negatives of the Minister of Finance's speech. I doubt whether she has the comprehension to deal with some of the economic issues that we have here today. I saw the Hon. Minister of Finance was shaking his head at her because he understood... *[Interruption]* ...

Mr. Speaker: Continue Hon. Member.

Mr. Nadir: Thank you Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, let us have some order please.

Mr. Nadir: I listened to her touch on a bit here and there. She mentioned growing protectionism in the world. I do not know if she is so versed, that the global economy...*[Interruption]*

Mrs. Backer: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order.

Mr. Nadir: Mr. Speaker...

Mrs. Backer: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order...

Mr. Speaker: I am listening to you, Hon. Member.

Mrs. Backer: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member is repeatedly referring to our new Shadow Minister of Finance as "she" and "her", and I think it is affront to all women here and *his eyes pass people*. That is what I would say. I think it is affront and I call on the Speaker of the House to protect the Hon. Member, Mrs. Lawrence. Thank you Sir.

Mr. Speaker: You have heard Mrs. Backer, Hon. Member.

Mr. Nadir: Mr. Speaker, you and I, I think, have a good appreciation of the Standing Orders.

The last speaker spoke of growing protectionism in the world, but there is no growing protectionism in the world. Over the past two decades, the world has worked assiduously to bring down barriers to trade, and even in the last Economic Partnership Agreement, which called for the breaking down of barriers, when our President was saying that these agreements are not in our best interest and everybody else in the region signed, and we were the last, this year, last week, we were the first to amend the rate to bring down these tariffs so that we can have less protectionism. The Hon. Member, Mrs. Lawrence, is a bit out of her depth.

The PNCR-IG withdrew from Chamber.

I want to return to the statement by the Hon. Minister of Finance in paragraph 1.4, in terms of the resilience of the Guyanese economy, as mentioned also by the IMF team. What has happened is because of the diversification that has been achieved in the economy, and unlike what the Member, Mrs. Lawrence, said about the Government did not support the growth of the service sector, I remember, budget after budget here, saying that every developed economy, and every economy that tends toward this type of development..., we have seen service sectors in the range of seventy per cent of the economy. Today, it is close to forty-five per cent in Guyana, still a long way to go. Our economy, because of its diversification – because of some of the new sectors - has been able to withstand the external shocks and also has been able to withstand the low output in sugar.

This whole issue of external reserve, and today it is standing at US\$780 million - I think that is equivalent to about six to seven months of exports - I am sure that at no other period in our history...This might be one of the largest set of reserves we have ever had in the history of Guyana and British Guiana, so if every man and woman who are able to work today do not work again, we can go on holiday for seven months and still import for seven months, all the things that we need. That is what this is saying. [Mr. Franklin: That is stupid.] It is not stupid. That is what it is saying. It is equivalent to seven months of imports. [A Hon. Member: Deal with the debt.] We will deal with the debt too.

Much has been made about this whole issue of national debt and greater borrowing. It is acknowledged that in 1992, this country ended with US\$2.2 billion in external debt. In 1992, the gross domestic product of this country divided by the population gave a per capita income of about US\$400. If the debt of US\$2.2 billion was divided by US\$400 it would have taken every man, woman and child seven years, in 1992, to pay their portion of it. Today, the per capita external debt is about US\$1,500 and our GDP is US\$2,500, in seven months – not seven years - every man, woman and child can pay off their portion of the debt. That is the progress we are talking about.

The other thing is that we cannot see what we did with the US\$2.2 billion. We cannot see where it went. [A Hon. Member: Part went to the barge.] Part may have gone to the barge and so forth. But, today, all over this country one can see where the debt that has been incurred by this Government is: in four-lane highways; in lights along the highways; in over one thousand roads in the small communities in this country; in health facilities throughout the length and breadth of this country; in the repair of one thousand and one hundred schools in this country; in putting by 2013, seventy per cent trained teachers in all of our schools. That is where it is going. In the next two years, over six hundred medical doctors, Dr. Westford said to me, will be back in Guyana. That is where it is going. What is sad is the attempts of some politicians and some local commentators to stop the IFIs and the donor community from continuing to support progress in Guyana. That is what is sad. I have said before that they have a mentality that they prefer to rule over ruin.

There is the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) strategy which is coming on stream, and this ICT strategy is not about one laptop. The ICT strategy for this country is six years late. Why? It is because some Members in the Opposition along with a particular telecommunication service went to the United State of America Department of Treasury, five to six years ago, and blocked a US\$52 million loan that would have brought the ICT reform, six years ago, to this country.

I remember in 2004, January - I think it was around 8th January – His Excellency President Jagdeo, and Dr. Ramsaran and I happened to have been on his team to visit India, went to meet President Abdul Kalam. As soon as President Kalam pushed his hands out – the President was walking, and Dr. Ramsaran and I were standing – the first thing he said to President Jagdeo

was, “We are going to build that stadium for you.” But what had happened when we came back from there was that those commentators and opposition obstructionists went to the IMF and said that the debt that we were going to contract will be unsustainable, that the stadium should never start, and even if it were started we should stop it. They tried to block that. If we have this togetherness which Dr. Singh is speaking about - if we have a bit more of that... - and the hand has been stretched out across the room time after time. It had been hit. We have been told to put it on our mouths and shut up, and things as those.

Time after time, they have gone to the IFIs. Look at the European Union (EU) issues. Look at the British security programme. Did it happen because they are so bad? I will tell you what is bad, Mr. Speaker. Just at the end of the PNC regime in 1992, when the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) was introduced, you will see here, in those Greenidge’s budgets, that he complained that the donor community and the IFIs did not provide all the assistance they promised because - he said it in those budgets - they did not trust the Government. We continue to get our support. We continue to get new friends in the international scene. Look at Guyana! I sat in the International Convention Centre so proud to see all those Presidents from South America sitting here, while I remembered standing on the high bridge at La Penitence and welcoming the Duke of Edinburgh, seeing the return of the body of the late Sir David Rose, having being able to touch the car in which President Castro was in and listened to Mohamed Rafeek pull a note on it. I have also witnessed our hosting of the Non-Aligned Movement Conference. Today, Guyana has such a high profile on the international stage. Look at the Finance Commonwealth Ministers Meeting, as the Minister of Finance said, followed by the RIO Summit, and then Union of South American Nations (UNASUR).

What was very revealing at the UNASUR meeting was when President Lula did his ad-lib speech. He faced the same thing. When he first took office, all his critics ran all over the world and he said he could not even get to see a third rated diplomat in America.

3.38 p.m.

The International Monetary Fund (I.M.F.) came to him to tell him what he must do and what he must not do, and he stood up, beat his chest proudly and he said, “Today the I.M.F. owes me money”, a lot of money. What we are seeing here in these accounts, in this Budget, is current

revenue exceeding current expenditure by \$13 billion. Is that right, Dr. Singh? The issue is not so much the quantum of debt. The issue is if we can manage the debt that we are incurring? That is it, and yes we can!

On average, they say a government should not contract a deficit that is a bit more than 7% of the Gross Domestic Product. That is the target that the macroeconomists use. About 7% of the Gross Domestic Product should be the limit. We are only at 3.5%. It says that we can borrow more, but we are not going to borrow for the sake of borrowing and certainly, from what we are seeing in this Budget, Dr. Singh is not borrowing for borrowing to finance any election giveaways.

They made a lot of statements about the domestic debt and the Finance Minister acknowledged that the domestic debt has grown by 15%, but out of the \$100 billion in domestic debt, \$94 billion is spent on mopping up excess liquidity so that we can contain inflation – a key variable that investors look for. \$94 billion is spent to ensure that we contain the supply of money in the economy so that we do not drive inflation to hyper levels. The inflation variable is very important because when inflation goes up, it is the wages and salaries of every man and woman that is eroded. It is prudent that any good Government would want to ensure that we contain inflation and it was contained last year. Yes, we predicted 4% in the previous Budget and we ended with 4.5%. That is not so bad because most countries look at a limit of about 5% and if one looks at our inflation levels over the past few years, it has been single digit in the last three years; containing inflation in the single digit.

More particularly, this issue again of debt that they are saying is out of control... when one has excess money and one goes for a mortgage, the first thing that the banker will look for is to see if he or she has about 30%-35% extra money after all of your living expenses and then they will try to fashion the quantum of the mortgage that you can afford and that quantum, they will normally say, will stay between 25%-30%. What we have contracted is not only manageable, but it is going into a focused area, an area that is going to bring the transformation for tomorrow, today.

I sat during previous Budgets over there and I was happy to talk about the advances in Doppler, light on the highway, but today I am so proud that we can speak of an information communication strategy for Guyana; it is not one laptop. We can talk about a backbone; we can talk of E-Governance; we can talk of constant supply of electricity that has to power this

economy and these transformative things. I have likened Information Communication Technology (I.C.T.) to bringing potable water to our people in their homes. That is how transformative it is.

Twenty years ago, you and I know, as we have travelled the length and breadth of this country, it was a task to fetch water from the outside pipe into the downstairs bathroom. It was a task to fetch the water from downstairs to upstairs. All around the country there were children, women and fathers, starting from 5 O'clock in the morning, pushing go-carts. After twenty years with what we have borrowed, what we have invested in the delivery of water to our people, look around at what is happening today.

I went to the back of Fyrih yesterday, right down to the last street, wanting to see what Mr. Chand is doing in the sugar sector. Things are looking good, Mr. Chand. The boys say that they are ready to go. I went to Albion yesterday and as I drove – we left very early as, I think, we accompanied the Prime Minister on a walkabout in Mahaica too – there was an absence of all this human power of men, women and children fetching water. All that energy has now been released for study, recreation, building the family and this is what I.C.T. is going to do for Guyana - this same kind of transformation, and the Minister of Finance has spoken about these transformative things.

This Low Carbon Development Strategy and the potential that it has took a certain amount of brilliance ten years ago to look into the future and say, “We can make a good return on our forestry resources without cutting it down.” This Government led the way and today we are counting the inflows from the foresight and strategy – the transformative things that will happen.

This Government and I have been in it for ten years. I have noticed how it has continuously re-examined itself and is finding better ways to deliver more services to our people. Two years ago Minister Manickchand promised \$50 million to help single parents, while \$25 million was allocated towards training and \$25 million was allocated so that they can get the tools of the trade in the areas in which they were trained. We were able to help 374 single parents two years ago, but the Government took a step back and said, “Hold on, is there not a larger vision here? Could we not do much more for this \$25 million?” After that self examination and introspection the brilliant idea came up, “Instead of putting this \$25 million to benefit 374 people with tools,

let us put it in setting up the institution, the Women of Worth (WOW) Secretariat.” Instead of helping 374 people it was 1,700 people this year. In the last two years, \$50 million will go into the WOW Secretariat where they help the women to get small loans instead of just giving 374 of them the tools, now it is a larger pool. That is the kind of thinking this Government has been bringing to use of the hard earned money of the taxpayers.

When we hear that this Budget has only to do with maintenance and that the capital programme does not give a vision for reform in sugar and rice, it sounds totally erroneous because we have to maintain what we have so that we can keep the production going while new technologies are introduced. That is why we have the new Skeldon Factory. There will be problems but under the previous regime there were no maintenance; not even innovations. It was “*wuk til it bruk an’ den park it.*”

This is the strategy that this Government has been looking at and these are some of the transformative things that are contained in the Budget that is going to be delivering a better standard of living to our people. As Minister Singh closed the Budget, he mentioned the thousands of people who are benefiting directly from previous budgets. I think he mentioned the 15,148 persons who have house lots – this is tangible. He mentioned the 20,629 persons who got connected to the electricity grid. He mentioned the 27,344 persons who saw an ophthalmologist at Dr. Ramsaran’s hospitals and the 542 who got...

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

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

Mr. Speaker: I will give him 6 minutes because he over-spoke. When his 6 minutes are completed that will bring him up to 15 minutes.

Motion put, and carried.

Mr. Nadir: He mentioned the 500 people who got cataract surgery, but you will hear on this side Minister after Minister, sector after sector, tell you of the tangible benefits all of our people - the poor, vulnerable, professional or whoever sought the service - received.

Even if we look at my small sector, over the past four years over 4,000 persons received \$140 million in claims from errant employers through the labour department. In terms of finding jobs for people, over 6,000 people got jobs in the last four years through the Central Recruitment and Manpower Agency. This is just one small agency. Over 4,000 persons were trained by one programme – the National Training Project for Youth Empowerment. That is one programme only, not all of the programmes. In the last four years and more than 700 single parents were trained. These are tangible things that are being felt and especially by the ordinary people of our country.

Persons were saying that this Budget does not speak to the economy and employment. This Budget is all about employment. I am of the view, as the Hon. Minister of Finance, that in five years time we are going to have look seriously at importing a lot of skills and manpower, even at the lowest level because last year the Central Recruitment and Manpower Agency had 500 vacancies for which we did not have the skills. When we talk about unemployment, and I think the economist measures unemployment as counting the number of people looking for work and cannot find work... but if one does not want a job and one is able bodied and does not want to work then one is not unemployed. We are hearing that we are hiding unemployment numbers. Well the U.S. Embassy's Trade Department has been issuing a trade bulletin every quarter. They are measuring unemployment at about 10.3% right now, which is one of the lowest in the Caribbean. I am so sure that they are counting those who are not looking for a job.

This issue of employment in the Budget has been further stimulated by the tax breaks that have been offered and when we were mentioning how solid our bank is, someone was mentioning illicit money. I hope they told that to Clifford Reis when he reported record profits. I will tell you in terms of Banks D.I.H. alone, the 5% reduction in taxes from 35%-30% will put \$154 million extra in Banks' pockets this year if they have the same level of turnover as last year. They say that it takes about US\$20,000 to create a decent job. The 5% reduction in corporate taxes across the commercial and the non-commercial companies is equivalent to this Government forgoing \$1.7 billion in taxes. That alone, without the multiplied effect, can cater for 600 new jobs - that single measure.

Japan has lowered their rate from 40% to 35%. Japan is now at 35% so, Dr. Singh, you are in pretty good company when you have the productive sector at 30%. I see the Japanese business people are pressuring the Government to bring down that tax rate a little bit lower.

I want to go back to this whole issue of the Budget not catering for the expansion and the introduction of innovation. Banks DIH is boasting of an investment this year of \$3.2 billion with new plants. Do you know why it can do that with confidence? The Government has created the confidence and the investment climate.

Look at the banking sector. At the banking sector we have seen in the last four weeks two new banks open up on the East Bank of Demerara and a third one hot on its heels. The Finance Minister did mention in his Budget that insurance and finance are among the fastest growing sectors in the economy and the strongest in our economy today.

We hear that nothing is being done for the service and finance sector, as well as how far back we are. Yes, we are far back in many things but do you know what we are ahead in? We have been delivering, year after year, positive economic growth for our people, better benefits and a greater standard of living. Very few countries in the Caribbean can say that they have seen annualised growth rate as we have had in the last four years. Very few countries in the Caribbean can say that they have contained inflation as we have had in the last four years.

I do not doubt that our people continue to go...

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

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

Motion put, and carried.

Mr. Speaker: Proceed, Hon. Member.

Mr. Nadir: I heard it mentioned on the side about the migration. The arrow is now turned in the other direction. The last speaker quoted from Appendix I on page 64 and if we look at the next migration effect, we will see now that it is coming down. That is a turning point. People will continue to seek economic wealth rather than livelihood satisfaction. I would not doubt it.

I had an opportunity to look at two indices recently. One is a Satisfaction Index and Guyana ranks 36 out of 110 – out of many countries – in terms of happiness of the people. There was another one that I looked at. That is why the Finance Minister's Budget is premised on very good foundation and I will deal, if I have enough time, with the projections which he made and the criticisms that were levied on those projections. In terms of our people, the Finance Minister has built this Budget on a foundation that is held up by a people who have great compassion and generosity for each other. That is why the disparity in our wages is so low. Guyana today, in terms of the giving index, is number 5 in the world out of 110. It is not measuring what the Government of Guyana donates overseas. It is measuring the spirit of our people. That spirit has been so repaired that they are calling this year the Year of Redemption. This is the Year of Re-election and, I say, one good term deserves another and another.

The spirit of the people of this country today... [Mr. Ramjattan: Your position has transformed. It is very transformative] ...very transformative! I am in very illustrious company in terms of the movement from one side to another side. We say the Hon. Member Mr. Raphael Trotman and the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan have transformed themselves out of two parties into their own. If there is another transformation happening on the other side, what is the problem? Mr. Nandlall would say "plenty fluff." So be it!

This Budget is on that foundation where we have a people that care for each other and are willing to share and that is why this Government has also been driven to ensure that we can continue to offer more and better services to all of our people.

\$4 billion last year went to the development of house lots. The projections in the Budget were criticised as being unattainable. Last year I said that I had confidence that the projections could be accomplished and the one big block we had is this whole issue of sugar. When he is projecting, this year, a growth in sugar of 35%, it is not as if we are moving from 300,000 tons and we are going to get to 450,000 tons. What is happening here is that sugar is rebuilding and when one is starting from a low base he or she can expect high numbers. Why do you think that India and China continue to grow at so high rates? If you check, they are starting from very low rates and we had the same issue here. In 1991 and 1992, when the E.R.P. was introduced, one saw growth rates of 7% and 8%, but in 1992 our G.D.P. was \$393 million. It took about 7 years more for us to double that, to make another \$393 million. We have gotten \$393 million in two

years during the last four years. I do not know, Minister Singh, if you had followed the numbers but in 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 one has seen the G.D.P. jump from US \$1.4 billion to US \$2.2 billion and that exemplifies the performance of the economy and why it is that the Finance Minister can be very optimistic with the projections which he has made in this economy and, more particularly, why we can afford it.

We were told that real wages have been eroded and how the worker today is worse off than previous years. There are two years, last year and the year before, when public service wages and salary increases outstripped inflation and the numbers are in the book. Last year inflation was 4.5%, public service wages and salary increase was 5%. In the year before, inflation was three point something percent, public service wages and salary increase was 5%. The year before inflation was three point something percent, public service wages and salary increase was 6%. The point I want to make is only 20% of the economy is Government services; 20% of the workers are Government workers.

What is happening with all the other workers in the country? Are they getting less than the inflation rate? I will tell you. These are all collective labour agreements that are lodged and have been in the press. In 2008 we had wages increase varying from 7.7% from Demerara Mutual Life. We have seen Guyana Telephone and Telegraph Company at 9.75%, Guyana Power and Light at 9%, and Demerara Distillers Limited between 8% and 12%. I am speaking about the 80% of the other workers of the country. **[Mr. Patterson: Tell them that the tariffs have been raised]** We have all of that: Courts at 11%, New G.P.C. at 11%, Le Meridian Pegasus at 9%, Sterling Products at 9% and 10.5%, and the list goes on.

For 2009 they were: 6%, 7%, 6%, 7% to 9%, 8% to 9%, 11.5%, 9% to 13%, 9%, 9% and 10.5%. For 2010 we still have a lot of the negotiations going on. We have seen Demerara Life at 5%, North American Life at 12%, Demerara Timbers at 4.5%, and Demerara Distillers at 5%, 6% and 7% depending on the grade.

What it is saying here is that the creators of wealth and the private sector have been enjoying robust performances thanks to the climate which has been created by the Administration and they have been ensuring that part of those improved performances have been returned to the workers of our country.

There is so much to like about this Budget. I like this issue about the lowering of the threshold and in lowering the threshold, as with the companies, we are forgoing \$1.7 billion in taxes. For me, those simple tax measures that the Finance Minister has introduced will free up, based on last year's returns, \$3.4 billion. I do not know what the multiplying effect on the economy is. Dr. Singh, is it 5 or 6? Let us say a comfortable 6. That \$3.4 billion will translate to over \$18 billion in the purchase of new goods and services in our country.

We heard some comments that we do not have the absorptive capacity to take on the budget measures. The absorptive capacity has to deal with our knowhow. It has to deal with research and development, the introducing of new technologies, and the improvement of productivity and production processes. It has to do with developing our exports more so that we can earn more foreign exchange so that we do not drive inflation, and so that part of all of this new technology introduction, the improvement in productivity and production, goes to export, brings back in more US dollars, stabilises the exchange rate and offers Guyanese a better standard of living.

4.08 p.m.

Mr. Nadir: For the 20,000 house lots that Minister Irfaan Ali allocates, every house that is built will need 20,000 fridges, 20,000 television, 20,000 stereos, and 20,000 computers. If Government does not match that demand with increased export earnings, we will only drive inflation and it will have to spend more money to zap up liquidity just to contain it.

As the Minister of Finance said, an economy is not only about rice, sugar and bauxite. I am talking about 20,000 new jobs in call centres with the new backbone coming in. Twenty thousand! The spin off effect of our people developing the know-how to service the 90,000 laptops, to fix the fibre optic cables, to deal with the V stats that are in, to deal with the wi-fi and wi-max systems is that they will develop new technologies. Do you know what will happen? As we develop those skills, people will come here and buy those services and there will be an increase in the growth of the export of services. This has been one of the big areas with all the trade negotiations in terms of the World Trade Organisation's (WTO's) previous rounds. It dealt a lot with the cross border trade in services.

The whole issue of the economy and the transformation which Government is talking about, the small but very significant budget measures that will further stimulate production and productivity

and create employment in our country are all contained in this transformative budget and not an election year budget.

On the issue of transparency and accountability, we read in one newspaper column about all the reports not being tabled. Last year, this Ninth Parliament saw an unprecedented tabling of Reports. Almost 105 Annual Reports have been tabled in this Ninth Parliament after they were audited. Another Parliament may have to be built, but I think we should file the documents electronically so that space can be saved. Every single person who seeks to read them should have access to the electronic library.

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

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

Motion put, and carried.

Mr. Nadir: I read about one former Minister who laid an accusation that Records of the Proceedings of the Parliament, especially for the Public Accounts Committee, for 1986-1992 could not be found. I do not know where he got that information, but what I know is that in the last ten years, in particular, of the People's National Congress regime there was a lack of tabling of any report in this National Assembly. This Government is not going to measure itself by that government's standards, but when the former Minister is going to lay an accusation at the credibility of people like Mr. Frank Narine, Mr. Maurice Henry, Mr. Sherlock Isaacs and the Speakers prior to you, Mr. Speaker, it is a cause for great concern. One thing this Government prides itself upon is the whole issue of transparency and accountability.

[Speaker left Chair.]

[Mr. Harripersaud Nokta assumed Chair.]

Congratulations Sir.

Transparency International can come to Guyana but what it has to do is not depend on one biased commentator for all of its evaluation. That is the issue. It cannot depend on one biased commentator to be the source of reference. If not, the Government will have to see how

transparent Transparency International is. Guyana has many critics who have developed fame for being critical but have not had the credibility to match. They have to have some credibility if they want to offer a critique rather than a criticism. [Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs: A critique is a studied analysis.] A critique, I am reminded Mr. Speaker, is a studied analysis. Like the last speaker, a person can be a critic and just pull wild charges from here, there and everywhere.

I want to raise another issue that the Hon. Member Mrs. Lawrence mentioned. It is the issue of the expenditure of Central Government being masked; that supplemental that comes year after year masks the true nature of public expenditure. Every time there is a supplementary tabled in the House, a particular newspaper puts it as a headline item making it look as if this Government is on a wild spending spree. When one looks at the reality, the numbers tell a different story. The numbers tell a story of a government that continues to exercise great prudence in the financial management of the affairs of state.

In 2008 the Finance Minister presented a Budget of \$119 billion. During the year, he presented supplemental of \$11.7 billion, which is 9% more than what he initially brought to the National Assembly. If one listens to the wild charges and persons who only look at the newspaper headlines, one would want to add \$119 and the \$11.7 and get \$130.7 billion. That is not the true picture. In spite of \$11.7 billion in supplementary, the total expenditure in 2008 was \$2 billion less than projected in the Budget - \$117 billion as against projection of \$119 billion.

[Speaker resumed Chair.]

Welcome back Mr. Speaker.

This is no wild expenditure. What was the position in 2009? In 2009 a budget of \$128.9 billion was presented, \$15.7 billion in supplemental came – that was a total of 12%. If the two is added, it will run to close to \$144 billion. If you listen to the criticisms and read some of the headlines, one would expect that in 2009, Government spent close to 12% more. This is not so. Actual expenditure in 2009 was \$128 billion. That is half a billion dollars less than what was projected in the Budget. That is very, very prudent management of the economy.

What happened in 2010? Again, as we saw from the supplementary last month, the headlines were bold and the criticisms were grave. They claimed that the \$11.3 billion in supplementary that was presented, if added to the 142 billion would get a budget of \$155 billion. The reality is that actual expenditure last year was 139.5 billion which is close to \$2.5 billion less than what was projected in the Budget. What a record. [Member: What is the point?] The point is that there is an exercise of extreme fiscal responsibility. That is what it is.

There are projects that have a faster take up rate and there will be more money flowing in but Government cannot spend a cent unless it is approved by the National Assembly. Government had projected to spend \$10 million in the refurbishing of the Parliament Office and a donor stepped in and gave us an additional \$10 million to make it electronically up-to-date. In order to spend that additional \$10 million it has to be brought into the accounts. Government has to come for supplementary.

There are several projects that did not take off. For example, the projects under the Norway fund did not come off. When one looks at the Capital Budget of the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, with regards to the renovation of Stabroek Market and the construction of the home for the elderly, these were projects that were slow in their implementation. The Ministry had a lot of resources that were not expended, and that is where the balancing comes in. The Hon. Minister of Finance, in his prudence and responsibility to the people, will ensure that he stays within his targets and his limits. If his Ministry has an extra billion dollars from a special inflow, what should he do? Should he pocket it and do not spend it? Dr. Singh if you could spend it to help the people, bring it as a supplementary to the National Assembly and let us spend it to help the people of our country.

I have said over and over again that we do not live in paradise. I think that the \$US205 per capita income has put us in a special place that was never before reached in the history of our country. It is evident in the 10,000 new cars that are registered and on the streets every 11 months. That is the record. Our people are enjoying a better quality of life. Only a few years ago, we had to talk about building bicycle sheds for workers in the public service. Today we are inundated with the requests to build car parks for the public servants. I noticed that the Speaker had the same problem. Just as the Speaker had been wise to convert some greenery into a parking lot for the staff, my Ministry has had to do the same. Last month a labour leader came to the Ministry of

Labour on Brickdam and he initially drove past the building. When he came in he said, “Mr. Minister when I saw all these new cars, I thought I was in the wrong place. I thought I was at GT&T”. [Member: Only Mr. Carvil Duncan would say that.] It was Mr. Lincoln Lewis. [Mrs. Backer: No way] No way?

I remember a particular gentleman, whose name was recently mentioned, said at a May Day Rally that he would not shake my hand. Four times in the last two weeks he shook my hand. It is no doubt that the quality of life of our people has been getting better. When people who know differently hear the critics’ level that nothing is happening, it produces a lot of dissonance in their minds. When election time comes, just as how Government is saying that it has not done too badly and it has delivered on one promise after another, the people will say that one good term deserves another and another. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Ms. Wade: Thank you Mr. Speaker. As a woman I want to say something before I make my presentation. The theme for Budget 2011 is *Together Building Tomorrow’s Guyana Today*. How can we achieve this when a few minutes ago a Government Minister stood up in this National Assembly and disrespected our Shadow Finance Minister, the Hon. Volda Lawrence? This is unacceptable Mr. Speaker! What a shame! The nation is watching!

I rise to make my contribution to the 2011 National Budget titled *Together Building Tomorrow’s Guyana Today*. I am heartened that the 2011 Budget topic refers to a collaborative approach to building Guyana today. This gives credence to what the P.N.C./R has been calling for in the interest of Guyana. The late party Leader and the current leader, Mr. Hugh Desmond Hoyte and Mr. Robert Corbin, respectively, gave proposals for shared governance and/or inclusive governance which has never been embraced by the P.P.P/C Administration. However, I hope that this is a case of “better late than never” and we will watch over the coming months to see whether concrete efforts will be initiated to give meaning to this year’s Budget theme.

Rice

I am sorry that the Minister of Agriculture is not seated here. However, I have noticed my friend, Mr. Seeraj, in the corner.

At paragraphs 4.9 and 4.10 of the Budget speech under the sub title “Transforming the Economy”, the Hon. Minister of Finance set out, in respective paragraphs, what were achieved and the activities to be undertaken in the rice sub-section within the context of modernising the traditional sectors as a critical aspect of transforming the economy. The proof of the pudding is in the eating and the nation will be the judge over the coming year.

The fact of the matter is that despite claims of higher paddy prices, increased production and productivity, the rice industry remains on shaky ground. This P.P.P /C Government, which boasts of widespread support for rice farmers, has been shortsighted in adopting measures that can guarantee consistent improvement to the many millers and farmers. I am talking of over 6,000 families being directly involved.

Consideration must be given to traders, transporters, seasonal labourers, traders in fertilizer, bags, chemicals, fuel, and related services such as the banking industry. It is clear that the rice industry impacts on a substantial percentage of national economic life. There is the appalling situation where more than 70% of the export markets for rice are in the hands of foreign owned companies.

We, in the P.N.C/R, are unwavering in our beliefs that a strong independent private sector is critical for national building. How can the P.P.P/C Government claim to be serious about food security for the nation and still allow a key economic sub-sector, which is supposed to maintain income for thousands who are involved, to be stagnant by allowing two buyers, Mahaicony Rice and Nadira Rice, to preside over such a worrying situation?

Rice farmers understand what is happening in the industry. They are aware that the measures being introduced today are of little consolation to the fact that having heeded Government’s call for increased productivity, investment in machinery and other equipment, that they are vulnerable in terms of receiving adequate returns on their investments. I call on the Government to adopt a scientific approach to the management of the rice industry in the areas of planning and marketing and strive to engage an adequate number of professionals, not the ones that are only reactive to challenges that may arise from crop to crop, but those that recognise the commitment of stakeholders and is prepared to preserve their well being.

It was not by accident that during the P.N.C. regime that there was a separate institution named Guyana Rice Export Board (G.R.E.B.) that successfully marketed Guyana's rice abroad. This agency understood the various European Union Protocols, World Trade Organisation (W.T.O.) agreements, interpreted international market trends, successfully engaged CARICOM trade and Foreign Ministers and, in general, positioned Guyana's rice as a product much sought after at prices that allowed farmers to live comfortably on an income derived from paddy sold directly to millers, or by milling their paddy and selling the rice and by-products. There are so many areas in the rice industry in which farmers expected improvement but nothing happened.

Prior to the 2011 Budget, the P.N.C/R embarked on a series of consultations with various stakeholders in society and listened to their views as to what they regarded as important in their lives and what they wanted. It is known that the Government went through similar motions, but what happened? The Government ignored most of the contributions of the people. What a disappointment! However, I would like to thank all the patriotic citizens who took time off to participate in these consultations and for allowing me to be their unheard voices here today.

The Budget before us is \$161.4 billion and soon supplementary provisions would be sought to the tune of billions. The P.P.P/C Government is aware of all the pressing issues and yet they have failed, miserably, to address them. We are all aware that Region 5 is the largest agricultural Region and, therefore, farmers' inputs to the country's development are very important. Farmers continue to suffer severely. During the rainy season, the situation worsens. There must be some comprehensive drainage plan to address flooding that will take into account existing and proposed development, especially south of the main canal and also the continuation of Phase 2 of the Mahaica/Mahaicony Abary/Abary Agriculture Development (MMA/ADA) Scheme which is long overdue.

The farmers of No. 9 Village have been promised the digging of their canal from BD3 to BD5 since 1996. To date nothing has been done. At this rate, how can one build Guyana's tomorrow today?

The Hon. Minister of Agriculture - I am sorry he is not here - needs to address the very serious land issues in Region 5. In 2009, consultations were held throughout the Region, dealing with serious land issues and, to date, nothing has been done. The farmers are still awaiting answers.

Some of them cannot even plant and are living by overseas help. Remember the famous saying, “You can fool all the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all the time.”

Housing and Water

Let me turn to some critical issues in my region. A comprehensive system needs to be put in place to deal with housing in Region 5. Housing committee meetings are not held and very often applicants have to wait until the officers from Region 6 come to the Region to deal with their applications. The Region 5 administration has been repairing some houses year after year, wasting taxpayers’ money because they fail to have these houses occupied, although there are officers in need of accommodation. The police houses in the compound at Fort Wellington are in a deplorable state and no efforts are being made to have them renovated. Police officers are now occupying health houses and the legitimate health officers are deprived. The houses at MMA/ADA compound are all in deplorable state. They are eyesores in the Region and nurses, teachers and other public servants in the Region need homes. The house for nurses is being occupied by a doctor. Hence, the nurses are deprived of the use of their facility. Our teachers are suffering for housing accommodation. Can these houses be available to them?

Taking into consideration the \$1.5 billion, on page 42, that is allocated to the water sector, will consideration be given to families who cannot produce documentation of ownership to access water? What about the poor and less fortunate who cannot afford to pay for the connection? Would they be deprived of this main source of water? Please, Sir, make your intervention now. The Budget document on page 41, paragraph 4.84 spoke of potable water for every citizen. Care is given and not spoken. Residents are making their own judgment right now.

4.38 p.m.

There is always the problem of unreliable electricity in the Region and these outages affect the flow of water for long hours. It is time that generators are placed at these pumping stations to bring relief to these residents.

Youth, Sports and Culture

Our nation's future is in a state of depression. The interest of our young people should be the priority of any Government. What is yet to be seen is a business competitive environment to create jobs for the jobless youth, especially in Region 5.

In Region 5, Government needs to establish a pathway that will create health lifestyles for our promising youths. All registered youth organisations need to benefit from an improved youth, sports and culture system. Region Five needs to promote programmes to protect our vulnerable young people who are marginalised within their communities. Emphasis should be placed on dealing with the incidences of HIV/AIDS. Preventative measures promote positive values that are easily fostered thorough sports. The youths of Region 5 need a platform for drama, music, arts and care for kids with special needs. Adequate supply of sporting gears and the upgrading and developing of sports facilities throughout the Region is needed so that our young people can occupy their time meaningfully while showcasing their talents and eradicating ills. These matters need urgent attention. Please do not ignore them.

Health

There is an urgent need for an ambulance at the Fort Wellington Hospital. Relatives of referred patients are finding it difficult to get their sick to other health institutions and nurses are not allowed to accompany patients in private vehicles.

The Mahaicony Diagnostic Centre has a surgeon but the operating theatre is without equipment. The generator at this institution is, also, out of order.

Energy Power Generation and Supply

It is sad that those who do not learn from their mistakes are condemned to repeat them. Since 2006, the President visited Region 5 and promised the residents of Ithaca, No.8, No. 9 and No. 30 villages and Calcutta cross streets electricity. To date, they are still waiting and there is nothing mentioned in the 2011 Electrification Programme. The Hon. Prime Minister, Samuel Hinds, and the Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, Dr Frank Anthony, are quite aware of these promises. How will these families benefit from the lap top distribution exercise? Or is this the Government's way of saying that they will not qualify?

Since I became a Member of this Hon. House, it has been clear that this Government refuses to listen. It is all about broken promises. A Budget involves planning, coordination, evaluation, reporting and review. The occasion, also, presents an opportunity for the stewardship of the Government, but this is not happening. It is disappointing that in this information and technology age, some of our citizens are still using lamps. They cannot even enjoy a simple television. The youths are asking questions. I wonder if this is the manner adequate, reliable and affordable power will supply the needs of individuals. Citizens remain an urgent priority as stated in the Budget. What is disturbing is the cost factor to access power in the cross streets. It is in the vicinity of the \$230,000 per person. Is this not torture for grassroots citizens? The Government need to show some concern and bring some relief to these people. We are talking about poor families.

Street lights continuation is very necessary with all the ills our society in the Region is facing. Urgent attention needs to be given to the areas where the lights are out of order for some time now.

Roads and Bridges

Let us look at roads and bridges. It is the view of the residents that they should be consulted before works are carried out in various communities. While the Government boasts about accomplishments of roads and bridges, I want to highlight the poor quality of works for large sums of money. In some areas the quality of work is questionable. There is no level playing field when it comes to the rehabilitation of streets or roads. If chip seal bitumen is being used in Bush Lot, then let the same be used at No.28 Village and not loom. Stop the discrimination. It will cause serious problems in the Region.

In the Catherine Village area the streets are deplorable. The sick and the dead have to be transported by boat in this day and age. No.8, No. 9, Litchfield, Belladrum, Novar and Perth, all streets are in a deplorable state and need urgent attention.

Sea and River Defences

Region 5 needs a proper seawall structure. The boulders placed in punts cannot prevent the sea from moving inland. The residents of No. 37 Village, Kingelly and Brahn and those at Ross and

Yeoville are very much fearful as the sea continues to create breaches. There is need for urgent corrective measures. It is unsafe and frightening.

The Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) is the talk of the President but it should be noted that all environmental issues should be given equal treatment. Solid waste management should, also, be looked at. At Catherine Village, the Koker at the Abary sluice needs urgent attention. Heavy rainfall and river flow continue to erode the area and is causing fear.

On page 31, paragraph 4.47, the Government has budgeted \$3 billion for continued works of the sea and river defence structures throughout the country. This Government needs to prioritise works and put more money into the crucial areas to avoid disasters. Let us build seawalls and stop this cut and paste system.

Vulnerable Groups

The emphasis and objective must be happiness to our people, especially, since this Government says that it is caring. The big question, then, is: who determines what will make our people happy? I refer to the public assistance recipients and the attitude of some of the Board Members. It is appalling to witness the humiliation some of our single women are exposed to - a detailed description of their lives along with the insults. Hence, the reluctance of most of them to ask for such needed help.

The Minister responsible needs to address these special issues. In Guyana, today, there are women who are going through life alone. We need to face reality. They are poor women. These officers need to visit these poverty stricken communities before they jump to conclusions. Judging from the last review that took place, I am sure we will see a lot of out-of-school youths because of economic reasons. Some workers cannot survive on the meagre wages due to the high cost of living. The applicants that were rejected need to be reviewed. No welfare work is done presently in the Region. There is need for more officers. Welfare matters before the courts are being dismissed and the perpetrators are allowed to walk freely.

The distribution of pension books leaves much to be desired. The work load is too much for one officer in each sub-Region. The application system is also cause for concern. Very often persons

apply on time only to be told, when they go to uplift their books, that they have to re-apply. The length of time an application takes to process is too long.

There are parents who cannot afford to send their children to school on a daily basis because of the high cost to travel which includes the Bridge crossing, books and snacks.

Conclusion

Mr. Speaker, the Finance Minister mentioned that the Government will deliver a brighter future for all Guyana. I say that the people of Region Five await this bright future. For us, on the People's National Congress Reform -1G (P.N.C.R-1G) side of the House, our priority is the well being of the people of Guyana. We are committed to ensuring that all the people of Guyana are treated equally and with respect.

Shouting the biggest Budget ever is not going to make an impact on the lives of the citizens of Region 5. It is time the People's Progressive Party/Civic (P.P.P/C) Government listen to the recommendations of the Hon. Members of the Opposition and stop the ayes always have it and not even change a comma.

I, however, pray that at the end of this debate, God will give the utterance that self will decrease and the Holy Spirit will increase and take control of all the atrocities of ungodliness that is taking place in this beautiful land of ours. *[Applause]*

Assembly suspended at 16:50 hrs

Assembly resumed at 5.40 p.m.

Minister within the Ministry of Finance [Ms. Webster]: Mr. Speaker, I rise today in this Hon. House to give my support to Budget 2011- *Together Building Tomorrow's Guyana Today* - within the context of our Low Carbon Development path. Let me once again commend my colleague, the Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, on his 2011 budget presentation made in this Hon. House on January 17th, last. Over the past five years we have strived to deliver the National Budget earlier to this House and this year we have managed to do so in record time. The last time a national Budget was delivered early was in the year 1997, making this year Budget the earliest one in 14 years. It has meant longer and more intense hours for our

hardworking staff from August, 2010 to January, 2011. This is the testimony to many competent officers who form part of the public service. Let me publicly recognise the contribution of the Technical Staff of the Ministry of Finance and those several agencies, within the ambit of the Finance Sector, who have worked beyond the call of duty to ensure the timely delivery of this year's National Budget.

This Budget is not an election year Budget; it does not reek of expanded deficits. Let me cast our minds back to 1992 when the Budget was presented by the People's National Congress (P.N.C) Administration's Former Minister of Finance, Mr. Carl Greenidge, when the Budget deficit as a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product (G.D.P) was a staggering 39.8%, some 21.2 % higher than the previous non-election year - 1991. Instead, in 2011, under this responsible PPP/Civic Government, the fiscal deficit is budgeted to decline in an election year.

This highlights our Government's unwavering commitment to fiscal prudence and to ensuring a sustainable development path that does not see our country returning to those days of old, where the albatross was the debt burden which strangled the then Administration's ability to do anything for the Guyanese people. We, on this side of the House, refuse to go back to a path where debt is incurred in an irresponsible and unsustainable manner, and where our people are denied access to basic services.

Supplementary Provisions

With regards to the issue of the supplementary provision which has been raised on numerous occasions in this House, without reservations I can state that the supplementary provisions brought to this House by this Government were driven by circumstances of a nature unforeseen, unavoidable or urgent. I wish to make a comparative analysis as to how the previous administration dealt with this matter, and make a comparison of the highest level of supplementary provision to Budgets in the 90s and the period 2006 – 2010.

The facts clearly show, if one reviews the gazetted orders of that time, that during the P.N.C's last five years in office (1988 – 1992), the annual average of total supplementary provisions approved by this Hon. House amounted to an astonishing 57% of the Budgetary allocations, while under this present PPP/C Government the annual average represents a mere 14% of the Budgetary allocation. That is less than one quarter in percentage terms of that of the P.N.C. This

is testimony to the prudent fiscal discipline applied by this Administration in relation to the management of our country's public finances.

Progress on Debt

This Administration's track record of the fiscal responsibility and prudent debt management is in stark contrast to that of the P.N.C Administration which straddled our country with an oppressive external debt burden that reached approximately US\$2 billion in 1992 or more than five times the G.D.P at that time. Thanks to the PPP/C Government's sound economic management and judicious policies and practices, Guyana's external debt stock now stands at about US\$1 billion, or 54% of our G.D.P. This tremendous achievement by our Administration in lowering the external debt was due, in part, to the significant debt relief obtained under arrangements with Guyana's bilateral Paris Club and some non- Paris Club and commercial creditors, as well as from multilateral creditors under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative and Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative.

However, another key factor behind the lowering of the external debt stock is the fact that from 1992 to 2010, this Administration has repaid principal amounts totalling about three quarters of a billion United States dollars to our external creditors. Moreover, with regard to the debt relief obtained, it should be noted that this was not automatic as part of international debt arrangement as some may have us believe. Rather, debt relief was contingent upon Guyana's proven track record of sound economic performance, implementation of necessary reforms and responsible new borrowing practices. Government has had to lobby strenuously, on many occasions, for debt relief to be obtained.

Over the past year, debt service payments increased by about 64% to approximately US\$28.8 million, as Guyana commenced repayments of the principal amount due to several creditors including Venezuela and the International Monetary Fund (I.M.F). Despite this increase last year, external debt service payments only accounted for approximately 5.4% of the Central Government's revenue in 2010. This is a dramatic improvement from the dismal days of the P.N.C regime when in 1991 total debt service payments amounted to close to US\$100 million and consumed approximately 90% of Government revenues.

As a result of the lower debt service payments, over the past years, Government was able to use its resources where they should be used, that is, to invest in our people and the development of this country. The evidence of this investment is clearly visible in:

- The improved and expanded healthcare facilities and the services as seen in the five new diagnostic centres, the National Ophthalmological Hospital, and the upcoming new surgical speciality hospital which further expands the menu of health services being currently offered to our people;
- The new schools and enhanced education system that provides expanded curriculum where technical vocational alternatives are readily accessible and an expanded school feeding programme, to name a few; and
- The massive infrastructure development currently transforming the length and breadth of our country- in our roads and bridges, as part of our expanded transportation network, our sea defences and drainage and irrigation systems, and our rapidly growing housing development.

The role of the Public Sector Investment Programme (P.S.I.P.) in transforming infrastructure landscape has been very significant. The P.S.I.P has, over the past five years, concentrated on investing in selected areas of high priority with its focus primarily on the social sector. In fact, capital investment in the social sector increased from 20% of total P.S.I.P in 2006 to 38% of P.S.I.P in 2010, showing an approximate 100% increase over the period. This accomplishment came as a result of both the immediate and medium term needs of the education, health, housing and water sectors being identified through their respective sector plans to maximise the growth and services of these sectors. Major infrastructural works in the housing sector include the construction of primary and secondary roads, access bridges, internal drainage systems and structures, drilling of wells, and the provision of water distribution networks. Over the five-year period, investments in the sector totalled \$19.4 billion and benefited a total 44, 900 households. With respect to the education sector, \$16.3 billion was expended during the period 2006 – 2010, resulting in the construction of 54 new primary and secondary schools in all our ten Administrative Regions.

In the health sector, \$12 billion capital investment was spent to improve the population's access to primary health care, as well as improve the quality of health care provided. It is significant to

note the achievement of the construction of four Diagnostic and Treatment Centres at Diamond, Suddie, Leonora and Mahaicony, the Linden Hospital and the National Ophthalmology Hospital in Port Mourant.

With respect to the transport sector, over \$15 billion was expended on the construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of our roads and bridges within the period 2006 - 2010. Key highlights included the New Amsterdam/ Moleson Creek road, East Bank Four Lane Road, the Berbice River Bridge and the rehabilitation of critical roads and bridges structures. Capital investment within this sector has advanced, substantially, our transport infrastructure connectivity by reinforcement of our intra regional linkages.

I wish to reject outright the insinuations made by the Hon Member, Mrs. Jennifer Wade, with respect to road works currently being done. In fact, road works are currently being done throughout Guyana, in all of the communities. These road projects were publicly tendered and the awards made are based upon qualifying criteria. These roads are designed and constructed based on the intended functionality of the roadway. These roads are being done in this country at unprecedented levels never seen before in the history of this country.

The PPP/C Administration has moved Guyana from an insolvent and unsustainable debt position, in other words from a state of bankruptcy under the previous Administration, to one of debt sustainability.

Over the past five years, the net present value of debt to Government revenue ratio, which is Guyana's main debt sustainability indicator, has consistently remained below 200% which is well below the benchmark of 250% and inspires confidence in our economy, both domestically and internationally. Government acknowledges that despite these achievements, there remain challenges in the area of debt management such as the decline in the availability of new concessional resources, and the potential risks from exogenous shock such as high food and energy prices that can affect our future debt sustainability position. In light of this, Government is continuously striving to address current and future challenges through enhanced capacity building, updating of the debt and new financing strategy, and engaging non-traditional donors and creditors to access concessional resources.

While this Government was expending enormous efforts to reduce debt and maintain debt sustainability, similar efforts were being taken to ensure that a stable macro-economic environment was maintained. Policy interventions designed to stimulate growth in the private sector has led to increased growth in several sectors of our economy which has, in turn, contributed to overall positive growth for five consecutive years averaging 4% over the period 2007 to 2010.

Inflation has been contained to single digits from 2008 to present and inflation in 2011 is targeted at 4.4%. Government is able to do this as a result of proactive monetary policy coupled with specific interventions on food security spearheaded under the Grow More Food Campaign as well as by regulating the excise taxes on fuel to ensure that Guyanese consumers do not feel the full pass through effect of the high world fuel prices.

One could recall in 2008 during the global fuel crisis that many people in developed countries could ill afford to fill their tanks with gasoline whilst Guyanese consumers continued to pay significantly reduced (subsidised) prices at the fuel pump. Thanks to this Government's proactive interventions. No bump at the pump! This has all been achieved in spite of the global financial turmoil and volatile commodity prices. By any standard, and, especially for small developing countries, we have done well.

We have continued to make significant strides in strengthening the public financial management in the areas of expenditure management, tax administration and audit oversight.

6.00 p.m.

As we move ahead and aim to more effectively target scarce resources and ensure value for money, we will advance, this year, and the years ahead, the development of a national monitoring and evaluations system. This system will aid our agency heads and the programme managers in the public service to develop more targeted programmes and projects that give effect to policy directives consistent with our National Development Goals.

Accountability and transparency has been the watchwords of the Government and to this end the area of internal audit is a priority focus for our Government as we continue to strengthen accountability and transparency across all of our budget agencies. Last year, we re-established

the internal audit division within the Ministry of Finance which is expected to be staffed and become operational later this year. This division will ensure stringent adherence to internal audit recommendations, maintain effective internal control across central Government, and effect appropriate actions based on internal audit findings. The results will speak for themselves in the coming years when the Auditor General is able to report continued improvement in the internal control mechanisms of Government.

Already, the 2006 Public Accounts Committee Report which was laid in October last year has identified improvement in adherence to the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act as it relates to public accountability. We expect to table the Treasury Memorandum shortly in this House. Even now, the Public Accounts Committee is currently examining the 2009 Report of the Auditor General, making it the first time that the P.A.C. has been current in its review. We await the P.A.C. Reports of 2007 and 2008.

This Government has spared no effort to ensure that the Audit Office continues to be adequately resourced, and this year is no exception. The budgetary allocation to the Audit Office of Guyana in 2011 has grown by over ninety million from the previous year's allocation, a 26% increase.

It is under this current Administration that the Audit Office of Guyana has been able to meet the deadline for submission of the Public Accounts of the Ministries, Departments and Regions to the National Assembly as was done last year. In addition, the Audit Office of Guyana has conducted value for money audits which are published on the Audit Office's website. These are developments of which the Government is very proud, and for which the people of the country must be proud of - these noteworthy achievements.

In glaring contrast, let us recall the years from 1982 to 1991 when no financial statements were prepared by the then Government and the Auditor General had nothing to audit. This PPP/Civic Government has brought the light of transparency and accountability.

Steps are being taken to further develop policies which will become enshrined in law to address areas of non-performance by contractors, consultants which have been brought to Government's attention. Government remains committed to deal condignly with anyone found to be culpable in this regard.

The reforms undertaken in the area of procurement have been substantial, and I am proud to say that we are way ahead of many of our sister Caricom Member States, in terms of our modern procurement laws. In support of our modern legislative infrastructure, systems are continuously being introduced and upgraded. The National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (N.P.T.A.B) has reviewed and revised the procurement handbook, the Tender Board manual, as well as the standard bidding documents and their accompanying guidelines. Additionally, an N.P.T.A.B. website, which was created in 2006, readily enables access to procurement information including Minutes of Tender Board openings and contracts awarded for which Cabinet approval was received. More importantly, this Government's policy has placed greater emphasis on transparency and scrutiny. This website is currently being upgraded to become a dynamic website with links to the management information system database.

In order to ensure that the procurement process is effective, the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board has placed emphasis on capacity building by providing training not only to the staff of the board, but to all personnel involved in the process. Training has been extended to general staff, Heads of Budget agencies and to all senior Government officials, Procurement Officers, Auditors and all other personnel with procurement responsibilities, the National, Regional and Ministerial Tender Board Members - evaluators nationwide. Fifteen local specialists were trained who now carry out ongoing training and support within the system. This Government will continue to extend every effort to ensure that the procurement process continues to be efficient and transparent.

Significant reforms have also been made in the area of tax administration which we did to improve overall efficiency and revenue collection. As the Guyana Revenue Authority fully implemented operations under the new functional structure, efficiencies were created, there was greater focus on debt management, and the expanded use of risk profiling allowed for improved collection in several areas. Further, there was continued progress and improvement under the Total Revenue Integrated Processing System (TRIPS) which facilitated timelier, more transparent and accurate data entry processing and analysis of revenue collection, and which will see additional modules being added in 2011, including manifest and third party modules which will strengthen the systems for detecting false declarations.

Additionally, in the medium term and e-filing of tax returns, modules is expected to offer tax payers a faster and more efficient option for submitting their tax returns. Government continued its trust towards the full streamlining and automation of G.R.A. processes in an effort to improve its management and current operations. In addition to G.R.A. risk profiling for Customs inspection which reduces the number of physical inspection needed, the recently acquired container scanner will aid the Customs arm or the G.R.A. in the execution of its duties in 2011. This represent the first ever container scanner to be put in use in the area of tax administration.

G.R.A. has also expanded and improved its monitoring and enforcement operations through the acquisition of several new patrol boats in 2010 which are currently in use. Additionally, the Marines Operation Unit, which will be fully outfitted in 2011, has commenced its operations. New checkpoints have been established at Crab Island, Kurupukari and Charity; the latter two being earmarked for upgrading later this year.

In 2010, G.R.A. continued to expand its reach across the country through the establishment of fully integrated regional tax offices in Linden and New Amsterdam, with plans in this new year for completing an additional office in at least one other location. Plans for 2011 also include the use of the new state-of-the-art warehouse facility which was completed in 2010 and which is expected to improve the management of this process in the Customs area. Collectively, all these reform and administrative initiatives are expected to make tax administration easier for tax payers as well as for G.R.A. in its tax collection efforts. This will lead to the improved revenue collections of \$104.4 billion which is targeted for 2011.

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

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

Motion put, and agreed to.

Ms. Webster: I will touch on the Economic Partnership Agreement (E.P.A.). On 14th January, last, Guyana became the first among member states of CARICOM to implement the agreed E.P.A. tariffs in fulfilment of the requisite obligations. This process of liberalisation is expected to affect several commodities, some immediately while others will be in the near to distant

future. Products that will not be affected by this process are excluded, and these include milk, sugar, vegetables, rice, fish and meat products, most beverages, paints, some paper products, steel products, soaps and detergents, some textiles, and furniture. This exclusion is extremely useful as it will ensure these exports are not replaced by imports from Europe while products which would be immediately liberalised consist mainly of products within the low duty rate of 0% to 5%. However, not all such products are being liberalised, for example milk, which presently has zero tariff and which is excluded from the liberalisation schedule to maintain the necessary policy space for our present and future production interest.

The final category of products are the ones which would be fully liberalised within a phase of five to twenty-five years period, and would include motor vehicles and parts, tyres, potatoes, certain plastic articles, cement, certain vegetable fats, medicaments and electrical conductors. We are happy to mention that most of these products are not produced locally. It is important to note that the possible revenue loss as a result of the implementation of the E.P.A. will be managed by this Government to minimise any dislocating effect.

Predictability of Aid Flows

There has been positive acknowledgment from the International Monetary Fund and many of our other development partners about Guyana's ability to manage its aid flows. The Inter-American Development Bank has also shown confidence in this regard. Towards the latter part of the year 2010, the I.D.B. commenced the use of country systems in the implementation of products financed by the Bank. The I.D.B. is currently in discussion with Government to apply payments directly through the Consolidated Fund. This is testimony to the fact that our development partners have confidence in our public financial management system to manage their inflows. It is important for all our development partners to work towards ensuring that there is predictability in the level and timing of their support to Guyana.

Private Sector Credit

A thriving business sector is both an indicator of and a contributor to economic growth and development. Businesses are affected by a number of external factors over which Government has varying degrees of control. Government has made a significant impact in its recent term in

the legal institutional and regulatory framework which quite simply makes it easier for doing business in Guyana.

In light of the substantial improvements made in tax administration, the ongoing work under the Nation Competitiveness Council and an increased level of business activity, Government's policy to reduce the Corporation Tax from 45% to 40% for commercial companies, excluding telephone companies, and from 35% to 30% for non commercial companies is intended to make available higher profit shares for companies to retool and reinvest in new systems and technologies, as well as new and expanded product lines. Such actions from our private sector will ultimately catalyse the process of economic diversification and hence greater economic resilience.

Our financial sector reforms undertaken over the past years, have served to ground the sector in a strong regulatory framework that has been tested and proven to be able to withstand the recent global financial crisis. The further strengthening and modernisation of the financial sector was aided by the passage of key legislation over the period. To this end, the Credit Reporting Bill 2010 was passed and provides for the establishment of a Credit Reporting Industry which will facilitate the provision of information about potential creditors from a creditable source. This legislation will serve to provide more reliable competitive and responsive credit lending while protecting borrowers rights. In addition, the New Building Society now falls under the direct supervision of the Bank of Guyana so as to ensure all financial institutions are part of a modern and robust regulatory framework.

The Bank of Guyana has also issued guidelines on risk management and public disclosure. The risk management guidelines set out the minimum standards that shall be expected of a risk management framework in a licensed financial institution. Effective risk management increases the prospects of business objectives being achieved while the public disclosure guideline is based on the premise that the reporting of comprehensive, meaningful and accurate qualitative and quantitative information, in a timely manner, provides strong market discipline for a market institution to manage their activities and risk exposures prudently and consistently. Ongoing legislative review is being undertaken to identify possible areas for strengthening to ensure that the regulatory and supervisory framework governing our financial sector remains strong.

On the area of domestic credit, as our economy continues on its expansionary path, we are proud to report our achievement of five consecutive years of positive growth, reflecting an annual average of approximately 4% which is supported by a steady increase in the overall net domestic credit available. As our public sector and financial institutions continue to be our net lenders, our private sector has continued to capitalise on the use of these available resources and remains a net borrower. Over the past five years, net domestic credit has mainly increased from \$43.3 billion in 2006 to \$55.6 billion in 2010 with credit to the private sector growing by 19% in 2010 as compared to 17.9% in 2006, thereby emphasising the greater role played by the private sector in the continued development of the economy.

Over the past decade, the financial system in Guyana has experience significant changes with expansion intermediation. Total financial assets of commercial banks have steadily increased, contributed mainly to the expansion in loans and advances. Private sector credit which comprises loans and advances to the business and household sectors, real-estate mortgage loans, investments in shares and equities, credit cards and other local securities have gradually been increasing over the period. As at the end of the year 2010, the private sector credit has increased to \$112.3 million, reflecting a nominal growth of 19% over the 2009 figure which was \$94.39 million. Private sector credit grew increasingly, reflecting the commercial banks' willingness to diversify their portfolio and support the private sector's role in continuing to be the engine of growth for the economy.

The sectoral distribution of the stock of private sector credit reflected that credit to the agricultural, manufacturing and mining sectors has rebounded in the past two to three years with the evolution of Government's low income initiative and concessions given to commercial banks to assist in easy accessibility to financing the real-estate/mortgage loan sector has reflected an increase in lending.

The policies of the Government have served to stimulate private sector investment and some comparisons over the years would amply demonstrate what a marked improvement credit environment exists, supporting our burgeoning private sector. Real-estate/mortgage loans have moved from \$545.9 million in 1999 to \$33.81 million in 2010, reflecting a nominal increase of \$33.264 million. Real-estate/mortgage loans accounted for less than 1% of total private sector credit in 1997, but as at 2010 it accounts for 30.1 % of total private sector credit. Lending to the

personal sector has also improved with individuals borrowing for cars and home improvement as well as other personal home items. The share of personal loans moved from 15.3% in 1997 to 18.2% in 2010. The distribution sector of the economy has shown increase in credit allocation, thus indicating increased activity in this sector. Our Government's vision for tomorrow's Guyana is guaranteed by investments taking place today. These investments are taking place across all sectors: in our health, education and housing sector, in information and communication technology, and in hydro power generation.

Investments on the horizon remain promising. Mullite and gold in our mining industry show great potential. We will continue to support explorations within our Exclusive Economic Zone and urge an accelerated work programme so that the discovery of oil could be realised in the shortest possible time. The oil extraction industry holds great potential for linkages with other sectors, especially those in the services sector. Procurement in shipping, engineering and fabricating, maintenance and servicing, office and supply management, trucking and haulage, communications and security are all areas where expectations for growth from petroleum operations are expected in varying degrees, dependent on the level of activity, in the near and medium term. I am sure you will agree that these new developments will certainly enable us to transfer our economy as we continue to work together building tomorrow's Guyana today for the people of this dear land of ours.

In closing, I urge all Members of this House to support Budget 2011. I thank you.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Speaker, let me, at the start, indicate congratulations to the Hon. Finance Minister for coming up with a budget that he would like us to believe is not an elections budge. Though his attempts were rather strenuous, it is as clear as daylight that indeed the massive spending that is being done here in this budget makes it one that is an elections budget. It is important to understand that this has been a pattern over the last four years whereby there has been tremendous spending, and that spending has behind it a lot of what I regard – and I have stated over the last couple of years – massive corruption.

I have indicated through the quotations, and I will re-quote because lots of people here do not want to remember, that behind massive spending there can be extraordinary substandard work and there can be extraordinary corruption. That is why in 2009 I indicated, based on the study

done by the World Bank Guyana, largely, through the contracts that are granted to so many people, friends of the Government, has become somewhat of a 15% Government. Just for the opinion of those over there who might want to differ with me, I would like to say, and again quote from *The Bottom Billion* – by the way, the author of that book has published a new book that has fixed Guyana in the bottom billion - *Wars Guns and Votes* by Paul Collier. He indicated that today Guyana is in the bottom billion. This is what he had to say about corruption. I want to directly answer my Honourable Friend that just stated so much about accountability and transparency.

6.30 p.m.

This is what he said on page 137 of his book:

“Corruption has its epicentre...I started by focusing on our banks where much of the loot is deposited. Among the companies that pay the bribes, two sectors seem to stand out: resource extraction and construction.

Corruption in the construction sector has been a dirty secret. Construction has all the ingredients conducive to corruption. Each project is a onetime thing only.”

He wrote a book called *The Bottom Billion* my dear, and he then named Guyana as one. *[Interjection]* Yes at page 137. You are getting angry. I am going to further quote from Mr. Anand Goolsarran’s book as to what he says about corruption, then I am going to give you a complimentary copy of the book.

“Each project is a onetime thing only and so cannot readily be priced. There are so many uncertainties in execution that it is not possible to draw up what economists refer to as a complete contract. As a result, it is easy to evade the discipline that would otherwise be imposed by competitive tendering. A crooked construction company colludes with a public official to win the contract with an artificially low bid but then it re-contracts on points of detail that prop up during construction.”

This happens here in Guyana, Mr. Speaker. Almost all our contracts afterwards have to go back for some readjustment – some \$24 million, some \$40 million. And we are told there are credible studies done. *[Interjection]* There are so many instances.

What that does is raise infrastructure cost and reduce growth, and the effects are even larger. I want to say that that effect will be a tremendous gap between the rich and the poor in Guyana.

When one checks this document called *Budget 2011*, the massive infrastructural works all around is quite noticeable. We have seen, however, areas that have had roads done and after two years go back to those roads...areas that have had bridges done and go back to the bridges...and a whole host of other things like wharves and schools. I want to get straight to the point because... [Interjection] We have thirty minutes. Let me just quote again. I notice Mr. Ali is going away. Why is the corruption in the construction sector particularly important in the bottom billion countries? It is important because the IDB, the World Bank and other institutions are feeding and fuelling infrastructural works, and to that extent it is causing this kind of corruption to occur. There must be, as the World Bank has now indicated, solid monitoring for projects. And I am very happy that that is indeed what is happening with the Norwegian/Guyana Agreement. They have indicated quite clearly that the money will not be given until the projects have been properly designed to avoid corruption. And if all that the Hon. Member Jennifer Webster has indicated goes a far way in indicating that one index, why then has the World Bank, having gotten the \$US30 million, after all this time, not given it for the projects? Something is wrong with our transparency and accountability procedures. It is obvious. But more than that, the projects are not designed as yet. The documents are still to go in after all that time, and our President is getting angry with the Norwegian Prime Minister, indicating to him, "Why not send the money? You are taking a long time. Our forests have done everything." It is important to understand that.

This Budget has quite a lot to do with that aspect I just mentioned - corruption. I am of the view that what will happen, at the end of the year, will again be that which I have been always stating, and that is they are going to come for some supplementary allocations to ensure that they get more moneys to spend. It is not going to be the final amount as stated here. Every year we come. Last year they came for \$4 billion dollars for the Ministry of Housing, and there was a huge deception about it because what we had was intended for the Ministry of Housing, but we understand it was diverted to the sugar industry. Even the President, this year, indicated that it was. You do not come here and say a certain Ministry wants \$4 billion dollars and then it goes to the agriculture sector, to GuySuCo. What is that? Is that accountability and transparency?

[Interjection] That could not be. That is what caused the Minister to be in the Committee of Privileges. So you talk about transparency and accountability but it is not here.

I wish to rebut by asking, “How could that statement be made that we are making vast improvements in these areas when, indeed, we are having legal opinions about the lotto funds from the Hon. Attorney General indicating that it should not go into the Consolidated Fund? Then there is the National Industrial, Commercial and Investments Limited (NICIL) funds not going there. Also, there are so many contracts from NICIL, in a very stealthily manner, going to places like Queens Atlantic. I do not want to mention certain others because it will embarrass some people here.

We also have a Tender Board but the Public Accounts Committee and the Auditor General have been indicating that the Tender Board Regulations are not being adhered to. The Public Accounts Committee Reports have been constantly indicating that a lot of the proper things to be done by public officials are not being done. We had contracts being awarded, like the Amaila Falls, with tremendous suspicions all around it. And to a certain extent, we have more than that.

It is indeed then not quite correct to tell this Hon. Assembly that things are going good. It is a tremendous divide that I notice. When one thinks about what was being said first of all by Mr. Nadir and then Hon. Minister Webster, it seems we are not living in the same country.

[Mrs. Backer: We are not.] Absolutely, we have a country that has bauxite workers, sugar workers, and rice farmers all angry and Members of the Government come here and say how ‘hunky-dory’ it is. We are talking about unemployment rates but we do not have the statistics as to what they are. However, the Hon. Mr. Nadir will come and say that there were 6,000 persons employed in the last four year, and it would appear they do not want to work. When one goes out all across Georgetown to Port Mourant and even Fyriish where he went... some of those citizens of Fyriish told me that they told him about employment for their children having nine and ten subjects and cannot find jobs. Some persons with five and eight subjects are cutting cane, and that is not a lie. I went to Sisters Village and found a young man cutting cane because he could not find a job. So it is extraordinarily difficult to understand what those Ministers are talking about. What could they be talking about?

I want to make mention of a couple of specific things - law enforcement. Only recently we saw what is called the dismissal of charges against two persons who had done an extremely dastardly act on a young person. This Government loves to pass laws – all kinds of laws – but its record in implementation and enforcement, I find astounding. There were laws passed here for a new Forestry Act. I do not think it was assented to. But even for those that the President has assented... what do we have? Are they being implemented? There are laws where it is stated that televised cameras would be used in the prisons to ensure the prisoners are encroached through those cameras. Have they become operational? We talked about preliminary inquiries being done through paper trials, paper PIs or paper committal. Have they happened? It is strange. It is extremely difficult to understand so many things being implemented and not happening.

There is the Insurance Act in which monitoring 15%...no more was to go overseas. What happened? Literally, the whole thing went to the Bahamas and caused the CLICO debacle. *[Interjection]* Yes, and you had your Act. That is the point I am making Mr. Minister. The Government passes Bills and do not abide by them, then when the debacle occurs, it says, “Here is the problem,” - like Mr. Nadir - “We did not monitor the thing properly. So why did you pass the Bill?”

The Procurement Commission has not yet come into being, and it is the Government that has the obligation to ensure that it be established. This Public Procurement Commission is an institution that is supposed to ensure the scrutiny of all that which Minister Webster indicated – the Tender Board; all those contracts, but it does not happen. Why does it not happen? This Government loves the fact that for contracts above \$15 million and more it has the capacity to award without any scrutiny. They still want that. Cabinet must have that power without any scrutiny. The point I am making, having loved control - and, of course, I have come up with “control freakism” - it is that which they want to continue.

We have so many aspects in which we could be critical because the budget, as presented, did not address these issues. Another specific issue I want to spend some time on is that of jobs. This Budget would have been acceptable if it were focused on job creation, focused on the value added sector, and focused on what I would regard as tertiary or value added products in all the sectors. Do we have that happening? **[Mr. Neendkumar: Yes.]** Well, you can say “Yes”, but I am saying that is the divide we have. There are so many people... **[Mr. Neendkumar:**

Mr Patterson is laughing.] Yes, Mr. Patterson can laugh, but you will also laugh to the extent of laughing it off because, indeed, we do not have.

Let me give an example of what this Government's policy has done. Instead of say, in relation to the rice industry, ensuring that at least the final product – rice - is sent to Venezuela, we have paddy in very huge amounts being sent there. When paddy is sent to Venezuela for its rice mills, it creates employment for those over there, Mr. Agriculture Minister. Why do we have to negotiate so that we could then send paddy over there? Why not the rice? And this is exactly what I will come to.

There was another law passed that has to be enforced against rice millers. What is happening to the enforcement? *[Interjection]* I agree with the law, but what is happening with enforcement? The Executive branch of Government must ensure enforcement. But what do we have? The police are now being made scapegoats. The policemen are not abiding by the law and are not enforcing it. That is the underlying problem we have with this Budget. These laws are created and put in the law books... then when the government ought to ensure the procedures are there for the execution so people are going to get their paddy moneys – no - it is not happening. Who do you want to blame for that? Then if it is the police, what do you intend to do about the police not doing it? *[Interjection]* And yes, they 'cuss up' the magistrates too; they are not enforcing it. So we have in the statute books all these laws, but are they in any way being implemented? That is the point I am making. You seem not to understand that.

I want to come back to the point about job creation, having been diverted a little by Mr. Nandlall. We would have preferred that this Government, through the Agriculture Minister, start negotiating some contracts to get ethanol produced in Guyana. That is the good thing for sugar knowing the big problem sugar is in. Why can they not turn our rice into other products - it was mentioned earlier – like cereals and so on? Why can they not turn our gold into fine jewellery for the international market - world class jewellery at that? Why is it that in Region 10 special emphasis is not being placed for an alumina plant there? And, of course, why can they not support the tourism industry to market our unique eco-tourist product?

Again, why can we not expand our light manufacturing sector by giving it some more tax incentives? What does it have? Notwithstanding the 5% reduction in tax for the non-commercial

entities, this is still the most taxed country in the entire Caribbean. *[Interjection]* We are. And when you add that tax, Mr. Prime Minister, to what we have as VAT at 16 %, you are talking about a lot. And when every industry has a certain levy like the rice levy, the forestry levy and all the other levies and royalties and gold, that is quite a lot. Why is it we just cannot get our entrepreneurs into agro-processing to the extent that we can export and have the values? Do you know why? It is because this Government does not find entrepreneurship as part of its underlying philosophy. I have indicated that all along. That is why all across the country entrepreneurs have become very hesitant in requesting from the Government the programmes that will help them. The Private Sector Commission has to state to the Government that which is going to satisfy this Government. There is a fear about them. They will come here and indicate that the 5% is wonderful. Do you really believe that the private sector is accepting that? They are not to a large extent; very many that have spoken to me have indicated that is absolutely not the way to go; that a lot more ought to be done to ensure...

Investors find the crime situation appalling. And then there is a Government that can be extraordinarily vindictive. For all the other commercial companies, tax was brought down from 45% to 40 % and GT&T and the other telephone company paid 45%. What was the rationale behind that? I am indicating to you that if you want IT to be the basis of your take off – as you talk so much about IT – and you have the telephone company being largely what will ground such a takeoff, why did you not give the telephone companies that extra 5% so that they can take off? It could very well be because the Government is soon going to be a direct competitor to GT&T. We must be fair to our service providers all across the land, especially those who have invested to bring that industry to the state it is in today - not vindictiveness and witch hunting. When other investors note that they are going to take a position that this Government is not really levelling the playing field... they have discriminatory practice. It is an important point Mr. Speaker. Why? It is, to a certain extent, affecting job creation. It has to.

I want to mention too that the Minister did not want to talk on two very important points which are causing what is called moneys in the system – remittances. You did not want to mention that which comes into this country and probably is going to... *[Interjection]* Well, it is. No, no, you are trying to feel your way out of it by stating that it is a wonderful thing your Government has been doing.

This Administration continues that deficit spending. It adds to the bureaucracy every day and increases the national debt of our children. It is happening. You always start, as your base, with the \$2.1 billion, but I insist that you must start with the base at 1992/1993 so we can know what have been the improvements that have occurred. You do not start with a base that we agreed had certain wrong and errors about it. You gave the impression, when you compare us with 1982, that indeed you have come somewhere. But, please, let us look at where we were, let us say, last year. Are we doing better this year? [**Members:** Yes!] Why is it that many people are vexed with what is happening? [**Interjection**] Oh, yes! Why are sugar workers striking so much? Why are bauxite workers striking? Why is it all across Guyana, women, although we talk about wowing them with WOW, are indicating that life is not better today?

When one talks about the sugar industry and what is happening there, it is obviously embarrassing - the ilk of Ms. Gail Teixeira and the other Members across there. It would appear that you have to wait to turn around the turnaround plan. We have to turn around the turnaround plan. We have to take that plan and turn it upside down. A part of the principle that this Government has put and adopted in relation to the sugar industry says the industry must make money before workers can be paid better. Well, we, in the Alliance For Change believe that workers must be paid better for the industry to make money. It is fundamental. We have to pay the workers but you do not. This sugar industry which is an industry, largely, upon which our entire economy has a bearing, is down and out, literally.

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

Mrs. Sheila Holder: Mr. Speaker, I beg that the Hon. Member be given an additional 15 minutes to conclude his address.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Ramjattan: They talk about prudent management of industries. Why is it in the sugar industry we had over \$3 billion of EU moneys being lost? Why? Did you not have time enough to prepare the sugar plan for the EU? Then you come and say you are going to turn it around. All of these things, when I look at them, are indicating to me that what they are talking about over there and what we see on the ground obviously are very distant.

It is only when we have good governance policies, when we have economic growth as the objective, when we are going to strengthen the private sector's ability to create new jobs, we are going to have what is called development and growth in this country. *[Interjection]* We are not having that at all. The amount of the debt we have right now is at the pace to double in eight years. How better is the PPP/C in management of this economy than the PNC Administration? What they talk about here is so unsustainable. They are more concerned about building their own homes rather than building the country.

7.00 p.m.

Mr. Ramjattan: If they could only take the time to go back to the drawing board and check out on taxes, and crime and check out on all the things that I have just mentioned, we will go a far way, but that is not done.

In relation to all that I have said, let me just... Now I have indicated that I want to quote something from a book written by Mr. Goolsarran, *Improving Public Accountability*. It is important that we quote a couple of passages from it in which Mr. Goolsarran is making the point. At page 114, he indicated that we passed the Fiscal Management and Accountability (FMA) Act of 2003 and it had to have certain things in place. The Minister is not going to like this:

“Establishment of time frame for the commencement of the preparation of Government budgets. Approval of Budget submissions accompanied by Programme Performance Statements by the concerned Minister of each Budget Agency. These statements are to be presented to the National Assembly together with the National Budget.”

Do we have that happening?

“Although Programme Performance Statements by Ministries and Departments are presented to the National Assembly, at the time of the National Budget, there are only brief bullet statements of strategies and indicators accompanied by no actual expenditure. The indicators of the achievements are not quantified.”

Why do we pass all these laws and we do not have them being implemented?

“Since the passing of the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act, little or no attempt has been made to establish an organised system of internal audit at the various Ministries and Departments.”

He wrote this in 2009, and even up to today we do not have those happening.

I want to also mention... [Mr. Benn: That is not true.] As you know, you are going to say whatever you want to. I am indicating a person who has written a book on Guyana’s situation, and it is the former Auditor General who was literally chased out of the place. He had to go, and where is he today? He is an Auditor General for the United Nations. He talks about your transparency and accountability and said a lot is left to be desired. He talks about Ministers of the ilk of Mr. Irfaan Ali doing what they do, but then leave them in the Committee of Privileges. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the House is extremely rowdy. I wonder if I can ask Members to please show some order and respect for the Member who is speaking.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Benn: Mr. Speaker, on a Point of Order: I was asking that the Hon. Member quote the part, in the book of Mr. Goolsarran, which speaks about Mr. Irfaan Ali.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you cannot ask the Hon. Member anything. You can only ask me something.

Mr. Benn: I am sorry Sir. I am asking you to request of the Hon. Member that he quote...

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Speaker, I said “the ilk of” and we all know that he is a Member before Committee of Privileges, and the author is writing that, indeed, Ministers have not ensured that the FMA has been abided by...[Interruption]... and you are trying to distract... I want to close, Mr. Speaker, because that is always going to happen when I speak here.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will suspend for fifteen minutes, please, until Members can collect themselves.

Sitting suspended at 7.05p.m.

Sitting resumed at 7.22p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, every Member of this House has a right to speak and to speak without interruption. You may not like what the Hon. Member said, but the Hon. Member has a right to speak and I am appealing to you to show some decorum and allow Members to get through their speeches. I do not wish to invoke the Standing Orders which allow for very strong sanction to be taken against Members who interrupt another Member from speaking; in particular, shouting across the aisle is extremely disrespectful. I cannot understand... You should come and sit here and see how it looks. I mean it is really disrespectful, and I refer you to Standing Order 45. I would not read it out.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Speaker, it does appear that the Achilles heel of this Government is corruption and it would appear that the Members do not like to hear that whenever we bring these points out from this side of the House. But I am going to finish off and complete my address knowing very well, that notwithstanding your instructions just now, they will still heckle.

The circumstances of our time demand that we reconsider and restore the proper limited role of Government at every level. We have to have reforms; and we have to have reforms, especially in relation to our governance institutions. This budget did not address anything like that. We have to have change in the way we treat with decorum those who are critics, and not the way that Mr. Nadir indicated when he spoke that we are not doing it with justification. We are. We want results not rhetoric. We want cooperation, not partisanship. In relation to those, that is, results and cooperation, the truth is that this budget fails to offer any of them.

Guyana must always be a land where our liberties and our property must be valued and respected. That has not happened over the past years because, of course, in relation to those matters, the Government has not identified any clear goals and procedures to take us there. Where the opportunity is absent, as it is here, we must learn to create it, and that is why the theme, *Together Building Tomorrow's Guyana Today* is so nice. But the effect of it all, through all this dissension and partisanship and non-cooperation, is leaving us without Guyana being built today for a brighter tomorrow. To that extent then, I want to say that which has occurred in this budget, the content of it, does not, in any way bring that togetherness that we seek. It is not because we want to falsify the accounts we want to make greater the state of affairs when,

indeed, it is at a lowly status. We have to ensure that we have that togetherness that is going to take us places, and really live the theme of this budget.

We, in the Alliance For Change, would like to see lots more done. It is not as if, as against two decades ago, things have not happened, but we must not use those years as benchmarks for what is happening today. We can do much better, and better in the sense of working together so that we can create a better Guyana.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Minister in the Ministry of Health [Dr. Ramsaran]: I welcome this opportunity to join this discussion, and more so for the benefit of the wider Guyanese public, and to be allowed the opportunity to put pay to some of the misconceptions, more particularly to those which were just expressed. But before I go into that, allow me to thank my colleague and good friend, Mr. Manzoor Nadir, for doing a very good job in opening the innings for the Government side in this debate. He was incisive; he was very analytical. As a matter of fact, Mr. Nadir, you have been so good, through you Mr. Speaker, that your presentation will be rebroadcast at one of the prime time shows tonight at 8.30 p.m. So we will be getting it right with you at 8.30 tonight, and I am told that people will be waiting for the repeat.

This budget is a budget of continuity, as the Hon. Minister of Finance said in one of his first interviews shortly after delivering the budget speech, a few days ago. Shortly after, the Private Sector Commission (PSC), in what it is described in its own words as “an initial scoping of the budget”, issued a press release under the headline: “PSC congratulates the Minister of Finance, Government of Guyana on tax reforms”.

I will mention a little more on that to enlighten the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, when he intimated that the underpinning ideology of the administration does not recognise entrepreneurship, so that is a learning point, a teaching point, for him. We will come back to it. “PSC congratulates the Minister of Finance, Government of Guyana on tax reforms”

Remember the reduction from forty-five per cent down to forty per cent reduction, and from thirty-five per cent to thirty per cent and so on, we will come back to that. The PSC further congratulated Dr. Singh and the Government for “Bringing our country to this watershed

position in its history”. This is what the PSC is speaking of. This is a pronouncement that I take to mean that the Private Sector Commission approved of the contents of the budget as presented. So there seems to be a difference of opinion here between the honourable colleague across the aisle, Mr. Ramjattan, and the August body, the Private Sector Commission pulls a part that should tell volume - “unprecedented relief...” To quote again from the release of the Private Sector Commission: “... to approximately 40,000 workers.”

This is not what I am speaking; this is what the Private Sector Commission said after analysing the budget at its first press briefing. To quote again: “The Government of Guyana has, in fact, moved the engine of growth into top gear.” That should really put an end to the discussion or the argument of Mr. Ramjattan. But I know that sometimes that it is difficult when one is bitter to follow logical arguments, so I would like to use an ABC technique - simple pettifogging. I would like us to turn...and this is before I get into the meat of my discussion tonight.

Mr. Speaker: I hope you get there very soon, Hon. Member. Time is going.

Dr. Ramsaran: Okay, but I was told that I would be able to do it with your guidance Mr. Speaker. Of course, as you can see how cooperative they are. Your disciplinary action has definitely brought fruit, Mr. Speaker. Congratulations. But let me go back to my pettifogging tools. First of all we can look at the context of the book, or the production, “Small Businesses”, 4. “Sectoral Developments and the Agenda for 2011”. You all have it here, Mr. Speaker. Let us run down, Mr. Ramjattan, to page 26, and here you can see all the measures aimed at creating conditions for small people to be able to create wealth at the personal level, at the family level and at making small businesses. Since we might be a bit myopic on that side of the aisle, let us go through a bit. We hear about the Small Business Council in the Small Business Bureau which has a Council that does certain things. We hear, or are reminded, that the Women of Worth (WOW) Programme... Somebody wanted to throw aspersion on that. How shameful! Five hundred women already benefited at different levels - a private sector entity. One of the best manager in the country has joined - one of the flagships of entrepreneurship in the country, incidentally - with one of our most active Ministers and presented the opportunity for WOW to come forth and here it is, in this August House, being denigrated, pulled down, shredded into pieces by a misinformed, or a poorly informed, colleague.

Allow me to inform him a bit more, and I do note the concentration with which Mr. Trotman is listening, so I am certain that he would be able to whisper a few words of wisdom to his colleague who incidentally happens to be on his left. This is what happens. WOW will allow women of the underprivileged sections of our society to have access to cheap money, cheap credit, and that in itself was one of the problems that prevented the poorer classes, the poorer people, the poorer women, the poorer underprivileged from rising into that entrepreneurial: *I ain't got capital, I can't do anything*. The Black pudding lady on the corner: if things are bad, she cannot buy the ingredients to make the black pudding; no souse and black pudding that weekend; no business for the young lady. That is a simple example.

Let us go again, and this is now on page 27, Mr. Ramjattan and colleagues, and especially for the media, and that is, of course, in the booklet presented by Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, *BUDGET 2011 Together Building Tomorrow's Guyana Today*. Page 27, subparagraph 4.29, and this is what Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh said:

“In addition, the establishment of a credit bureau under the Credit Reporting Act which was passed in 2010...”

It was a few months ago, Mr. Ramjattan.

“...is expected to dramatically improve the ease with which small businesses are able to access financing.”

If that is not a good underpinning for encouraging our small entrepreneurs, you tell me what is. [Mr. Nandlall: Lower the interest rates.] We are coming to that, my good colleague, Mr. Nandlall. Now, remember last year we had a very heated discussion in this August House when we debated the Credit Reporting Act. Many Members on that side seem to have forgotten what they themselves said. Well they need to be doing more to earn their keep and represent their constituents because I can tell you that some of their constituents, the dwindling numbers of their constituents, also benefited from the provisions of the Credit Reporting Act. In other words, it was a package not only...I see Mr. Ramjattan is shaking his head. I seem to be getting over, Mr. Speaker, so I will continue with my efforts. I am encouraged. For all the years in our youth organisation we were not able to get it over to him. Let me try, but *wuh rain cant full, the dew cant full*.

It was a package when Mdm. Minister Manickchand joined with the Guyana Bank of Trade and Industry (GBTI) to secure the funding for this special window to allow moneys to be loan to these women - a bigger picture came out. We needed to create a framework, the legislative framework. I should not be lecturing to a lawyer on this. Colleagues, look at Mr. Ramjattan. He is listening intently. So I would like to point out that indeed there are key areas where the Ministry of Finance, through the instrument of this budget, has taken care to see that entrepreneurship is in a firm position and cocooned in a good legislative atmosphere to encourage entrepreneurship. We should congratulate the Minister for that. I had some other notes on this. I seem to miss them. But let us go back to page 23 if page 27 is a bit too advance for Mr. Ramjattan.

Let us go back to page 27, closer to Mr. Ramjattan, because I do know that he does have a rice farming background and one of his colleagues roundly and correctly praised our hard-working rice farmers. Let us just look at one more line and I will leave it at this point and move further, Mr. Ramjattan and colleagues. This is what Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh said at page 23, subparagraph 4.18:

“Further, 7,500 farmers will be trained to be better equipped to contribute to the diversification effort.”

Then he went on, in different sections of the presentation, to explain what that investment in training is. To do that - “will be trained,”... It is this year. Last year, four thousand were trained in addition to that pool of trained entrepreneurs. So, Mr. Speaker, I would like to call that to your attention. I, particularly, would like to urge Mr. Ramjattan to be more acquainted with the provisions of the administration and, indeed, these provisions form part of the “underpinning”, to quote him, “philosophical underpinning”, of the administration in supporting small families, small businesses, in putting them on their feet.

As I said, this budget has certain characteristics that we should not forget - first of all, its earliness. I noted that so far in the entire discussion, in the House and on the television, and in the wider public, only one other person has noted this, my good colleague, the Hon. Minister Jennifer Webster, who spoke a few minutes ago. Now, that is something we need to note, not in passing. It is part and parcel of the package of promises and aspirations of the administration -

good governance. Why is it an indication of good governance? Regularly, our operatives in the field, the persons who managed these funds when they are dispensed to the Regions and to the various agencies, complained that when the budget is passed later in the year they have difficulties expediting their work projects, capital works and so on. We must congratulate the technical team at the Ministry of Finance. We must congratulate the Minister himself for bringing this. As a matter of fact, as a historical side, I remember that one time – and remind me if I am going wrong here – under the PNC’s administration, one budget went, as to be presented on the 1st April. Am I correct? An April fool’s budget! We are going to be tending closer and closer toward the beginning of the year. I want to note that, Mr. Speaker, and it has big meaning. It gives the operatives in the field, that is, persons in the Region, persons in distant locations, this feeling that their complaints are being heard. Further to that, this is a budget of continuity; it builds on what we had last year. That can only be discerned if we were to pursue the budget in more details. I would attempt to do that a bit later in the short time I have been allocated.

Further, this is a budget of transformation and reform. It even goes beyond reform; it is transformational. There are certain key things that will be done. We heard of the backbone for the Information Technology (IT) infrastructure. We see already how it is playing out, how it is resonating positively among the Guyanese people, and how it is even acting as a unifying mechanism. Look at what happened only a few days ago at the International Convention Centre. Look at the joy of those people interacting with their administration when they came to know that they will be part of the fight against the digital divide. No longer will computers and access to IT training and such new knowledge be restricted to the privileged. Further, this budget underlines one of the main tenets that the President and his administration have adumbrated, and being implemented over the past few years.

Equity of Access

If you were to check in the budget, you will see how it is reflected, both at the regional levels and the services that we are providing. The infrastructure that Government is consolidating or building upon from last year was strategically placed in certain areas to address the needs of communities right across the spectrum of the Guyanese nation. Government is building on a sound foundation. I now refer you to some concrete things that we have achieved with the aim, at the same time, of showing to you how the Ministry and the wider administration have been

careful to allocate resources to address needs, and, at the same time, to ensure that they are equally spread or as justifiably spread as possible.

I would like also to point out that in this year the administration, and it is intimated in the budget, will be going for value for dollar. I spoke of equity of access. There were times when, in the past, that might have been important, might have been emphasised, but due to the need... for example the house lots. At one stage, house lots were given without certain amenities. Well, people might say, why do that? That is because there was the urgent need just after 1992 when the PNC had already dismantled the Ministry of Housing. It was urgent at that time to give the house lots and allow people to develop them. Times have changed, and now the Government has constructed roads, and installed water and electricity. Similarly, this year budget and future budgets will be emphasising – I can speak of this budget particularly and I suspect that it will be the same thing in future budgets - the value for dollar, the certain emphasis on winning or defending the interest, or defending the investments that were made.

7.47 p.m.

Let us look at some of the things the Government has been able to do, for example, in the area of health which the Government is using as a tool to fight poverty. The Government has been so successful that sometimes certain criticisms are found in the media, which in themselves allow the Government to feel proud. The criticisms are sometimes ill-advised or inaccurate, but the mere fact that they tend to attack the effort shows that the Government is pinching someone's corns or bunions.

Spread of Resources across the Country

I was reading one of the newspapers recently, January 15th, under a heading called: “Is this revisionist history?”, in which the author, one Desmond Saul - this comes from the *Kaieteur News* newspaper, filed under the letter column - attempts to detract from the very good effort of the local administration, that is, the Regional Democratic Council (RDC), Region 4, and more so, the central administration, to bring good services to the Nabaclis community and communities adjoining that one.

There were criticisms, for example, that there were no doctors, there was no Medex, and the place was actually run down. What is shameful is that with the new technology, information technology, this bit, this piece here, would be all around the world misinforming those who do not know better. So this is a community which, up to a few years ago, at the location I am speaking about, the Dr. C. C. Nicolson Hospital, named in honour of one of our sons of the soil, who did well for health in Guyana... it was a derelict, run down health centre, masquerading under the name of a hospital. Now, it has done the following: from January 1st to December 31st, the outpatient department saw over one thousand patients, within the range of a thousand and five hundred patients; the anti-natal clinic - one hundred and twenty-nine, and what is more important is the maternal and child health department. This is very important. I see I have caught the attention of many of the women and that is because of the recent interest in the unfortunate experience of maternal deaths. Here, at that small institution, there were seventy-one deliveries and this is at an institution which is being besmirched in the newspaper, in the letter column of the *Kaieteur News* newspaper, which seems to have taken unto itself the role of the political opposition.

I will like to enlighten this House that that community is predominantly a working class community, persons who eke out of a living - public servants, small farmers, and so, and so forth. It is also a predominantly Afro-Guyanese community. I want Members to note that there were seventy-one live deliveries, no still births, and only six high risk pregnancies were referred to the Georgetown Hospital, all of which were done in a timely fashion and resolved positively. No still births!

Let us look at this example, Mr. Ramjattan, my good colleague. Remember when I started to say that the budget spreads the marmite all around, gives a little to each and every one. This shows where, in a focused manner, the Ministry was able to develop a hospital which in the past, under the PNC's administration, had been run down. Now, it was able to get the hospital up to standard and the community is positively responding. Let us look at the resources allocated there: One Medex, two doctors, one nurse/midwife, one midwife, three nursing assistants, a clerk, pharmacy assistant, hospital attendants, two of them, community health workers and an ambulance driver. **[Dr. Westford: What about the porters?]** They are not called porters anymore, my good Minister. They are called hospital attendants, and there are two attendants. So

my friends in a small area this administration has been able to bring resources. What does this mean? [Mrs. Backer: Nothing.] Well, if this means nothing you are not appreciating the efforts of this small team of workers. This meant, further, that the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation had seventy-one less cases to deal with. Those are cases that would have otherwise overburdened the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation.

But, Mr. Speaker, the Government has been able to do other things in other areas. I quickly want to walk this Assembly through them so that you will be impressed by the work being done by our good health care providers. Let us look, for example, at the Suddie Diagnostic Centre... [Mr. Ramjattan: Talk about the Linden Hospital.] Well, we will come to that too. The total number of cases attended for this year was fifty-five thousand, that is way out in Suddie, not speaking of the little work that Charity did. We can go for a further breakdown: Surgeries which were done - one thousand, three hundred and something, and so on, and so forth.

Let us look, for example, at another facility. Why am I emphasising this? Remember I said that this year we have to get value out of our expensive investments, last year. These were the expensive investments - Diamond, Leonora, Suddie, Linden, Mabaruma, Lethem, Port Mourant, where there is the national facility for eye care, Leonora Cottage Hospital, a hospital which a few years ago was underutilised. Today, the total number of cases attended was eighty-two thousand for the year, and that is only at the Leonora Cottage Hospital, I have not touched on the West Demerara Regional Hospital.

Dental work at that facility - four thousand persons. Are you going to scoff and say that Guyanese do not have good teeth? Why scoff at the effort to provide good services at the primary health care level? Those of you in the opposition benches, who I see, listening with a more intent ear, let me further inform you that four thousand dental procedures were done, and, of course, there is a robust chronic disease section.

Let us look at the Diamond Diagnostic Centre. Why I am emphasising this is to show that there is a package. On the East Bank of Demerara, where incidentally two banks have recently been opened, the Government has been visionary. It had already placed there, even before the big thrust by the private sector and private homemakers began, a very expensive hospital. The Diamond Diagnostic Centre, so far, for last year, saw ninety thousand, four hundred and sixty-

seven patients. That is only in the hospital. I am not speaking of the health centres which need to work better, but also did some work. Total number of dental cases attended to was three thousand, six hundred and forty-nine. Do you know what that means, colleagues? This number of persons did not need to travel to the Cheddie Jagan Dental School for remedy. There were also major surgeries done at that facility, some two hundred and ninety-two surgeries. What is important is a silent victory for this Government which is reflected in these numbers.

Ophthalmology

Ophthalmology or eye care has come on the front burner of the nation in the health plan quietly, and in some cases not noted by the media. Ophthalmology: Six thousand, eight hundred and twenty-nine cases were seen not at Port Mourant, but in your backyards. We can go on and on, Mr. Speaker, but I wanted to wet your appetite before I build further on my discussion.

We can also look at the situation which is even more expressed at the Mahaicony Diagnostic and Treatment Centre.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, it has taken you thirty minutes to wet my appetite, so you will need some more time to build on that.

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

Mr. Speaker: At the end of this fifteen minutes we will take the suspension.

Question put, and agreed to.

Dr. Ramsaran: Thank you Prime Minister and thank you Mr. Speaker. Let us continue to build before I go into my further time. At the Mahaicony Hospital, a hospital which unfortunately this administration had inherited in a certain condition, the outpatients department saw, for last year, thirty nine thousand, eight hundred and ninety-seven patients.

Surgical Operations

This is where I need to address certain misconceptions by my good colleague across the aisle, Ms. Wade - three hundred and thirty-three... normal deliveries - one hundred and thirty-one,

whereas at the Fort Wellington Hospital, which previously was the dominant hospital in the Region, there was one hundred and sixteen normal deliveries, and so on, and so forth.

So the Government's investment, as noted by the Hon. Minister of Finance last year, is paying off. Further to that, this Government has been doing things not in isolation, but has taken certain actions that complement each other. All of those facilities, last year, enjoyed additional personnel. Last year, thirty new Guyanese doctors successfully graduated and were deployed. The bulk of them, some twenty-five or twenty-six, is at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation and five at the Mahaicony Diagnostic and Treatment Centre. The effect is already being felt and we need to give support to those young doctors. Young doctors have to be supported and nurtured. Unfortunately, especially towards the end of last year, when there was the unfortunate spike, and sometimes inexcusable spike, in maternal deaths, the doctors had a rough time, psychologically, and still are recovering from that, and we need to support them. This is a group of young people who enjoyed scholarships to Cuba and who are now serving their communities.

I would like to point out that the Government continues to build this year. It also recognises the need already, for example, for expansion of certain services. I would like to note that the Minister of Finance has been able to mobilise resources already to expand the Diamond Diagnostic Centre. You would note, Mr. Speaker, in the details presented in the documents that an inpatient ward will be added to the Diamond Diagnostic Centre. That is to take care of the added burden that development in that area has placed on the hospital as originally was conceptualised. It is the hope that it will have some fifty beds, both for male and female, and, that again, will be a boom to the community, because it has already been expansion. Why? It is because that corridor is rapidly developing under the enlightened policy of the PPP/C.

Three banks! How on earth are you going to tell me that there is no entrepreneurial spirit or encouragement, and three banks, which are the symbol of entrepreneurship, are opening their doors? I want to tell you this: only a few weeks ago the Guyana Bank for Trade and Industry (GBTI) opened an expensive, modern state-of-the-art facility just opposite my little hospital which is going to grow shortly. It has already announced that shortly, in a few months time, it will be opening a branch in Lethem. That is something to note. I would like to take this opportunity to thank that bank for having donated to the Diamond Diagnostic Centre, an

ambulance and some other equipment. This is corporate social responsibility. I congratulate it and I am certain that other entities will take note and follow suit. This is indeed the private sector and the administration working hand in glove.

Mr. Speaker, you would note in the budget that moneys have been allocated already for the improvement of the Cheddi Jagan Dental School. Many services are offered there but still some have to be sought in the private sector - dentures for example. In this regard, there will be - you will see that it is reflected in the details of Capital Expenditures in the budget as presented - the addition of a dentures laboratory at the Cheddi Jagan Dental School, in Carmichael Street. A generator will also be put there to support the activities. So two of the flagship activities of the Ministry, which are not so romantic, the eye care and the dental, and which usually do not hit the headlines, have been quietly making good strides and they are now being rewarded with more resources to give more services. Those are things that we should note.

Further, I would like to point out that the Ministry will be procuring vehicles such as ambulances and a particularly interesting vehicle is additional, vehicles or additional resources, for the Materials Management Unit (MMU), which previously was referred to as the drug bond. So it will be more efficiency in the distribution of drugs, medical supplies, and hopefully that will address some of the kinks which were observed in the system. The system is not perfect but with the addition of this vehicle to the MMU it will be able to do better. I would like Members also to note that significant resources have been allocated for the continuation of the works at the new bond in Diamond. [Mr. Franklin: Is it a special vehicle?] It is a simple vehicle, but a little addition sometimes goes a far way. [Mr. Nadir: It is like a...[inaudible]] Yes, exactly, small mercies that do help.

The Ministry has been allocated more resources, and also has been allocated resources for training. Why I want to speak on this is because in the recent times, especially in the last year, significant numbers of trained health care providers have been added to the system. They are inexperienced; they need coaching; we need to hold their hands; we need to be patient with them; when they make mistakes, we also need to correct them, and sometimes penalised them, and, of course, we need to continuously train them.

I would like to point out that the Ministry of Health has been one of the first Ministries to get on board the bandwagon of the wider administration as far as computer training and IT are concerned. The Ministry has been training over the past three to four years established community health workers, Medex and health care providers who were not computer literate. This is one of the small activities that will go a far way. It will build on the transformational initiatives of the Government. In other words, the Ministry is moving towards a new workforce - a computer literate workforce. Over the past year, the Ministry has been able to graduate through those remedial computer courses several scores of workers. Many of them, in the past, have never booted up a computer. What does this mean? It means now that after having eight to ten weeks of free additional training, they are now computer literate. They can now do their presentations in a more enlightened fashion. They can also indulge in self learning by going on the virtual libraries which are now electronically available.

Further to that, this is an enlightened approach to human resource development – investment in human resource. I note that in Monday's *Guyana Chronicle* newspapers there is a picture of two of those hard-working health care providers who so benefited. I recognise, for example, midwife Douglas Rodrigues, one of my hard-working workers at the Lodge Health Centre, who never before had that opportunity. What is more, this investment is to be regarded as a non-salaried incentive, because if this was to be done in a private institution, and there are many business schools across the city which offers computer training, it could cost as much as a \$120 000 out of the pay pocket of a given worker. The Ministry of Health has taken on that burden. Besides that, those courses are administered in such a fashion so as not to take the health care provider out of the clinical setting. This education is given in non prime time, after hours and on the weekends. And it was found that those workers are so thirsty for knowledge, for skills, have so much imbued with the need to fight the digital divide and to come into the new age that they voluntarily take the extra effort to come out in the evenings and on the weekends to become computer literate.

The Ministry of Health is happy to say that over the past two to three years, it has trained, predominantly in Georgetown, two hundred and twenty-five such workers. Initially, the Ministry was using its computers that existed in offices to do that, until a very good agency called Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) joined in the struggle to fight the digital divide and

helped it with some more computers. I want to use this forum to thank ITEC, and the various heads of ITEC, which provided that support. So this is an enlightened approach and I would like to tell you it is not only Georgetown centric. The Ministry is, currently, even as I speak, up to this hour, training some one hundred and twenty-two more health care providers to become computer literate in Region 5, and shortly there will be that graduation. The Ministry has trained a small amount of workers on the Essequibo Coast and hopes to expand it.

I heard a little whisper from over my shoulders, my good colleague, Mr. Parmanand Persaud has indicated that in the Essequibo a second batch of *Essequibians*, that is, a second batch of health care providers from Essequibo who never had access to computer training, will be so trained. I see my colleague from Essequibo also shaking his head. Things are gaining momentum and I would like to congratulate my hard-working computer trainers who have been working with the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health took the lead and I will encourage other Ministries to follow. That is quite an achievement for those workers. I can tell you how proud some of them are to be able to present a report.

As a matter of fact, there is another very interesting programme, the Acetic Acid (VIA), which is heavily supported by two of the trainees who emerged from that programme. All of the data is not only entered, but in some cases elementary analysis is attempted using the computer. The VIA programme, of course, is a new innovation, which has been implemented in the past few years in the health sector, which aims at the early detection of cervical cancer, another boon for female reproductive health. Some of the key persons in that area are two particular Medex who are also graduates of the remedial computer training programme.

I would like to point out that other significant focused infrastructural development will occur in this year. My colleague, Minister Nadir, mentioned that we travelled together to India. I am going back to India shortly. As a matter of fact, I am going back very shortly. [Ms. Selman: Are you staying?] I will be coming back, but let me tell you what will happen when I come back. Remember Mr. Minister, remember colleagues, when I went with the President the last time to India we came back with a stadium. Could you remember that? This time, and I would like to refer you to the relevant pages in the budget document, you will see where, under “Infrastructure and Capital Works”, a relatively small sum has been allocated for the construction of a specialist surgical hospital. Now, Mr. Speaker, the moneys you see in this

budget are only to do the preliminaries, to start things up - to get things going early. When the President comes back from India, and I will be coming back too, we will be bringing back a specialist surgical hospital. *[Interruption]* I am speaking figuratively my good friends...

Mr. Speaker: On that note, your fifteen minutes are up and we will take the suspension now and resume when we return. Thank you.

Sitting suspended at 8.15 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 8.53 p.m.

8.53 p.m.

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

Question put, and agreed to.

Dr. Ramsaran: Thank you Prime Minister. Mr. Speaker, I do hope you all have enjoyed the repast, while I am getting into the final moments of my presentation. Incidentally, as I promised, the good Minister is already on prime time television on the programme *Getting It Right*, and he is being well received by the nation, that is Mr. Manzoor Nadir, as he incisively led off the debate on Budget 2011.

I was on the point of showing how the Government is already, with this budget, building on what it did, especially last year, and how we are creating the Guyana of tomorrow. I was on the theme of the specialist hospital which we will be figuratively bringing back, not like *hand-o-man*, putting it on the palms of my hand and fetching it back here, but as what was done with the stadium. Do you remember those years when we spoke about the stadium and the naysayers had a lot of things to say? This year, we are going to be bringing back a specialist surgical hospital which will be another symbol of the future Guyana. This will position Guyana in advance of many of our Caribbean neighbours. It will also lay the foundation of the future vision. It will be the second wave of infrastructural investment that the President has referred to, most recently, in his speech at the One Laptop Per Family launch at the International Convention Centre.

Tertiary Health Care of an International Nature

This, hopefully, coupled or linked with other development that we have been witnessing, will see not only Guyanese resident in Guyana, but Guyanese in the diaspora and, more so, probably non nationals coming to enjoy an international standard service while at the same time doing so in a facility that is located in a good environment. Look at our roads – the four-lane highway which is going to be expanded. Look at the corridor. Let us look at something concrete: the East Bank corridor which is being developed. That is the vision of the future. Some eight thousand house lots – very well developed, good infrastructure - a hospital already in the area which will be expanded, and the private sector thirsting to go there, three banks, and so on, and so forth. As the Hon. Minister indicated in his speech, more call centres are to be established or expanded. This hospital is not to be seen only as a technical facility, a facility to deliver quality services, but a symbol of the Guyana of tomorrow. Minister Manniram Prashad might want to develop more the concept of health tourism. [A Hon. Member: A “concept”!] It is a concept. In India, for example, it is one of the fastest growing arms of tourism. That is something we should note.

Mr. Speaker, before the year is out, you would see the \$50 million which is allocated in this budget, Government of Guyana moneys, already used to do the preliminaries, and already we are getting on the way to have that additional facility which will project us into the future. That is why I, particularly, like the theme of the budget presentation – *Together Building Tomorrow's Guyana Today*. That is the future.

There are other things that we see in the budget which might be necessary, at this point, to pull out and highlight, because they are somewhat interrelated with this massive investment in health infrastructure and training of health care providers, and that is the re-migrant settlement opportunities, or schemes, whereby entrepreneurs will be encouraged to attract persons of the older generation – the Guyanese who are nostalgic for our tropical paradise; those who now are snowbound and have to come out in their old age to shovel the snow away. They want to come back and the Government is working in partnership with the private sector to make this possible. Of course, a significant consideration is quality health care because those older folks have become accustomed to the provision of certain minimums, that is, in health care delivery. So if the Government is to attract them and sustain that attractiveness of Guyana for that cohort of re-migrant, it not only have to encourage the entrepreneurs to work with it to develop the re-migrant housing schemes, but it needs to put in infrastructure such as the specialist hospital. Further to

that, you will be noting that there is a massive increase in training of the personnel. This is not only about the health sector. This is about the vision. This is about a tomorrow's Guyana, because those specialist facilities, initially - facilities as the diagnostic and treatment centres which are now predominantly manned by foreign teams, in case of the diagnosis centres, highly qualified Cuban teams - any such investment will have to be manned by foreign specialists who will coach, nurture and mentor our local graduate doctors and pass on skills which will, of course, be coupled with a robust postgraduate programme which incidentally – I hear some scoffing from the opposition benches – already exists.

A handful of surgeons already have been, in which the programme is certified, accepted and baptised, as it were, by the leading surgeons of Canada. In other words, although it is being delivered in a Third World country, it is of an international level. It is supervised by external examiners and the programme is of an international character. That was not only done in surgery. The second batch is now in classroom. That has already being initiated in orthopaedics, for example, and at the level of the nurse, specialist programmes have been restarted. Only a few weeks ago the first batch of anaesthetic nurses graduated. In other words, the Government is creating the play dough with which it is creating the future. Doctors have graduated, professional nurses with some initial postgraduate qualifications, and when there is interaction, cross-fertilisation, virtual learning.... Now you do not necessarily have to go overseas, there can be conferencing, although it is not excluded that foreign scholarships will be granted. Allow me to come to that a bit later. Now that fusion will allow the Ministry of Health to develop and exploit, better, the massive training and development of nurses.

Next year, we expect three hundred and one more graduate Guyanese doctors to return from the Cuban programme. The flagship programme at the University of Guyana also produces a small quantity of excellent doctors. That too will be added – that small graduate group - to the three hundred and one. The picture you are seeing, colleagues, is where an enlightened administration is not only investing in infrastructure, but has accepted that, initially, although this investment is going to be fast-tracked, it needs outside help. The specialist facility will be yet another such facility.

Note what is happening at the diagnostic and treatment centres. More and more young Guyanese doctors are coming into the staff and they already started to get post basic training in endoscopy,

ultrasonography and so on. I want to tell you this bit: Shortly, Dr. Renee McDonald from Linden will be returning from Paraguay as a fully trained Ophthalmologist - eye specialist, eye surgeon. While she is preparing to come back, there are already two others who just departed for Guatemala. They will spend three years there and, shortly, a third one, Dr. Layne who is now doing a good job in Annai, having returned and given service, has been awarded the third scholarship for eye care internationally this year and she will be going to Paraguay. I want to congratulate these young people on their hard work and for being awarded the scholarships. There are three of which one is coming back, and more will be going next year. Three scholarships will be award next year. The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Public Service intend to, in a more strict fashion, monitor these scholarships. I like to point out too that this year a young man came back from Bangladesh after having specialised in eye care. What I am showing is that we are creating the specialist cadre. This is creating the future - sustainability.

This is a budget of continuity. This is a budget of transformation. Many of the things I pointed out are creating the basis for that transformation. We are already creating a sustainable workforce, an educated workforce, which will be able to take advantage of new knowledge and new technology.

I will like to congratulate the Minister and his team for having produced a budget that recognises that we have achieved certain things and that we needed to pause and focus on specific areas. These areas are contained in the budget. I have attempted to take out a few, especially from health, and from the silence I hear in the House, the nodding of heads and so on, I think that my colleagues agree with me that we have achieved in the area of health and other areas. As a result, I would urge both sides of the aisle...I can assure you that the general populace is already positively inclined so do not get on the wrong side of the people. You have already been doing that in the recent past. You can redeem yourselves and join the Guyanese population in supporting this budget as presented by Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh. Let us forget the petty differences. Let us, together, start building tomorrow's Guyana today. [*Applause*]

Mr. Fernandes: I rise to make my contribution to Budget 2011. I do not want to forget the petty differences. I want to talk about the concerns of the people, more so, the concerns of the people in Region 1. I will like to give a rundown of some of the things that happened and are happening in Region 1, and some of the things that we will like to see happen. My friend, Hon. Member Mr.

Nokta – I am seeing him wiping his face in the corner – when he was campaigning, he was talking about the boats. When I came in this National Assembly, I heard that there was a roll-on roll-off ferry which was coming from China – over four years ago. In this budget, I hear again about a roll-on roll-off ferry.

Mr. Speaker, when Mr. Nokta was talking in 1992 about ferry, he said it was the old slave ships the PNC had. He said he will move away those old slave ships because if a *karass* passes it would have bore them. We are still using those same ferries today. The only thing is that the ferries are not moving as fast as those times. But if to cut down on travel time now it is moving slower, and very slower. Let me give an example. Let us talk about transportation. The boat usually departs at one o'clock on Thursdays but sometimes – we were talking about ensuring we cut down on travel time - it does not leave until five or six hours after. Last Thursday, the North West ferry left at quarter to nine, it was supposed to leave at one o'clock, and North West people were locked up in the bond. You are talking about development of people and you are talking about four years ago. I can go back to four years ago. I have no difficulty with that because it is the same ferry we are talking about. When those people left at quarter to nine, at night, and they had to go to North West, at Kumaka, they travelled all night and all day on the sea – they are not sailors and fishermen – and they reached at quarter to one the next morning. Before they reach their location, the boat will have to stop at Morawhanna. Morawhanna is a village that was abandoned by this Government. The *kokers* broke away. When there is high tide, water floods the whole village; when it is low tide, the water drains. The only area which is not covered by water is the wharf.

There was one time when Guyana Oil Company (GUYOIL)... I do not want to talk about GUYOIL now. I will talk about it just now. Prime Minister, we discussed GUYOIL already. GUYOIL which supplied fuel and created employment for the community was removed from the area. Who would want to ensure that he or she lives in a community where every high tide it is flooded? I talked to an old lady once. She told me that it is difficult for her to move. She said that she would like to move and that the people survive by three ways: water, land and air. I asked her if it is not easier to move her house. She said, “Mr. Fernandes, I can break down this house but I cannot build it back.” When there is the talk about this brighter future tomorrow, that is not for everybody - not the people in Morawhanna, at least, and for a lot of the people in Region 1. I

want to make this point: when the lady talked about water, land and air, she said, “When the tide is high we will catch fish; when the water goes down we will catch crab; and when there would be some *bunea* in the corner we can shoot it. That is how we survive.” It was very difficult for her to say because our children do not have jobs in that area. There are children who have to go to school to Mabaruma because there is no secondary education there. We have to cross the river. [A **Hon. Member:** Tell them about the roads.] I will tell you about roads just now. But the boat still had to travel to Kumaka.

I saw in the budget that there are some moneys to fix the stelling at Kumaka – the stelling will be rehabilitated. This old stelling that is supposed to be rehabilitated with money from this same budget, the wharf has already fallen overboard. It is not as Charity wharf which fell overboard all of a sudden. The wharf had fallen for a number of years. I brought it to the attention of this National Assembly – the wharf fell overboard.

I heard in this National Assembly, the Speaker before me, the Hon. Member Dr. Bheri Ramsaran, was talking about supporting small business; there were many banks which were being built in all different parts of the country, and all sort of thing. Well, the banks that we have in Region 1 are the right bank and the left bank of the Aruka River. Those are the only banks there. When we talk about supporting small businesses and entrepreneurship, and all those fancy words, those small businesses which are also close to the wharf are falling into the river. They have to move away from there because it is overboard they are going.

In last year’s budget, it was said that there was \$70 million to be spent to rehabilitate Kumaka. Mr. Speaker, you would not believe this: Some men went into the area and bore about four holes, measured and put down something, and covered them and went back to Georgetown. I do not know if \$70 million was spent there, but apparently, the Hon. Minister Benn could tell us in his presentation what they did. We were hoping – as we are talking about the development of Kumaka – that something substantial will be done to ensure that the people survive because those are their businesses and they are working there.

When the boats go to Kumaka, the people do not come off and stay there when they have to go to Kwatamang, Hobodia Creek, and the riverine areas, and all of those. There is a creek close by called Kumaka Creek. A lot of Amerindians live there. They used, at one time, their natural

energy to paddle their boats to the creek to go home after travelling from Georgetown. If they want to go and fish, hunt or bring their produce to Kumaka, they used the same creek. Do you know what some of the administrators in the Region did recently? They blocked the creek with concrete. In Georgetown, when the trench and all those canals are blocked because people throw rubbish into it, the Mayor & City Council has problems to clear those waterways. The Government is building canals to drain the area. How could you block a natural waterway and have people suffering? This creek drains the Hosororo swamp road, the Barabina low lands, where people have farms, the northern portion of the Mabaruma compound, a part of the Drum's Hill - all of those areas. Those poor people used those waterways to transport their goods, to hunt, to fish and to catch crabs. I do not see what the wisdom is in blocking the waterways. There was a high bridge that vessels passed under - the Barabina bridge. It is made low so that the boat cannot pass. Who is left outside, is left outside. How is left inside, is left inside. It is like the rainstorm. As you know, when rainstorm is in *sky land* it cannot come down to low lands. It is something like that. One is either left inside or left outside.

I cannot see the wisdom in blocking the normal waterway. I do not know. I see a lot of presidential candidates. I have made this point before and I was hoping that those people in the Region, the regional officials, will...Mr. Speaker, is it unparliamentary to say *hard ears*? It is not unparliamentary. I think that they are *hard ears*. They hear when people are crying all the time. People were crying, "How are you going to stop me from using my energy?" They said that the people must catch the bus. The people do not have the money to catch bus. What is happening now? The Kumaka bridge is blocked and it is causing those areas to flood, and the Barabina swamp road, which is about a mile of road, is constantly under water. If there is a shower of rain it would flood. The children who are going to school have to take off their boots and walk through about two feet of water.

Late last year, a child nearly went into the trench because the water was so high that he missed the road and he nearly drowned. I had put an article in the newspapers about this. I was angered by it because the people complained to me as one of their representatives. Two weeks after, the local administrators – *hard ears* people – got some white wood, blocked the road and threw mud over it, and as soon it was high tide, it washed away again. I believe that if there is talk about the

development of people and a brighter future today or tomorrow, we have to address those concerns. Those are general concerns that I believe should be addressed.

As we are on roads, I heard the Minister – I think I heard him right - saying that this year we will spend \$10.1 billion for roads and bridges. If I am correct, I just want to know what portion will be spent on roads and bridges for Region 1. The reason why I am saying this is because, over the years, the officials for the Region purchased some heavy equipment to build roads. I mentioned this in the National Assembly before that those equipment were left lying around all over. As soon as one reaches Morawhanna, there is a hynamac. If one goes in other parts of the Region...Some of the equipment have never worked. But here, in this National Assembly, I want to say that there are other Ministers who do not want Region 1 to look so bad. Apparently, they want to assist the local administrators who are really doing a flimsy job. The Minister of Agriculture assisted the Region with an excavator to do some work in the Region. This excavator did not even last a week. It was buried in about ten feet of mud. Ask the Minister of Agriculture, he knows about that. It was there since last year and only last Friday the officials were able to take it out because the Minister of Agriculture had to send another excavator to dig out that excavator. This excavator looked like a big crab buried in the mud with its *tenta* up in the air. The regional officials did not do anything about it. When the Minister of Agriculture sent in another excavator, they wanted to keep both of the excavators in there. I get the impression that the excavators will not be in there for long because they were given instructions to park it at Kumaka. I guess the other one is coming back on the next boat.

When we talk about development... [A Hon. Member: What about the drain?] We will talk about that just now. When we talk about development and we are talking about roads, I did mention Barabina road. The Hon. Prime Minister went and checked it out because I spoke about it before. He knows what I am talking about. This road is five and half miles to the Mabaruma Secondary School. The schoolchildren will have to cross the river, walk for four miles and catch a vehicle for the next one and a half miles. When they are going home in the evening they will have to catch a bus for one and half miles and walk for four miles because the road is in such a terrible state of disrepair. There are some big craters in the road. Nobody lives in this area. It is a swampy area so vehicles do not want to go down there. It is because the school does not have enough accommodation for all the children within the Region, some of them have to walk.

Nobody here would like to know that his or her children are walking through a rough terrain for four miles - a lonely area - every school day. It is eight hours. I was hoping that out of this \$10.1 billion, some moneys should be spent in that area.

Over the last couple of years I am here in this National Assembly, I have been hearing about, “We have about \$24 million for Yarikita road. In another year, with the \$24 million dollars, Yarikita road will be fixed.” Not one inch of work was done on that road. Yarikita is about twelve miles from Wauna. There are a lot of farmers in that area. People have to walk about five miles to take their produce to a boat. If they want, they will have to walk the trail because no vehicle could go into that trail. If we talk about farm to market road, if we want to talk about development and if we want to talk about a brighter future for the people, it is important that we get the money for the Region. We should spend the money. We should fix the roads and everybody will be happy.

Last year, for Port Kaituma, from the school to the hospital, to the waterfront, those areas are slushy when it rains – *putta putta*. When it suns there is a lot of dust. Children have to go to schools every day and people have to go to hospitals. This National Assembly passed \$32 million to do some work in the Port Kaituma area. Mr. Speaker, no work was done there up to this day. So if you are talking about people having a brighter future today for tomorrow, we have to fix those concerns.

9.23 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about power. I heard about a lot of laptops being distributed, which is very good and I support that. I know that the P.N.C. supports giving out these laptops but hear what the matter is; these laptops have to work with electricity. If you get two hours of blackout in Georgetown people are shouting that we have “Blackout!” In Region 1 we get 5 hours of power and 19 hours of blackout every day, that is from 6:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. and no power after then. If you want to ensure that you develop this country in a way of equitable distribution of wealth and support, you will need to use power tools and refrigerators. We need to ensure that there is power in the daytime and night-time. You may not be able to give us 24 hours of power but at least 8 hours in the day.

I saw in the Budget that we are getting \$10 million to purchase a generator, but I think a survey should be done by the technical people the Government has to ensure that we know exactly what we want and what we must get to ensure that we have adequate power to supply so that the people could develop evenly.

I would like to turn on the light switch at any time. The Hon. Minister said that we have lights in all of those communities. He was not referring to Region 1. He was referring to other areas. I am not saying that the Government would like to fool people or that they are fooling people, but for the last election a promise was made to the residents of Wauna that they would get power, “We would give you a generator. You can have adequate power.” The Government made an attempt and they sent down the generator about three years ago. This generator is still parked in the Mabaruma compound. I am telling this Parliament that if we decide here and money was spent to purchase a generator and it has gone into the region, they should put it into service. They should not promise the people. One does not wait until the next election to put up the generator to fool the people because they need it.

I mentioned in this Parliament some time ago about water. Every other day you have one hour of water being pumped. One has to be at home to ensure that he or she gets it. You are talking about a brighter future for tomorrow today. We had, before, overhead tanks that supplied water at Hosoro, Mabaruma and Wauna. Now because of some problem these tanks got damaged with time and because nobody is fixing these things so there was the natural gravity flow, one pumps one time and when the water goes down, one pumps again; sometimes every other day or so. When pumping one day and one skips a day and if one is not around, there will be no water. One is left without water, as a result, and one has to go to find a pond.

In these modern times, those are concerns that we should address because you would not like that to be happening to your community. Why are those things being allowed to happen in the hinterland? And you are talking about a brighter future!

I just want to make a few points on agriculture because Region 1 was one of those areas that supplied ground provision to the nation. The Region supplied citrus plants from far and wide. The Hon. Mr. Nokta knows that. He knows that there was a wonderful agriculture station there. Today that agriculture station is like a ghost town. If one goes there, one gets a few passion

fruits, but no citrus. The buildings are in a deplorable state of disrepair. We need to ensure that we look after those things.

The Government made an attempt some time ago to give some transportation. It was about two years ago. They sent in an all terrain vehicle (A.T.V.) with no documentation. The first day the officer passed the police station, the police pulled him in. He said, “You have luck because it is a Government vehicle, but you must ensure you get the proper documents for this vehicle.” After two years, the vehicle still has no documentation. Nobody can find it but the people have to do the work and they want to do the work.

Because of the flooding we had in the Region, the people who planted eddoes and yams and all those things, had their crops go under water and were spoiled. Promise was made to give them some planting material but they did not get it. About 130 people were promised that they would get some relief to go back and do their farming. Out of the 130 or more people they gave 60. So there was some difficulty as to who will be the first 60 that will get this relief. That caused some problems along with the black sigatoka that destroyed the plantain suckers. These are not the rich people, but the poor that we are talking about. If you give 60 persons relief, there is another 70 or so more hoping that they will get relief. The system, to my mind, was not what the people really expected – some got, but all should have gotten. I think that is reasonable.

In these communities we have a lot of young people. One of the big problems is unemployment after they leave school. After one leaves school within the Region, for education, there is no other institution of higher learning. One has to come to Georgetown or some other part on the coast. If one wants to go to the University one has to come out here, of course. There was a time when they used to get some support in the area of sports and youth development, in general, but this seems to be something of the past. Unless somebody in the region decides, or unless there is a national school championship, there is no really centrally organised sports programme within the Region, no support for sports, or, as a matter of fact, the development of young people, in general.

Another burning problem that people in the area have is that of birth certificates. I believe that this Administration heard about these birth certificate problems over and over again. Another problem one will have with the problem of birth certificates is clinic cards because there were

officers in the Region who were collecting any kind of documentation one would have and they would tell you, “I collect this documentation, especially your birth certificate... do you have a clinic card?” They collect your clinic card as well. They do not return these documents. When they do not return these documents, the children would have problems with going to school because they need the clinic card for continuity of the record. If they do not have those records, they will have difficulties in different schools and areas. When one goes to the hospital they would want to see the clinic card.

I heard Dr. Bheri Ramsaran talk a lot about hospitals just now and he talked about Mabaruma Regional Hospital, but he was not telling you that before they finished building the Hospital they had to start repairing it. He did not say that. He did not say that some of the staff had to wear raincoat while at work because the hospital was leaking so much during the rainy season. He did not tell you about the amount of shortage of drugs at the Mabaruma Hospital. There is talk about the people from all of those areas that do not have to come to Georgetown anymore. However, there are a lot of referrals that we get from Mabaruma Hospital just because they do not have the drugs and they do not have the technical staff there to administer the drug to the patients. The Minister also did not tell you that when the community health workers come from the far-reaching areas to collect drugs, they do not have enough drugs to take back.

I want to talk about one experience in this Parliament - one alone. There was a man whose wife had malaria. They live far from the river. He said, “I gon’ come tomorrow.” However, that same evening his daughter took in sick with diarrhoea. They were in the Barama River. He paddled down six hours to reach the health post. When he reached the health post they did not have the drugs there so he had to go to the next health post which is about four hours down. When he went to the next health post, they said, “Well, hear what is going to happen. We gon’ try to treat you here, but we do not have a microscopist.” – that is the person who, I understand, checks for the malaria infection. He said, “Give me any kind of medicine you got. Once it is for malaria, I gon’ drink this thing because hear wah happen now...” This guy was telling me this story. He said, “Dah thing wah yuh does do in de toilet, meh daughter doing it in de boat. I ain’ wan dis ting continue. If you have any kind of medicine to stop this thing please give me because I don’t want to go to another location to find this microscopist in case he is not there.” The point I want

to establish is that even if you have those community outposts, you need to ensure that you have enough drugs to service the area.

I am talking about the concerns in the Region. I know that there are certain little things that the Government could do to ease the difficulties in some communities. At Port Kaituma Hospital, there is an ambulance. The ambulance has not been working for one year because a part is broken and somebody needs to weld it. Now the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) gave the community another vehicle and this was for clinics and those kinds of things. The Minister knows about his. This PAHO vehicle has been down for seven months because of a fuel pump. Those are easy things to fix in my mind. One does not have to go to the Minister for those things. I think that the regional officials should be in a position to fix those things unless they are incompetent. If they are incompetent, then the Minister should find out what happened to the ambulance. What happens now is that we have a lot of referrals as I mentioned just now. They have to pay for their own transportation from the hospital to the airstrip. Those who do not have money have to walk to the airstrip or the Government will have to find some private person to assist them to reach to the airstrip to get to Georgetown. If someone is sick in the village, somewhere a far way off, he or she will have to find his or her own way, although there is an ambulance. But because there is a little part that has to be weld, it is not working. We all know that if that vehicle is not being used, other parts will go wrong after some time.

There is a community called Baramita and there is a community called Moruka and I guess that we know about all of those areas. In Baramita, a plane crashed there some time ago – I read about it in the papers – but I do not want to talk about the plane crash. I want to talk about the airstrip. If you were a pilot, you would not have wanted to touch down on that airstrip. You would not even want to touch down as a passenger! This airstrip is up and down. When this plane crashed the other day, they blamed it on the pilot. It is probably the pilot's fault; I do not know. I was not there to investigate, but the airstrip is in a bad state of disrepair. Holes are there so one has to find the levelled part when on the ground.

I want to say the same thing about Bemichi Airstrip. Bemichi Airstrip is like a road. Vehicles are driving across the Bemichi Airstrip and are leaving holes. When last has the Minister gone to Baramita? You should go to Baramita to see Baramita Airstrip. I was in Baramita a week ago.

The Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Finance, Mrs. Jennifer Webster, mentioned earlier in her presentation that we had some difficulty with fuel and I raised this point in Parliament before. People talked about contraband fuel. As I said earlier, people used to get employment at Morawhanna because of the GUYOIL operation. GUYOIL closed down. That was the only source of legal fuel in Guyana. The same Minister who was speaking just now should be asked how the Regional Democratic Council (R.D.C.) gets their fuel. How does the National Democratic Council (N.D.C.) get their fuel? How do the other Government agencies in Region 1 get their fuel? The Northwest Ferry is not a fuel vessel. It may carry fuel only to run the boat. How are the other institutions in the Region getting fuel? The Minister talked about the engine of growth. How will the agriculture, logging and mining sector perform if they do not get fuel? Find out how those agencies get fuel. We are talking, but we are making the people in the Region do wrong things because we are encouraging the people to smuggle fuel across because they have to survive. Nobody wants to die. One has to get fuel to move. An investigation needs to be launched to see how the Region gets fuel.

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

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

Motion put, and carried.

Mr. Fernandes: Thank you Mr. Speaker. In the Region, there is a man called “Peter Sellers”. This man is a “sell” man and he loves to sell Government property and land, but “Peter Sellers” is not his real name; is it the Government? There are people from the N.D.C. who have control of certain Government lands in the area, and senior regional officials are bypassing the N.D.C. and are accepting application for Government land under the control of the N.D.C., and those persons are relatives and friends. When we talk in this Parliament, we say that the Government is performing well, but I have the impression that some of those regional officials are not performing so well. Those are regional officials who belong to Region 1 but are living in the Government compound in Government houses. It is my view that they are not too sure if they will be there after elections, but they want to continue to live in the Government compound but Government lands that are under the control of the N.D.C. are issued out by the R.D.C. without

the approval of the N.D.C. or Guyana Lands & Survey Commission. I understand that all lands come under the Guyana Lands & Survey Commission and I believe that it does not have the authority to issue out Government lands, and I believe that the relevant Minister should investigate this. If they take away the Government lands and give them to their relatives and friends, those lands should be regularised because Government has so many programmes for development and that is why they have those lands which are reserved. Unless the N.D.C. says that we have no use for the land, I think it should be regularised and the Minister should do that.

At Port Kaituma, I guess only the “Hammer Man” can go there to correct that situation. Regional officials are giving out land under the N.D.C. at Port Kaituma which should not be under the N.D.C.’s control. Where there is a plan for a road to be built, the lands have been given around the area, which is wrong. In my mind, it should not come under the R.D.C.’s authority. It comes under the N.D.C. or Guyana Lands & Survey Commission, and I believe that those lands should be regularised. If in front of the wharf where the boats moor, they do not have enough space to manoeuvre because people are building on the wharf... It should be regularised because a lot of illegal business is being done there. The boat would take a long time to turn around. This causes a slowing down of business. There are other boats other than the North West ferry that traverse that area but they would have to wait until the North West ferry moves or if they are in the way, they will have to move to give the North West ferry priority; it is the Government’s vessel. They understand that but they need more space. These officials are giving out lands all around the place. It needs to be regularised because if a fire occurs out there, we would have problems and we do not want to wait until that happens to correct the situation. The situation should be corrected urgently. As a matter of fact, I believe, based on recommendation from the people in the area, that there should be another area where another boat or two could moor. In the mean time, something should be done to ensure that there is adequate space for the boom – the thing that moves the goods – so that they could bring things off and on so that they can move faster. As such, the North West ferry would not have to stay five days in the area; this will turn around. There are too many people, buildings and all of those other things in the area. I believe that you should correct those things. **[Member: Peter Sellers]** “Peter Sellers” is involved in that too.

Also at Port Kaituma, there still continues to be the problem where the rental of Government buildings to individuals is concerned, except for one person – and I checked the last of the

accounts. There is no paper trail. There is no accountability about who is collecting this money. Some people want to know if it is “Sellers” that rented out those buildings but it is not “Sellers”. They are Government officials. Those buildings should be legally rented out to persons and we are supposed to see this money coming back as part of this Government’s coffers, but we are not seeing those things. It is important for the Minister to investigate and find out why it is that these people are not paying. If they are paying, who is collecting this money? I think that those are small areas that need to be looked after to ensure that we have a brighter future and proper accountability.

The police seem to be doing a very good job in the Region. I must say “hats off” to the Minister. When we see somebody doing something good or a Government official doing something good, we should give him or her, his or her praises. At one Budget presentation, I said that the front step of a police officer’s house, was rocking and broke off. The police now have to put a blind to cover the... I went to visit one of those houses up there. You all are doing a wonderful job. When I went into this house I had to sit down on a five gallon container because they do not have furniture in the house. So I asked, “When you have a guest where do you sit?” He said “I got to sit on my bed.” It is a big building. I think that we should address those concerns. Those are genuine concerns. We would have a brighter future for everybody, not only the people on the coast.

On the post office, I mentioned this in this Parliament before, if you want those old people who collect money from the post office to get their payment... because we have to fix the post office because...it is cracked up all over. If one knocks a little hard, the wall will break. It would encourage thieves to break into the post office but, as a Government, you have to fix it because if they carry away the money, the old people will not get paid and we want them to get paid. Did you not raise the pay recently?

I just believe, Mr. Minister, that you should go to check it out. Check out the concerns. When we bring the concerns to Parliament we should ensure... do not say it is a joke. It is not a joke! This is serious business. This is business of the people. I just believe that if we look after these concerns for the people in Region 1 or part of the concerns, we can talk about a brighter future for everybody.

Mr. Speaker, you would not like to live in Baramita where you would have to go through the water every day or even Barima or Morawhanna.

Finally, I am just asking the relevant Ministers to ensure that we address those concerns so that everybody would have a wonderful future. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Ms. Shadick: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I rise this evening to make my contribution to the debate on the Budget for the year 2011 which was so eloquently presented to this Hon. House on Monday 17th January by the Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, under the theme *Together Building Guyana's Tomorrow Today*. It promises to be a bright future for all Guyanese.

I join my colleagues in offering congratulations to Dr. Singh on this his fifth Budget that he has presented to this House. As the Hon. Minister pointed out in his presentation, and indeed it is well recognised by all Guyanese by now, this is the last Budget for the electoral five-year period, this Ninth Parliament which began with the P.P.P/C's victory at the elections held on 28th August, 2006. Looking at what the Budget holds for 2011, we also need to take into consideration those budgetary allocations and the targets which were met in the past four years. There is a definite path which this Government is traveling upon; a path which is designed to place Guyana firmly in the 21st century while ensuring that every citizen benefits from improved infrastructure, social services and all of those other amenities which are considered absolutely necessary for a happy and productive life.

Over the past four years, we have seen internal and external developments with still more modern facilities being established. These facilities touch the lives of each and every Guyanese. Who will contest the fact that the Berbice Bridge has brought tremendous benefit to every Guyanese, especially "Berbicians", as well as all of those who travel to Suriname on a daily basis for either business or pleasure. Except if one wishes to do so, no "Berbician" is any longer forced to overnight in Georgetown when they travel to the capital city for any reason and, reciprocally, no resident of Demerara or Essequibo is forced to overnight in Berbice after traveling there for whatever reason. Who in his right mind is brave enough to cast doubt on the advantages which the Takutu Bridge brings to Guyana and the benefits which will accrue from Guyana's relationship with Brazil, or Guyana's stature in the Caribbean Region as a result of the construction of a new and modern national stadium?

Who in or out of this Hon. House can reasonably and rationally question, refute, deny or ignore the many benefits brought to Guyanese by the establishment of the up-to-date ophthalmology center at Port Mourant or the diagnostic hospitals at Diamond, Suddie, Leonora, Mahaicony, or the new hospitals built at Lethem and Linden, coupled with upgrades of hospitals, poly clinics, health centers and other health facilities in every region of Guyana. All of these are staffed with doctors trained in Guyana, as well as Cuban and young Guyanese doctors who have returned to serve after successfully completing studies in Cuba. This is testimony to this Government's commitment to providing health services to all Guyanese.

Who in his/her right mind can write off the benefits to our youth and sports enthusiast or all those who are interested in the preservation of our culture which the National Stadium, the Olympic-size swimming pool and the National Archives, not forgetting a world-class synthetic track bring? These are only a few examples of new and modern pieces of infrastructure which have been built or are being built for the comfort and pleasure of our citizens. Youths have benefited and are continuing to benefit from additional training in several areas, including training to secure their future livelihoods.

The thousands who now have their own homes on house lots provided to them by this Government at extremely low cost, the tens of thousands who no longer have to trek sometimes for miles for potable water, the children who can enjoy a bath every morning in an indoor bathrooms before going to school, which are comparable to any in the world, cannot be fooled and will not be fooled by the naysayers and would-be presidential hopefuls who are now travelling around the country trying to convince them that Guyana needs to be rescued from a failed political outfit from some nightmare. I wish to remind our detractors that nightmares occur when one is asleep, but I am convinced that Guyanese are fully awake and are cognizant and appreciative of all the progress which is there for all to behold. I urge the naysayers to wake up, look around, behold the evidence all around them and take some time to smell the roses and smile with the people.

I was old enough during the infamous years prior to 1992 - and I am not going to say how many - and I can assure this House that I, personally, lived through a nightmare when residents of Leguan, the island of my birth, which, by the way, is striving today, were told that there was no way of keeping back the great Atlantic and consequently my family and all the residents of

Leguan would have to evacuate our birthplace and find alternative living space. Those were the times when nightmares abounded while Guyanese were wide awake.

9:53 p.m.

Although I know that the Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security will be speaking on this issue expansively later, an issue which is near and dear to my heart, this Hon. House has to applaud the Government's efforts at safeguarding the most vulnerable of our citizens, most of whom are women, the homeless, the children and our elderly. This is why Government has taken steps to increase old age pension and public assistance and these have more than doubled over the past four years. There has been a slew of Bills catering for the welfare of children which were passed in this Hon. House during the past four year period. There is the Women of Worth (WOW) programme which women and single heads of households can access so that they can set up self generation activities. For the homeless, the Night Shelter in Georgetown can accommodate 250 persons on a 24-hour basis. Very soon upon its completion, there would be a 300-bed residential centre for rehabilitation and reintegration set up at Onverwagt. Who then can question this Government's care and concern for its most vulnerable citizens? Some seek to do so, Sir.

While I am on the question of old age pension and public assistance, I remember the presentation made by the Hon. Member, Ms. Jennifer Wade, who spoke about the amount of time it takes for applications to be processed. Old age pension applications have a processing period of six weeks and that is why persons who will be due for old age pension are asked to apply at least six weeks before the due date. Public assistance applications are looked at by local Boards of Guardians and those Boards of Guardians are the representative body. Every Board has at least one Member of the Opposition who can raise the concerns of their particular constituents. They look at and process applications for public assistance. The laws regarding public assistance cater for a six monthly review of the recipients' needs and that review has to be done according to law. The Boards of Guardians are made up of local people from the areas and they are not all from the same place. They are supposed to be from villages in that area so that they can personally know the means and livelihood of the people whom they have to adjudicate upon. I hope that helps the Hon. Member in understanding the process.

There are so many things which I can point to but my contribution today must focus on Region 3, the constituency for which I have parliamentary responsibility. I invite every Member of this Hon. House to take a trip to any of the communities, whether coastal, island or riverine, which lie between the Arabaru Creek and Makouria, to observe the development and speak to the residents who are benefiting from Government's intervention in each and every community.

Travel to Karia Karia or Bonasika Creek and see that the children who go to school there have a special boat and engine which picks them up at the various landings where they live. Travel to Hog Island or, indeed, any place where there is a school and inspect the up-to-date sanitary facilities which have been provided for use by students and teachers. Go to Morashi by boat or by road from Parika and observe all the exciting developments that took place and continue to take place along the Essequibo River.

It is obvious, to me, that the Hon. Member, Mr. Mervyn Williams, who, also, is a Parliamentary representative for Region 3 never went to any of those communities in the riverine areas. Anyone can comfortably board a speedboat at the Hubu koker - they do not have to jump because the steps are very nicely laid out - and travel to any and all of the riverine communities between there and Makouria and speak to the people who continue to benefit from improved services. The Hon. Member should not stand in the House and guess. He should go and talk to the people and find out. These are there for all to see and hear and no amount of negative rhetoric, media or empty promises by those who want to be president can change what is, today, and what can be in the future.

All over Region 3, roads, schools, bridges, hospitals and health centres are being built, upgraded or rehabilitated. Wells are being dug, water treatment plants are being built and potable water supply networks are being upgraded or installed. Canals, trenches, aqueducts, kokers and sluices are being cleaned, dug, rehabilitated or built. A spanking new, modern secondary school and technical institute are going up at Leonora. The modern synthetic track is also being constructed at Leonora, while existing housing schemes are being extended and new housing schemes are being established to cater for increased demand for houses. Go into Parfait Harmonie and Tuschen and observe what is happening. See what is going up and what is yet to go up.

Continuing the pattern established by this P.P.P /C Administration in 2010, the Regional Democratic Council expended the capital budgeted sum of \$41 million for education on extensions to the Leguan Secondary School, and the Vreed-en-Hoop, Kawall and Two Brothers Primary schools. Proper sanitary facilities were constructed at Aliko, Blankenburg, Upper Bonasika, Fort Island, Western Hog Island and Great Truli Island Primary Schools. Ramps were built at Sand Hills, and Endeavour and Princess Carolina Primary schools. A landing and revetment was constructed at Lanaballi Primary School.

Furniture and equipment were also provided, in 2010, to schools in areas such as Bel West, Parfait Harmonie, Tuschen and Plantain Walk as well as schools in all riverain communities. The schools at Parfait Harmonie and Tuschen are new, so excess funding was provided for furniture and other things. That was part of the supplementary estimates that members of the House were quarrelling so much about. They can go and visit and see that the children are happy.

In 2011, continuing to provide better services for our people, the budgeted sum of \$50 million is expected to be used for the construction of the upper flat of the Cornelia Ida Primary School, teachers living quarters at Upper Bonasika Primary school, the lower flat of the Leonora Nursery school, the extension of the San Souci Primary School and modern sanitary blocks for the Sand Hills Primary School and Uitvlugt Secondary School. Within this sum, there is also provision for furniture and equipment including desks, benches, chairs, tables, cupboards, bookracks, screens, chalkboards and fire extinguishers for whichever school (s) make such requests during the year and as the need arise. [**Mrs. Backer:** What about board erasers?] The Parent Teachers' Associations (P.T.A.) provide that.

With respect to health, the 2010 budgeted capital sum of \$24 million was expended on extending the clinic building at the West Demerara Regional Hospital, the construction of a mortuary, complete with a freezing unit; at the Wakenaam Hospital, a waiting area at the La Grange Health Centre and rehabilitation works at the De Kenderen and Bel West Health Centres.

Mr. Hinds: I would like to crave your indulgence and ask that Standing Order No. 10 be suspended so that the Sitting could continue until the listed speakers have concluded.

Motion put, and carried.

Standing Order suspended.

Ms. Shadick: This year, there is a budgeted capital sum of \$51 million for health, which will be used to construct extensions to the Outpatient's Departments at the West Demerara Regional Hospital (W.D.R.H.) and the health post at Aliko, rehabilitation works for the health posts at Lanaballi and St. Lawrence, as well as the doctor's quarters at the W.D.R.H. There is also provision for a new ambulance for the region and several pieces of essential equipment including an x-ray automatic processor, autoclaves, freezing units, food trolleys, stretchers and an electroencephalogram (E.E.G.) Machine. This is in keeping with Government's commitment to its citizens to continually improve health delivery nationwide.

Region 3 is mainly an agricultural area and this Government continues to bring relief to farmers. In 2010, using a capital budgeted sum of \$45 million for drainage and irrigation works, concrete structures with concrete head walls were constructed at Western Hog Island, Bonasika and Bamboo Creek in Morashi. A wooden structure with wooden door was constructed at Beeline in Toevlugt. High density polyethylene tubes with concrete headwalls and self acting doors were constructed at Carla Dam in De Willem, Fort Island and Reserve 662 in Parika. Timber Revetments were constructed at Greenwich Park Secondary School and the Zeelugt Burial ground. In addition, the Region bought and had in stock HDPE tubes in varying diameters and these were distributed according to needs in all areas.

In 2011, continuing the trend of the past four years of this Ninth Parliament and, indeed since 1993, for drainage and irrigation works the sum of \$50 million has been budgeted for the Region. The money is intended to be used to raise the sea and river defences at Eastern Hog Island, the stretch from Vriesland to Potosi on the West Bank of Demerara. Revetments will be constructed at Sisters Village and Enterprise and a koker will be constructed at Hog Island. HDPE tubes will also be purchased and be available to meet needs in all areas which make such requests.

This Government continues to try to provide better conditions of living for all Guyana's citizens including those who live in Region 3. To this end, in 2010 the sum of \$45 million was expended for procuring crusher run for the roads in Leguan and Wakenaam, upgrading the Naamless to Morashi road and constructing the Patentia/Sideline Dam, Masjid Street, Stewartville, Glasgow Street, Bagotville and the Zeeburg Masjid Street.

The further sum of \$25.5 million was expended to upgrade road networks at La Bagatelle in Leguan and San Souci in Wakenaam. Rehabilitation work was done on Back Street, Sara Lodge and roads at Vergenoegen and Goed Fortuin.

In 2011, there is a budgeted sum of \$98.5 million for public works in Region 3. This sum is intended to be used, in part, to construct footpath Bridges at Aliko, Saxacalli on the Essequibo River, Belle Vue and Wales on the West Bank Demerara and La Harmonie on the Demerara River. Several bridges and revetments would be constructed in Leguan and Wakenaam and a heavy duty bridge will be built at Karia Karia. Roads in areas such as Leguan, Nouvelle Flanders, Belle Vue and Leonora will be upgraded and roads in the housing schemes at Groenveldt, Vergeneogen, Patentia and De William will also be upgraded. All of the projects outlined, as having been completed in 2010, may not have been included in the 2010 Capital profiles but were, nevertheless, completed using the 2010 Capital Budgetary allocation. This was only possible due to transparent tendering procedures coupled with prudent management, resulting in savings which were used for additional works undertaken with the necessary approval of the Ministry of Finance.

Similarly, in 2011 the Region's administration would continue to carry out its mandate in an efficient manner and additional projects may very well be undertaken using any savings which it realises as well as any supplementary sums which the Ministry of Finance will make available to the Region. It is hoped that this will happen.

Having regard to the plans for 2011, already the Region has had cause to place advertisements in some of the newspapers, photocopies of some which I have here, for pre-qualification of contractors for the construction and rehabilitation of roads, for the construction and rehabilitation of buildings and bridges and of other infrastructure such as fences, trestles and ramps, cleaning and excavation of canals and dams, the construction and delivery of school furniture, for tenders for weeding and cleaning on a monthly basis, and for tender for weeding and cleaning on a two monthly basis. There are different areas that are cleaned every week and areas that are cleaned every two months. It is evident from these actions that the Region 3 administration will award contracts for projects, including those for weeding and cleaning for which sums sometimes less than half of a million dollars is allocated, only after a public tendering process. This process includes adjudication by the regional or Central Procurement Tender Board. Public procurement

is governed by law and this is in keeping with the P.P.P/C's commitment to transparency and accountability at all levels of Government and is in stark contrast to what was the order of the day prior to 1992. Prior to 1992 there were phantom projects, phantom contractors, and money was spent but nobody saw what was done for that money.

The measures outlined in Budget 2011 promise more to benefit all Guyanese who can be assured of a bright future which is premised on *Together Building Guyana's Tomorrow Today*. Sir I, therefore, have great pleasure in commending this forward looking Budget to this Hon. House for unanimous passage. *[Applause]*

Ms. Kissoon: Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to this 2011 election budget debate. The people of Region 10 are still looking and waiting for their fair bite of this budget. The people of Region 10, once again, still see no hope in this 2011 Budget as this Government continues to make promises. We all know that the old adage, "a promise is a comfort to a fool", rings out. But I tell you, Mr. Speaker, the people of Region 10 are not fools.

Youths, mothers, single mothers, teachers and other residents of Region 10 continue to experience hardship as they are still not getting value for money under the P.P.P/C regime. Much was being said by the Hon. Member just now about schools and furniture in Region 3. This Government is promoting child-friendly classrooms, but in Region 10 there are still crowded classrooms. There is shortage of furniture in Region 10. The new Silver City Secondary School requested furniture two years ago and, to date, they have received none. The McKenzie High School received furniture suitable for primary school children. In less than one month, the furniture was falling to pieces.

[Mr. Speaker left Chair]

[Madam Deputy Speaker assumed Chair.]

Much is being talked and bragged about how many millions are being spent on building new schools and yet there are numerous rundown buildings. There is great need, Mdm. Speaker, for established schools to be upgraded in Region 10. Some examples are the New Silver City Secondary School, and the Wismar/Christenburg Secondary School and certain sections of the McKenzie High School need to be upgraded.

Laboratories are being placed in schools and some schools do not have laboratories. Schools are receiving laboratories and persons cannot appreciate the newness and grandeur of the school. The McKenzie High School needs proper labs. New buildings are being built; yet, persons in Region 10 cannot enjoy what they have. If this Government will give the students the materials and allow them to build and repair the school furniture, the students will be learning and acquiring skills at the very same time. I can assure this Hon. House that there will be value for money, unlike what we are getting from this Government.

There are some teachers in Region 10 who are paying tithes with this Government. Those Christians will know what I am speaking about. Teachers are paying 10% of their salaries as rent for Government quarters. I need the Minister of Finance to note that every time there is a big 1% increase for teachers, the rent goes up. To add insult to injury, no proper repairs are being done to these quarters and Government is saying that it cares for children and teachers. Let me tell you, Mdm. Speaker, that the teachers are still performing under these conditions and I think they should be applauded for this. Shame on this Government! The teachers need a fixed rent and the rent should be the same across the board since there are teachers of different status. There are Deputy Headmistresses and Masters, Temporary Qualified Mistresses/Masters, Senior Assistant Masters/Mistresses (S.A.M.s), and Senior Masters/Mistresses (S.M.s) so everybody's 10% will be different and they are living in the same quarters and under the same conditions.

I notice that under Programme 803 – Education Delivery, buildings in the Capital Projects Profile, no repairs will be done to the teachers' quarters where rent is being collected. The established buildings are left to deteriorate and, as I said, some of these teachers are paying 10% of their salaries as rent. There are children dwelling in some of these houses and there are floor boards missing. I know of a case where one mother had to take the floor boards from her bed to cover up the flooring just for the safety of her children. When will the Guyanese people get value for money? When will the stealing stop? When will justice be served? This is only being done to teachers' quarters. There are other officials in the region who are occupying Government quarters and their houses are being repaired and their yards are being fenced. Why the favouritism?

The educational system in Region 10 is dysfunctional and there is need to get to the root of the problem. Promoting students merely to say, "No student is left behind", or reduce the drop-out

rate is not a viable solution. The solution lies in understanding the many problems faced by students, families, the school system, teachers, and the community. The policy should be reviewed, Mr. Minister.

Region 10, in general, and Linden, in particular, needs employment. Therefore, there is need for an investment strategy for Linden since the Government has none.

Secondly, wages and salaries should be increased so that parents can provide the basic needs for children to go to school. As a teacher, it is sad when children come and tell you that they had nothing to eat. This affects the child's ability to concentrate on school work. Government needs a programme to ensure that our children do not go hungry. The School Feeding Programme is a step in the right direction but it is inadequate. At the level of the school, there is need for more trained teachers with experience. This simply means stopping the migration of teachers. The Government is doing absolutely nothing to end the depression in Region 10 and so it affects the children and their learning.

The health sector is killing more patients than saving lives. There is shortage of drugs but yet this Government continues to blind its eyes and do not see the need to increase the amount budgeted for drugs and medical supplies. There are too many women losing babies. One woman lost her 37-week-old baby due to negligence on the part of the doctors and also to the fact that there is still no technician to operate the ultrasound machine. There is a shortage of oxygen. One young woman lost her baby because on their way to Georgetown the oxygen ran out. She said to me, "Ms. Kisson the oxygen ran out and I had to watch my baby bleed through her mouth and nose." When they got back to the hospital, that baby died. We need change here and I hope that the Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Health is hearing me. There is no proper means of transporting oxygen on the ambulance. Nurses have to hold the infusion bottle all the way to Georgetown or create a drip stand in the ambulance. There is need for a doctor at the Wismar Hospital on a 24-hour basis and the Records Office needs to be removed. I heard the Minister speak about Dr. Mc Donald returning to the Region. That is nice and we appreciate it. Just imagine that nurses were told that they have to place their restroom by the toilet and that they should get ply board and create a partition. How disrespectful it is to the nurses that Government trains and brings them back to dwell in this kind of state!

The Chief Executive Officer (C.E.O) of the Linden Hospital Complex, who has long passed the age of retirement but still continues to administer and - I hope this is Parliamentary language - to demonise the hardworking nurses and staff of the hospital. He recently sent around a circular stating that nurses will receive their gratuity in March and September when they should really receive it in February and August. The union representative did not receive such a circular and did not receive any information from central Georgetown. The C.E.O. continues to remove the maids from the job and send them to clean the doctor's quarters and Cancer Society Clinic during their eight hour shift. They then have to return and complete their normal duties at the hospital. Why can these maids not do the work in the afternoons after they would have completed their eight hours be paid for their labour? Where is Mr. Manzoor Nadir, the Hon. Minister of Labour?

10.23 p.m.

The Wismar Hospital is infected with mosquitoes. There is a shortage in cleaning agents, drugs and injections and, still we 'blaw' about hospitals that we are building. Under the People's National Congress Reform's Government, Linden received water on a 24-hour basis; now we have to settle for 12 to 14 hours per day. Infrastructures are being put in place but the absence of draining causes difficulty and casualties - Minister you know what I am talking about here. The streets and roads are, also, destroyed.

The quality of water in most areas is still not drinkable. The people have to buy or boil water. It is good to say that you are going to do roads and streets, but it is clear that you do not know what you are doing. There is no sense in constructing roads with proper draining, and those very roads, streets and paths, that you plan to construct, Hon. Minister, have no proper drainage.

I noticed that provision was made for works to be done on roads leading to Three Friends Mariah Elizabeth after I spoke about its deplorable state during one of my Budget speeches in this Hon. House. The people appreciate and welcome it but we need proper roads and value for money. We want long lasting roads. [Mr. Rohee: Let us hear about the lights now.] We are getting blackouts. Ask the Prime Minister.

The youths of Region 10 are still grappling with the high rate of unemployment and, yet, when a vacancy arises there is discrimination. Let me refer you to a recent example. There was a

vacancy advertised for Sports Coordinator in the Region and some young persons who know that they are qualified applied for the position. Low and behold when they turned up for the interview this is what the Youths were told by a well known PPP activist... the young people did not foresee this coming. They were told, "Well you know this is a politics thing and we know that the P.N.C is strong in Linden. We want to deal with the youths so if you want to get this job you cannot be associated with anybody for the P.N.C." They were asked if they were in any youth group, and when they replied that they were in a youth group with Ms. Kissoon they were told not to say that when they go to Georgetown because they would not get the job. Today the individual is without a job because of the association with the P.N.C Member of Parliament, Ms. Vanessa Kissoon, yours truly. How sad. Shame on this Government!

Despite numerous calls from the Leader of the Opposition and the Minister of Labour, this Government still has not done anything for the 50 plus RUSAL workers. The Minister dealt with everything that does not concern him and nothing was said about what the workers can expect. Shame on you, Mr. Nadir!

Mdm. Speaker, I really wanted Mr. Speaker to hear me because I wanted to take him to Region 10 - I know that he is campaigning for presidency so this might be an opportunity to start an early campaign - to see what is going on in the Region. It is this Government's plan to bypass unions. I was present when the President, Mr. Jagdeo, told the RUSAL workers that he does not want to deal with the Union. He wanted to speak and deal with the workers. How disrespectful!

There is much talk about women and children, etc., and the 'Stamp it Out' Bill which deals with abuse to some extent. We embrace this, but some single parents are still being abused verbally by a known PPP/C councillor who insults women when they go to receive public assistance. Derogatory statements were made to a 53 year old Amerindian woman and a 45 year old woman. These women are complaining because this councillor ridicules and brings them down to nothing when they go to receive public assistance. Yet, we are talking about promoting women and children.

The people of Region 10 are still suffering. We know that the truth hurts. We are calling on the Ministers to play their part. We have roads in Region 10 that within three months of their completion there are holes in them. Drainage is not done and there is erosion. Yet, this

Government and Minister come to this Hon. House to say that they are spending billions of dollars. We are still waiting for the list, which was promised by the Hon. Minister, Irfaan Ali, of all of the roads and streets that he stood up in this Hon. House and shouted at the top of his voice that they were doing in Region 10. To date, we have not received the list and the amount of money that will be allocated to the different roads, streets and paths, etc.

This Budget cannot be judged merely by the amount of money that it proposes to spend. It must demonstrate its capacity to transform the lives of the people of Region 10, and the citizens of Guyana, not merely to keep an entire nation on life support. The Budget before this Hon. House was not inspired by a vision of a transformed country. It does not give our people, especially our youths, the hope that tomorrow's Guyana will be any better than the crime, unemployment and poverty of yesterday. I rest my case as, we all know, the ayes will have it. *[Applause]*

Mr. Ninvalle: Mr. Speaker, allow me, please, to make my contribution and support the 2011 Budget presented one week ago, in this House, by my colleague, the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, the Minister of Finance. While doing so, I, also, wish to add my congratulations to the newest Member of the House, Ms. Joan Baveghems, and urge her to give of her best efforts to the National Assembly.

The 2011 Budget presented by Dr. Singh continues Government's trend of uplifting, building and comforting this nation, something that has been happening since 1993 and will continue for years to come. Of course, listening to Members of the other side you may find what I have said hard to believe. Listening to them, too, would make you wonder if we are all in a country that has seen its fifth year of economic growth. I wonder if it is understood and appreciated by that side of the House how careful and astute our planning is and how Guyana's boat has been kept afloat while many others have capsized. Hon. Members, I wonder if the wild and unsubstantiated utterings emanating from the other side of the House have anything to do with bitterness.

I dare say, without any fear of contradiction, that if this year's Budget is an Election Year Budget as the Opposition is suggesting, then an election has been held every year in this country since the PPP/C has been in power as every year we have made provision to build and care for the nation.

I looked at the Stabroek news of 19th January, 2011 and it read:

“The Private Sector Commission (P.S.C) yesterday praised Government’s move to reduce corporate taxes and raise the personal income tax threshold, saying it has vindicated the body’s efforts to work with the Government on implementing the National Competitiveness Strategy (NCS).

In a statement issued yesterday, the PSC said the raising of the threshold to \$40,000 will bring ‘unprecedented relief.’”

I am now baffled and bamboozled. Am I living in the same country as Members of the Opposition?

Achievement in 2010

During 2010, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport continued to foster partnerships with several sporting associations in the process of producing historic moments for this country. One such highlight happened when Guyana was chosen to host the C.A.C Rugby Sevens competition. It was unprecedented and spoke wonders of the multipurpose National Stadium which many on that side had vowed would remain a white elephant. The Ministry worked tirelessly with the National Rugby Union in organising and staging the C.A.C competition. This competition saw eight countries taking part. In almost a story book ending, both the National male and female teams won gold medals, truly a historic moment for rugby and sports, on the whole, in Guyana, made possible by Government’s timely support.

Government also played a pivotal role in our National Rugby team’s participation in the 2010 Commonwealth Games in India and, though we did not win a medal, the experience gained for attending a competition of that magnitude will forever serve our young team well.

In keeping with the Ministry of Sport’s initiative to decentralise sport in Guyana, several pieces of equipment was handed over to the Guyana Amateur Boxing Association, one of these equipment was a new ring. The acquisition of this easily collapsible piece of equipment allowed for boxing, which has won Guyana its lone Olympic medal to date, to be taken to the communities instead of the other way around. Thousands who have never before seen a boxing match, much less step into a ring, now have the opportunity to do so. And to complement this, a National boxing coach was employed and he has already started traversing not only Region 4,

but other Regions scouting for and neutering hidden talents. Mabaruma, Lethem, the North West District, Paramakatoi, and Kato are no longer off limits to the fistic sport. Government support did not stop there.

The National boxing team that went to the C.A.C Games in Puerto Rico may not have returned home with two bronze medals had it not been for intervention by the Ministry which paved the way for weeks of encampment and providing the services of the national coach to work with the team.

On the advice of the Minister of Sport, the Amateur Boxing Association is currently planning a resuscitation of the Caribbean Boxing Championships which should be held in Guyana this year. Apart from providing high-level and much needed competition for our young fighters, the staging of the competition here paves the way for Guyana's return to the hierarchy of regional boxing. It also stands to assist in the international rankings of our fighters. We have seen the success of the Friday Night Pro Am Fight card which, in less than a year, has grown to the point where Regional television is now interested in broadcasting. We all know what international television can do for our country and this sport.

Last year, the Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson, during a presentation to this House, complained that the Olympic-sized swimming pool would not function properly. I now take this opportunity to inform Mr. Patterson that the pool is completed without fault and will be opened shortly. Despite what criticism the Opposition may now cough up, the pool will remain what it is - a world class facility.

For over three years, the piloting of the Ministry's Inter-block Football Programme has seen its tentacles reaching many communities. Our collaboration with Banks DIH has produced the Guinness Greatest of the Streets football competition. In 2011, our intention is to expand on these two programmes. Inter-block and Street football remains a dominant factor in creating friendship bonds, is useful preparation for more formal football and allows for the joys and benefits of organised football to be experienced by some of the most excluded in society. It also lifts self-esteem and self confidence. Many argue that such activities are responsible for the fast paced dexterity that powers South American and Central American football. Our intention during

this year is to modify this programme into a more attractive product that can be marketed to a wider cross section of Guyanese. It will touch even the most remote areas in the country.

Since upgrading of coaching skills remain high on our agenda, Government, last year, facilitated former national captain and Coach Gordon 'Ultimate Warrior' Braithwaite's journey to Germany to be part of 28 coaches from 24 countries who participated in B Level coaching course. Thanks to this Government, Braithwaite is now one of a few in this country who can boast of being a Level B coach.

The attempt to let persons embrace the culture of physical fitness was enhanced with the inauguration of the Big Ride two years ago. We anticipate that this year thousands of ordinary Guyanese will participate in this cycling event as word and activity in the Ministry's Fit for Life Policy spread. In the same vein, please be reminded that the Teach Them Young Run by National coach Hassan Mohamed is still peddling after decades, and many of our current top wheelers are graduates of that programme. And we can expect even more activity in the National Park, following the resurfacing on the track there. This development will also benefit several hundred joggers and fitness conscious persons who use that facility on a daily basis. The Three-Stage and the Five-Stage races remain signature events on the cycling annual calendar and commands wide international participation.

The basketball arena has not gone unnoticed by this Government. Plans are afoot to put in basketball facilities at municipal market tarmacs in several areas so that youths can participate in meaningful activities when there is no market. The areas earmarked for this development are: Diamond, Enmore, Bath/Waterloo, Buxton, Pouderoyen, Dewillen, Charity, Lusignan, Plaisance and Patentia. Please take note that in keeping with our propensity for inclusiveness, Hon. Member David Patterson, the President of the Basketball Federation, was invited to meetings and consulted on planning the way forward. This initiative has been extended to schools with the Ministry erecting facilities for basketball in 10 schools across Guyana. Mdm. Speaker during last year there was more collaboration between the Ministry of Sport and Education and a strengthening of ties between the Ministry and National associations.

In the area of Youth, the Ministry has in its plans the reworking and formulation of the National Youth Policy and Action Plan and advancing the cause of youth through the establishment of

youth bodies within regions. Taking note of the incidences of youths in crime, the Ministry will conduct sessions intended to equip community leaders with knowledge and skill needed to establish youth friendly communities.

In concluding, if I or any rational thinking person should take the aforementioned into consideration, then there would be no hesitation in supporting the 2011 Budget. Thank you.

[Applause]

Mr. P. Persaud: I am here to give my bit in support of the Hon. Minister of Finance, Ashni Singh, who presented such a wonderful and huge Budget, in this National Assembly, for 2011. One hundred and sixty one point four billion dollars is a lot of money. It shows the people out there what we are going to do for them in the year 2011.

Before I go into my speech, I want to make a few points on the Hon. Member Desmond Fernandes' remarks. Speaking of Region 1, I want to feel that Moruca sub-Region is left out of Region 1, according to what he has been saying. I have been traversing that Region for over 20 years and I want to tell you that what you have been saying...the only area that he touched on for Region 1 is the Beluji air strip. Apparently he flies over the people of Moruka's heads.

In November, I visited Moruca sub-Region and was amazed to see what was going on. I went by boat from Charity to Waramuri. The people of Waramuri told me that you no longer have to travel by boat to reach Santa Rosa; you can use a minibus from Waramuri and drive on a road. When I went to Santa Rosa by bus the Regional Executive Officer told me that you can travel by bus to Cubana. It is possible for you to travel the entire Moruca sub-Region by way of minibus.

I want to now speak on my Region - Region 2. Region 2, again, performed exceedingly well by completing its work programme in good time. We could have, even, asked if there was more for us. The kind of administration we have functions under various sectors. We have seven such Committees which oversee the works of the Region. I want to name them:

1. Health, Sanitation and Environment;
2. Finance, Economic and Employment;
3. Education, Youth, Sports and culture in collaboration with Commemorative Activities;
4. Local Government and Regional Affairs;

5. Amerindian and Hinterland Affairs;
6. Works, Agriculture and Drainage and Irrigation; and
7. Women Affairs and Social Security.

These Committees met regularly, last year, and put forward issues raised to the Regional Democratic Council at its statutory body. I want to tell you that our Region met 11 times in 2010.

Local Government

We have five local authorities Neighbourhood Democratic Council and one township in Region 2. I want to reiterate the point that since 1994 we had no reason to establish any interim body. The Council that was elected in the 1994 Local Government Election is still functioning well.

Our N.D.Cs make full use of the subventions given by the Local Government Ministry and I want to thank that Ministry and the Minister for giving us the \$3M subvention. It is very useful to maintain roads, streets and clean drains within the communities. The township of Anna Regina will make full use of the \$7 million that was given to them. I can tell you that residents of the community really appreciate what the town council has been doing for them. [Member: What about the farmers?] My colleague will deal with farming.

Education

Our R.D.C and the Education Department are working in collaboration with each other. We have five officers at the Department of Education and four welfare officers; these officers have been reaching out regularly to all the communities of the Region, monitoring 29 nursery schools, 38 primary schools and eight secondary schools. I want to give you the number of pupils who are attending these schools. At the nursery level we have 1,630 students; at the primary 5, 830 students; and at the secondary 4, 964 students.

I want to make this point because in the past we had persons with only Secondary School Proficiency Examination (S.S.P.E.) teaching in Region Two; we do not have that anymore. At the nursery level, we have 81.2% teachers trained; at the primary level 71.4% of teachers trained; and at the secondary level we have 77.9% of teachers trained.

Attendance

Because we are paying teachers out of the treasury... this Budget caters to paying teachers. I want to give you the attendance rate. This is something of importance that this Parliament should know: attendance rate of teachers at the nursery level, in 2010, was 99%; and at the primary and secondary levels it was 98%. Regular visits to the schools by our officers gave us the percentage of students' attendance: At the nursery level it was 90%, primary - 94% and secondary - 92%. With teachers attending classes regularly, our percentage of passes from grades one to three at the C.X.C has moved from 70% to 75.7%. The Anna Regina Secondary school has been doing well with 100% passes at various subjects. The subjects that acquired 100% passes are Agriculture Science, double and single award, Building Technology, Human and Social Biology. For English 'A' we received 89% and for English 'B' 79%. At the National Third Form Examination, our secondary school gained 78% passes.

Water

I want to say something about water in my Region. I want to commend the Guyana Water Incorporated (G.W.I) for the work done over the past four years. We have had a completed overhaul of the water system in Region 2. For the first time in the history of Region 2, we have flowing from the tap of the resident from Queenstown to Waterhall treated water from the Lima water treatment plant. This water treatment plant will serve over 20,000 residents. The new well recently constructed at Somerset will benefit 5000 residents. As we speak, there is a new well being constructed at Onderneeming and one at Dryshore is yet to be commissioned. During the 1980s we had eight wells in Region Two; four of them were working in 1989. Let me tell you how they were planted. One was constructed at Good Hope at the extreme end of the coast and there was another one at Charity.

10.53 p.m.

So water has to be sent one way. What I would like to recommend to the planning of the present Guyana Water Inc is to shift those wells to middle areas so that water can be distributed both ways. It is good planning.

I can name the areas in which the wells were drilled: Good Hope, Queenstown, Onderneeming, Henrietta, Dartmouth and Charity. We can judge for ourselves. Very innovatively, Guyana Water Inc. works in collaboration with the Government of Guyana to establish for the first time in the

Hinterland communities – I do not want to step too deep into this – solar wells, and serviced the area of Mainstay Lake, Tapakuma, Capoey Lake and Hackney. The residents of these communities are amazed to know that they can also have water through the tap rather than to go down into ditches.

Sports

In the field of sports, 2010 was another successful year for Region 2. We have two officers at the department, one dealing with youth work and the other dealing with sports, and I can say they have performed exceedingly well. For the first time, we have developed several interim committees in various disciplines of sports, for example basketball, volleyball, softball cricket and dominoes. Those are interim bodies, and we have a confirmed and established Table Tennis Association firm in Region 2.

Together with the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport and the Director of Sports, we had a wonderful day of interaction with all the various disciplines of sports in Region 2. Over five hundred and twelve individuals participated in that activity. Our officers had outreach programmes. Mdm. Speaker, I would like you to know that the Officers included R.D.C. Councillor and Members of Parliament into the outreach programme into different communities like Capoey, Limasands, Onderneeming, Charity, Pomona, Supenaam, Suddie, Gib, Jackelo in the Pomeroon, among other communities that we visited.

Mdm. Speaker, The Director of Sports in collaboration with the Youth and Sports Office in Region 2 distributed sports equipment to sports clubs across the Region, including schools. I will like to name Abrams Zuil Secondary School as one which benefited from that programme.

Under youth activity, we had four-day camps for the youth in Region 2, held by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport. We also had a club seminar which involved all the youth and sports clubs in Region 2. We had a leadership seminar. We had the road relay of which all youth clubs, secondary schools and primary schools participated. We sent our camp leaders to train at Madewini.

One of the important things I would like to note this year is that we had His Excellency the President host the Luncheon at NOC. People have different perspectives about the NOC, and I

would like to give, under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, that residents – I am not going to use the word inmate at this time, because they are temporary residents at that institution – benefited from a lot of activities. When they leave there, they come out with skills and academic training such as welding and fabrication, carpentry, joinery, masonry, catering, plumbing and musical skills, especially in the field of steel pan.

My Region, while we have rice, that of which my colleague will be dealing with, forest products is another important economic venture in Region 2. We have nine saw mills existing in the Region, and eleven lumber yards.

Human Services

Human service is very important, and Region 2 benefited tremendously in the year 2010. I would like to let you know that we have three local Boards of Guardians and they are functioning very effectively to screen people who applied for public assistance on other issues, or benefits which should have come from the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. Over two thousand pensioners received their books in Region 2. We have had meetings with them, and they welcomed the water assistance and the relief they are getting from the Guyana Water Inc. Fifteen hundred residents are receiving public assistance, and they have welcomed the increase that they will be receiving.

Businesses

In terms of businesses, it is very important to note that because of the environment in Region 2 we have a growing business sector. One of the new innovations in Region 2 is the establishment of supermarkets. We have the Alfro Alphanso four-story supermarket at Charity which is yet to be commissioned but it is already being used, Jai Gobin Supermarket in Anna Regina, Lalo Supermarket at Mainstay, Hemlall Supermarket at Queenstown Village on the Essequibo Coast and the Jai Gobin at Suddie. The residents at Region 2 see supermarkets as one of the easiest ways to do their shopping for groceries and other things.

Tourism

In light of tourism, Mdm. Speaker, Mainstay Lake still remains one of the main tourist sites in Guyana. It is being used regularly by not only locals but international tourist. One of the

highlight activities usually held every year is the August regatta at Mainstay Lake. Capoey Lake is also another area to talk about. Lots of people visit Capoey Lake every Sunday. The hot and cold lake is still established there. Because of the environment and the working relationship of our people, I would like to commend the service being given to our people by GBTI Bank, New Building Society, Republic Bank and Demerara Bank, discussion is now ongoing for Citizens Bank to set up a branch at Charity.

Rice

Region 2 is rice growing area and I would like to tell you that we have fourteen established functioning rice mills in Region 2.

Multipurpose Centre

The Multipurpose Service Centre at Anna Regina continues to serve our residents well in the areas of birth and death certificates, income tax, lands commission business, immigration, Bureau of Standards and Revenue Authority.

Hotels

Because of the amount of tourist and visitors to Region 2, we have fourteen hotels and guess houses. I would like to name them: Purple Heart, Xenon Hotel, Fabz at Charity, Chris Parris at Dartmouth village....

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the House is getting a bit disorderly. I know it is very late and we are all very restless, but please let us listen to the Hon. Member. Let us give the Hon. Member an opportunity to complete his presentation.

Mr. P. Persaud: Arabian Sea View Hotel, Arabian International, Orbin Oasis Hotel, Tropicana Hotel, Odels Guess House in the Pomeroun, Akawini, Bootsville at Reliance, Babydoll at Cotton field, Large Hotel at Suddie and George at Marias Lodge.

Mdm. Speaker, in closing, this the 2011 budget presented to the Nation with the theme *Together building tomorrow's Guyana Today* gives us a true reflection of what is really meant by spending \$161.4 billion this year, and tells us that we are preparing Guyana for the future. Very importantly, the largest expenditure is in the education sector. This will allow us to prepare the

young people for a bright future. The huge amount which will be spent on agriculture secures our country, and we can talk about food security. The huge amount on public works will allow us to see massive infrastructure development. The billions in the health sector will contribute to our nation being a healthier one. Sports is very important, and millions will be spent which will allow our people to live a more healthy lifestyle. Our hinterland communities will also benefit a great lot from this year's budget.

With this broad coverage of this, the 2011 budget, I think all of us in this House should support and will support the Hon. Minister of Finance in the final passage of the 2011 budget.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

ADJOURNMENT

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, this brings us to the end of today's sitting.

Mr. Hinds: Mdm. Speaker, I move that the House be adjourned until tomorrow at 2 o'clock.

Motion put, and carried.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: The House is adjourned until tomorrow at 2 o'clock.

Assembly adjourned accordingly at 11.04 p.m.