

Official Report

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

11TH Sitting

Monday, 16TH April, 2012

The Assembly convened at 1.09 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Letter of complaint by the Leader of the Opposition

Mr. Speaker: Good afternoon Hon. Members. Yesterday I received a letter written by the Leader of the Opposition under the caption: *Complaint of the Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly on the Reporting of the National Budget Debate by the Guyana Information Agency*. It is a complaint that the Government Information Agency had shown bias in its reporting. I have since communicated by way of letter to the head of that agency. I have forwarded the material that I have received and, I believe, I have sent a copy of that letter to Mr. Granger. I have asked Mr. Neaz Subhan, whom I am advised is the Director, to give a comment on Mr. Granger's complaint.

Cumbersome traffic arrangements

I have my own complaint which is that I find that the traffic arrangements are becoming intolerable. I was a victim of this today when it took me about ten minutes to move about 300 yards to get here. We have repeatedly asked the Commissioner of Police to reassess these arrangements, but it does not seem as if any action is going to be taken. I know that some

Members have their own misgivings and their own views, but I would like to say that it is causing severe dislocation and disruption across the city and it is something that I am sure we all agree cannot continue as is.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

BUDGET SPEECH 2012 - MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2012

“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 2012 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 2012-03-30;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2012, of a total sum of **one hundred and seventy nine billion, six hundred and ninety six million, five hundred and forty six thousand dollar(\$179,696,546,000), excluding thirteen billion, and eighty four million, seven hundred and thirty five thousand dollars (13,084,735,000)** which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in the undermentioned schedule, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to make further provision in respect of finance.” *[Minister of Finance]*

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now resume the debate for the Budget 2012. I invite our first speaker for today Ms. Amna Ally, the Opposition Chief Whip to address you and I trust that we have all had a good weekend and that we are all charged up and ready to face this week. Go ahead Ms. Ally.

Ms. Ally: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members of this House, I rise to make my contribution to this debate under the theme: *Remaining on Course, United in Purpose, Prosperity for All*. Before I proceed I want to join with my fellow Parliamentarians who spoke before me in welcoming and congratulating all of the new Members who have joined this National Assembly.

Before I continue with the presentation, I want to point out a few things. When I listen to some of the comrades of the House, one would believe that history began only in 1992. Sir, I want to gently remind the Hon. Members Dr. Vindhya Persaud, Dr. Jennifer Westford, in absentia, and Hon. Member Mr. Norman Whittaker that the work today is premised on the infrastructure laid by the People's National Congress as well as opportunities offered by its many programmes which benefited young people like you and me.

Secondly, when Hon. Member Jaffarally spoke, he told untruths about the road repairs on the East Bank Berbice, Region 6. I suggest that despite the Hon. Member is from that Region, he confers with his Minister, Hon. Member Mr. Robeson Benn, who is the authority as to what the programme is for the East Bank Berbice Road.

Mr. Speaker, when I look back at previous themes of previous Budgets, I see, *Together Building Tomorrow's Guyana Today*; I see, *Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana*; I see, *Working Together – Reinforcing Resilience*; but I can see, in 2013, "Picking up the Pieces for Shattered Egos". Hon. Member Dr. Singh will not present that one.

As the Hon. Minister delivered his presentation, I wondered whether it was a case of an animal going to the slaughter house. Or was it no vision? Or was it sheer arrogance? I wonder if the 2011 programme and expenditures were truly evaluated to serve as a basis for staying on that course for prosperity and development. Are we happy with the expenditure of the \$24.3 billion spent on the National Strategic Plan? Are we comfortable that the US \$4.2 billion spent on teacher's education fully achieved the objectives? Are we satisfied that the \$919 million spent to

have trained teachers by 2013 has underscored the results that we are looking for? And, finally, are we satisfied that the \$769 million spent on the University of Guyana (UG) Turkeyen and Tain Campuses has prepared the educators in the various fields to aid the prosperity for all? If the answer is yes, I submit that there was no value for money invested in the education system in Guyana.

As I look at the Budget for 2012, I honestly believe that if those plans come clean of arrogance, with improved management capabilities, professionalism, value for teachers' time and resourcefulness, we will see unity in purpose which will yield prosperity. I refer to page 40 of the Budget presentation:

“This Government recognises that education is a prerequisite to the successful development of a nation, and as such we will continue to respond accordingly to the educational needs of our people in order to improve their quality of life. To this end, Mr. Speaker, \$26.5 billion has been allocated for the education sector in 2012.”

First I must say that that is a great strength of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), but that is a figure with no meaning. A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) welcomes the proposed expenditure but we demand value for money. We demand that the beneficiaries must be the nation's children. We demand that moneys are spent for what they are intended. We demand that there must be adequate and relevant programmes for our children. We demand that there must be proper accountability and openness of all monetary transactions. We demand that our teachers must be rewarded with improved wages and better working conditions; no 5% or 8% is sufficient. Do not hide behind the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), I warn. We demand that the Ministry of Education must focus on professionalism, skills and techniques and stop cronyism. We demand proper personnel allocation and evaluative measures to be implemented in all Ministry of Education projects.

I will now turn my attention to a few areas of focus that is considered very crucial in the education sector, as illustrated in the Budget.

Education Delivery

The Budget presentation alludes to various aspects of the delivery of education. I note, though, the objective of Education Delivery is to effectively and efficiently co-ordinate, monitor and manage the delivery of education at the Nursery, Primary, and Secondary levels, and at the Technical and Vocational Institutions in accordance with National Educational Policies and curricula. And one of the strategies outlined is to ensure that qualified staff and teachers are distributed across all levels of school as well as all technical institutions.

Today I will not speak about the lack of focus of the Government but rather to underscore that the focus of this Government is to:

- (a) Acquire the relevant international funds to splash on - and one only has to go to the Auditor General's Report to validate this statement;
- (b) To boast about the largest Budget ever and how much is allocated for education; and
- (c) To quantify, in monetary terms, the amount of money allocated for education without measuring real achievements.

Delivery has not been forthcoming in the way we would like it to and that is why we still face the dilemma of poor English and Mathematics results - and more of this later. It is because this Government does not stay on course with its projections. For years, in this National Assembly, I have been speaking of curriculum guides for schools and today, in 2012, the problem prevails. My latest information is that the National Centre for Education Resource Development (NCERD) is now editing some of the curriculum guides. I ask the question: how could the teachers in schools be ready to deliver education if the basic curriculum guides are not available? Well in case you are slow learners, let me tell you that English and Mathematics do not start in the 10th and 11th Grades. It starts from Nursery through Primary, and if one falls down there it is difficult to pick up in the 11th Grade.

The Budget boasts about fulfilling the percentage of trained teachers in keeping with indicators of the National Strategic Plan. The practical situation is across the country; in all ten Administrative Regions, many schools do not have adequate teachers. Just skip across to Regions 2, 3, and 7, just to mention a few, and do an analysis. Where would any Government in

its rightful mind have one teacher to one hundred children of varying abilities and levels? So the Government must not come here and “pampazet” about the billions spent on education when the nation’s children continue to suffer.

Training and Development

There is no doubt that Training and Development is vital in this sector. I feel very proud when I read in the Budget speech that enrolment for the Associate Degree at the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) is approximately 900 students. Annually, too, the University of Guyana produces approximately 5,500 students. I urge, though, that we do not necessarily benefit from mass production and that we must not lose sight of quality production; we must not focus on how much fees we can garner but whether we are fulfilling the variables that will give us a quality product. Many of our teachers are trained but migrate thereafter because our conditions and salaries are not attractive. Why can we not recognise this? Without teachers we cannot have other professions.

Finally, in Training and Development, we must ensure that we meet the needs of our students; we must meet the needs of our teachers; and we must develop opportunities that meet the needs of the larger society. We must ask the question: why again in 2011 is poor performance reflected in the Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate (CSEC) examinations?

Literacy and Numeracy

For a number of years, the question of Literacy and Numeracy has been receiving injections for improved performances. One will recall that it started some years ago with the Basic Education Access, Management and Support (BEAMS) Project, where lots of money was floating about. And then there was the end of the funding, consequently the end of the Project. However, 12 of these trainers were retrained and they were working in the Regions. One would have thought that the Ministry would have been serious to address the Literacy and Numeracy problem and so it would have given them the support for continuity. Instead, the Ministry decided that it was going to frustrate these trainers, so it called them together and requested of them to pull the Region they have to be posted to – and I mean ‘pull’ as if it were a raffle. The end result was that the Ministry managed to frustrate ten out of the 12 persons who were remaining. If a Region 2 person pulled Region 6, that trainer could not have put in place all the necessary and adequate

arrangements to go and do the work. Because of this, the Ministry is left with two trainers. So I do not know where this continuity is going to take place – two trainers. Is the Ministry really serious? Does it really want improvement in Literacy and Numeracy?

We have heard the Minister speaking about pilot project to improve English and Mathematics in schools where some \$85.7 million has been earmarked to finance this project. This is nothing new! During the tenure of this very Government, a magazine called, *The Reformer* was released in December 2002 while the Hon. Dale Bisnauth was Minister of Education and the Secondary School Reform Project (SSRP) was implemented. Hon. Minister, I urge you to read page 15 of that magazine. If you do not have one, I can lend you mine. In the content, the reasons for poor performance were outlined and the recommendations were also given. Because of a time constraint, I will refer, in gist, to one recommendation which speaks to frequent monitoring, continuous assessment and practical strategies, just to mention a few.

The Ministry, in its early years, had two objectives: initially, to identify and treat early deficiencies; and actually, to provide continuous assessment. The situation analysis reflected no systematic approach to address the first objective, but the second one is fully implemented. So while it is good to do something to improve the poor results, let me recommend, even though it may appear to be long term that we start with the very young mind. Kenrick Hunte and Geoffrey Smith are professionals who have investigated the minds of our young people and have given authorship to them.

Learning Channel

I said earlier in my remarks that we demand value for money. According to the Budget, \$47 million has been expended on the educational television broadcasting service. This unit is clearly not equipped to provide a 24-hour service, on television, that addresses the issues confronting the school system today. This service performs the role of a regular television channel broadcasting programmes developed for the market and certainly creates awareness of events in education. The initial objective was to provide resources needed to support curriculum delivery in schools.

The situation analysis shows that we already have existing audio programmes that are tailored to assist delivery of curriculum in primary schools, e.g. the Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI)

Mathematics and broadcast to schools programmes that cover a wide range of subjects. I wonder how much of the \$47 million went to where it did not belong.

The National Strategic Plan

The 2008-2013 National Strategic Plan attracts a tidy chunk of the Budget. It is acknowledged that this is an ongoing Programme, but \$24.3 billion was allocated in 2011 to this Programme.

Illustrated in the National Strategic Plan is to equip all secondary schools and 50% primary schools with computer laboratories. According to the Ministry of Education, 80 secondary schools and 60 primary schools have so far been equipped. It is worthy to note that according to the Hon. Member, Mr. Jaffarally, 20 out of those 60 went to Region 6. I wonder how the other 40 have been distributed to the other nine Regions.

1.39 p.m.

While I do not want to disabuse the Minister's mind, I wish to request of her, a circulation to this National Assembly, the list to all of its members. The situation analysis reflects that firstly, a computer laboratory cannot be a school with a few computers because no school has few children. Secondly, in Linden at least in five primary schools the equipment is non-functional because the complete systems are not available. Rather, in some of the schools, the computers are still in boxes. Thirdly, the absence of Information Technology (IT) teachers looms largely. Fourthly, in Linden again, Region 10, five secondary schools were earmarked for computer labs. I ask how many are functioning. There are problems and more problems; no technicians for the schools that the computers are given to. The computers are not having optimum functions, et cetera. Is it because it is Region 10? In Region 5 the school ranking eighth was the first to have a few computers. There again, they are not working and there is no attempt to get them working. Yet, we boast about these computer laboratories.

What did the Ministry do with the money for this project? The July 4th, 2011 Kaieteur News reported that 1,400 computers are to be supplied for these computer labs. Are these the same computers that are still in the boxes? Are these the same computers minus parts? Are these the same computers with no power supply? **[An Hon. Member: Ask Kaieteur News.]**

Are these the computers from Digital Technology where approximately \$300 million of

taxpayer's monies were involved? I certainly cannot ask Kaieteur News that, Hon. Member Ganga Persaud, you need to tell me that! How can our education system be enhanced with the mess which this Government has created?

Finally, on the question on the large sum of money allocated for this project. I call on the current Minister, current because she was not there last year as that Minister, to come clean and produce in this National Assembly the list of the 300 trainee teachers who should have received laptops before the end of 2011 as was reported.

I now turn briefly to the University of Guyana (UG)... [Ms. Backer: That is whole day.] Page 41 of the Budget refers to over \$900 million dollars allocated to the University of Guyana. [Mr. Rohee: inaudible.] It must be noted that the University of Guyana, as I said before, produces about 5,500 students annually. If you used to listen a little bit more you would have been better off Hon. Member Rohee.

Secondly, the University is made to survive on a student fee of 127,000 – one of the categories - per student. Lo and behold I heard a few nights ago mutterings by the Private Sector Commission, the mouthpiece of the Government, that they feel it may be necessary to triple the University fees. I submit that APNU rejects this. It will only cause increased hardship for our young people.

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

Dr. Roopnarine: Mr. Speaker, I wish to request that the Hon. Member be given fifteen minutes to continue her presentation.

Question put, and carried.

Ms. Ally: Thank you Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, I heard a few nights ago mutterings by the Private Sector Commission, the mouthpiece of the Government, that they feel that maybe it will be necessary to triple the University fees. I submit comrades that APNU rejects this position. This will only cause increased hardship for our young people.

Thirdly, with the UG mega budget the Office of the Pro Chancellor has to be financed. The Pro Chancellor's job is primarily to filter the PPP/C propaganda.

Fourthly, remuneration of UG lecturers is so low that it results in mass migration of lecturers. The University of Guyana, a tertiary institution, must be addressed. There are too many problems, staffers, management, UG Council, people losing their jobs because of their political affiliation among others. I urge the Minister to take a hard look at improving the conditions at the University of Guyana and to close the door to any harsh conditions on our students by increasing their fees.

In terms of technical and vocational training you will recall at the last Budget presentation, 2011, I was very critical of the Government's approach and existence of the technical and vocational training. I am harkened to know that from the last to this present time efforts have been made to address my concerns and recommendations, this is a good sign. I have seen and read various reports for the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Council and I would like to urge that efforts be made to correct the grey areas in these institutions. Time does not permit me to address all of these concerns, but I will attempt to highlight a few.

The education system, despite the reported high spending in TECVOC (Technical and Vocational Training) still places too much emphasis on academic achievements. TECVOC is not valued high enough. Firstly, there is no one who is qualified in technical education to manage a technical programme run by the Ministry. At the moment a retired Assistant Chief Education Officer (ACEO) Secondary is in charge of the technical education. [An Hon. Member: He is not qualified.] If you had known you would not have even said "he". It is against this backdrop that I bring to this forum that the training institutions in Mahaicony and Leonora are not conducting technical programmes of any significance. In each institution over 200 students are enrolled, but only about 70 now attend. Parents and students are frustrated of the institution not yet staffed and some of the much need equipment not yet installed. The few teachers employed, note I did not say instructors, resort to teaching secondary school English and Math in an attempt to keep the students occupied. Are these institutes therefore serving the purposes for which they were intended? Certainly not! Let me remind Hon. Members that these two institutions cost nearly \$1 billion, and the interest is not there to utilise them for the right reasons. Where is the value for money?

Secondly, in the Budget we speak of the vast sum allocated for teachers training. Yet, budgets come and budgets go, and we cannot get trained personnel to conduct training in these TECVOC

Institutions. Many of our teachers who teach technical subjects are merely graduates from the secondary school system with no practical experience in industry. Hence, the courses offered at Secondary Competency Certificate Programme (SCCP) receive a theoretical treatment and modicum of practicals with a few and obsolete pieces of equipment.

I would like to give just a little recommendation to prepare our personnel for teacher education and training programmes. It requires not only theoretical constructs, but much dependence on on-the-job training in industry.

Our TECVOC programme must also be consistent with those aspects of Government programmes. Noticeably absent is a programme to train personnel for extractive industries in oil, manganese, et al.

Finally on this note, many of the principles and practices that inform the present education system are out of date. The science programmes need to get special attention as well as those of technology. The impacts of development in computer and information technologies, environmental science, micro electronics and others challenge to develop the capabilities of Guyanese.

I am taking a look at education across the country now. Education must be for the Guyanese society in both rural and urban areas. In so doing, we must take into consideration culture, physical landscape and other factors that would enhance our education system. Only recently we had to highlight problems with basic toilet facilities in the Port Kaituma Region 1 area. What bothers me is that when you highlight such problems you are told that it is not the central Ministry of Education that is responsible it is the RDC or Local Government Ministry. May I recommend early that there will be a collaborative effort or approach between the Local Government Ministry and the Ministry of Education, because it is the same Government and they do not share anything. This will avoid the blame shifting between the Ministry of Education and the Local Government. Our children must not suffer because they are not sure who to blame.

Mr. Speaker, in Region 2 our children in the lower Pomeroon are deprived from a secondary education because the Government cannot make adequate transportation arrangements for those children to come to the school in Charity. It must be noted that the cost for one child to travel to Charity is \$1,000 daily. Imagine if there are three or four children coming from the same home.

Could the parents afford the money, especially since this Government has taken the cost of living to a hilarious hilt? I raised this matter with the RDC Chairman in Region 2 as well as the Minister of Education, but I am told that they have to wait until the dormitory at Charity is completed. Meanwhile, tragedy occurs. The Minister nor the RDC Chairman of Region 2 nor they together cannot influence to make shift arrangements for those poor children. I wonder if it is because traditionally the lower Pomeroon votes do not come in favour of the PPP/C.

At the Ulelli Primary School, the Headmaster has to cover with plastic to sleep during the rainy season, and this has been going on for years! Yet, the Minister of Finance comes to tell us in his Budget presentation and I quote, “\$2.8 billion was spent on construction, extension, rehabilitation, and maintenance of our schools and other education facilities countrywide”.

In Region 3 parents had to resort to picketing before work could have been done at the Uitvlugt Primary School. Region 4 poor planning and renovations were never completed for an on time return to school. There was picketing by students, teachers and parents in order for the Ministry to provide furniture for students at the Golden Grove Secondary School and many other schools. I have already mention grey areas of Regions 5, 7, and 10 in other areas of my presentation. Hence, I wish to look at Region 8.

By way of questions and answers some education issues were brought to this floor in the National Assembly. As you would know, twenty three pupils of the Paramakatoi Secondary School and from the dormitory were expelled. What is interesting for APNU is the programme which the Ministry had for these delinquents, or is it that we still leave school children to the wolves. That is a recipe to fuel crime. Let us not give up on those children.

Finally, I call on the Minister of Education to investigate into allegations of boys’ molestation in Region 9. I dare say if it is good enough to take handouts there, it must be equally good to protect those Indigenous boys and girls from being molested.

In conclusion, there are a lot of other areas I wish to speak on such as universal secondary education, the remediation programme, the issue of the no-child-left-behind programme, the issue of monitoring and evaluation, the EFA FDI programme lessons among others, but because of a time constraint I will not be able to do so. However, in conclusion I wish to make the following recommendations.

Mr. Speaker: You could proceed Hon. Member you have 10 minutes.

Ms. Ally: Firstly, the main issue of monitoring and evaluation is lacking. Hence, it does not give a time assessment to inform future plans. Secondly, NCERD must be put under a microscope; you need quality not quantity. Thirdly, stop the syndrome of “jobs for the boys” cronyism and work with professionals, seek to train them and give opportunities to unveil their talents. Special considerations must be given for increased emoluments and condition for teachers. Here, I reiterate the call by APNU’s Hon. Member Carl Greenidge to increase the salary of teachers by 20%. I know the Minister will come with an episode of the Guyana Teacher’s Union Memorandum of Understanding (GTU MoU), but if you read the Kaieteur News of Monday 9th April 2012 you see what the assessment of the President of the GTU was for the non-interest of teachers generally who did not attend the conference. Even the MoU that you may want to refer to is plagued with a magnitude of deficiencies. I call on the Government to restore the subvention for the Critchlow Labour College if you are serious about our young people. If the money allocated for the Ministry of Education is used strictly for the purpose intended, and with no diversion of deals, certainly there will be an improved system.

Finally, last Friday, Hon. Member Clement Rohee spoke of the Tsunami. I want to say to the Hon. Member that indeed the Tsunami is coming. The Tsunami is coming with raged and turbulent waters. When it arises it will see the PPP/C out of office and this country will usher in good governance in the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. So, let Mr. Rohee know that we welcome that Tsunami.

To conclude Mr. Speaker, I also call on all of our educators in whatever section your knowledge and skills are being utilised to consider having a good and improved education system in Guyana, and we must work towards achieving this. I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Member. I now invite the Hon. Minister of Education to address the Assembly.

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: May it please you Mr. Speaker. I wish to begin by offering to the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh our warmest congratulations for presenting a Budget that has not only content that is worthy of consideration with a view to adopting but for presenting it in such a way that his almost three hour speech was pleasant to listen to. I know that the staff of

the Ministry of Finance worked long hard hours and I would like to say to that staff on behalf of all of Guyana thank you.

I would also like to welcome to this Hon. House the new and young Members who have come here for the first time and I encourage that they continue, because I have seen very pleasant representations here, to represent their constituencies in the best way that they can.

We heard on Friday Hon. Damon mentioning that perhaps we should change the name of the Opposition to something else because maybe with that name the Members on the other side feel that they have to come and oppose. I heard the Hon. Ramsammy, who is always really pleasant to listen to because of his spirited speeches, saying that year after year we on this side come and propose and Members on the other side come and they oppose. That is because that is what we do.

I also heard the Prime Minister, the Hon. Leader of this House, saying that it was a confrontation that Dr. Jagan had with other members of society, perhaps Members of the Opposition that led to us having flights to go to the interior for ordinary passengers and led to the very progressive Ogle Airport expansion. It is that that I would like us to focus on doing, the Cheddi Jagan type of confrontation, that sort of contribution that we should all make to the development of this nation. It would be up to us in this Hon. House to make the changes that we all cry out for. It is up to us in here to decide how we are going to go forward.

I do not know that being civil and reasonable means that we have to agree all the time. Some of the very issues that we discuss here and some that we will continue to discuss meet with the most passionate of disagreement in my own home and we are all good people in my home. I am not sure that we have to agree on everything, but we must be reasonable in our assertion, demands and our presentations.

I do not believe that anybody in here will question the sincerity with which Hon. Member Vanessa Kissoon represented her constituency, or the passion with which Hon. Dawn Hastings spoke on behalf of her constituency, or the earnestness that attended young Trevor Williams' presentation who incidentally we should note is one of the few Members of the Opposition who did not read his speech as a first time Member, a young man; nor could we question the accuracy and the well researched view of the Hon. Member Dr. Vindhya Persaud or the passionate

accurate account by Hon. Member Jafarally or the detailed account we got of Region 2 by Hon. Damon who incidentally did not print his speech, he read it from a set of hand written pages. We cannot question that they have a deep and abiding desire to serve. I do not think that we can question that, but our presentations must be attended to by reasonableness.

I do not believe in coming to this Hon. House and saying nothing has been done by the PPP and there is no value for money or that there is nothing in this Budget for anyone. [Mrs. Backer: inaudible.] Your Honour, I am always very flattered by Mrs. Backer's attention. Some people say that it is infantile cattiness but I believe it is love, so I welcome the attention that I attract from Mrs. Backer.

Coming here and proclaiming that nothing has been done by the PPP and coming here and saying that there is nothing in this Budget for anyone, and saying that there is no improvement under this Government is as unreasonable as though we on this side came to say that we have done it all and there is nothing left to do. Coming to this House and exerting, you Sir, and the people of Guyana and exerting that the people of Guyana have given a majority to the Opposition and not seeing that those same people have asked the PPP/C to lead the development which this country would experience can hardly be called reasonable. Calling "sexily" for inclusive governance and slapping away every hand and every outstretched hand that is made can hardly be called reasonable. I heard Hon. Member Dr. Rupert Roopnarine in his maiden speech calling for, and I am quoting, "a new political epoch and seeing this new dispensation as an opportunity for nurturing a new political culture". Ironically, misconstruing what I said last year, my call for us to work together, so that he can make his point this year. Even more ironically, saying that they are prepared on this side of the House to meet the new challenges and rise to the occasion.

I would like to give the Hon. Member the benefit of the doubt, he has not been here, and I think all in all he is a good man. But, we have had repeated experiences where our outreached hands and our offer to work together has been slapped away. I remember when I was launching Legal Aid in Region 5 and I invited the Hon. Member who is the geographic representative, Jennifer Wade, to come and not only sit with me at the head table but make remarks on this programme. I did not give her a script, I told her to come and say whatever you want to say. The Hon. Member said that she was coming. I had Hon. Ramkarran who was our guest speaker and a whole set of

executive members of the Bar and Guyana Association of Women Lawyers (GAWL) and hundreds of residents of Region 5 waiting for the Hon. Member. She never showed up until the end of the programme, but during the programme colleagues and members of the PNC/R came with placards outside of the event launch. How is that working together? Perhaps Hon. Rupert Roopnarine did not know of that. Two weeks ago I invited Hon. Member Amna Ally, who has been publically announced as the shadow Minister of Education, to come on the television programme... [Mrs. Backer: Which channel?]

2.09 p.m.

NCN, no less, to discuss the very serious issue of corporal punishment in schools. The Hon. Member said she could not make it until 6.30 p.m. and I put the programme for that time. The Alliance For Change (AFC) was represented by Mr. Dominique Gaskin, Red Thread was represented by Karen De Souza, and there was a veteran teacher in the person of Jennifer Cumberbatch. We waited and waited but, alas, the Member did not show up. [*Cries of Shame*] How can it be reasonable to say that we are building trust, we are working with each other and we are prepared to rise to the challenge to work with each other? How can we say that and we come to this Hon. House with a motion in the name of no less a person than Hon. Roopnarine to change the Parliamentary Management Committee? [*Interruption*] No this is a fact. When the PPP/C was in office with a majority - not a slim majority but a several seat majority where several of us could have been absent and we would have voted and still won - we had a Management Committee where the PPP/C had five members and the Opposition had five members. Now there is the slimmest of majority, one person, and we come to change that Management Committee, irrespective of the agreements that we have reached amongst parties many years ago to have five members from the Government and five members from the Opposition. So when Members speak of wanting to work together it must be more than a fancy headline. It must be more than something that sounds nice on the record. The people of Guyana must judge us based on what we do and not what we say. I am wondering whether it is inclusive governance the Opposition wants or whether it is the government that the Opposition wants. Inclusive governance is what we are prepared to work towards; government, they are going to have to speak to the people of Guyana who have told them, "no". We are wondering, and I would genuinely like to know, whether the Opposition wants to work with us so that we can

develop this Nation or whether they want to pick up their bat and ball and go home, and come back only when they can sit on this side of the House. Because if that is what they want that is not a genuine call for working together.

I wish to focus on the education system, but before I do that I would like for us in this Hon. House, and the Nation at large, to recognise Mr. Sheik K. Baksh, a man who served as the Minister of Education for five years immediately preceding me, and who served the people of Guyana in this National Assembly for 15 years before. The records of this country would highlight the best results in every sector of the education system occurring under his watch. While we do not have the Education Digest from 1983 to 1994 they just could not print it because they had no money to do that - the Education Digest would show that what I am saying is accurate. I would like to say on behalf of the people of Guyana that we thank former Minister Baksh for his service.

Education in any part of this world is important. It is perhaps the most important sector that any country is going to have to deal with. We are vibrantly aware in the Ministry of Education that what we do now will determine what our country looks like in the future. We are aware of that. We are not alone in our questions; we are not alone in our quest for perfection. All across this world conversations are taking place about why the investment we make is not matching the results we should get; why boys are not as interested in education as girls; how we can stem the dropout rates. Conversations are taking place all across this world and Guyana is no different. We are not only having conversations on these issues, we in the Ministry of Education are doing tangible things which will give us answers to some of the problems we have. We are not perfect at all. In fact, we have many problems, but we have to sit down and discuss a way forward for those problems to be resolved. The easiest thing to do is come here and find a leaking roof, a paling stave that fell, a child who does not have a pair of boots, somebody's lunch kit that is not filled, and a teacher who was not trained. It is easy to do that. The hard part, the challenging part, would be for us to sit down together and chart the way forward so that our children can be the beneficiaries of our combined efforts. But we have to first be interested in taking this sector forward.

A marked feature of the education system, in fact of every sector under the PPP/C, is equity. I heard Ms. Ally doing a dangerous thing just now – attributing to politics a school that did not

have something, or a place that did not have something to politics. If there is one thing that politics should stay out of it is the education system. If there is one thing that we should not politicise, is the education system. [Mrs. Backer: What about Genevieve Whyte-Nedd that never got confirm and the board at UG? How do we keep politics out?]

Mr. Speaker: Could we allow the Minister to complete, please?

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, this education system where we have seen equity, or we have consciously practiced policies to equitably deliver services, has seen results. I remember when I was in primary school almost exclusively all the children that went to Queens College (QC), Bishops High School, St. Stanislaus College (Saints) and St. Roses High (Roses) came from two schools, Stella Maris and St. Margaret's Primary; now we are seeing children from Sparta, Cumberland and Regma Primary, In fact, the child who topped last year was a little boy from Regma Primary in Region 10. A number of top students came from all across this country last year. That is equity in service. When I was going to High School all the top students at Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) and Caribbean Advance Proficiency Examination (CAPE) almost exclusively came from QC, Bishops, Roses and Saints. Last year two students topped this country and the Caribbean with fifteen grade ones, Anuradha Dev from QC and a little girl called... [Interruption by Opposition Members]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members there are about fifteen different debates going on and we need to hear from the Minister of Education. When Ms. Ally was speaking I did not hear these interruptions. Could we allow the Minister to proceed with the minimum of interruptions and interference, please?

Ms. Manickchand: ...a little girl from New Amsterdam Multilateral School named Shalita Appadu. That is the equity of service, the result of it. We spread our service all across this country and this is what we get – children all across this country doing well. We must continue this trend. There is continuous attention and expenditure to the education sector. This year we are dedicating more than 13% of the national budget to the education sector when comparatively speaking four per cent was dedicated to the sector. Thirteen per cent of our budget is going to the education sector. This continuous attention, this continuous expression of love for our children through the sector, has seen us achieving Millennium Development Goal No. 2. We have

achieved universal primary education. That means children all across Guyana, in every nook and cranny, are accessing primary education, writing the exams so they can access secondary education, and can become self sufficient, but, more importantly, so that they can help to contribute to the development of Guyana. The continuous expenditure has seen us coming closer to a place where we have universal secondary education. We have a plan - we are about to present it and implement it - where we are going to pledge to this nation that we in Guyana will achieve universal secondary education.

We heard from Hon. Member Dawn Hastings that she was a privileged child who got a scholarship to access education and came to town. We are not bringing out the one or two good students to town; we are carrying the school to their homes, to thousands. Not one, thousands of our children can access the education. Now, in addition to the schools, we boast of 22 dormitories across this country where more than 2,000 children are accessing an education, where before now they would have been without access to that education.

I would be the first to say that we have problems in the dorms. Homes that have two children have all kinds of problems – rudeness, children getting away, not doing their homework and all other kinds of problems. Where there are several children in a dorm there will be the same problems. We are talking about adolescents, teenagers, children who are becoming naturally curious. There will be problems. We are prepared to address those problems.

While I am at it, let me just say the Hon. Member Ms. Ally said that we were ignoring the Lower Pomeroon children because the Lower Pomeroon votes for the PNC/R or APNU. The Lower Pomeroon children were offered places at the Wakapow dorms. They have refused those places. We understand why and we are making provision for them to access education through other means. So to say we have ignored them at the Ministry of Education is to denigrate all those people who are working hard to deliver education in this country.

The natural result of having more secondary schools is that we have more children writing CSEC and more children passing CSEC. When I wrote CSEC, 5,125 children wrote the examination, and in 2011 12,700 plus children were writing. When I wrote there were 20,616 subject entries and in 2011 there were 70,781 subject entries. That is the effect of equitably distributing a service. That is the effect of investing in the education sector. This extra attention we have paid

to the education system has seen us getting 70% trained teachers in our system presently. We are hoping that by 2016 all the teachers in our system can be trained.

The representation this Hon. House got just now, which incidentally is a misrepresentation, is that in the Essequibo there is one teacher to 100 students. We have moved away from the “one-teacher schools”. And I say to the Hon. Member that if she knows of a school like that, let me know. Because now the ratio is one teacher to 35 students in the secondary schools, and in the remediation programme it is one teacher to 25 students. In fact, we have no shortage in Region 2. There is an excess of teachers in Region 2 and we are trying to spread them out. These are the facts; these are the results of the investments we have made in the education system.
[Cross talking between Opposition and Government Members.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members do we proceed with the debate or do I rise and go out of the Chamber and allow this to go on? I do not know what to do today. Please proceed Hon. Minister.

Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Speaker, we recognise in the PPP/C that teachers are the backbone of our education system and that is why we pay specific attention to them. Through our policies and programmes, our salary scales and other benefits we say, “We love you and thank you”. We have been saying that repeatedly. It is true there was a time in this country when teachers fled. When trends like that start and if you look at the 1993 Guyana Public Sector Review written by the World Bank, not the PPP/C, wrote this:

“The most notable change has been the sharp decline in spending on teachers’ salaries both by the Ministry and the regional administration. Over this period spending salaries by the Ministry dropped from 62% of total recurrent spending to 25%.”

So when Ms. Ally says the history of this country did not start in 1992 she is right, and we are suffering because of the history that started before under the PNC.

Mrs. Backer: Mr. Speaker, on a Point of Order, it is absolutely inaccurate, and I call on the Member to withdraw the fact, that prior to 1992 there was no education. If it means that it means that a lot of us here, including Mr. Neendkumar... **[Ms Teixeira:** She did not say that.] She did say that. She said that prior to 1992...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mrs. Backer, you have put a Point of Order and then you continue a discussion with Ms. Teixeira.

Mr. Backer: Sorry, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I have heard the Point of Order. Hon. Minister could you give the context in which you made the statement and let us move on, please.

Ms. Manickchand: For your benefit your Honour, with the greatest respect, I did not say we did not have education before 1992. I said I agree with Ms. Ally that the history of this country did not start in 1992 but it started way before, and it was because of what happened way before that we are now suffering. That is what I said. And there is a man sitting out there with a copy of the Hansard that could tell us what we said. But in 1992 I was fifteen so I do not want to speak from a 15-year-old perspective.

Let me tell you what the official record of this country was. This is represented in the World Bank Report. The Guyana Public Sector Review which is in two volumes. I will read one paragraph. The Report is for 1993 and it is our history that the Hon. Member wants to hear about. This is what it says about education:

“In the 1960s Guyana educational system was considered one of the best in the Caribbean. Today (in 1993) it is very probably the weakest; learning in the schools measured by national and Caribbean wide examinations is extremely low; a large proportion of teaching force is unqualified and untrained; text books and other teaching aids are seldom available.

Guyana’s success in achieving universal access to primary school in the early 1970s appears to be eroding, and is accompanied by rising repetition and drop-out rates.

The sector’s problems are further acerbated by education subsidies which tend to be regressive favouring wealthy rather than poor children and tertiary rather than primary education.”

In 2012, what we have is a state where we have achieved universal primary education. In 2012, what we have is a place where we are closer to delivering text books to all our children even

though we still have 'a way to go'. In 2012, we have 70% of our teachers trained instead of a large portion exiting this country, and the untrained teaching this country's children. In 2012, we have a system where not only rich people are benefitting; we have a system where every single child in Guyana could equitably access service. That is what we have in 2012.

I did not intend to go back to the report but Ms. Ally is forcing me. Teachers are the backbone of this system. We have established 10 strategic training centres all across this country, again, so that we could equitably train our teachers. Because of that we have seen 70% of our teachers being trained. I believe it is because of this attention that we have seen 63% of our teachers in the nursery system being trained, 67% of our primary school teachers being trained with the hinterland moving from 38% to 43%. We have seen the secondary sector moving from 59% of trained teachers in 2007/2008 to 63% of trained teachers in 2009/2010.

Last week I sat with teachers who were delegates from the Guyana Teachers Union and I heard their concerns. I also heard their deep commitment to the development of this nation. I am confident that with the teachers we have in the system we are going to take that extra leap forward, year by year, until Guyana is developed to the point when we can all be proud and to the point when we can all say, "We have arrived".

I heard two sad stories. Two separate teachers from two separate schools, both pregnant, were beaten by guardians and parents. Three days after one of them was beaten she lost her baby. This is something that is absolutely unacceptable. Our teachers must not face violence in school. And I ask this House to stand with me today and denounce violence against our teachers. And I say that we in this Ministry of Education are not going to tolerate any violence against teachers. Complaints we will take; any violence against teachers we shall personally ensure that the perpetrators face the full force of the law. We stand with our teachers in solidarity against violence that is being meted out to them.

Mr. Speaker, much was said about Mathematics and English, and the fact that we have instituted an intervention programme tells you that we too are worried about Mathematics and English, particularly because we need passes in Mathematics and English before children can matriculate. We are deeply worried about this matter. We are going to continue to strategically employ strategies that we hope will see results.

I wish to read this to Your Honour. It is an article called *“What are Science and Mathematics Scores Really Telling Us”*. It was written by Allan Brown and Linda LaVine Brown. I am talking about the United States.

I quote:

“Maybe you remember the headlines: *“Math and science tests find fourth and eighth graders in U.S. still lag many peers”*, proclaimed the New York Times. *“No gain by U.S. students on international exam”*, reported the San Francisco Chronicle. *“Economic time bomb: U.S. teens are amongst the worst at math”*, warned the Wall Street Journal.

Of course, every commentator has a seemingly obvious solution. *“Spend less time motivating students and more time enforcing standards”*, proclaimed the Cleveland Plain Dealer. *“Give parents school vouchers, and open charter schools”*, demanded Newark Star-Ledger columnist. *“Throw away the calculators, and get back to basics”*, insisted a coalition of conservative Californians.”

It is true that we have problems, and I always remember Justice Bernard saying we are really good at self flagellation. We are excellent at beating up ourselves without seeing a bigger picture. When I wrote CSEC a much smaller number wrote CSEC. When I wrote CXC 9% of us passed English, and 18% passed Mathematics. [Mrs. Backer: Which school?] Nationally, across this nation.

When our Hon. Friend James Bond wrote CSEC in 1997 13% of our children passed English and 13% passed Mathematics. Our 30 per cent for Mathematics now is bad but it is better than it was before. The point has to be made that it is not now that we are doing bad in Mathematics, the country has a history of doing bad in Mathematics; it has a history of doing bad in English. We must examine why. If we really want a solution then I invite you come and sit down and let us examine why. Let us take this forward.

In 2011, 30% of our students passed Mathematics and 60% of our students passed English. I want to say this: while it is true we have done poorly we are not alone. Let me give you what the other CARICOM countries did in 2011. Antigua and Barbuda 28% of their students passed Mathematics; Dominica 34% of their students passed Mathematics; Grenada 31% of their

students passed Mathematics; Jamaica 33% of their students passed Mathematics; Montserrat 32% of their students passed Mathematics; St. Lucia, 28%; St Vincent and the Grenadines, 25%; Suriname, 5%; Guyana, 30%. There were four countries which lead the Caribbean, and the highest of those countries got 51%, barely over the pass.

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

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Rohee]: Mr. Speaker, I would like to move that the Hon Member be given fifteen minutes to continue.

Question put, and agreed to.

Ms. Manickchand: So, Sir, what we came up with last year is a five-person partnership – government, parents, students, teachers and volunteers to help us monitor this. The government was to provide equipment, materials and resources - textbooks, calculators, geometry sets, graph paper, past papers, and revision DVDs. We met with almost all the students who were present, more than once, from November to now, to inspire them and talk about attitudes we need to employ if we are going to be successful at these exams. We met with all the parents who turned up, more than once. The number of students we are looking at is more than half of the present cohort writing CSEC in the public schools; and more than 41 schools are benefiting in every single region of this country from those resources. Then there are volunteers who have kindly consented to check with these schools daily or weekly, however often they want, to ensure the system we put in place is actually working. Our teachers, whom we must commend, have not only embraced this programme but are enthusiastic about carrying it on. They have been putting in extra hours so that our students could pass Mathematics and English. We must thank them and say congratulations to our teachers.

And yes, it is true that we have to wait until the results to say whether this method worked. But this is what I will tell you, whether we see immediate results or not I can say with every confidence that what we have done is reinvigorate the mathematical conversation across this country even to the point where they call us crazy people at the Ministry. Let us start this debate, let us start talking about some of the solutions, irrespective of how you voted, irrespective of how you look, let us have that conversation in a constructive way.

The Guyana Learning Channel started in 2011. When we listened to the Hon. Member, the Chief Whip, Hon. Amna Ally, we would believe we had this programme forever but it is not working and there are so many problems with it. This programme started on 1st April, 2011 and from then to now we have provided a 24-hour service in Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 and 10. We are putting infrastructural works in Region 8. We are at different stages of setting up at Karasabai, Ituni, and Orealla. Mabaruma is experiencing some power problems that will be fixed shortly, and as soon as it is fixed we will be on air. From then to now 2,641 programmes were broadcasted targeting learning skills such as problem solving, collaborative learning, language skills, and different levels of reading proficiency. Over 60 local programmes were produced, but we want to take this learning channel to a different stage.

2.39 p.m.

We want to take it to a place where we can say, “Listen Guyana, big or small, adult or child, if you watch and follow these programmes on Spanish and Portuguese every day at this particular hour, by x number of days or x period of time, you will be proficient in these two languages”. Those are the kinds of innovative, visionary methods we have to use if we are to take our education system from a place where none of us are happy with, to a place where we can all be happy.

The Hon. Amna Ally raised a few issues that I would like to address. The Hon. Member said that we would... well I want to address this one first, the Hon. Member said the person who was appointed head of the TVET (Technical and Vocational Education Training) Centres was unqualified and went on to give enough characteristics of that person so that she was identifiable, including to retort to a heckle that it was not a male, it was a female. That Hon. Member is not capable of defending herself in this Hon. House. She is a former Chief Education Officer (acting) and she is continuing to provide sterling service to this nation. If you want to attack us, attack me, do not speak about my Officers; do not attack my officers. They have spent their entire lives giving service; all of them. Some of them started working from the age of 16 and they continue giving service and in any event... [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Ms. Ally, allow the Minister to respond please.

Ms. Manickchand: In any event, the Hon. Member was wrong, as usual. The Officer is the coordinator of the school boards under which the TVET Centres function. She is not the person in charge of the Technical Vocational Education and Training. I say on behalf of Guyana, thank you Mrs. Melcita Bovell. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Can we have the Minister proceed please.

Ms. Manickchand: The Hon. Member made much of us hiring cronies and giving jobs to the boys. Sir, I look across the education sector and I am very happy, very please and very grateful that I can rely on the persons who are behind me here today, to take this sector forward. These persons are not cronies. Look at them; they started working since they were 16 and 17 years old in this education system. How did they become cronies? Look at our Chief Education Officer, young, bright and thorough, how is he a crony? The Hon. Member spoke about monitoring and evaluation. We have one of the best persons in our system, Ms. Donna Chapman, who is going to make sure our monitoring and evaluation is at a different level.

We recognise we have problems, but you cannot come to this Hon. House and make out as though all the persons from the Ministry of Education are a waste. When you say we have done nothing, you are not speaking to Manickchand; you are speaking to the thousands of persons who work daily in this system. You are telling them their whole life they spent teaching and administrating, they did nothing. That is what you are telling them and that cannot be acceptable.

On the issue of computers, again, the Hon. Member did not represent to this House the truth. We have set up infrastructure across this country and an entire unit headed by Ms. Marcia Thomas who is going region to region to make sure those computers are installed and to make sure they are working. This is a bigger strategy; this is a part of bringing education to our people and giving them computers not only in schools... [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Sergeant-at-arms I am going to rise. I think this is becoming too... it is untenable and unbearable.

Sitting suspended at 2.44 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 2.52 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: The session is resumed Hon. Members and I think that we can all agree that what started off as a little noise, grew into a continuous uninterrupted din that is making it impossible for me to hear. It is causing the Minister to have to shout and when she goes there is a response and it is not getting any better. With the speakers who are to come I believe it is going to get worst. So it is obvious that we cannot and I will not continue in an atmosphere like that.

I have spoken to both Chief Whips and they both have pledged their continuous and continued cooperation and support. I am told that, particularly on the Opposition side, they are concerned and vex, if I can put it that way, about a statement that Ms. Ally cast aspersions upon a particular individual, she insists that she did not. I have advised her that the appropriate thing to do is to rise on a Point of Order and point that out in much the same way that Ms. Teixeira does from time to time, rather than have a battle of words going on. Ms. Ally has indicated to put things back on a proper course, she will rise on a Point of Order, which I will entertain and then Hon. Minister will continue. We will get this done in a respectful manner and we will get the peoples' business conducted. Thank you very much.

Ms. Ally: I rise on a Point of Order. In my presentation I did not say that the officers from the Ministry of Education are Ms. Manickchand's or the Minister's cronies. I said in my presentation...

Mr. Speaker: Ms. Ally the word cronies alone is ... Make your point of order about the person you said. That is a negative aspersion. I will have something to say on that in a minute or two.

Ms. Ally: Yes Mr. Speaker, but I did not say that the officers of the... the Minister referred to persons such as the Chief Education Officer and the Assistant Deputy Chief Education Officer, Mr. Olato Sam and Ms. Chapman respectively. I want to say this Mr. Speaker, in this House when we speak, we do not speak about person's staff and officers; we speak about the Government and the Government's policy and what the Ministers are doing.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, thank you for your Point of Order. Hon. Minister the point is that no names had been mentioned. The impression given that Ms. Ally had impugn the good standing and character of the Chief Education Officer and Ms. Chapman and Ms. Ally said she did not do so. So I ask that we modulate and we moderate our own...

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, I heard you and I am moving on, but I wish to say this though...

Mr. Speaker: Before you do, I would just like to just mention that thanks to a document the Hon. Member Mr. Rohee brought to my attention, it is a ruling coming out of the House of Trinidad and Tobago. My counterpart, Mr. Wade, pertaining to the right of reply, where he just granted a right of reply to a member of the public, a senior civil servant, who felt that his character was impugned by Members of the House and he was outside, so the Speaker allowed a statement to be read by the Clerk of the National Assembly of Trinidad and Tobago to defend the man's honour. I am asking that we bear in mind that though we have immunities, we do not have a right to castigate and impugn persons and their characters. I may be considering giving effect to what is happening both in the United Kingdom and has happened in Trinidad, as recently as the 4th April, in allowing citizens of Guyana the right to reply to statements made against them in their absence by Members of this House. Proceed Hon. Minister. Thank you very much.

Ms. Manickchand: Thank you very much your Honour, I look forward to that consideration, hopefully favourable that we could actually allow that. I think it will open up the Parliament a lot more.

Sir, I heard the Point of Order, I heard the explanation, but likewise, everyone else heard what was said and I will leave it at that. There was something said and I responded. Mr. Speaker our priorities... Sir, could I just be reminded of how longer I have?

Mr. Speaker: Seven minutes.

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, the Ministry of Education recognises that while we have to steal from the Hon. Kwame McCoy, we have come a far way. Even from year to year within the period that this Government was in office and I believe that we can fairly say that the education system now for over two decades is the best that it has ever been. But, I would say with equal surety that we are not where we want to be, it is a work in progress that we dedicate ourselves to every single day. Not only the persons at the Ministry, but the 10,000 teachers teaching out there, the parents of the 300,000 students that we have in our systems, the managers of the almost 1,000 schools that we have in this country, every day we are working to make it better. I cannot tell you, that if we spend 50% of our budget on education that we are not going to get those leaky roofs somewhere in this country; that we are not going to get a step that needs repairing; or we are not

going to get a student who needs a different textbook. I could tell you Sir that we have a lot of work to do in the system.

Our vision for this year is going to encompass us starting to or continuing along the track in a focused way to attain universal secondary education. We will be focusing on science and right now we are recognised in the region for the various programmes we have put in the science system. We are going to be focusing on the field of science and how we are going to better deliver this so that we will make children interested and not only interested, but that that interest will translate into graduation from science fields which our country needs.

We are going to be focusing on how we could provide better for our children with disabilities and our special needs children. We are going to be focusing on how we can improve the Mathematics and English grades. I would be the first to tell you that four months is the most undesirable period to have to change a grade. We know it has to start at nursery school, we know it has to continue in the primary school. This will be the only four-month programme this country sees because we intent to start it and put the measures in place, which needs to be put in place so that three or four years from now Mathematics will not be posing as big of a problem as it was posing for us for the last two decades.

We are going to be focusing on how to do more on the Learning Channel that allows us to use this as a resource, that was not only visionary, but could realise the vision we saw when we put it in place. We are going to be focusing more on monitoring and evaluation. It needs to be done and we have capable persons who can carry that programme out. I have met personally, more than once, the Regional Education Officers, telling them that they have our support and what we need from them in terms of monitoring. As we speak, we are looking, we have a consultant doing a study on what our schools need. By the time she is finished we are going to know, not only which schools needs a better sanitary facility or a better child friendly area, but we are going to know the costs that are attached to this.

Even as we speak, even as we can celebrate here right now, today in 2012, the progress we have made in this sector, I would be the first to tell you that we know every time one student does well, we have twenty more that we have to work with. Even as we celebrate our progress we must continue to strive to make sure that we take this to a different height. We take education in

Guyana to a different height, a higher height. In this effort, the Government alone cannot do it; the Government alone does not want to do it. The Hon. Vanessa Kissoon can tell me better about how the automatic promotion policy is working, because she is in the schools, she is there, we have spoken about it and we have to speak about it some more.

I want to; and I invite, with every sincerity, the contributions that the Members of this Hon. House have to make, whether they are critical or supportive. We must be supportive, we must, "Gave Jack his jacket" we must recognise when things have gone well, but I have no objections to being told that things are not going well and where they are not going well and what is going badly about it.

I have given to Ms. Ally, the shadow Minister, all the telephone numbers she can possibly get me on, home, office and cell. I have offered to Ms. Hastings, who is in the region, all the telephone numbers she can get me on. I said the same thing to Mr. Alicock.

I want to say, the Government is reaching out, we are reaching our hands out and asking you, the Members of the Opposition, to hold our hands and let us take Guyana forward, but there is only so far we can reach. If every time we reach out, because it is political expedient to do so, the Members of the Opposition hide their hands behind their backs, Guyana will progress, but not as quickly as we can progress if we worked together. We welcome not only the Opposition Members, but all the citizens of this dear land to work along with us, to take us to the place where we can all celebrate a Guyana where we are doing better in our homes individually and where we are doing better across the nation in every single sector.

The World Bank says that we have to cut poverty in half, we used to be 67% I believe in 1991 and in 2006 they did a report and said we now have poverty at a level of 35%. We have cut poverty in half, but I wonder if we went this route alone and if we had seen the kind of cooperation, I believe we can see in this House, then how much further would we have cut it?

While we have cut poverty on this side of the House, the Government has provided an environment where poverty has been reduced by half, we still have 35% of our people living in poverty and so until there is no person left living in poverty, this Hon. House and every Member herein has work to do. I invite the Hon. Members, genuinely, to work along with us so that we

can bring this poverty level down much further and much quicker with a view only to providing service to the people we have stood up here and sworn to serve. I thank you Sir. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: I thank you too Hon. Minister. Thank you Hon. Members. I now invite Mr. Joseph Harmon to address the Assembly on his maiden presentation to this House. Go ahead.

Mr. Harmon: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. It is with a sense of a great responsibility to the people of Guyana and to this Hon. House that I rise to make my first intervention in this budget debate.

Coming after my friend, the Hon. Minister of Education, whom I have had the privilege of working together with at the Guyana Bar Association, I must say that these hallowed Chambers probably do make persons a little more feisty, because I do not recall my learned friend this feisty a few years ago, but it is a good thing I believe.

Before my time starts to run, permit me first of all please to correct a little bit of misrepresentation which was made to this Hon. House by the Hon. Mr. Robert Persaud, the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, when he spoke on Thursday. The Hon. Minister said that Government had engaged the Opposition in the filling of certain appointments in the public sector, appointments to boards and commissions and that the Opposition had not responded. I wish to state that after an invitation was given to the Opposition by the Office of the President, the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Lance Carberry and myself attended a meeting at the Office of the President on the 29th February, 2012. That was a day when the entire Office of the President was flooded. My learned friend, the Attorney General was at that meeting and so was His Excellency the President. At that meeting some preliminary exchanges on the President's preferences for appointments to these boards and commissions were made. The Leader of the Opposition at that stage indicated to His Excellency and at that meeting that he was of the view that we ought to have a code of practice for persons who were going to be appointed to these public offices and the said Leader of the Opposition produced this document here called, "A Code of Practice". The Hon. Attorney General would have received a copy of this document.

The President indicated that he would wish to study this document as a prelude to concluding our consultations on the appointment to these offices and I must say that maybe it is that the President is a very busy person and therefore, until now, we have not had a response from him in

that regard. So, for the Hon. Minister to say that it is the Opposition that is not reaching out and taking the hand that has been offered by the Government, is clearly a misrepresentation of the facts, it is not so, I want to clarify that.

Today, I will address issues as it relates to public infrastructure. My learned friend, the Hon. Minister Robeson Benn; Housing and Water, the learned Minister, I do not know why he is not here today I have some words for him. The Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, I believe, is a very bright son of the soil and one who we all as Guyanese can be justly proud of; I do believe that. But in this 2012 Budget I see very little features which justified the several platitudes given to the Hon. Minister and his staff.

There is a remarkable absence in my view of originality in this budget. It appears to me that this budget was prepared long before the 28th of November, 2011, as I understand the budget process works. Therefore, it did not take into consideration the changes which took place after that date. The opportunity to consult with the Opposition on the final product, even after the 28th of November, I believe was spurned by the Government and this is what we get as a result of that.

The Hon. Minister, Mr. Clement Rohee, in his presentation in this budget promised us that we will see a PPP/C tsunami. It is a well know fact that a tsunami leaves within its wake a mass of destruction, loss of life, limb and property. We have to ask ourselves, is this what the PPP/C is promising this nation? Is this what you are promising the nation? It is also a fact that animals have a sense of a pending tsunami and they migrate to higher grounds before the tsunami arrives. Lions, tigers, sheep and even goats have a sense of a coming tsunami.

The theme of this Budget is, *“Remaining on Course, United in Purpose, Prosperity for all”*. Now if we examine the budget themes from 1999, in fact, from 1992 up to the present time, we see a curious mix of words from one year to the next. So what we have is just a little fixing of this word here and another word there and that is what you get for a theme. So no matter what the theme is, you are getting the same medicine every year; the same thing every year.

Since 1992 up to the end of the 9th Parliament, the PPP/C held majority seats in this National Assembly and so no matter how eloquent these speeches were, no matter how persuasive the arguments were from this side of the House, it did not impact in any

significant way on the allocation for these sectors that I am responsible for. The PPP/C had the numbers and if they said it was so, it was so. “All in favour say aye”
[**Members of the Opposition:** Say aye.]

On the 28th November, 2011, the majority of Guyanese voted to change this model of development which the PPP said they had been pursuing for the past 19 years and despite that rejection, to produce a budget which says, “*Remaining on course...*” is in my humble opinion contemptuous of the people of Guyana. The people said they wanted change, they got some change and we must give them that change in this House. So confident that they were on the right course that this is what the Hon. Irfaan Ali, not here today, said in his budget debate of 2009 and this is from the *Hansard*:

“In 2006, we spoke about our approach over the next five years and that approach was based on the concepts of pro poor growth. Let us not forget that our approach to development was not to achieve high growth and forget about the social benefit, forget about the development of the social services and forget about the development and delivery of education and health. No. it was ensuring those things remain priority, whilst at the same time, we strive for economic growth. These are the fundamentals...”

This is what he said:

“You talk about ideology. This is the fundamental basis on which our ideology is built over this period. And we are proud of that fundamental basis...”

He went on to say that:

“... the framework you will be proud of when we face the 2011 elections because we are going to walk away with a bigger majority, now that the people know what we have to offer”.

This is what he said. Well the Hon. Minister now knows what the people know. Therefore, you cannot give them the same framework. They said they do not want that

and you cannot give it to them. You cannot force it down their throats like bad medicine.

In the budget speech at page 32, the Hon. Minister of Finance speaks to physical infrastructure for transformation and in his speech he said that more than \$19.2 billion has been allocated for improvement of physical infrastructure that will encompass “water, roads, bridges, air and river transport as we move to modernise and transform our economy...”.

3.17 p.m.

In the said budget, the Hon. Minister said that he will invest \$11.8 billion to sustain and improve roads and bridges – the expenses of \$10.9 billion which will be spent on roads and \$964 million which will be spent on bridges.

Like the Hon. Minister, we on this side of the House also believe that physical infrastructure plays an extremely pivotal role in transforming a country. However, where we part company is in the Minister’s methodology in achieving that goal. We in the APNU believe that this pattern of development in which large sums of the people’s money are spent on projects which have the appearance of providing jobs for a selected group of persons connected to the PPP/C is wrong. We believe that this sector is critical enough to demand a national conversation – like my friend, the learned Minister of Education... to produce a plan on the network of roads and bridges necessary to link our hinterland with the coast and unleash the immense potential of our hinterland. We believe that a national conversation is necessary.

We believe that there is a vast amount of talent right here in Guyana in our engineering fraternity to develop such a plan that would give the Guyanese citizens the satisfaction that their monies are being well spent and that it is being spent in a proper way. The writings of accomplished engineers, such as Mr. Charles Ceres, Mr. Charles Sohan and others, have commented on the absence of a vision which defines our infrastructural projects and they have called for prefeasibility and feasibility studies, bill of quantities and project documents for major projects to be laid before this House. This is a call which we, on this side of the House, fully support.

In a letter appearing in the Stabroek Newspaper, dated 19th March, 2012, Mr. Ceres had this to say about engineers giving poor service to projects – I am not calling any names. This is a letter

that has gone unchallenged since it was written. I will just extract some aspects of what Mr. Ceres said. He said "...there are several ongoing projects on which design flaws are readily obvious..." This is not something that one cannot see. He is saying that, as an engineer, they are readily obvious. He said "I will begin with identifying the corrective work on the roadway at Hope on the East Bank of Demerara. The design solution at that location is attempting to apply a geotechnical engineering solution to what is essentially a hydraulic problem." Mr. Ceres goes on to say "While the solution itself may not be appropriate, its effectiveness is compromised by several design flaws. The most obvious design flaw is the location of the anchor piles within the active zone created by the sheet pile wall." He goes on to say that the revetment itself will mobilise active forces. This is in the public domain.

Let me go to one that is right nearby, at the corner of Vlissingen Road and Homestretch Avenue. The writer says this: "The road was recently widened to enhance traffic flow at the intersection. I think the intent is commendable, however, the intersection was widened by driving piles and building revetments into the canal on the west side of that intersection. This effectively reduced the area of the canal for the available flow of water. Constriction of the canal at this point has resulted in the creation of a backwater effect upstream of the intersection. So at noon on the 1st March, 2012, there was a marked difference in the elevation of about one foot between the area east and the area west of the canal. Castellani compound and a portion of Homestretch Avenue are now flooded because of that backwater effect." This is what Mr. Ceres said.

The question that these engineers ask, as do all other Guyanese citizens ask, are we getting value for our money. Will we get value for the \$19.2 billion allocated for this sector? I respectfully suggest that the answer is, of course, a resounding "NO".

For example, I believe that Guyanese ask the question "What is the point of building a four-lane highway on one portion of the East Coast of Demerara and, what happens to the other portions of this road?" Is this a national secret? On the East Bank they built a little piece, and then at the end of it, there is a two-lane road. Where is the national plan? There is no plan. Engineers with whom I have consulted on this matter informed me, and I do verily believe their advise, that this exercise is a colossal waste of money because what they are doing is to contract one engineer to dig earth from the sides of the road and take away the earth. They contract another engineer to bring sand from Timehri and fill that into the hole where the earth came out from. Mr. Ceres has

written about that and the suitability of having something like sand being put there when he feels that a better engineering solution would have been to utilise the same earth and use some kind of equipment to fix it. But this is all job for “the boys”!

We have received invitations from my friends on the other side of the House to visit some of these projects. I have had reason to write the Hon. Minister, Mr. Robson Benn, and he has responded quite nicely. I have written the Hon. Minister, Mr. Irfaan Ali, and he has also responded saying “you can visit some of these projects”. Well we wish to make it clear, and we want to send notice to all and sundry, that the representative of the people in this House, together with the competent technical advisers will be visiting all of these projects. We will have to ensure that the people get value for their money. The people have demanded no less of us and we will deliver. The slush funds to contractors who are sympathisers of a particular political party are going to be cut. We will get value for our money.

I will like to turn to the issue of air and river transport. At page 33, paragraph 4.48, the Hon. Minister of Finance noted that air and river transport infrastructure plays a crucial role in the economic progress of our country. He stated that the Government’s energies have been focused on improving international trade in goods and services. We believe that that is good, Hon. Minister. It is very good but, in this regard, what does the Hon. Minister do? He allocates \$717 million for the docking of vessels and acquisition of spars under this sector; that is it. I am advised by reliable marine engineers – and I verily believe them to be accurate in their advice – that a major portion of that money, if not all of it, may be needed to dry dock the two ferries, the Sanbanto and the Kanawan, even before they are put into use for the purposes for which they came, but more on these Chinese vessels later. **[Mr. Benn: “Chinese bad?”]** I never said so. I was trained in China; let me let you know that.

There is an obvious failure in this budget to address, in significant ways, a strategy for port infrastructure development; although, according to the Minister, international trade is very important, the shipping must be considered as the gateway to economic development. The allocation in this budget seems biased in favour of internal maritime transport as against international shipping. There is an ongoing siltation of the Demerara ships channel which limits the vessels of a certain draft from calling at this port. This continues to affect the efficiency and competitiveness of the shipping industry. In this regard it is noted that the country’s main

dredger, the MV Steve N, has been out of compliance for a very long time and there is obvious sloth regarding the repairs and maintenance of this dredge. There seems to be a lack of vision or forward planning since the effective operation of port Georgetown for several decades has been predicated on an effective maintenance dredging schedule.

For over a decade the shipping industry in Guyana has been issuing calls for the Transport and Harbours Department and the Maritime Administration Department to acquire a vessel with the capacity and the capability of carrying out hydrographic surveys with fire fighting capabilities and to do buoy tending; yet this budget, as presented, has nothing at all to do with the development or purchase of these assets. It is therefore logical to conclude that the safety and security of Guyana's main port has been placed on the backburner by this Government.

It is no secret that the two pilot vessels which are operated by the Maritime Administration Department are old, slow and outdated. When these vessels were acquired, approximately three decades ago, they were more suitable... [Mrs. Backer: Before 1992?] ...I do not want to say before or after anybody. However, with the advancement in ship technology, the ever increasing demand of international shipping and the security threat, there is an urgent need for more improved, faster and more efficient pilot vessels yet this budget makes no provision whatsoever for such vessels. It is clear to the APNU that special provisions will have to be made for harbour patrols because piracy and security in our harbours are very important issues.

The Government has acquired two new ferry vessels, the Sanbanto and the Kanawan, to operate between Parika and the now controversial stelling at Good Hope, Supenaam. There was clearly ineffective planning given that these vessels have arrived several months ago and are still moored in the harbour at Georgetown, while the stelling at Parika is yet to be modified to create a roll-on roll-off facility. What is worst, is that these vessels, as I said, will soon have to be docked because of marine growth and the absence of the requisite mechanical device which was not included in the original specifications. Consequently the people of Guyana will have to bear the additional burden of increased cost associated with those two vessels.

Some knowledgeable persons, including Mr. M. Ali, a retired Government of Guyana Chief Hydraulics Officer, in a letter to the Stabroek Newspaper on 21st March, 2012, expressed reservations about these two vessels relative to the draft and other specifications in light of the

draft of the Essequibo River. He said that these things are going to get stuck in the river. Most likely what is going to happen is those vessels will not be able to be utilised in their full capacities, so instead of carrying 40 vehicles they may only be able to carry 20 and, worst still, at low tide it will be different.

I am further advised by knowledgeable engineers in this sector that the cost of maintaining and operating these vessels, because of the types of engines they use, on a monthly basis, will far exceed the income which they bring in.

Mr. Speaker we looked at search and rescue: there is absolutely no provision for these, so our search and rescue capabilities have not been addressed in this budget. Regularly we read about our fishing folk who are stranded out at sea, who are robbed, some of them get lost out there. Just last week, I understand, there was a boy who drowned beyond the Demerara River and his body was floating in the Atlantic and the coast guard went past him and the explanation that was given was that they were inexperienced and therefore did not do what they were supposed to do.

Search and rescue is an important feature of any country. We as a nation must show by the allocation we make in our budget that we are serious about our fishing folk and, therefore, visits by high officials to commiserate with the families of these people when they get lost or they die is not enough. We have to show tangibly that we are serious about this and allocate resources for that purpose.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Hon. Member.

Ms. Ally: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

Mr. Harmon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this regard A Partnership For National Unity in its Manifesto, on page 9, stated this: “The APNU, in Government, will give serious attention to revitalising and restructuring the Central Planning Unit in the Ministry of Public Works to give greater focus and direction to a well structured and integrated approach to transport infrastructure, development and management.” We recommend the establishment of this Unit or the revitalisation of this Unit by the Government and we will support it.

At page 35, paragraph 4.54, the Hon. Minister allocates \$2.9 billion for the continued protection of our sea and river defences. In 2011 the sum of \$2.7 billion was spent on the protection of approximately 10 kilometres of sea defence in Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 for critical and emergency work. I agree with the Hon. Minister of Finance that our sea defence protects our homes, our social and productive infrastructure from the onslaught of the ever rising sea; I agree with him. The residents of Leguan, however, were only recently reminded of the perils of living there on an island. Let me read, a letter that was written to the editor of the Stabroek Newspaper on the 12th April, 2012, by Mr. Charles Sohan ...

Mr. Speaker: Excuse me, Hon. Member. Does somebody need to answer their phone? Do you need time to do that? There is a phone ringing.

Mr. Harmon: I do not want to read the whole letter but this is a letter which basically says that what had happened there at Leguan will happen there again because of bad engineering work and the wrong people are doing things that should not be done. Work for “the boys” again. He says, for example, “The Ministry of Agriculture, National Drainage and Irrigation Authority should not be doing that. That is a job for the Ministry of Public Works.” He says also, “An analogy worth noting that the Ministry of Local Government, with no experience in stelling construction, was the contracting agency for the failed Supenaam Stelling which eventually had to be taken over by the Ministry of Public Works for completion.” This is what he said.

Despite the massive expenditure in this area we continue to get shoddy work and our Ministry of Public Works seems incapable of supervising or demanding quality work for our money. I would wish to take one example to support my point and I refer to the Auditor General’s Report for the year which ended 31st December 2010. Page 73, under the heading “Accounting Area: Sea Defence”, this is what the Auditor General’s Report says: “At the time of inspection on the 20th September, 2011, the works on the \$550 million rip rap sea defence, Abary-Profit, West Coast Berbice, Region 5, was still at mobilization stage and some temporary works were being completed. Based on the documents seen, the project had exceeded its completion date by over 2 months and would therefore attract liquidated damages if any approved extension is not granted.” This is the important part, in which he says: “Payments under the contract amounted to \$156,561,000 but a valuation of the related works and material on sitet amounted to \$20,638,000...” \$136 million disappeared.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Speaker, on a Point of Order I would like to say that I want to object strenuously to the assertion by the Hon. Member that \$136 million disappeared from this project. The Auditor General's Report did not say that and, again, I want to object strenuously, strenuously, to the assertion by the Hon. Member that \$136 million disappeared for this project. If the Hon. Member could prove it or get the police I am prepared to go to jail today.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, on a Point of Order... I believe that the Hon. Mr. Harmon was applying basic arithmetic based on what he saw. You are the speaker immediately after and you may correct it but a Point of Order I would not allow because whether Mr. Harmon is wrong or right, he is seeing what is before him and as Subject Minister coming immediately thereafter you have a duty to set the record straight.

Mr. Harmon: Let me follow up, the recommendation by the Auditor General is this: "The Audit Office recommends that the Head of the Budget Agency carry out critical reviews of the Ministry's work supervision process in order to determine why progress payment of such magnitude could have been made for such meagre work in progress." What else do you want? What else?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Speaker, on a Point of Order, the simple matter of the Hon. Member, from his reading of the Auditor General's Report suggests to him that \$136 million disappeared and this impugns my character, the Ministry's character and the Government's character. I am calling on the Hon. Member, since he had sufficient time to research and find out on this matter before he stood up in this House to make such assertions...

Mr. Speaker: Okay, thank you. Hon. Member, Mr. Harmon, are you saying that the Minister has made off with \$136 million?

Mr. Harmon: Mr. Speaker, I did not say that. I am reading from what the Auditor General...

Mr. Benn: Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: With respect, Hon. Minister, I am speaking and you are to take your seat. With respect I am not going to allow continuous and repeated interruption of a Member's speech because some Members feel that they are aggrieved. You have a right to reply which is coming in a few minutes and you may present, as I said, all the information you need to set the record

straight. The Member is giving what is his perception based on the figures he has before him, right or wrong. I am not in a position to judge and I cannot, but you have the right to respond which you will get in a few minutes time. Thank you.

Mr. Harmon: I will now turn to housing and water, very quickly, but before I deal with the allocations at the Ministry of Housing I would wish to address certain statements that were made by the Hon. Minister of Housing and water on Sunday, 8th April, 2012, on page 16 of the Guyana Times Newspaper. Minister Ali being interviewed about the Budget Debate chose to hurl insults and generally impugn the character – I will use the word “impugn” now – and reputation of Members of the Opposition. This is what he said: He said that the Government was cognizant of the high level of irresponsibility displayed by individuals in the combined opposition, Opposition Member were irrational, that we were schemers and plotters, and that we were playing political games. This is what he said, the Hon. Member Irfaan Ali. I do not know if the Hon. Minister is aware that apart from being an officer of the Court, in good standing, I am a Member of this National Assembly and the holder of a Military Commission and a Member of the Order of Service of Guyana and I do not play games. My colleagues are not here to play games. Politics may be a game to the Hon. Minister but to us this is serious business. We are here, in the National Assembly, to take care of the people’s business and we take our oath seriously – to defend the Constitution of Guyana. So if the Hon. Minister and his colleague may be there to plot schemes and play games, we are not.

Over the years 2009, 2010 and 2011 this Ministry spent \$27.6 billion. This year the budget allocates \$3.6 billion in the housing sector to increase access to affordable housing, improve the quality of infrastructure of housing schemes and to regularise squatting settlements.

[Mr. Nandlall: 6,500 house lots.] Yes, I like the figures.

The question we must ask is: “Have we gotten value for this huge sum of money that has been spent?” The vision, as stated by the Hon. Minister of Finance, in the budget, on page 44, is to ensure that all Guyanese have access to adequate and affordable housing within the context of sustainable and economically viable communities. We agree with that. That is very good.

3.47 p.m.

However, this is what the Hon. Minister of Housing and Water, in his budget presentation in 2009, said:

“...part of the strategy to address low income families includes the development of 400 core homes, 400 core homes for low income families. This will be available, Mr. Speaker, through you, the Hon. Member Ms. Manickchand. This would benefit particularly those vulnerable persons within our society.”

What have we seen? In the Budget 2012 speech, the Hon. Minister of Finance reported, three years later, that there is the completion of twenty-five core homes and fifty-nine others have commenced. [Mr. Nandlall: That is over eighty families who will benefit.] That is out of four hundred, in 2009. Successive Members from the Opposition benches have been making the point about the need to properly plan these housing communities. Mr. Aubrey Norton in the budget debate of 2011, as reported in the *Hansard*, said this:

“...without fear of contraction...”

Those were his words.

“...proper planning is impossible under this Government since it has no land use plan. It is well nigh impossible to have a cohesive housing development plan if you do not have a proper land use policy. Rather than the Minister of Housing and water coming here to tell us how many house lots he distributed he must develop a policy which ensures that there is the development of infrastructure that is durable, relevant and modern, in which there is adequate potable water, electricity, drainage, recreational and cultural facilities...”

On 13th April, 2012, Ms. Roxanne Douglas, who resides at La Parfaite Harmonie on the West Bank of Demerara, lost her home and two children perished in the fire. While we commiserate with the family, A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) is cognizant of the reality of living at La Parfaite Harmonie and, in particular, Westminster, Phase 3 of La Parfaite Harmonie. This is what those people are living under: No accessible fire service, and even when a fire tender is available there are no fire hydrants; there are no police stations; in many sections of this community, there is no electricity; roads are in a deplorable condition - people have to walk about half of a mile to actually get to a minibus because of the condition of the road; there are no

schools and no health facilities; garbage disposal is non-existent; a multi-purpose centre which was built there, over two years ago, is still to be opened. It is locked up. This is happening in a housing community which was developed by the Government and so it was an excellent opportunity presented, for it to establish a proper place for people to live. Instead, it boasts in this National Assembly of how many house lots were distributed. The Hon. Minister must apply the \$27.6 billion, which this House approved, over the last three years, to the people's welfare. They need it now.

The new housing development at Eccles is another matter. I will go into that at another time. The quality of work on those houses which the Government sells to public servants and to persons at a certain level in society for \$4 million is a scandal waiting to be exposed. I have been there. For now, I would suggest that the Hon. Minister pays a visit and examine closely the work being done there by the contractors. This is a project that we, in the Opposition, will pay careful attention to. We will go and visit.

I know that my time is running short, but I would like to touch on the issue of water. In Budget 2012, \$2 billion has been allocated to improve the quality of water supply. Of that, \$900 million is for the installation of distribution mains; \$100 million is for the upgrade of water supply...

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

Ms. Ally: I move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Harmon: We believe that the right to potable water by all Guyanese is almost at the level of a human right and we support the expenditure in this sector with that purpose in mind. Our problem is the implementation of the plan and the accountability for the moneys spent on water. If we look at what the Ministry said about water for the Coastland and for the Hinterland, we will ask the Hon. Minister to explain to the residents of 'C' Field Sophia how far they have to go to fetch water; to the residents of Dazzell Housing Scheme on the East Coast Demerara why they have to pay \$500 for a small drum and \$2,000 for a four-hundred gallon tank of water. It is to ask residents of La Parfaite Harmonie about the roads, low water pressure and sometimes no water. It is to ask the residents at Blairmont Housing Scheme why they have to fetch water from a canal

to use. Why? The Hon. Minister must be aware of those things and that access to water is very crucial, and, therefore, I would respectfully recommend to him that he pays careful attention to those things. Those are things that we have spoken about.

Let me submit that in this budget there is no unity of purpose and, at the end of the day, if we allow it to proceed without amendments there will be no prosperity in this country. In fact, there will be plenty of poverty. This budget shows how out of touch with the ordinary citizens the People's Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) has become. It shows clearly why it was rejected by the majority of the electorate at the last election. The Hon. Ministers would want to give us the impression that they have just come and they want to work together. Twenty years we have been on this bus - twenty years – and it has been running. It is time. I surely recommend that we seriously amend this budget and produce one that really provides the basis for a good life for all Guyanese – a people's budget.

I thank you Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Members. It is about seven minutes to 4 o'clock and I have just been advised that the catering staff has not yet arrived. I will like to give the Hon. Minister, Mr. Benn, a full opportunity to respond and to be able to get any advice and or material that he may need. I am going to take the suspension now and we will resume at 5 o' clock on the dot.

Sitting suspended at 3.55 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 4.58 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before I call on Minister Benn to address the House, I would just like to make an announcement which I consider being pertinent, and it has to do with persons who are in the public gallery. I have had cause, in the past, to mention that persons who are in the gallery are to observe the decorum of the House, that is, by not speaking, clapping, moving excessively or, at any time, engaging any Member in the Assembly. Minister Benn has brought to my attention that words were spoken to him. I have since advised the person that that is not tolerated and so we would expect that in the future there will be no reoccurrence of anything of the sort. That is not to say, however, that if any Member of the House wishes to speak to a person in the gallery he or she may not go to that person, but we should refrain from having

members of the public coming into the inner sanctum, if I can put it that way, of the House... On that note, I invite the Hon. Minister to proceed and I trust that we will allow him to start and complete his presentation unimpeded, and with a minimum of interruption. Thank you Hon. Members.

Minister of Public Works [Mr. Benn]: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, first off, I would like to commend, in his absence, the Hon. Member Dr. Ashni Singh and his staff for the preparation of this budget. I would also like to welcome, particularly, the new Members to the House. I think their presence, in itself, should allow for better forms of debate, a more engaged form of debate, given the new configuration of the House. I would like to apologise, too, to you, Mr. Speaker, perhaps, for losing my temper at the presentation of the Hon. Member Mr. Harmon. But I need to start.

Mr. Speaker: I must say, on that, Hon. Member, again, as I said for Mr. Moses Nagamooto, you will remain honourable in my eyes. I did not notice any breach of the Standing Orders or I did not notice that you were at all angry, or that you lost your temper. Proceed.

Mr. Benn: I think that a quotation to start my discourse this afternoon on the budget from Charles Dickens, from his book "*American Notes*"... Particularly, I had to find it and haul it out because I am worried about the nature that the debate has been proceeding, the atmosphere engendered outside in the streets in relation to our engagement here in the House and the overall question of how we move forward. I know that the Hon. Member Dr. Roopnarine had made a few encouraging statements with respect to the engagement going forward, but for now I would like to quote Dickens, "*American Notes.*" He said that America was noted then for:

“Despicable trickery at elections; under-handed tamperings with public officers; and cowardly attacks upon opponents, with scurrilous newspapers for shields, and hired pens for daggers.”

I think a number of newspapers have been quoted in the House with respect to particular issues. I know that the budget debate, and the new exuberance, with respect to the configuration of the House, as I said, maybe, is going to some people's heads, but I think that at the end of the day, as I said in my presentation on President Donald Ramotar's speech to the Parliament, now is the time that the Guyanese patriots and nationalists - the true Guyanese nationalists and patriots -

must stand up, to read and to look into this current situation and to win from it the best for the Guyanese people.

I do not believe that, from the presentations made in this honourable House, thus far from the other side, the situation has been very encouraging. It has been said and it is noted...The Hon. Member Dr. Ashni Singh is not here today. **[Mrs. Backer:** He was here. He has gone because you are speaking.] He is not here at the moment, but a colleague of the Hon. Member Dr. Ashni Singh, Ms. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, is being considered now, perhaps the die has already been cast, as a Nigerian economist to be President of the World Bank. This colleague of Minister Dr. Singh does not have the luxury at this time...Of course, we will be happy if she could become President of the World Bank because then it would be in the hands of those who would serve it - this Minister, who is currently the Minister of Finance for Nigeria, does not have the luxury as Hon. Member Dr. Ashni Singh has, to speak of six years, year on year, of five and six per cent growth. This Minister does not have the luxury of being able to stand up and say that within the twenty years of an administration, in this country, of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), in similar situations, that her country has been able to move the life expectancy of its people by ten full years – one decade – as it has done in this country. In Nigeria, I believe it is forty-nine years - the life expectancy.

When we speak in this House on the budget we need to contextualise the situation in which we present our budget. We need to understand where we came from. People always talk about the fact, they say, that the budget is doing nothing for the poor; they say that the budget is doing nothing for the old people. People have stood up in this honourable House and said that increases, to the older people, on pension cannot even buy a loaf of bread and a quarter pound of cheese. In their day, from the other side of the House, there was no bread and no cheese! The older people, of course, were not a significant part of the population in their time. They would have died out before. There were all discussions and talks about people lying about in the street, and going into the garbage bins. **[Mrs. Backer:** Is it not true?] It is unfortunate. It is true that there are people lying on the streets. We have seen them on the pavement in front of the Public Buildings. In their day those people would have already been dead! Soon the new centre at Onverwagt will be finished, which will take care of the needs and the issues relating to, I

believe, six hundred elderly and needy persons in this country. There will be a new centre to take care of our old people. We must remember under whose watch The Palms fell down!

Mr. Speaker, the unfortunate discussion and misunderstanding you have seen today, again, in the newspapers with respect to the question of Value Added Tax (VAT), to the question of increases in the cost of living, and all of those issues that we have seen being discussed, of course, we have to take note of them.

The Hon. Member Dr. Ashni Singh is not here, but I would have had a couple of questions for him. A couple of these questions relate to the issue...if persons have not noticed, we have kept our exchange rate in Guyana stable. Where the landscape in the Caribbean and southern Europe is littered with economies which are in deficit and are requiring injections and emergency surgeries to keep afloat and alive, we have been able to keep our economy going.

The other questions I would have asked him are related to whether he has increased the money supply? Whether he has printed money? Whether he has done any Quantitative Easing (QE)? - I know that the answers are no. A stable economy, the prudent management that the country has had under the PPP/C is something those in the Opposition can wish away and ignore and have people on the streets not think that the streets they walk on, the improvements that they see, the improvements that they live in their lives do not exist. The fact of the matter is that a lot of the problems that we had related to the issues of confusion being sown and confusion continues to be sown, in spite of the numbers, and in spite of living the life, in the minds of the public with respect to our economic development or undeniable progress.

Persons have stood in this House and laughed at the four-lane extensions; they have laughed at the work being done as a waste of time. Some people have said that the... The Hon. Member Mr. Harmon did ask, I think - "why do a little piece and not go the whole hog?" I wonder where the money will come from to do all of these things that they want to be done all of the time. The Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh, last week received Mr. Yadav, the Chief Minister for Uttar Pradesh. Mr. Yadav went with a long list of requests, demands, requirements and expenditures needed. The Prime Minister of India did say to Mr. Yadav, in concluding, that he will "provide every help possible." On our side, we take the same approach - "every help possible" - because the interventions we can make can only come from the work and production

of our people. We will not create a “Pied Piper” scenario. We will not build castles in the sky in relation to the development of our country.

I must admit that I was disappointed by the presentation from the Opposition benches on this budget, particularly the presentation of the Hon. Member, the former Minister of Finance, Mr. Greenidge. [Mr. Greenidge: Who cares?] Of course, Mr. Greenidge does not care. The Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge, last year when the budget was being presented in this House, came into this honourable House in dark shades. The vision was too bright for him! Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge came into this honourable House to speak on the budget...and this is why we miss the late Mr. Winston Murray. I would say that the presentation by the Hon. Member Mrs. Volda Lawrence was superior to the presentation made by Mr. Greenidge. Mr. Greenidge came into the honourable House without any pockets. He did not have anything then to offer to the people of this country and, again, now, he comes with nothing to offer but platitudes and harum-scarum ideas with respect to this budget.

On the question of the increases in prices of goods and the cost of living in this country, where it is not managed, would create a terrible problem. There have been suggestions that the reasons we are having increases in prices are related to VAT. I want to submit, and I want to provide to the Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge and his cohorts on that side, that zero-rated items under VAT...

Hon. Members (Opposition): Cohorts?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I did say to an Hon. Member earlier that the words “cohorts” and “cronies” have a negative connotation, especially when referring to one’s parliamentary colleagues.

Mr. Benn: I am sorry Mr. Speaker. My interpretation of the word is that it is meant to be a group - a group of persons who come together at a certain place at a certain time.

There have been statements made that the VAT must be reduced to ten per cent. There have been statements made...and I have here a list of items which are zero-rated under the VAT. I want to remind Hon. Members that the issues relating to VAT meant that it was put in place of consumption and other tax items which were higher than it, in itself - with the intention of protecting the poor and the needy and reducing their expenses... or any interference with respect

to VAT... - there were essential food items, seventeen items, essential consumable items, essential domestic services, and a host of other interventions, which were zero-rated for it. But now we have had another renewed assault upon VAT. Persons have said in this House that wages and salaries must be increased by twenty per cent. Persons have said that VAT must be reduced to ten per cent. In the street they say... [Mrs. Backer and Ms. Selman: What is wrong with that?] I will tell you what is wrong with it just now. Persons have said that the threshold must be increased even further. Persons have made representation with respect to the corporation tax. There has been no analysis of what the impact of these measures would have on the revenue and the well-being..., and how the infrastructural and other developments, the social services of this country, will be maintained for the benefit of the poor and the needy. There has been no analysis. I have a list of the items which are zero-rated under VAT, and I would like to point out that in the Caribbean region where VAT is, countries are moving to increase it. In the United Kingdom, it is trying to move VAT, I think, from twenty to twenty-two per cent. In other jurisdictions, there is not only VAT; there are sales tax and state tax. This issue of VAT I will leave to the Hon. Member Dr. Ashni Singh to deal with condignly in his wrap up because I am one of those who know that this harum-scarum approach to the budget and economics is one which will bring us to disaster.

That reminds me of another budget. There was another budget in 1962, I believe, a Kaldor Budget. It was said that the Kaldor Budget would have killed poor people; it would have destroyed everything. We all know very well that at the end of the day, when the smoke had cleared, everyone acknowledged that the Kaldor Budget was the best thing for Guyana at that time, and that the measures adopted later by the People's National Congress - United Force (PNC- UF) coalition Government were measures which were mentioned in the Kaldor Budget. It can be checked in the record. Mr. Greenidge could sit here and speak nonsense. I am sorry to see that a man of his stature and merit from a time gone by has been reduced to a mere heckle in this House.

Issues related to the increases in goods and services are imported into the country. There is something called "a Index Mundi" on the internet and it displays a five-year moving average, month to month, of international prices for commodities. It shows that for oil, for West Texas Crude, there has been a seventy-five per cent over five years. That is something we cannot do

anything about. It shows that, for the index of food prices, all foods traded on the international market have increased by 46.51 per cent over five years. It shows that for fuel, the price has increased by 63.42 per cent over five years. We cannot do anything about that. Therein lies the increases in prices that we see at the shops. When we go into the shops to buy, it is a choice we make and at the last minute we can withdraw if we do not want to pay VAT. This increase in fuel prices is that which stimulated and created the push for changes in the Arab world. The Jasmine Revolution started when a man called Mohamed Bouazizi lit himself afire because he had some problems in relation to doing his work and that led to massive changes in the situation. The problem started in relation to the increase in food prices which were also related to the issues of global warming, where countries were being faced with reducing crop outputs, lack of water and all the problems down the line related to that issue.

5.20 p.m.

Nineteen billion dollars has been a proportion to my Ministry this year from the budget. I want to thank the Hon. Member Dr. Ashni Singh, again, for his considerations in relation to recognising how important infrastructural development is for the development of our country, and where it is noted that investment in infrastructure can increase the livelihood, the efficiency and the economy of poor families, by as much as thirty per cent, is being put in place. I am aware that there are designs on the budget that the Hon. Member Mr. Moses “scissorhands” Nagamootoo...

Mr. Speaker: With respect, Mr. Minister, I do not think that... That is a highly inappropriate comment from a Minister to a Member of the House.

Mr. Benn: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Mr. Member Moses Nagamootoo said, in this House, that he will take out the scissors, and take it to the budget, and cut up it. Others on that side said that they will bash the budget. I want to say, in this House, that we are at an important threshold in relation to these matters, because they can cut all they want; they can bash all they want. At the end of the day the people will see and note the interventions we would have made, how they would have affected their livelihood, going forward, and who made the cuts and who made the bash.

I want to deal with an issue that the Hon. Member Mr. Harmon related to this House. He was quoting from the Auditor General's Report, and the Hon. Member suggested that \$136 million disappeared and, imputed, I believe, that the Ministry and, therefore, the Minister, too, had a hand in the disappearance of the \$136 million of Governments funds. I would like to report that there is a project at Abary/Profit which has a contract sum of \$267 million, of which an advance of forty per cent was paid, and then an advance of \$100 million was paid for the purchase of materials, accounting for \$156 million, total. At this time the project is now sixty-five per cent completed. The contractors are working to complete this project. This contract has a liquidated damages clause and the clause has been applied. The liquidated damages clause has been applied and worked now relates to \$27 million in relation to the project. I would also say that this is a bonded project – that bonds are in place to secure the money with respect to this project. I am surprised... In the first place we were surprised that the Ministry was never given the Auditor General's Report to respond to, as it had to be done with respect to this project. We were never provided with the report, so we never had the opportunity to respond, and it appeared... There was every clarification possible, and information available, with respect to the project. So when transparency, accountability and due process are spoken of, all those things, we have them here. I say, again, I am prepared to go to jail today if the other Members can prove me wrong - if they can prove me, my Permanent Secretary and my engineers wrong on this matter. The Hon. Member, in presenting his assertions on this report, was deliberate in misinforming, in misadvising and trying to sow confusing with respect to this project.

I want to deal with another matter and it relates to the power supply in Linden. Enough, perhaps, has not been said, but I remember working in Linden, which today has the most reliable supply of power in all of Guyana, and we had to work hard to rescue the bauxite operations, both at Linden, Kwakwani and Aoraima. The Hon. Member stood up in this House ... In fact, the Hon. Member Ms. Vanessa Kissoon was screaming, from the other side, "*We ain't paying nothing.*" [Ms. Kissoon: *Ah seh we ain't paying it.*] Yes. "*She ain't paying nothing.*" But if the Hon. Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, who said that he was not running a "Republic of Linden" but a whole country, could not get it done then...? We have to work at this problem to make sure that the subsidies which are being given to Linden, which are supported by the Linden Economic Advancement Programme (LEAP), Linden Economic Advancement Fund (LEAF) and Linden Enterprise Network (LEN), and all those moneys provided by the Government of Guyana

through those services, to provide opportunities for the communities to move on... We believe that the community has moved on. The Hon. Member spoke, on the other side, that there was full employment then, but we know that in 1983 when the alumina plant closed two thousand men went home without a job – in one day.

Now they scoff at the work we do on roads and they are wondering who is doing these roads and whether they are properly done. They are not happy to see men working in this country. They are against, perhaps, at the sight of men working. I am encouraged to see men in this country working on the roads, bridges and all infrastructural projects in the communities, throughout the length and breadth of Guyana. [Mrs. Backer: They are selling sweets and cigarettes.] Some may be selling sweets and cigarettes, but they are employed; they are gainfully occupied and they are not creating problems due to crime. I want to say to the Hon. Members that they should not be creating situations where they appear to be - let me be careful how I pronounce it - against men - anti-men. Let me be careful, because then I will have to sit again. I am happy to see men and women working, it encourages all of us. We are happy to see that and we hope that the Hon. Members, when they are talking about some of the issues they are raising, will pay attention to this problem and give some encouragement to those working men and women in respect to the things that they do - humble as they may be.

I would like to speak to some of the issues in the budget in relation to the activities...

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

Mr. Rohee: I move that the Hon. Member be given fifteen minutes to continue.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Speaker, I was under the impression that I had forty-five minutes.

Mr. Speaker: You do, but what I realise is that if I just give Members five minutes before... So I am staging it so that you will have forty-five minutes, but I am giving you thirty minutes, then at forty-five minutes, then I will give you a five minutes. In that way you can prepare. But if I tell you that you have five minutes left, it could put you in some... So proceed.

Mr. Benn: I would like to speak quickly on some of the activities we have done in some areas, in relation to the works in the various departments, If I start, perhaps, about the... The Civil Aviation Department has been moving from strength to strength. The Guyana Civil Aviation Authority has been working hard to facilitate and manage air transport and air traffic in Guyana's sovereign airspace and landing sites in the country. We would like to note particularly that the number of passengers, who have been carried by our domestic carriers, has shown a significant increase from nine thousand one hundred and thirty-nine passengers in 2010 to twelve seven hundred and twenty-three in December. For the comparative years in 2010, ninety-six thousand nine hundred and eleven persons were carried by our domestic carriers and in the year 2011 there has been an increase of one hundred and forty-five thousand persons, an increase of about forty-six per cent!

In relation to cargo carried, there has been, in the year 2010, thirteen million pounds of cargo carried and in 2011 there has been an increase to twenty million pounds, a significant increase which points to the dramatic improvement in the domestic cargo being moved in our country. This is significant because, as you know, Mr. Speaker, we have invested in a public-private partnership with the Ogle Aircraft Inc. and we are working, this year, to complete the making of Ogle Airport into a regional airport. The Guyana Civil Aviation Authority has almost finalised investments and installations related to improvement of the air navigation services and we have spent close to \$1 billion in improving the radios, the infrastructure on the ground, the Very High Frequency Omni-Range (VOR), the systems relating to improving landings and take-offs at the Ogle and Cheddi Jagan International Airports to improve the efficiency and flight safety at the locations.

I move on to the Cheddi Jagan international Airport (CJIA), total passenger movement has increased by six per cent, year on year, 2010 to 2011. There is now a total passenger movement of four hundred and seventy-three thousand one hundred and twenty persons. I would say that year to date, even while there are difficulties with REDjet, and even now that an arrangement has just been done to have Suriname Airways to begin its flights, there is an increase of twenty-three per cent in terms of persons using the airport - gross numbers, in terms of total passengers movement.

In terms of total flights landing, incoming and outgoing, there have been significant increases by all the operators - Caribbean Airlines by sixty-three per cent, Leeward Islands Air Transport (LIAT) by sixty-two per cent, Miata by thirty-one per cent, Delta by eighty-four per cent, REDjet by fifty per cent and other itinerant flights by thirty-six per cent.

We continue to make investments in the interior landing strips. The Guyana Civil Aviation Authority is expected to allow for the installation of tracking devices in all aircrafts flying in the sovereign airspace so that any plane flying in our international airspace could be tracked and identified.

An arrangement has been entered in with a company, China Harbors Inc, in relation to dealing with the current facilities, challenges and constraints at the CJIA. Persons who use the facility - I have a picture here, taken at 3 a.m. - would be aware that the current airport is very small. It is not an internationally rated or standard facility. It does not have air bridges; it does not have the equipment and other arrangement which will handle passenger growth going in to the next fifty years. So an arrangement has been entered where an amount of \$150 million will be spent with the company, China Harbor Inc, to improve the facility at the airport. In the first instance, the runway will be extended by one thousand and thirty-three metres and a new airport terminal building will be constructed. This is a dire necessity if we are to take advantage of the development of the flights coming south to north and in South America and if we are to take the opportunities of having flights landing from South and western Africa, and also Indonesia and Singapore. There is a great opportunity there that still lies a-begging for us to take advantage of those marketplaces so that all types of large and white bodied aircrafts can land at the airport.

The loan is being concluded with the China Export Import (EXIM) Bank for US\$130 million. The Government of Guyana is expected to contribute a difference of US\$20 million. We hope that this approach will resolve a lot of the issues, not only the physical and infrastructural issues, but also the human and social issues which currently surround the airport, particularly the persons who are living on the airport land and the issues, which we hear of from time to time, with cocaine being thrown over the fence or holes dug on the runway with cocaine in them, all of those problems. We hope to resolve those issues.

The Demerara Harbour Bridge Corporation has done exemplary work in relation to maintaining its facility. It will be able to extend the life of the structure, which we believe - when it would have completed the repairs to the hydraulic ramp, over a two-week period, by the middle of next month – of seven to ten years so that we can rely on safe and proper travel over the Demerara Harbour Bridge. If I compare the daily total of travelling over the bridge, it is in the amount of eight thousand one hundred and forty-five vehicles. For the issues relating to the Demerara Harbour Bridge, and to the East Bank highway, we have been considering the issues of congestion crisis over the bridge, issues relating to working with the Guyana Police Force to resolve some of those, and the growth of vehicular traffic in our country. I want to note that our vehicle stock is said to be some seventy thousand vehicles of all types. We are aware, for the last three years, that the increases in vehicles every year have been the amount of ten thousand new vehicles. In the old days – I would not say which days - the new stock of vehicles would have increased in an amount of two thousand three hundred vehicles.

The stock of vehicles has been increased by five-fold and this is why we are putting money into the investments, into the four-lanes on the East Bank, on the East Coast, going first to Buxton and then to Golden Grove, to reduce the congestion and to reduce the delays and to make life easier for people, and also to accommodate the growth. If the cars alone tell us that it is increasing by five-fold, to accommodate the growth which some people, on one side of the House, do not see, and do not want to see, but the people who drive the cars... The people who expect that the four-lane will be completed...

Hon. Member Mr. Harmon stood up in this House and was quoting from an engineer who said that the sides of the canal are being dug out and filled with sand. Well, I do not know of another way to deal with slop because it is a canal which is being dug and sand is being put, which is a material that can be drained to build up and make stable the embankment. I say here, again, today that we are going to, soon, have our engineering conference and I am inviting all Members of this House to come and to partake, and to critique and to criticise, and engage in peer-review so that true facts can be known. Persons have said that the revetment at New Hope, that there is writing in the newspapers by this surveyor... [Mrs. Backer: He is not a surveyor.] He is a Geo-Technical Engineer... that geo-technical studies were not done and that the anchor piles are within the area of the slip circle of the revetment. [Mrs. Backer: That is true.] That is not

true. [Mrs. Backer: So the boy is a liar.] He can decide for himself, when he comes and sees the information, whether he thinks you are a liar or who the liar is, but I am saying that that is not true. Drill holes were drilled; geo-technical analyses were done; embankment on soil stability analyses were done and calculations were also done by hand. The information is there for evaluation and for all to see. We are now completing an arrangement which will last for the next twenty years. People can scoff at our efforts but maybe there was not anything to scoff at in the other time because there was nothing built. There was nothing to be built after a certain period of time.

I would like to turn to the Maritime Administration Department (MARAD). It is true that we have run up a deficit with respect to dredging.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have five minutes remaining.

Mr. Benn: We have indeed run up a deficit with respect to dredging. This deficit has been occasioned by, as was said, the decrepit state of the Steve "N". The Steve "N" has just been repaired. We expect it to go into service soon, but we anticipate that we will have to replace the equipment and that is what we are working towards. We have also talked... and we are working on the issues. We even made visits to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, to its maritime officials, to examine the pilot vessels it has because we, too, have recognised, and we have said, that we want faster boats which will not simply go eight nautical miles but twenty or twenty-four nautical miles, for optimal arrangements.

Any death on the high seas in legitimate circumstances is regrettable. Our work, with respect to search and rescue, and all those issues, is well known. We made tremendous efforts on the recent incidents to bring succour and help to those persons who were in distress on the high seas. I believe, given the time of notification which we had... Let me say that there was never a search and rescue centre in the Maritime Department of Guyana - never in the history. There is a search and rescue centre which is mobilised every time an incident occurs and we have said that and it is there. The Hon. Members are welcome to visit.

MARAD has shown tremendous strides to being able to develop the maritime issues in relation to Guyana. Persons on the other side have difficulty in saying *Kanawan and Sabanto*, but, yes, we hope that shortly those vessels will come into operation. The Parika facility is completed; the

Supenaam facility is soon to be completed, and we welcome them to join us on those boats from the People's Republic of China. I do not want the Hon. Members to be coming out there and attempt to look at a "gift horse" in the mouth. The vessels have already been cleaned; they have already been in dry dock for the little changes which had to be made and are waiting, on the water, to go over to Parika and Supenaam within a week's time. Honourable ladies and gentlemen, you can scoff all you want.

I have a long list of roads which we have completed and accomplished, all over Guyana, in every nook and cranny. Maybe I should start by calling out the ones in Linden - Damon Avenue, Regma, Fraser Street, Moraballi... [*Laughter (Opposition)*] You can laugh at it but when the scissors are brought out I want you to be able to advise those persons for whom you are going to apply the scissors, to their interest, what you cut out and why you would have cut it out.

5.50 p.m.

Let me say too, there are Miscellaneous Road Programmes; there are Hinterland Road Programmes. Maybe the Hon. Members did not hear the Hon. Member Pauline Sukhai, Minister of Amerindian Affairs. For the first time minibuses are going to Karasabai. She spoke about the reduction in the cost of moving from Karasabai to Lethem, from \$60,000 to \$6,000. Mr. Speaker, I am telling you, before the end of this year, we shall be at Monkey Mountain! Our Hinterland roads will be at Monkey Mountain. If there was a dream that had to be retrieved from Monkey Mountain we will retrieve it and bring it! We will realise the dream on Monkey Mountain, and beyond that, I am going forward, we shall go further and build and bring for our people. I know the Hon. Member still does not believe that a minibus can go to Karasabai. I will get the man who will take that Member there.

In closing, I want to thank, on my own behalf, and on the behalf of the Government, the efforts that our engineers and administrators have made under difficult circumstances to continue building in our country. I guess they would have had a taste of the critiques and criticisms - not bad perhaps - which comes out of this honourable House. I am sure that most people here would agree that they are not warranted. We can refute all of them. If we build there are times when there will be failures and disappointments, but we have to keep building. Any person, any dispassionate observer, any place on this planet, would have to admit - dispassionate, unemotive

observer - that the greatest periods of growth, the time for the springing off for Guyana's development, ...the opportunity has never been greater. We can talk about the developments - the expectations we have for petroleum; the expectation we have for developments in the mining, otherwise, and the expectations for an improve life for all of our people! I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Member. Hon. Members, we will now hear from Mr. Christopher Jones who is no stranger to this House but is speaking for the first as a Member of Parliament. Come on now Mr. Jones with your maiden speech.

Mr. Jones: I rise to make my contribution to the Budget 2012. But before I do this, Comrade Speaker, permit me to just note a statement by the Hon. Minister of Education as it relates to the teachers. She said: "We love the teachers and thank you." She also said: "Teachers are the backbone of the nation." Of course, no one will dispute that, but when the teachers, and by extension the public servants, can go to the marketplace and say to the vendor, "I love you; give me some groceries", then the Opposition will be silent.

I turn my attention to the Budget 2012, presented under the theme, "*Remaining on Course, United in Purpose, Prosperity for All*". The theme for this budget seems to suggest that despite the burdens of a sixteen per cent Value Added Tax, high levels of unemployment, discrimination, corruption, high rates of school dropouts and a high crime rate, this Government intends to remain on that course.

"United in Purpose": Given the composition of this Tenth Parliament, one would have believed that the Government would have grasped the opportunity to ensure that all of the political parties represented in this House play a meaningful role in the putting together of this Budget 2012. This did not happen. So much for "United in Purpose"

"Prosperity For All": In analysing the Budget 2012, it provides great difficulties for one to see where or to whom this prosperity goes. Certainly, it is not the pensioners; it is not those receiving public assistance; it is not the members of the police force, the army, the nurses or the teachers. It is prosperity, for whom?

It would be remiss of me not to iterate a statement issued on December 12, 2011 by then presidential candidate of APNU, now leader of the majority, the Hon. David Granger. The statement read, and I quote:

“Brigadier David Granger has issued an urgent call for the establishment of a tripartite budget committee. The call comes before the convening of the 10th Parliament, expected to take place later this year.

Mr. Granger also stated in the same statement:

“The proposed tripartite budget committee be convened as early as possible to oversee the preparation of the budget (and subsequent budgets). This committee will, among other things:

- collaborate with the Bank of Guyana, Guyana National Bureau of Statistics and other departments in presenting an accurate and detailed picture of the economy;
- identify all sources of funds and examine potential sources of new funds;
- propose tax reform measures, including the lowering of VAT and personal income tax, with their likely impact on revenue and economic growth.”

Article 13 of Guyana’s Constitution affords citizens and their organisations opportunities to participate in the management and decision making processes of the state. This basic right this Government has failed to grant.

We saw on November 28, 2011 that over one hundred seventy thousand Guyanese have placed their confidence in a new dispensation - fresh ideas, an end to the ayes have it and an end to business as usual, and not in the incumbent. As such there is the absolute need for meaningful consultation with all stakeholders, especially young people who will ultimately be the beneficiaries of all programmes and policies implemented by this or any Government.

In his Budget 2012 presentation, to this esteemed House, the Hon. Minister of Finance, under the caption “Youth”, stated, and I quote:

“...over 2,900 out of school youths and other vulnerable young people were trained under the National Training Programme for Youth Empowerment (NTPYE), the Board of Industrial Training (BIT), and the Youth Entrepreneurial Skills Training (YEST) Programme.”

Training of young people must be applauded, however it should be noted that it is the responsibility of the Government to ensure that the nation has a well trained cadre of youth, equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to function effectively in the workforce. Since that matter has been cleared the questions which loom large are: Where are these youths employed and where are the jobs for those who will be trained in 2012? Was there a detailed study done to ascertain whether the training given is relevant to the current job market or even if jobs are readily available for the new trainees? Training persons is commendable, but it must be complemented with the creation of job opportunities. If this Government is serious about empowerment of young people it would formulate policies and programmes that can address this issue in a real way.

We were told by the Hon. Minister of Finance that some four hundred jobs will be created this year. Has the Government noted that in 2011 there were approximately five thousand five hundred graduates from the University of Guyana, five hundred and forty-five from the Government Technical Institute (GTI), four hundred and sixty-one from Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE), one hundred and thirty-four from Guyana Industrial Training Centre (GITC), and seventy-eight out of the Carnegie School of Home Economics (CSHE)? It is some six thousand seven hundred and eighteen from just five institutions coupled with the two thousand nine hundred from the various training programmes as highlighted by the Hon. Minister of Finance, a figure of nine thousand six hundred and eighteen. This represents but a small fraction of persons placed on the job market every year. I am sure that the Minister of Labour is aware of the number of people leaving these learning institutions yearly. Unfortunately, what we see there is the unwillingness by the Government to confront the question of the country's growing unemployed population. The International Labour Organization (ILO) stated, and I quote:

“...‘young people are more than three times as likely as adults to be out of work.’ Open unemployment is however the tip of the iceberg – the ILO estimates that an additional three hundred million plus youth can be categorised as ‘working poor’, meaning that they

are living below the US\$2 a day poverty line, despite working. These youths are often forced to work in deplorable conditions, for meager pay, trapped in the limitations of the informal economy.”

So I echo my own sentiments that it is commendable for the Government to train its youths in various fields, but after that, what is next? Where are the jobs?

One does not need a microscope to see the coherence of certain fallacies presented in the Budget 2012 as in the 2011. To bring clarity to this statement let me first focus on an excerpt of the Budget 2012. The Hon. Minister of Finance, in his budget presentation, said, and I quote:

“Mr. Speaker, the past year has witnessed significant developments in the area of sports infrastructure. In 2011, the National Aquatic Centre at Liliendaal was opened, along with our country’s first public squash courts at Racquet Centre in Georgetown.”

The Hon. Minister of Finance also told this House that a sum of \$675 million has been earmarked for continuation of the athletic track at Leonora, among other sporting facilities. When one notes that over the years Guyana’s best athletes came from Regions 10, 5 and 4, the question that arises is: Why the track is being built in Region 3? In a country of some eighty-three thousand square miles it is quite regrettable to note that the development of sports, and in extension youth, has been limited, whether deliberately or by sheer coincidence, to a small fraction of the country. Should not the allocation and utilisation of the country’s resources be for the development of all?

The Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport Dr. Frank Anthony, in his Budget 2011 presentation, alluded to the efforts made by his Government to develop sports and sporting infrastructure in Guyana. He said, and I quote:

“...ten multi-purpose centres that the Government is establishing in schoolyards across the various regions; it is also the ten multi-purpose tarmacs that the Government has established in various communities. This year will be adding to all of that because Government has set aside \$200 million to be spent in communities across this country. Therefore there will be approximately 200 grounds in various communities that will benefit from small grants. ”

I must bring this House's attention to the Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport's Budget 2012 presentation in which he stated that Government has set aside \$180 million, this year, for the rehabilitation of grounds, therefore communities can benefit from small grants. The question has to be asked: Where is the \$200 million, as the Hon. Member pointed out, that was allocated to the rehabilitation of communities grounds, last year? But I would not go in-depth with that, because on Wednesday this House will resolve itself into Committee and, of course, we in the APNU stated that we will be going through these Estimates page by page, line by line and the Hon. Member will have to account for the \$200 million. I must add, with a fine-tooth comb.

The Hon. Minister did not, at that time, name those communities, but we were told that some \$200 million of the taxpayers' dollars would be spent. Upon investigation, it is impossible for one to locate those multi-purpose centres. It is my fervent request that the Hon. Member would indicate to this House the exact geographic location of those centres, of which I am sure others, as myself, are eager to have a tour. One also hopes that the Hon. Member can furnish this House with the specificity as to those communities which were beneficiaries of those grants as well as an overall assessment of the said project and the criteria used.

In his presentation on the Budget 2011, former Member of this House, Mr. Steve Ninvalle named several communities in which development was poised to take off. He indicated, and I quote:

“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, De Willem, Charity, Plaisance and Patentia”.

My investigation has revealed that there is no basketball facility at any of the named areas. To use the words of the Hon. Member, now Attorney General, it was just fluff.

There is the saying “a picture tells a thousand words”, so I now present to this Hon. House, the evidence, or to quote the Hon. Member Mr. Rohee, I now present the “*ee-vidence*”. Diamond market tarmac, fluff.

Hon. Members (Opposition): Fluff.

Mr. Jones: Enmore market tarmac, fluff.

Hon. Members (Opposition): Fluff.

Mr. Jones: Bath/Waterloo, fluff.

Hon. Members (Opposition): Fluff.

Mr. Jones: Buxton.

Hon. Members (Opposition): Fluff.

Mr. Jones: Pouderoyen.

Hon. Members (Opposition): Fluff.

Mr. Jones: DeWillem.

Hon. Members (Opposition): Fluff.

Mr. Jones: Charity.

Hon. Members (Opposition): Fluff.

Mr. Jones: Lusignan.

Hon. Members (Opposition): Fluff.

Mr. Jones: Plaisance.

Hon. Members (Opposition): Fluff.

Mr. Jones: And Patentia.

Hon. Members (Opposition): More fluff.

Mr. Jones: Fluffy.

Mr. Speaker: Could you send those up as exhibits so I could observe them later on?

Mr. Jones: Sure Cde. Speaker. I will do so. Where has the money gone? Where has the hard work for taxpayers' money gone? The Hon. Member must account.

As a representative of youth, I must registered in this Tenth Parliament our disgust, dissatisfaction and disappointment with the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, having been in office for a number of years and to date this country does not have a youth policy. The Hon. Minister should hang his head in shame and do the honourable thing. I am of the opinion that no serious studies have been done in the preparation for the earmarking of developmental projects in the area of sports. Rather it seems as though projects are proposed and done without consulting stakeholders, in addition to being done in a willy-nilly manner. I am also of the opinion that if politics is taken out of sports and a genuine multi-stakeholders forum is held it will not only serve well for the development of sport but it will also provide a holistic approach or policy for youth development.

In taking an analytical look at the facts before this noble House, one can from his or her own opinion on whether there has been equity in the distribution of the country's resources and to whom, and for what purposes these resources have been used. One has to see sports as critical to the developmental thrust of youth and therefore resources must be put into sports for it to be successful in the long term. There is the need for sports to be better organised in schools. There is the need for training of coaches for basketball, football, cricket and the other sporting disciplines. There should be a nexus with schools and sports. To quote Mr. Ollie Cooperwood, an assistant wrestling coach of the West Carteret High School, in the United States of America, on the importance of sports in the life of a young student, he stated:

“The importance of sports in the life of a young student is invaluable and goes much further than the basic answer that ‘it keeps kids off the streets.’ It does in fact keep kids off the streets, but it also instills lessons that are essential in the life of a student athlete. Sports play a pivotal role in the makeup of a young athlete, especially in the middle school to high school years where student athletes are much more mature and mentally developed. Where else can a young, impressionable youth learn values like discipline, responsibility, self confidence, sacrifice, and accountability.”

Mr. Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations, stated and I quote:

“Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society’s margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies”

I take this opportunity to remind this noble House that it is the responsibility of those in positions of authority, public trust, to cater for and take care of the needs of the youth of Guyana. Let us aspire to join forces to work on policies and programmes to aid in the development of all Guyanese. For the future of this country, and her citizens, transcends beyond political differences, racial or other barriers. The life of each citizen of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana is impacted by each decision that we make in this esteemed House.

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

Mr. Ally: I move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Jones: There is also the need for sports to be handed back to the Guyana Teacher’s Union.

So with that, Comrade Speaker, let the words of one of our favourite national songs bring new meaning to us. Join me as I ask you to “let us resolve to fight together. See we do it right, together.” Comrades of this Tenth Parliament, can we do it?

Hon. Members (Opposition): Yes, we can.

Mr. Jones: I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Mr. Jones. It does appear that your time spent around the National Assembly has served you well, because you have prepared and you are ready. Congratulations. We now have Hon. Member and Minister for the first time, even though he has spoken on a Bill in his name before. I believe we should recognise him on his maiden speech, the right Hon. Mr. Ganga Persaud, Member of Parliament and Minister of Local Government and Regional Development. Go ahead Sir.

Minister of Local Government and Regional Development [Mr. G. Persaud]: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, please permit me to join with those who have expressed congratulations to the Hon. Minister of Finance Dr. Ashni Singh and his team of dedicated and committed staff members for preparing the \$192.8 billion Budget 2012.

The budget is undoubtedly pro-people, pro-development and pro-progress. All aimed at bringing greater joy and happiness in and comfort to all Guyanese, across the length and breadth of this beautiful country of ours. I also wish to endorse all that was stated so far by the Hon. Members of this House in reference to the good news embodied in Budget 2012.

During the year 2011, the Ministry and its ten administrations received budgetary allocations of \$3,540,241,000 on the capital side and \$16,971,689,000 on its current allocations. The Ministry and its regions expended \$3,409,286,000, or 96.1 per cent achievement on the capital side and \$16,697,964,000, or 98.1 per cent of its allocation on the current side for 2011.

Overall, the allocation to the Ministry and regions was \$20,395,840,000 and the expenditure was \$20,223,338,000 or 99.1 per cent in fulfilling the programmes and projects identified in Budget 2011.

It must be noted that the expenditures in the regions which were dominated by Opposition-affiliated councils were appreciatively very high in comparison to previous years and were reflective of greater dedication and commitment exhibited by the Regional Chairmen, Regional Vice Chairmen and Councillors in those regions. I wish to applaud those Regional Chairmen, Regional Vice Chairmen, Councillors and staff for staying the course by putting Guyana's development first, rather than focus on partisan politics, something we can all learn from in this House, although 2011 was an election year. Similarly, I wish to commend those Regional Chairmen, Regional Vice Chairmen, Councillors and staff in those regions which were dominated by PPP/Civic-affiliated councils for their commitment and dedication displayed in significantly completing both capital and current work programmes identified in Budget 2011.

Commendation is in order, especially when one recalls that there was a period in our history, when significant sums of money were returned to the treasury due to the Regional Democratic Council (RDC) inability to execute planned programmes and projects, thus denying citizens the benefits which were embedded in the execution and completion of those projects. I must also

point out one of the contributing factors to the success story in 2011 would have been the continuous retooling, retraining and building on our human resources base. Having said that, I acknowledge the comments made by some Members of this Hon. House of instances where infrastructural works were not done in keeping with the specification, and also in some instances where some of our contractors were found wanting.

6.20 p.m.

However, I do not share the less than favourable comments that were attributed to some of the contractors. I am certain that these comments and statements that were made, were not intended to paint all infrastructural works done in 2011 and also, all contractors who worked on Government projects in 2011, with the same brush. It is my hope that the Hon. Members will seek to assist the Government to monitor and evaluate all infrastructural works while they are being done so that accepted quality and value for money, so much talked about can be achieved. It is noted that both Opposition parties in this House have representatives at the level of the Regional Democratic Councils and even, in some instances, some of the Works Committees in these councils are chaired by Members of the Opposition. I will, therefore, anxiously await timely feedback from all Hon. Members of this House in this regard during 2012 and beyond.

I listened to repeated comments of “stealing” and “thieving” coming from the Opposition benches during this debate and I am certain that the Hon. Members on the other side of this House, recognised that they, like all of us as Members of Parliament, have a distinct role in protecting public funds and to take the necessary actions to prevent the alleged abuse, misuse, “stealing” or “thieving” of public funds as was stated by the Hon. Members. I wish to urge all Members to ensure that they carry out their obligations in a responsible manner to Guyana’s taxpayers, by reporting all incidents and providing evidence to the police, without delay, so that the appropriate actions can be taken against person(s) who are alleged to have abused, misused, ‘steal’ or ‘thief’, as was stated, public funds. To do otherwise, like withholding evidence, and coming to this Hon. House and making statements is failing the taxpayers of this country.

The Hinterland and deep riverine communities continue to pose their unique challenges with regards to infrastructural development and sustaining human resources development. Since the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Development Plan continue to cater for all villages and

communities in this our beautiful country, we are committed to overcoming the difficult terrain and challenges to deliver the approved programmes so that all Guyanese can continue to experience the joy and happiness which are derived from continued growth and development.

The Ministry continues to engage innovative and creative approaches in addressing and resolving problematic issues. Frequent engagement with other Ministries and sectors is something that one of the Hon. Members has called for. I wish to inform that Hon. Member that we already have, in 2012, met with the Ministry of Education and not only the Ministry of Education, but with other sector Ministries and have that kind of necessary collaboration. Sharing of resources, skills, et cetera, strengthening and monitoring of our evaluation unit, discussions with contractors and service providers, greater emphasis on enforcement of penalties, and more investment in retraining and retraining of our human services across the Regions are all part of the Ministry's 2012 approach to deal with some of the issues identified earlier.

Based on sound macroeconomic policies, effective governance and appropriate management strategies, Guyana continues to achieve economic growth. This has resulted in consistent increases in our budgetary allocations, especially from 2006 to 2011 and this trend has continued in Budget 2012. The Budget, as presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, reflected a capital allocation for the Ministry and the Ten Regional Administrations of \$3,493,914,000 and \$18,280,548,000 on the current allocations. Thus presented, the allocation of the 11 budgetary estimates under the Ministry is \$21,774,462,000. This is an increase of \$1,378,622,000 or 6.7% in comparison to Budget 2011. We wish to thank the Hon. Minister of Finance, on behalf of the Ministry and the ten regional administrations, for making additional resources available to us.

I wish to assure this Hon. House that the Ministry stands ready to work conscientiously with our ten regional administrations to implement the programmes and projects contained in Budget 2012 as presented. Further, the Ministry is committed to working with the six municipalities and 65 Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) in the execution of the subvention programmes which will be funded by Budget 2012.

Before I continue on Budget 2012, I wish to respond to some statements and concerns which were expressed by Members on the opposite side of this House. The Hon. Members, Mr.

Greenidge and Mr. Trotman, with regards to solid waste management and public health dangers, expressed serious concerns with regards to the collection, disposal and management of solid waste in the city of Georgetown. I cannot help but agreeing with the concerns expressed by both of these Hon. Members because this is something that the PPP/C Government and the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development have repeatedly and publicly expressed as concerns and have sought to work with the municipality of Georgetown to improve the situation. May I remind this Hon. House that all rates and taxes collected by each NDC and municipality is retained by those municipalities and NDCs to provide the services required by the residents in those municipalities and NDCs. Much talk is heard from some quarters that the Ministry has not supported the city's proposal to widen its revenue base. However, it is interesting to note that the city is collecting less than 60% of its present revenue base. And so there is in excess of 40% of revenue to be collected by this very city. And so, for whatever reasons best known to this city, it is either unable, unwilling or has not found the mechanism to enhance its collectable rate, but it continues to lament and use this excuse of a narrow revenue base to confront the issues and allegations with regards to proper collection of solid waste, disposal of solid waste and management of solid waste. The problem in the city will continue unless there is behavioural and attitudinal change at the level of the Council, and we here in this Parliament, the Members, can make a difference, but that is another story which we will deliberate on subsequently. Nonetheless, as stated by the Hon. Minister for Finance in his Budget speech:

“The disposal of solid waste in a safe and efficient manner in order to ensure the health and wellbeing of our citizens continues to be a priority for this Government. In this regard, the establishment of a National Solid Waste Management Division is expected to be in place by the end of the year.”

In addition to the city and its own revenue base, it is a known fact that the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, through approved Budgets by this House, provides an annual subvention to the municipality of Georgetown. That sum was \$20 million in 2011 and from budget support in 2010 it was also \$20 million. Apart from that, the Ministry continues to meet all expenditure for the closing of the Le Repentir dumpsite, formerly known as the Mandela dumpsite - but we have dropped the use of that terminology - and the construction and operations of Haags Bosch sanitary landfill through a Government of Guyana/International Development

Bank (IDB) loan agreement. Further, the Ministry of Public Works, as a rescue act, has taken over most of the roads in the city so that there is no cost to the city itself.

We have heard earlier in this debate and outside of this House, the term “bail out” used by many and on many occasions during the Budget debate so far. This is not an unfamiliar term to the municipality of Georgetown since every year the city turns to the Government with “bail out” requests. We are debating Budget 2012 now in this House, but we have good news: the municipality of Georgetown has already submitted its “bail out” request for 2012 to the Ministry.

The Ministry is responsible for managing and implementing programmes and projects included in the 11 budgetary allocations. Across these programmes, there are 11,259 employees and 7,000 of those are within the education programme. It must be noted that the staff of the six municipalities and the 65 NDCs are not included in this total. These 11,259 staff will all benefit from the increase in the income tax threshold contained in Budget 2012. Moreover, their families, especially their children, will continue to benefit from the free school uniform programmes, the hot meals and other nutrition funded programmes, and free education at the nursery, primary and secondary levels. They themselves, their children and their parents will continue to benefit from free health care services available across Guyana.

My colleague Minister, the Hon. Norman Whittaker, would have shared some of the 2012 Budget highlights of Regions 1, 7, 8, 9 and 10. I will, therefore, in the interest of time, focus on some of the major projects and programmes contained in Budget 2012 for the Ministry and Regions 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. But before I do so Mr. Speaker, please permit me to assure the Hon. Member, Mr. Bulkan, that the PPP/C Government has not breached the Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and has no intention to do so. The systems, procedures and processes established within the present legal framework for the consultations, compilations, preparation and presentation of this Budget were all followed. The Programme Heads, be it education, administration, public works, health or agriculture, had to present their respective proposed budget to the relevant subcommittees of the Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs), after consultation with their various constituencies. After those presentations, from subcommittee level, the proposals were taken to the Regional Democratic Councils. There the debates and discussions continued and after approval those draft budgets were presented to the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and then on to the respective subject Ministries. I

am willing to guide the Hon. Member through the process but time does not permit. However, I wish to assure him that I am available upon request.

Please permit me to address a statement made by the Hon. Member, Mr. Trotman, and which was repeated by the Hon. Member, Mr. Williams. The statement accused the Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, of providing more resources to the PPP/C controlled regions with smaller populations than the Opposition controlled regions. I wish to inform this Hon. House that using the number of listed voters for the 28th November, 2011 Elections, it can be readily seen that for Region 10, there were 24,065 eligible listed voters. This was ranked no. 6 in comparison to the other Regions, yet the Hon. Minister for Finance provided a total of \$1,938,359,000 in Budget 2012 for Region 10. This allocation is the fifth highest allocation for the ten regions, ahead of Region 5 with a voters' population of 32,807 and an allocation of \$1,659,900,000 which is \$278,459,000 less than the allocation for Region 10. The story gets sweeter. Similarly, for Region 8, I think that that is a no contest; lowest rank population, lowest rank allocation. I think we have commonality with that. **[Members: Region 4.]** Well I am coming to that. If I started with the top then I have to go down a little bit. Old people take some time. Region 7 which is ranked no. 9, based on 9,598 eligible voters, received an allocation of \$1,411,733,000 which is the eighth highest allocation for the ten Regions. This is a larger allocation than Region 9 with a listed voters' population of 10,204 and rank no. 7 in terms of number of voters. Region 9's allocation is \$1,263,904,000 which is \$147,829,000 less than the allocation for Region 9.

My colleagues, the Hon. Members, were calling for Region 4. Well here I come. Region 4, for budget purposes, excludes the entire area of Georgetown, is rank no. 1 based on the number of eligible voters listed, but received an allocation of \$2,949,478,000 which is ranked as the second highest allocation for the ten Regions. This is so because most of the central Ministries, undertake and fund programmes in Region 4 from their respective central Ministries' allocations. The East Coast Demerara Highway, the East Bank Demerara Highway: all those streets and internal roads that are being done in all those villages across the East Bank and East Coast of Demerara under the Community Road Improvement Programme (CRIP) programmes are allocations that are credited against Region 4 in the Budget. **[Member: It is the same thing in the other Regions.]** That is not so. We only have one East Bank Highway and one East Coast Highway. It bothers me because these allocation figures are available in the budgetary Estimates

which were given to each Member of this Hon. House. Yet the Hon. Members, Mr. Trotman and Mr. Williams, seek to ignore the facts as presented in these estimates and opted to make sweeping, incorrect assumptions and conclusions. The question is: how can these Hon. Members make such loose and incorrect statements and to what end?

The Hon. Member, Ms. Kissoon, stated that there was no development in Region 10 under Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo's presidency. I leave the residence in Region 10 to judge the credibility of that statement as well as the credibility of the maker of that statement.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Bulkan, stated that some \$137,621,000 was provided to procure all drugs and medical supplies for Region 8 for the entire year 2012, a grossly incorrect statement. The Hon. Member is urged to spend some time in understanding how the PPP/C Government works and the holistic principles governing budget preparation under the PPP/C Administration, thus avoiding future embarrassment.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Trotman, stated that the money for the road in Port Kaituma cannot be found. Had the Hon. Member taken a minute to consult with the Hon. Member, Mr. Allen, on his side of the House, he would have found out that the Hon. Member, Mr. Allen, attended a community meeting, in my presence, in March, 2012, when similar comments were made and the Regional Executive Officer, Mr. Nigel Fisher, provided documentary evidence to that meeting to suggest two things: one is that the former Regional Executive Officer, Mrs. Mary Williams, had written terminating the contract and that the sum of money was reimbursed into the Consolidated Funds. [Ms. Ally: Does she have a receipt?] As I said, documentary evidence was provided. Sometimes this communication barrier is right among and between benches, much less across the other side of the House. [Mr. Trotman: Make that information available to me.] Do your research.

I can go on with my responses to several flawed statements which were made during this debate by the Hon. Members from the other side of this House. But I must move on, Mr. Speaker, because you are going to call time on me just now.

Through the capital budget allocations in 2012, the Ministry will seek to acquire a server, furniture and equipment, pay retention to the market tarmac at Mahaica, procure solar panels for some government facilities in the remote communities as well as to meet costs with regards to

the solid waste management facilities at Haags Bosch, and upgrade the Ministry's compound. Further, the Ministry will continue to provide subventions to the 65 NDCs and six municipalities across Guyana.

Budget 2012, at a glance, contains the following programmes and projects in its capital legend: Region 2: the total allocation for Region 2 is \$2,214,410,000. [Mrs. Backer: You cannot even tell us how much Region 6 got.] I am coming, but I take long. \$1,868,460 is for the current programme; \$345,950,000 is for the capital project. The capital programme in Region 2 will account for the procurement of furniture and equipment for all programmes in that Region; purchasing of vehicles for the agriculture and public works programme and boats for the health sector; construction of sanitary block; construction and rehabilitation of drainage and irrigation systems at Golden Fleece, Coffee Grove, Perseverance, Middlesex, Good Hope, Three Friends, Devonshire Castle, Annandale, Dartmouth, Hampton Court, Reliance, Zorg, Adventure, Huis t' Dierens, Columbia, Capoey, La Union and Una Creek...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, your time is at 30 minutes. Keep going.

Mr. G. Persaud: ...construction of bridges at Golden Fleece, Coffee Grove, Perseverance, upgrading of community roads in areas such as Charity, Perseverance, Queenstown, Adventure, Somerset and Berks, Zorg en Vlygt, Riverstown, Columbia, Anna Regina, Bush Lot and La Belle Alliance; construction of access bridges to schools at St. John's, Martindale Annex, Hampton Court and Land of Plenty; construction of teachers' quarters at Akawini; construction of schools at Karawau, an extension of Wakapau school; construction of bridges to health centres at Dredge Creek, Abrams Creek; extension and rehabilitation of health facilities at Mora and Siriki; and construction of a health post at Mashabo.

The total allocation for Region 3 is \$2,797,815,000 of which current allocation stands at \$2,517,315,000 and capital allocation at \$280,500,000. The Hon. Member, Ms. Bibi Shadick, highlighted, in her presentation on Friday last, the major projects which will be undertaken by regional administration in Region 3 hence I do not wish to repeat.

Region 4: like Regions 2 and 3, the development trust continues in Region 4. I must point out that the total allocation for Region 4 is \$2,949,478,000 of which \$2,755,328,000 is on the current side and the capital allocation is \$195,150,000, an increase of 10.6% from the 2011 allocations.

The 2012 allocations will facilitate the purchase of furniture and equipment for the Administration, Education and Health programmes; purchasing of vehicles for the Public Works and Health programmes; construction of revetment and rehabilitation of drainage and irrigation systems in areas such as Enmore, Clonbrook, Cane Grove, Buxton, Soesdyke, Craig, Melanie Damishana and Paradise; construction and upgrading of roads in areas such as Victoria, Dochfour, Enmore, Land of Canaan, Supply and Kuru Kuru; construction of schools and teachers' quarters at Golden Grove and Low Wood in the Demerara River; rehabilitation of school at St. Cuthbert's Mission, an extension of a primary school at Soesdyke; construction and extension of health facilities at CC Nicholson Hospital, Cane Grove, Friendship, Mocha and Low Wood; construction of bridges in areas such as Vigilance, Buxton, Golden Grove, Melanie Damishana and Little Diamond.

The total allocation for Region 5 is \$1,659,900,000 of which the current allocation is \$1,392,800,000 and the capital allocation in Budget 2012 is \$267,100,000. Budget 2012 will result in the residence of Region 5 benefiting from the following projects and programmes: purchasing of furniture and equipment for administration, education and health programmes; purchasing of boat and engine for the health sector; construction of drainage and irrigation systems across Region 5 in areas such as Cottage, Planter's Hall, Governor Light, Mokomoko, Washclothes - Manuel canals, Baiabu, Grass Hook, Rutherford Canal, Yankee Branch Canal, Dantzig, Columbia; construction of bridges in areas such as Recess, Calcutta, Zorg en Hoop, Dundee, Ithaca, El Dorado; construction and upgrading of roads in areas such as Number 5, Number 10, Number 11, Number 28 and Number 30 Villages, Recess, Calcutta, Fort Wellington, Onderneeming, Bush Lot, Ithaca, Waterloo, Zorg en Vlygt and Burma; construction of annex at Fort Wellington Hospital and Number 8 Village; extension and upgrading of health facilities at Bush Lot, Forth Wellington and Mahiacony.

6.50 p.m.

I trust that the representative from Region 5, the Hon. Member, would have also identified those projects in the Budget and would have highlighted it here for our knowledge as well.

The total allocation for Region 6 is \$3,885,268,000 of which the current allocation is \$3,523,568,000 and the capital allocation in Budget 2012 is \$361,700,000. The 2012 budget

allocation will facilitate residence in Region 6 benefiting from the following projects: the purchasing of furniture and equipment for administration, education and health programmes, purchasing of vehicles for the agriculture and health programmes, construction and rehabilitation of drainage and irrigation structures, canals, bridges and embankments in areas such as Number 51 Village, Vryburg, Johanna, Zorg en Vlucht, Pleatanker, Orealla, Number 51 Village, Number 52 Village, Lesbeholden, Mibikuri, Sandvoort, Adventure, Amaco, Rotterdam, Manarabisi and Belmont. Construction of bridges in areas such as Port Mourant, Warren, New Amsterdam, Letter Kenny, Friendship, Limlair, Number 19 village, Grant Number 1804, Grant Number 1806, Whim, Auchlyne, Number 72, Yakusari and Belvidere. There will be rehabilitation of roads in areas such as those of Number 68 Village, Number 71 Village, Friendship, Grant Number 1803, Mibikuri, Cumberland, Manchester, Albion, Johanna, Auchlyne, Canefield Village and Adelphi. There will be the construction of Nursery schools at Albion and Glasgow. There will be the rehabilitation of Number 48 Village Primary School, and it will facilitate the extension of the New Amsterdam and Black Bush Secondary School as well as Skeldon Primary School. An x-ray clinic and health centre will be constructed at Port Mourant while a storage bond will be constructed in New Amsterdam.

The current allocation for all Regions will seek to meet the cost for payment of wages and salaries, benefits and allowances, fuel, stationery, travelling and subsistence as well as meeting other operational costs. Further, the current Budget 2012 will facilitate all Regions, to effect maintenance works to their buildings: administrations, schools, health centres, health posts and hospitals including sanitary blocks, vehicles, equipment and machinery thereby enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness in providing greater comfort to employees and citizens across the Regions. The maintenance of infrastructure will feature very high in budget 2012. Similarly, we are hoping that the municipalities and NDCs will listen and respond positively to our call to pay greater attention to solid waste management collection and disposal as well as to provide better services to residence within the local authority area.

It is a known fact that many budget agencies will be executing projects and programmes included in Budget 2012 across the 10 Regions. The Ministry is committed to provide the required support to aid the implementation of such projects and programmes. Training and development of our human resources for both elected and appointed officials are very high on

the Ministry's agenda for 2012, so much so that the training for elected officials as a result of elections 2011 first phase was completed. The Ministry has completed its training schedule and is awaiting the outcome of the budget to move ahead with implementation. The Ministry is working acidulously to support the PPP/C commitment to the holding of Local Government Elections in 2012. The Ministry is hopeful that this Hon. House will fast tract the pending legislations so that GECOM can move into preparation phase for the holding of these elections in this year.

Please permit me to remind us in this Hon. House that the Budget presented is for the fiscal year 2012. So it must be viewed within the context that within another 12 months or so Budget 2013 will be presented to this Hon. House and the cycle will go on annually. Hence, we must be optimistic that many more opportunities will be available for us to address whatever shortcomings, if any, and whatever disappointments, if any, we perceive in Budget 2012. No National Budget can and will be able to address all the problems and difficulties existing in a given society. The world, and no country is stagnant, especially third world countries, like ours, where what happens on the international scene has a direct impact on us at home.

Nation building, as we all know, is a task that could never be considered as complete. Rather, it is always a work in progress. No matter in which country of the world we are living, this will be a truism. So, we must not see Budget 2012 as being the end of whatever Government expenditure will be. This is represented in this following statement "Budget 2011 when presented to this House would have brought completion to several projects and programmes, equally, several other projects and programmes which were initiated by Budget 2011 will be completed in 2012 and some of those projects have completion dates after Budget 2012." So, it is a continual process of incremental growth and development.

In closing, I wish to urge all Members of this Hon. House to support and approve the allocations made to all programmes and projects included in Budget 2012 as presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh. In so doing, we will all be recognised as individuals who have expended our effort and time in ensuring the progress growth and development continues in this beautiful land of ours. I thank you Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: I thank you very much Minister for your presentation which was very informative. Hon. Members we will take the suspension now for the evening break. It will be precisely half an hour. On our return we will have three presenters, most importantly of course is Mr. Neendkumar. So, please be back in your chair promptly at 7.30 p.m. Thank you very much.

Sitting suspended at 7.00 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 7.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members the Sitting is resumed. Please be seated. We invite Bishop Juan Edghill to give his maiden presentation as a Member and as the Junior Minister of Finance of the Republic of Guyana. Go ahead Bishop. Please allow the Bishop to complete his presentation without interruption.

Minister in the Ministry of Finance [Bishop Edghill]: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of Budget 2012 and notably the first budget of this Government's five year term in Office of this Tenth Parliament under the theme "*Remaining on Course, United in Purpose, Prosperity for All*", presented by the Finance Minister, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh on March 30th 2012.

When His Excellency President Ramotar assumed Office and named his Cabinet, he did this on the basis of continuing the good work of the PPP/C and improving and strengthening those areas in need of reinforcement. Every annual Budget of this country or any other country represents the single yearly instalment of Policies and strategic priorities reflected in initiatives, measures and actions geared towards the accomplishment of our medium term goals and objectives. It is essential that this Budget 2012 be viewed in the context of both the previous initiatives as well as the proposed future steps along a medium term path toward achieving the vision of this Government.

What can be afforded as country is dependent upon several factors including the stability of macroeconomic fundamentals, our productive value as a country, our international trade performance, our rates of economic growth, our levels inflation, our exchange rate, our levels of savings and investments, our rates of employment and our own consumption levels. Balancing the ability to repay our debt and ensuring that we manage our national debt in a sustainable

manner and the levels of investment in human and social development and physical infrastructure needed to support medium term growth and development.

Some reflections on Budget 2012: My work during my tenure as Chairman of the Ethnic Relations Commission has driven me to review the budget by asking how the Budget 2012 ensures equal access and equal opportunities so that prosperity can be realised for all. Do men and women equally benefit from policies and initiatives in Budget 2012? Is our spending adequate to help meet the needs of every man, woman, boy, girl and infant? Are there measures in Budget 2012 which will help build a framework of equal opportunity and access? For example, in education, where our School Feeding and National Uniform programmes are not limited by any excluding criteria, but are opened and extended to each and every school child. The great intention of such programmes and inclusivity is to ensure that all our boys and girls regardless of race, religion, circumstance or region are afforded the opportunity to attain a quality education and thereby fulfil their potential for their own benefit and for that of the country.

In health, we have our National Immunisation Programme which ensures that every child is given full protection from preventable routine childhood diseases, and now we have added the Human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccine for our eleven year old girls to protect them from developing cervical cancer and other health problems later in their lifetime. It is my considered opinion that Budget 2012 is well thought out, pragmatic, pro-people, carefully considered and it is a document that came out of a highly consultative and iterative process that was analysed by some of the brightest and very mature professionals and technicians at the Ministry of Finance. May I take this opportunity to salute the Hon. Minister Dr. Ashni Singh and our team, some of Guyana's finest men and women who work every day for the progress and development of Guyana.

This budget is inclusive, non-discriminatory, non-sectarian and non-divisive. It is my conviction that no amount of misinformation or reckless statements can neutralise the well established programmes that the 2012 Budget offers. On a note of clarification, let me advise the Hon. Member Mrs. Cathrine Hughes that both the allocations for the David Rose Centre and the Help and Shelter are exactly what were represented from the Ministry of Finance. I have the budget submission here to prove it, and can share it with the Hon. Member if she so wishes.

I need to add that the subject of the David Rose Centre that the Hon. Member referred to in the Budget is not the David Rose Centre for the handicap, but it is the David Rose Centre that is housed in West Ruimveldt which is under the Ministry of Health. Last year at the David Rose Centre for the handicap which falls under the Ministry of Education, I am advised that over \$1,044,630 was expended on repairs to the building. There is a continual programme in conjunction with the Ministry of Health and there is continual relationship with the schools, so the school is benefiting.

I wish to also assure the Hon. Member Ms. Kissoon that there are Budget allocations for medical equipment for Region 10. Again, I have the amounts expended for such allocations annually for the past five years and what is provided for in the 2012 Budget, which I will be happy to share with her.

The numbers and the figures do not exist in isolation. There is vision, programmes and projects that are doable and which can translate to a pathway to progress and prosperity for all. The success story that Guyana's economy has recorded real growth over the last six years cannot be disappeared by the criticisms of the members of the other side of this House and the media who have sought to pretend that this information does not exist. The evidence of Guyana's real growth can be seen by sparkle in the eyes of our young people, the excitement that fills the air when our young people are talking about their future, our young people wait with eagerness and anticipation for us to give them the assurance that their future is continually secure. Please do not disappointment.

Guyana must not miss her day of visitation. Guyana must not squander her moment of opportunity. This is a kairos moment. I dare say that this a prophetic moment. Budget 2012 offers development with dignity, not just mere charity, but real opportunities. The development that I speak to is not about one of us or just some of us or even the best of us; it is about all of us. The affordable measures are pregnant with possibilities for growth. Understanding, patients, and innovativeness are required.

This country's vast human and natural resources are being developed in marvellous and magnificent ways. They provide a framework for achieving prosperity for all in a more technological environment. These resources allow the enlightened entrepreneur, not only to

dream but to illuminate the path for the realisation of that dream. For example, the small business development fund and the growing number of self employed persons. The biggest challenge to small business is financing and being able to secure small low interest loans to develop their business; this will be addressed in the small business development fund. This is the kind of support needed by the growing number of businesses in Guyana's Agro Processors Association which started in 2010 with four members and today has fifteen members who produce many of the local products such as coconut water, cassareep, spices, jams, seasoning and the condiments we see on the supermarket shelves or the Guyana's Arts and Craft Producers Association whose numbers have swollen to the hundreds over the years and has members in all ten Regions of this country. Though each individual business directly employs with a range of 3 to 35 employees at the moment, sourcing their supplies from their products...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister just one second. I am hearing a singing. Do we have a choir or something happening?

Ms. Ally: I saw Ms. Teixeira's mouth moving.

Mr. Speaker: I am hearing a singing of references to the devil, Jesus Christ and so forth. Hon. Members we each have our own religious beliefs, but let us not be invoking God and Jesus and the devil frivolously or flippantly, or as some form of tantalise or whatever against anyone. Let us allow the Member to complete his presentation. I do not think we appreciate the singing. I am hearing a singing and cannot seem to find out where it is coming from. In any event let us allow the Minister, please, to give his presentation.

Bishop Edghill: Thank you Mr. Speaker. If the intent was to intimidate I can ensure that it has not succeeded. The Hon. Prime Minister has spoken extensively and comprehensively on the issue of electricity generation and the option the options that are before us as a nation. The subsidy to the Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL) is intended to ensure the cost of living with respect to utilities does not increase for the majority of consumers who already pay a disproportionate share of the cost for electricity generation. As a company GPL is entitled to increase tariffs in order to generate revenues to meet expenditure needs. If government did not intervene to avoid this tariff increase then every one of us would be paying a 28% increase on our electricity bills. In which, if one currently paid \$6,000 a month, and I have flagged that very

moderately, instead you will now have to pay \$6,000 plus \$1,677, a total of \$7,677, reducing the amount of disposable income available for other important items. Higher electricity tariffs would also lead to higher overhead costs to businesses thereby increases the cost of production of goods and services and then obviously the price to the final consumer. All of this has been avoided by the PPP/C Government intervention to ensure the burden of the higher tariff is not faced by the consumer. I dare say this subsidy is in fact is a subsidy to the consumer, only that it is being paid to GPL; it is to help the consumer. Rest assured that even as the subsidy is provided to the consumer, we will continue to demand greater efficiency from the Board and Management of the company.

I now turn to the subject of old age pension. The question posed to me by many persons as I travel around the country has been, "Why has old age pension only been increased by \$600?" I have taken the time to explain as I do now. The old age pension must be taken in the context of increases in the past as well as what this Government is doing for pensioners. As pointed out by my colleague, the Minister of Human Service and Social Security, the Hon. Member Mrs. Jenifer Webster, the old age pension is not a sole source of income for pensioners; it is simply a monthly transfer, a subsidy given to every senior man or woman who has reached eligibility by turning 65 years.

Our Government's concern for pensioners who depend upon old age pension is not limited to a transfer; it is reflected in the investments made in agriculture to ensure that our farmers are able to produce more so that the prices of basic food items remain affordable. It is the investment we are making in electricity to ensure that the cost is not increased every time we turn on the lights in our homes. It includes that we mandate that no excise tax be charged on kerosene. It is reflected in our Health facilities to ensure that they are staffed with adequate doctors and nurses to provide free healthcare. It does not matter whether you have worked before or never worked a day at all, regardless of your income level on has just to turn 65 and apply and you benefit. You do not have to contribute towards it. Whether you are a business owner or sitting at home with you grandchildren you benefit. Whether you are a housewife or a minor you benefit, or a fisherman or farmer, or a parliamentarian or a painter.

The working population of this country, many of whom have to meet expenses of raising a family and children and have mortgages or rent to pay, travel cost to work, just to name a few,

we were able to afford an 8% increase in wages and salaries at the end of 2011 and we have sought to afford no less for our pensioners. This was in comparison to an inflation rate of only 3.3% in 2011. It is important to recall that when at the end of 2007 a 14% inflation rate was recorded, this Government increased old age pension by a substantial 63%, evidence of a Government who cares. From 2006 to 2011 this Government more than doubled the old age pension in the face of a rising number of pensioners at an additional cost of \$2.6 billion. How can one say that this Government does not care in the light of expending this level of resources? If one were to add the electricity subsidy to the old age pension plus the water subsidy then we would exceed the \$10,000 target that is being requested by members of the other side of the House.

Permit me at this time to say that I have heard in this Hon. House the question of the pension for the former President which was being referred to as a ridiculous sum of \$3 million being sighted. May I indicate to this House that no evidence suggest that the former President is in receipt of a pension of \$3 million or can receive at this time a pension of \$3 million based upon the calculations that are available for such a purpose. To suggest that is misleading, and I think we need to put it on public record that that figure is highly erroneous.

Even as we invest to ensure sustainability of the established sectors, we continue to actively engage in seeking support for the development of new and emerging sectors. To this end Government's ability to attract both local and foreign direct investment as well as successfully implement public private partnership as a means to secure new financing remains a priority. The level of foreign direct investments at the end of 2011 stands at US \$246.8 million and continues to show growth over the years. This level of foreign direct investments being injected into our economy is a strong signal of investors' confidence of how well this Government has managed this economy and more so it is an undisputable signal of the strong confidence that investors place in the leadership of this country under the PPP/C Government.

7.52p.m.

This Budget is replete with examples of growth in local and foreign direct investment in several sectors. Our extractive industries, CGX Resources Inc., the consortium led by Repsol Exploration S.A., and Reunion Manganese Inc., are becoming familiar or household names in

Guyana. In the agriculture sector we continue to enable our private sector farmers to be more competitive through training and genetic diversification of our crops and livestock while simultaneously expanding support for hinterland food security and the turn-key housing initiative. These are just a few examples of key investments happening all around us. The support given to hundreds of existing small businesses and hundreds of potential new investors, to ensure the small business sector is thriving and entrepreneurial dreams are realised, continues to be reflected as a priority in terms of resources allocated in this budget. To that end we are talking about employment generation and jobs for all; jobs that today include such areas as call centres which simply did not exist a decade ago. We now have ten call centres which employ over 3,000 people. So for anyone to say no new jobs are being created, they must be either blind or closing their eyes to the truth. As it relates to the issue of blindness may I take this opportunity to remind this Hon. House of the words from the sacred text: “If the blind leads the blind they both will fall into the ditch”.

I take this opportunity to urge the Hon. Members of this House, those on this side and those on the other side, not to be blinded by our own bitterness, neither should we be blinded by the failures of the past nor should we be blinded by fear.

Further, with the laying of the high speed fibre-optic cable from Providence to Lethem a whole new world of possibilities will be open to our technologically savvy teenagers – young men and women. Our young people must arm themselves with the appropriate education and knowhow to ensure they are part of the team leading transformation. The significant foreign direct investment in the extractive sectors has already created jobs in the exploratory stages and this includes heavy equipment operators, drillers, geologists, surveyors, geological technicians, GIS technicians and analysts, managers, operation superintendents, network engineers, cooks and labourers. Our people have also to be actively seeking employment, and collectively we must work on both sides to ensure that our young people gear themselves to take advantage of the jobs being created now, and the numerous opportunities that will present themselves in the future. They must take advantage of the training programmes available under the Board of Industrial Training (BIT) and those offered by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport. I want to strongly encourage both employers, and the unemployed to sign up with the Ministry of Labour’s Job Matching Programme under the Central Recruitment and Manpower Agency which seeks to match

employers with potential employees. One can register for this directly or online; it is free. I can speak very intimately to this particular subject because I have been able to write character references and recommendations for a number of young people who have benefitted from jobs by registering with the Agency. I want to encourage that registering becomes a practice.

The Guyana Office for Investment has estimated that the impact on job creation from investments they track - only the ones they track - is expected to be over 5,000 in 2012 alone, with expanded growth anticipated in the years ahead. Following the 2012 census, the Bureau of Statistics will be able to engage in a labour market survey which will be able to comprehensively capture employment statistics. I, therefore, take this time to let the Hon. Member Mr. Jones know that the 400 jobs he spoke about are only in one sector.

In addition to the reference in the Budget Speech, the areas of revenue administration in improving the services to tax payers will continue to be a priority. A few of these improvements at the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) include the operationalisation of the container scanner, which facilitated a more advance and efficient system of examination of containerised cargo. And since January, 2011 the container scanner has been used to screen all exports for narcotic substances in keeping with the international requirements. During 2011 the GRA introduced a flat rate system, in order to further simplify and expedite the clearance of personal effects imported at various ports of entry. The system involves reduced examination of personal effects and the application of a flat rate on import duties for non-commercial items imported in barrels, boxes, packages and parcels. Based on size importers of personal effects are able to clear and uplift their cargo with less difficulty. To improve transparency in the processing of entrees at Customs computer monitors have acquired and installed at Custom House and at all transit sheds. These monitors display the status of custom transactions, entrees, and allow for importers to ascertain the status of their entrees. The implementation of a new system that requires motor vehicles to be renewed annual by the registration date of the motor vehicles has resulted in improved delivery of service due to a significant reduction in the time taken to process transactions.

In 2012, improvements in the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) will include focusing on further strengthening these measures by fully computerising the process of issuance of trade, miscellaneous and driver's licenses, utilising new security enhanced features on the licenses,

intensifying enforcement on tax compliance measures, utilising third-party information to aid in the profiling and selection of tax payers for all tax types, in order to assist GRA's management in protecting and increasing revenue collections. GRA will establish customs offices in Bartica in Region 7 and Morawhanna in Region 1 during 2012 in view of increased business activities taking place in the interior.

I want to speak to the issue of impact. When the Hon. Finance Minister read the Budget on 30th March, I heard murmurings from the other side, and the question was asked: What is the impact? Please afford me the opportunity to continue to educate this House on the impact of the 2012 Budget. I want to speak to the education sector and the linkages. Our investment in education will serve to prepare our people and equip them with the relevant technical skills required to meet the Guyana of tomorrow. The Guyana of tomorrow will see new sectors, new industries, which will require new skills, both technical and non-technical. Our people will be trained to manage and develop these sectors. I am speaking about energy, oil and hydro. In the Information Communication Technology (ICT) sector we are talking about call centres, high speed internet services. In the tourism sector, the entire hospitality related business arena...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member you just had 30 minutes...

Mr. Edghill: ...in small business and agriculture diversification.

Government has invested in the University of Guyana to upgrade the laboratory and develop skills and competencies in the scientific and environmental area, to better equip our people for the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) and a green environment. This will also serve to further skills in research and development, in the light of new and emerging sectors which are mostly scientific in nature.

Also, substantial investments in the area of technical vocation have been made. Several technical vocational educational and training centres have been established across Guyana with two new additions in Regions 3 and 5 to develop the youths and skills that are required to meet our country's development agenda. There is also the Basic Needs Trust Fund programme that provides more skills not only to our youths but to housewives and our indigenous community. These programmes serve to empower young people and to supplement the livelihoods of

hundreds of others. The Information Technology (IT) centres in Regions 3 and 5 have led to previously unemployed persons being able to access learning and become employed.

In 2012, \$26.5 billion has been allocated for the education sector. One billion dollars has been allocated towards the continued implementation of the hinterland school feeding programme from which about 63,000 students will benefit. The school uniform programme will continue; 36 schools will be targeted countrywide as part of a pilot aimed to achieve better performance in Mathematics and English at CSEC examinations; over \$1.2 billion is being allocated to teacher training, inclusive of provisions for operational expenditure at the Cyril Potter College of Education, which is expected to produce 430 graduates from the Associate Degree in Education Programme in November, 2012 while another 800 students will complete the Trained Teacher Certificate Programme in July, 2012. All secondary schools will be equipped with functioning ICT departments; 3,500 teachers are targeted to be trained by the end of 2012. ICT based success markers programmes will be installed in 60 primary schools and teachers will be trained to use the software as a learning aid. \$900 million dollars is allocated towards the University of Guyana. Preparatory work for the US\$10 million University of Guyana Science And Technology Programme is completed; \$80 million has been allocated under this project towards the commencement of curriculum reform, research support, and infrastructure rehabilitation; another \$450 million has been budgeted for the Students Loan Programme. We have budgeted for the construction of an annex at the Ptolemy Reid Rehabilitation Centre which caters for over 60 differently able students. Additionally, the Centre will be rehabilitated so as to provide technical and vocational training to the students; \$3.3 billion has been allocated for continued construction, extension, rehabilitation and maintenance of schools and other facilities countrywide. I could list a number of schools and areas in all 10 Administrative Regions.

We are speaking to impact. In Housing and Water, the continued support for the housing sector has seen catalytic increases with the development of other sectors. Every year more houses are being built which requires finance from the commercial banks which in turn promotes the banking sector. The construction sector has taken off and is doing well with increased demand for construction materials such as cement, zinc, stone, et cetera. Thousands of skilled and semi-skilled workers have been employed within the housing sector, creating income and livelihoods

for thousands of families, enabling parents to send their children to school, and acquire the basic essentials of life.

The forestry sector has also increased with the demand for more wood thereby creating more jobs for people within the sector. The low income housing programme has also enabled thousands of persons, for the first time, to own their own homes. This in turn helps them to put their house and land as collateral with banks to start their own businesses. The housing sector also drives other sectors such as manufacturing, because as people own their own homes they have to furnish them. They have to buy appliances, the windows, the blinds. The quality of life for all Guyanese has been significantly improved.

I want to speak to the impact in the health sector. The life expectancy has also increased. People are now living longer and healthier lives. This in turn adds to a stronger and larger work force. A specialty hospital will be built to ensure that complicated services which currently require treatment overseas, at exorbitant prices, will be available locally at less than half the price. This matter will be addressed by other speakers. A hospital like this will see patients from the Caribbean as well as North America coming here to access these medical services. Government has invested in a Sprinkles and Coupon Programme to ensure that pregnant and lactating mothers have the required nutrients to pass on to their babies. More babies would be born healthy and free of illnesses and diseases which in turn will eventually bring down the investment. We have to buy drugs for the health sector. We could put that into another sector. We are not just spending money we are having impact.

In 2012, \$16.9 billion has been allocated towards the modernisation of this sector. Emphasis will continue on decentralising services, strengthening public/private collaboration to reduce chronic non-communicable diseases, and improving the quality of care and access to health services. \$672 million dollars has been budgeted to commence construction of the state of the art specialty surgical hospital at Liliendaal. An additional \$948 million has been allocated to construct, rehabilitate and maintain health infrastructure countrywide. This includes completion of the National Psychiatric Hospital, Georgetown School of Nursing, constructing of a health centre at Port Mourant, renovating/transformation of the Mahaica and Linden Hospital buildings, international treatment and rehabilitation facilities for drugs and alcohol, construction of a health hut at Kokerite at Region, 1 and we could go through the list. There are facilities throughout the

regions which will be benefitting from such an allocation. \$235 million have been allocated for the procurement of medical equipment and the construction, rehabilitation, and maintenance of accommodation for doctors and other medical support staff in areas such as Sand Creek, Karasabai, Kwakwani, Corriverton, Long Creek; construction of medic and community health workers living quarters at Baramita, Region 1, medic quarters in Hururu, Region 10; and construction of nurses quarters at Kwakwani, Region 10. Three hundred and eighty-seven million dollars are budgeted for training and improvement of public health personnel to meet growing demands for specialised services. Government has recently boosted its armoury of vaccines to provide coverage against the human papilloma virus (HPV). \$240 million dollars are budgeted to support distribution of anti-natal and infant sprinkles which aims to improve nutritional health for over 15,000 mothers and children.

We are speaking about impact. In the tourism sector the Government's continued investment in tourism has been showing returns and tourism continues to expand at a very rapid rate. A new Marriot Hotel will be built in Guyana. This in turn will create hundreds of jobs first to build the hotel, then for the persons who have to work at the hotel. There will be need for more taxis and more travel agents. The Marriott Hotel brings its own clientele and as such will attract thousands of new tourists every year. That is impact, Sir. These tourists when they come will want to go to see the Kaieteur Falls; they will want to visit the Iwokrama Nature Resort; small arts and crafts shops will see an increase in their profits. The new niche market in birding and yachting has also brought many tourists into the country, and Guyana is becoming a premier destination for these types of initiatives. The second edition, July, 2012 of the Bradt Guide of Guyana notes that Guyana has become a recognised and respected bird watching destination in its own right. It is important to note that what attracts visitors to a country is not simply how much is invested directly in the tourism product but more so the state of the economic, social and political developments. In a couple of years these ports will bring even more tourists into Guyana and hence an increase in business.

Let us talk about impact for our youth. Much emphasis has been placed to ensure our young Guyanese are powered through interactive programmes designed to enhance skills, develop and create a cadre of entrepreneurs to make a meaningful contribution to national development. The investments have been made in programmes such as the President' Youth Awards of Guyana

where out of schools youths have an opportunity to learn basic skills. There is also the Youth Initiative Programme which upgrades sports facilities for youths to develop their dreams of being professional athletes. These investments made over the years have served youths across Guyana and given them a renewed passion to pursue their dreams. For those who do not wish to pursue an education but prefer to learn a skill, for them there are many programmes to empower them to live their dreams of becoming a mechanic or craftsman or electrician. The Board of Industrial training is providing that outlet, Sir. This Government recognises that skills in all areas are needed, not only professionally but technically as well, hence the investment in programmes that cater for school dropouts and those who prefer to learn a skill. It is because of these initiatives that many young people will have a livelihood to provide not only for themselves but their families as well. The social impact that these programmes have will be seen in a reduced crime rate among the youth.

Impact on sports - the Government has also ensured that all Guyanese are provided with the opportunity to participate in sporting activities and empowered to channel their energies, abilities and talents to contribute meaningfully to national development. Investments in a national athletic tract and a swimming pool are some of the initiatives undertaken to ensure that youths who prefer to be professional athletes now have the resources to follow their dreams. The Guyana of tomorrow will see our young people competing at the Olympics, winning regional and international tournaments, and being world class sportsmen and women, because they have the facilities which are internationally acceptable to practice.

In infrastructure, our impact will be seen in the Sheriff/Mandela four-lane highway, in the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) four lane extension that is currently ongoing, and in the Black Bush Polder road - a 36 kilometres roadway which provides easy access from farm to market. The East and West Canje road is currently under construction; the East Bank four-lane highway, and the East Coast four-lane highway are all projects that are making their own impact and bringing about the prosperity for all which we are talking about. The Community Road Improvement Programme will attain, improve and sustain access to social and economic infrastructure through the rehabilitation of access roads in communities across Regions 3, 4, 5, and 6; and the strengthening of institutions under the supervision of the Ministry of Local

Government. My other colleagues have spoken about the Cheddi Jagan International Airport expansion.

We talk about the ICT/ e-government - to improve ICT infrastructure and provide equipment and services for the implementation of e-government through the construction and installation of 200kilometres of fibre optic cable and 44 wireless access network sites.

I will now elaborate on the area of strengthening public administration as mentioned on page 58 of the 2012 Budget Speech - Monitoring and Evaluation.

Mr. Speaker: Hon Minister you have five minutes to complete your presentation.

Mr. Edghill: Thank you very much, Sir. In Budget 2011 the Minister of Finance indicated that the effective and efficient delivery of government services is expected to be enhanced as work continues to advance to the development of a national monitoring and evaluation framework. Over the course of last year we trained over 100 senior government officials in key concepts of monitoring and evaluation and began workshop sessions with budget agencies to strengthen their programmes budgeting capability – all in an effort to ensure the expenditure of allocation is more closely linked to measurable indicators which can be monitored and tracked more effectively. This year as part of Government’s five-year plan training in key concepts of monitoring and evaluation will continue with another 150 public service officials being targeted. In addition more intensive works will be done with the two pilot sectors, health and education, both of which are guided by sectoral strategic plans and which together account for approximately 2 percent of the total budget. The Government’s focus on the social sector has seen significant investment over the years as we are now placing greater emphasis on improving the quality of service delivery by our teachers, our doctors, our nurses and other education and health providers. It is therefore imperative that we strengthen the ability of these sectors to use indicators to measure not only their output but also their outcomes and impacts. This makes the practice of fiscal prudence in the case of expenditure management more targeted and meaningful. Agencies can use data gathered from monitoring and evaluation to make more effective spending recommendations and decisions, and review systems and processes to ensure improved overall performance. Indeed, in order to improve the fiscal deficit over time in the face of growing demands, we need to improve both the efficiency and the effectiveness of how we conduct the

business of government. Our President has mandated all our public officials through their Ministers and Heads of Budget Agencies never to forget that our jobs are about providing quality service to the people, and that as public servants we carry the responsibility of serving the public. In doing so as public servants we need to get busier at being more effective and not simply being busy. In this way the Government will ensure greater accountability and greater value for money.

Guyana has come of age, we have heard the call, be assured of my promise to deliver to the people of Guyana greater value for money as was requested by Members of this Hon. House. There will be what I define as evidence based decision making and results oriented management under my watch.

In conclusion, I say that Budget 2012 is designed to ensure that economic growth and development are achieved. Within that growth opportunities abound for every individual citizen of our nation and for the expansion of businesses. I believe that without question the one common rope - and I say rope not thread - that binds us together in this House, is a desire to see a better Guyana in the future. In that desire we are most certainly united in purpose. And it is my firm belief that a common purpose can carry us forward and help us to collectively overcome challenges as we work to ensure a more prosperous Guyana for all.

As we consider the Estimates of the public sector we must be champions the causes of the people, we must be magnanimous, we must be patriotic, we must not be consumed by our own egos; there must be no grandstanding. The people of Guyana expects us to be visionary in our planning , strategic in our thinking, fair and just in our decision making, constructive and consistent in our actions. We are servants of the people. As their elected representatives we must discharge our responsibilities with a deep sense of accountability and with objectivity, without eye service. As we deliberate our decisions will define the moment and determine our tomorrow. Our young people are depending on us. They are demanding of us mature, exemplary, sensible, strong, and sacrificial leadership where they deserve the best. Let us give them the best by us doing our best.

I thank you for your attention and I commend Budget 2012 to this Hon. House. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Minister for your presentation on the budget. I now invite Hon. Member Mr. Neendkumar to give his long anticipated speech.

Mr. Neendkumar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Hon. Ministers and fellow Members of this Hon. House, I would like to join with my colleagues in welcoming the new Members to the House and I wish them a full five-year in this House. And for you, Mr. Speaker, I am confident that you will leave a legacy in this new dispensation on how you will keep us together.

8.22 p.m.

As I rise to support this 2012 Budget, allow me to congratulate our Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh and his reliable and competent staff, for the timely preparation and crystal clear presentation of this year's budget, consistent with the Constitutional provisions of the laws.

I must say that I did offer to my friends, that is, the Hon. Members, Chris and Trevor that they come to the Sports Commission and to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport. We are willing to show and explain to them what we are doing. For Chris, I would like to tell him that...

[**Mrs. Backer:** Who is Chris?] You got to go to the *blacka*. Why do you not go and swim in the *blacka*? You are ten cents...With respect to the multi-purpose quotes that were referred to, those moneys were not taxpayers' money; they were from the synergies between the Ministry and UNICEF. I can call the areas, Land of Canaan Primary School, Berbice High School, Tuschen Primary School, Covent Garden School, Fortwellington, Rosehall, Wismar, Christiansburg, Mon Repos and J.C. Chandransingh. In respect to the \$200 million that was referred to, I can assure him, we can provide him with the long list. Those moneys were not spent by our Ministry, they were allocated to the various regions and then to the NDCs. The Minister has forward it to me and I am willing to give you it.

We must thank all Guyanese for the fact that for six consecutive years our country realised real growth and today we can discuss, in this 10th Parliament, a record presentation of a \$192 billion budget. Hence, the theme of this budget is indeed appropriate, "*Remaining On Course, United In Purpose, Prosperity For All*".

I think when we come to this House we must be honest and truthful – we should be very honest – and I am quoting from what my good friend, Mr. Basil Williams said. The Hon. Members in this House are discussing the last five years and more particularly, the last year's expenditure,

however, this 2012 Budget is significant, since our country will be building on the solid foundation that we now have, thus ensuring the future realises greater and faster success.

This 2012 Budget, which is \$192.8 billion, is indeed a budget with an abundance of opportunities and certainly offers opportunities in all facets of the lives of every single Guyanese throughout this vast and diverse country of ours. I listened attentively to the presentations so far and I am also following the media and it is sad to know how misleading some presentations were. The media coverage by some sections of the press is most misleading. In last *Sunday's Stabroek News* a former Member of the National Assembly, who sat during the 9th Parliament on that side of the House, in an infantile presentation, presented to the readers that the PPP/C allocated a mere \$221 million for capital development in Region 10. The writer of that letter failed to let the public know that in 2011 this caring and responsible Government subsidised electricity to the tune of \$2.3 billion in Region 10. He failed to let the public know that the people in Linden are not using gas stoves, so they do not buy cooking gas or kerosene oil. They are living with the luxury of using electric stoves.

I want to be specific in respect to Region 10 and that is why I am going to tell you that in the year 2011 this Government allocated to Capital Works for roads, \$396,600,000 and for Current Expenditure \$39.9 million; for water, it allocated for Capital Works \$344.4 million alone for Region 10; for housing, it allocated \$134 million for Capital Works; and for education, it allocated \$90.7 million for Capital Works and \$1,107,000,000 for Current Expenditure.

I want to pause here. When I talk about honesty I want to remind those on the Opposition, our Comrades must be fair. There is a young kid by the name of Andre Allen who was the top student for the Common Entrance Examinations in Region 10 last year. I was in Linden over the last weekend and the people in Linden were very concern about the fact that you have a teacher sitting here from Linden and because of jealousy, none of them had the courtesy to call the child's name and congratulate that child. That child Andre Allen must be congratulated. We must congratulate the teachers from Linden for doing a good job. We must congratulate the parents. The teacher is sitting right here, the Hon. Member, Vanessa Kissoon... **[Interruption]** ...She did not congratulate... **[Interruption]** ...Mr. Speaker, further on that I want to let you know that they used that kid... young Allen was used on the platform of the APNU... **[Interruption]**

Mr. Speaker: One second Hon. Mr. Neendkumar. Hon. Member I really expected a Member from the Opposition to rise on a Point of Order, because a claim or a charge was made that out of jealousy, Members of Parliament, who are teachers, failed to congratulate a student who did well in Region 10. So without anyone who is a teacher rising to take the Point of Order, I would say that that statement is out of order, because failure to compliment or to congratulate someone or to not do so, I do not know how you could have made the quantum leap to say that that is attenuated by jealousy. I would ask that you withdraw it and move on.

Mr. Neendkumar: Mr. Speaker I will reword the last statement, but I was saying what the people in Linden told me.

Mr. Speaker: That may be a different matter. Mr. Harmon is on his feet. Go ahead Mr. Harmon.

Mr. Harmon: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order. The statement that the Hon. Member, Mr. Neendkumar has made is totally inaccurate. I do not know if Mr. Neendkumar did not understand what the people told him or what they told him was not accurate. But what I am saying is that when young Allen became the top student...

Mr. Speaker: The point of order please, Mr. Harmon.

Mr. Harmon: Mr. Speaker, the Point of Order is: the child was congratulated and the teacher that the Hon. Member is talking about was there.

Mr. Speaker: Okay thank you.

Mr. Harmon: She was there, The Leader of the Opposition and I were there. So it is not true...

[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much. One second Mr. Neendkumar. On the basis of the statement of a Member of this House that the child was congratulated in the presence of the Hon. Member Ms. Kissoon and the Leader of the Opposition, I would expect that that would be the truth, unless you can refute it. I would ask you to withdraw the statement, unless Mr. Neendkumar – you are being encouraged to refute it - if in fact it turns out to be the truth and you are just going to refute it on the basis of encouragements, there are going to be repercussions I must say. I will give you an example, when I first joined the Guyana Bar Association, as a

member, I was told that the word of a lawyer have the weight of an affidavit and when it is given it carries that weight. So if it is that a Member of this House has stood and said that he, in the presence of the Leader of the Opposition and Ms. Kissoon, visited and congratulated the student, unless you can refute it, be very careful. Thank you.

Mr. Neendkumar: Mr. Speaker, I have that type of respect for your Chair and whatever you say to do I will do, but I want to make myself crystal clear... **[Interruption]** ...I was specific. I want to be specific, that in this House, during the debates, none of the persons speaking from the Opposition mentioned the kid's name, none of them. That is my point and the kid was used on the platform for them conveniently during the elections campaign. I want to be very specific. Here they did not do it. I am very honest Mr. Speaker... **[Interruption]**

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Neendkumar, if in fact that is correct, that during the debates the name was not mentioned, that is permissible. Proceed.

Mr. Neendkumar: In respect to health, this Government ... Mr. Speaker, I will have to get my time back right... **[Interruption]** ...\$32 million was spent for Capital Works in health and a further \$231 million was spent for current expenditure. In the agriculture drive this Government spent \$29.9 million for Capital Works. This did not include the Kwakwani Utility Inc. which got a subsidy of \$325 million; it does not include that the Linmine Secretariat received a subsidy of \$2.5 billion nor does it include the current expenditure for housing, water and agricultural drive. I am saying this because what I am asking for is that we speak the truth. Do not come here and just *pompazette*.

For this year, I want to congratulate the Finance Minister and his hard working staff for their analysis. We have decided for Capital Works this year, the people of Linden will get \$108.5 million and \$44 million for Current Expenditure; Water, they will be getting a sum of \$472 million for Capital Works and \$515 million for Current Expenditure; for Housing, Minister Ifraan Ali is prepared to give them \$267 million for Capital Works; and for Education, they will be getting a further \$100 million for Capital works and \$1,188,000,000 for Current Expenditure. This is not included again in this Budget, that the Hon. Minister of Finance is saying that Kwakwani Utility Inc. will receive a subsidy of \$230.9 million. They also have a subsidy for the

Linmine Secretariat in this Budget for \$1.8 billion and this does not include the recurrent expenditure for the Housing, Water and the Agricultural drive.

We must face the facts; this is a Government for the people of this country. Region 10... [Mrs. Backer: The people rejected you at the polls and that is the fact.] ...well the people rejected you and we will take you to the *blacka*. Everyone who has worked in the Bauxite Industries knows that the industry became unprofitable since 1982 and it deteriorated under the last PNC administration. The poor condition of both plant and mining equipment resulted in the heavy loss of market during the 80's and early 90's. In 1985, we had a financial intervention of \$34.5 million, ECU by Sysmin (Systems of Mining Products); we had financial intervention in 1991 by the World Bank, Sysmin; and the European Investment Bank provided a further US\$23 million in credits in that phase for the use in the Initial Restructuring Phase of the (IRP). Despite abundant assistance by the PM (Prime Minister) and because of the poor management and weak governance by the PNC, bauxite production for Linmine fell by more than 45% in 1991-1992 and continues to drop thereafter, despite many plots, which was brought in under the PNC's administration to manage the industry in an attempt to make it survive.

It is this PPP/C Government that took the bold position in June 2003 to have the Linmine operations managed by Cambior, a Canadian company who owned Omai Gold Mines, Omai. Bauxite Mining Inc, (OBMI), as an interim measure until the PPP/C was able to better organise the financing for the full joint venture through privatisation. In December 2004, the Linden Bauxite was privatised by joint shares with Cambior having 70% shares and the Government of Guyana 30% shares. The Cambior shares were sold to BOSAI in China in the year 2007. Today the PPP/C and the workers of Linden can boast that BOSAI is running the Linmine operations at a profit over the last three years.

The Berbice operation is also a success story. BCGI (The Bauxite Company of Guyana Inc.) is also administering a highly successful business. Only last week the Prime Minister Cde. Samuel Hinds and the media were in the Berbice River where we witnessed the arrival of approximately \$25 million in equipment. Today, the Berbice operations which is producing 1.5 million tonnes of bauxite, is looking at producing 5 million tonnes annually, more significant is the fact that approximately 2000 more persons will gain employment.

A careful look at the period under review reveals that there was significant development in Region 10. The LEAP project which was the brain child of the former President, His Excellency Dr. Bharat Jagdeo provided tremendous development to Region 10 in the value of millions of dollars. Rehabilitation and extension of West Watuka farm to market road; installation of culverts at West Watuka; rehabilitation of Moblissa road; rehabilitation of three sluices/kokers at Burnham Drive; construction of Spreightland Bridge and Mr. Speaker I can continue.

We are extremely proud to know the fact that the first call centre was built in Linden where we have over 150 young people presently employed.

Investments in Linden – Bai-Shanlin Wood/Timber Processing Company invested US\$10 million; Sunshine Timbers Wood/Timber Processing Company invested US\$5 million; Arawak Shoe Factory invested GY\$20 million; Sebra Wood invested US\$75,000; Toucan Connection invested US\$510,000; and GNIC Container Yard invested US\$855,000 preparing for the Linden/Brazil operation. Mr. Speaker, I can continue with more.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Neendkumar, you can go a little slower, I will give you a few extra minutes. Take your time.

Mr. Neendkumar: Thank you Mr. Speaker. With respect to Region 4, as a geographic Member of Parliament representing the people of Region 4, I am pleased to report to this Hon. House, that based on the performance of the PPP/C Government, particularly during the 9th Parliament, our people are living a far better and healthier lifestyle. All of us in this House and the people in the country must agree that our drainage and irrigation systems are far more developed and capable of making our people live with less floods. Hence, our people's kitchen gardens and farmstead are far more productive. Gone are the days when our citizens were forced to traverse bad roads and fetch water on bicycles, go-carts, donkey carts and on their heads. Thanks to this accountable PPP/C Government we have made it a robust asphalt road and persons are getting pure water from their taps in their houses.

Under the PPP/C Government our young people and many who never thought they would ever own a house, are buying house lots and with low interest rates they acquired loans to build their own homes. Thanks Minister Ali.

I want to give some figures in respect to Region 4, in response to what they are saying...

[**Mrs. Backer:** Who are they?] What Mr. Aubrey Norton wrote, you all do not want to face the fact. Region 4 development – In 2011, roads and bridges - \$2,988,000,000 for Capital Works and Current Expenditure \$44 million; Capital Works for Housing and Water, \$1,229,000,000; Education, \$808 million for Capital Works and Current Expenditure \$1,861,000,000; Health, \$456 million for Capital Works and Current Expenditure \$251 million; and Drainage and Irrigation (D&I) \$357 million for Capital Works and \$84 million for Current Expenditure.

For this year I am hoping that good sense will prevail and in togetherness we will allow this to pass. Roads and bridges \$2,584,000,000 in Capital Works and Current Expenditure \$50 million; Housing and Water, \$917 million for Capital Works; Education \$743,306,000 for Capital Works and \$2,015,000,000 for Current Expenditure; Health, \$875 million for Capital Works and \$270 for Current Expenditure; and D&I, \$2,419,000,000 for Capital Works and Current Expenditure \$87 million.

This is the tentative ... [**Interruption**] [**Mr. Lumumba:** Mr. Greenidge, have you ever given out so much money?] Alright, we will talk about Mr. Greenidge now. May I take this Hon. House back to the Hon. Mr. Greenidge's Budget speech in 1992, page 22 3rd paragraph... [**Mrs. Backer:** Source?] The Hansard.

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

These were Mr. Greenidge's words. On page 63, the last paragraph:

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

Anyone travelling from Georgetown to Rosignol or Georgetown to Timehri can be nothing but amazed by the development these areas had under the PPP/C Government. The new housing schemes, our schools, health centres, along with our water and electricity, particularly our roads are all achievements all Guyanese are proud of.

It is undeniable that the last five years during the last Parliament has been a time of tremendous development in sports. However, allow me to quote from the Hon. Member, Mr. Carl Greenidge's Budget Speech, 1991 page 53, 2nd paragraph:

“This year promises to be an exciting one for youths and sports. Three important events which came readily to mind as the celebration of youth week... the national school athletics championship and our preparations for the participation in the Pan American games...”

And I continue to quote:

“An allocation of \$16 million has been made for the expenditures associated with youth and sports. In excess of \$7.5 million had to spend on the acquisition of sport gears...”

I do not have a problem with that.

“...and the construction of five boxing rings.”

We are still looking for those boxing rings... [*Interruption*] He has that in his Budget speech, I am quoting from his budget speech. Permit me to quote from Mr. Greenidge's 1992 Budget speech, page 65, paragraph 2:

“In order to help with the problems faced by the youths in the community, this year's programme contains \$19 million for development of youths and sports.”

I will like to thank the staff of the Parliament for providing me with this good information from the library. Thank you very much Mr. Isaacs.

Today we can rejoice over the fact that the Guyana National Stadium at Providence is a state of the art stadium that has put us at the helm of the Caribbean...

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Neendkumar you have five minutes.

Mr. Neendkumar: Our Aquatic Centre at Liliendaal allows Guyanese to boast that we have the best Olympic size swimming pool in this part of the world, further we are to complete this. I have confidence, this is a gold medal that had been earned earlier this week by Jessica and I am quite certain that she will go to the Olympic and get a medal.

The Racket Centre at Non-Pariel is in the process of reconstruction. However, this did not stop our Guyanese squash players from crushing the Caribbean challengers in our master show piece squash show. Our youths dominated the junior tournament. Our long tennis players were begging for proper courts, today we have two courts and our players are making maximum use of the facilities.

Through sports we are displaying new energies and optimism for our country. Under the newly developed sports policy, we anticipate an even more remarkable improvement in our sport facilities and the performance of athletes in the near future. We have established a \$100 million annual sport run to support the development of sports. This has allowed us to provide support to teams going to represent Guyana abroad and even more importantly, allowed us to develop sports and physical activities in our schools and communities.

This Government provided land for the construction of the headquarters of the Guyana Olympic Association and the National Karate School to build judo. Through our Ministry, coaches have been employed fulltime and they are now available to schools and community based clubs.

I am about to let this Hon. House know that we have three world class coaches presently in this country and expect this number to increase dramatically in the near future. We have a swimming and boxing coach from Cuba and we have a swimming coach from Japan. We are indeed proud to know that we have working in our Ministry, our own Guyanese, super-cat, the most successful cricket captain, Clive Hubert Lloyd.

We kept our promise and to the delight of our stakeholders, the special track at the National Park is in perfect shape after it was fully resurfaced and hundreds of Guyanese are enjoying their daily exercise, while our cyclists are training on a better surface.

Our Government believe in inclusiveness, hence, the synergies between the National Sports Commission and the Guyana Volleyball Federation yielded the highly appreciated new floor at the Gymnasium.

The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, under the astute leadership of Dr. Frank Anthony can reflect that during the period under review, Guyana hosted highly successful Caribbean Table Tennis Championships, Caribbean Squash Championships, Hockey Championships...

Mr. Speaker: One minute Hon. Member.

Mr. Neendkumar: ...and we all say let us congratulate our football team, that we have never reached this height, as we are waiting to qualify to play in the Brazil World Cup. International cricket, international boxing and international ruby, we have hosted all these last year.

Former President, Bharat Jagdeo must be recognised for his tremendous contribution to the development of sports and sports facilities, in particular, in Guyana. Over the years several sports associations, sports teams and sports personalities received tremendous assistance from President Jagdeo's direct intervention. The Ministry of Cultural, Youth and Sport is collaborating with several other Ministries to create a significant impact on social issues in Guyana through sports. The alliance with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education is developing rapidly and our people's realness of the necessities and the importance of a healthy lifestyle is quickly growing...

Mr. Speaker: Fifteen seconds.

Mr. Neendkumar: This Government's spending on sports must be fully supported..
[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: His time is up. The Hon. Member got time, I am working with a time clock here and twenty plus five minutes, with interruptions, he is on time. He has about fifteen to twenty seconds left and that is... Could you please wrap up in fifteen seconds!

Mr. Neendkumar: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Our PPP/C Government is presently constructing..
[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: One second Mr. Neendkumar. Ms. Ally if you feel I am doing what you said I am doing... I take serious offence to your statement that I am doing crap. I am working with a time clock and I am highly offended by your statement. You may be Chief Whip, but those statements I will not countenance.

Ms. Ally: Mr. Speaker, I did not say that.

Mr. Speaker: I heard that. I heard it.

Ms. Ally: I did not say that.

Mr. Speaker: Go ahead Mr. Neendkumar.

Mr. Neendkumar: Mr. Speaker, I commend this 2012 Budget and I want to ask this National Assembly to please support it. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Member. Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira could you proceed please.

8.52 p.m.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to speak before this House. I am a proud Guyanese woman; I am a proud Member of the People's Progressive Party and the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government who stands before this House to support the Budget 2012 – "Remaining on Course, United in Purpose and Prosperity for All". I am proud that this budget continues to provide support to Guyana's constant trajectory on building a modern democratic and developed nation.

I have heard comments from the floor and it appears as if some people seem to think that one budget can provide all of the answers. In fact, no budget can turn a country around in one year, but a budget can, over a period of time, lay the foundation for development and I will use a number of cases to support this: Singapore, Hong Kong, China, Brazil; all their paths to development were that of moving from under-developed countries or countries with major problems... Their foundations were laid over years with budgetary support, with legal and regulatory transformation as well as political will – if one looks at China from 1989, Brazil over the last 15 years, and so on.

This budget builds on what we are trying to do. It is not a panacea for all of the challenges that we face in our country – both at the national level and at the global level – but rather, as I said, as we continue to move forward this budget builds on earlier budgets and lends tangible support to the Government's Pro-Poor, Pro-Growth Approach to national development.

Mr. Speaker, you may have been quite a younger man when the very first budget of the first PPP/C Government in 1993 was tabled. We started on a very conscious trajectory of reconstructing what was a collapsed society and economy to advance the conditions of our

people's lives and to position Guyana as a modern and developed nation. One of the things we struggled with in the early years was: How do we have and develop growth while keeping a human face? How did we balance it? That is how we came up with the Pro-Poor, Pro-Growth Approach. Therefore, throughout the budgets, particularly of the period 2001 to now and more so in 2006, one would see the emphasis on balancing economic growth with a pro-poor approach being made. In the earlier period of 1993 to 2001 we were really reconstructing with very limited resources and tried to bring Guyana to a stage where it could be able to move into position of expanding the economic and agriculture base.

These were not easy decisions. The number of poor and vulnerable of our country was very large in the early years – the 1990s. We have to recognise that the per capita GDP (Gross Domestic Product) was US\$290 in 1991. Today it is US\$2,868 per capita GDP. Certainly this is something to be happy about; that we made a change in this way, the fact that poverty has been reduced but we have not conquered poverty yet. We have been able to make big strides in reducing it and we are satisfied that there is equalisation of opportunity for people at many levels but we still have to admit the poverty is still amongst us.

I will say this, I remember in my earlier days traveling around this country and seeing such abject poverty. The young generation today in this room does not know what a kwashiorkor baby looks like – kwashiorkor occurs when there is extreme malnutrition with swollen belly and red hair. This is what we saw in the 1980s where 54% of all children in Guyana were malnourished. I know from whence we came and I do not reserve this knowledge to myself alone, because there are those sitting in this room who also know that I speak the truth.

Members of the House, our greatest challenge is not only the economic one and bringing us into a level of stability where we recognise – and I will come to that later – that these achievements are not a fiction of the PPP/C; it is recognised by the international community that we have come from such a low level to what is now a respectable level where we can walk with our heads high in any part of this region and not be considered the “poor basket” of this region.

A number of speakers have referred to what probably is our biggest challenge as a country. The biggest challenge that we have to face is building trust and confidence. After trying to reconstruct this country and bring something up to some level by 1999, with the violence of

1997, 1998 and 1999, we went into constitutional reform because we had to. We – meaning not only PPP/C but all of the political actors and the civil society, had to find a way to repair the fractured governing structures of our society in an unstable political environment. If we did not find the stable political environment this country could not develop.

When we talk about budget... [*Interruption*] I am talking about, Mr. Williams, in case you have not read the Budget Speech, on page 59, “Governance” which the Hon. Member Dr. Roopnarine spent his time speaking about during his speech and I am also speaking on it.

We must be proud as a people, as a Parliament, in what we have done in terms of constitutional reform, Parliamentary reform and the fact that we had built an inclusive governance model. It is unique and I do not care who finds it funny or who mocks it. The fact that this country is the only country in this region that says that the Leader of the Opposition has a veto vote, on the Head of State; this, is a powerful tool of inclusive governance.

We can belittle these things but I want to honour the dedicated and committed individuals in the People’s Progressive Party and the People’s National Congress who worked to find compromise, not only in the constitutional reform period and in the many meetings by plenipotentiaries outside of this room and the rooms of Parliament but also found the language, crafting of the language for Standing Orders and constitutional changes and the motions that came here on the Parliamentary Management Committee and the Sectoral Committees. I want to honour those who were here and who spent dedicated hours, because of this. To me, this is a sign of political leadership that we must honour in our society – the “Dr. Luncheons” and the “Lance Carberry’s”, the “Winston Murrays” and the “Reepu Daman Persauds”. I was honoured on a number of occasions to be part of that and I am also honoured to have been part of the Human Rights Task Force of the Constitutional Reform Commission that worked on the Human Rights Section with Hon. Member Mrs. Backer, with Hon. Member Mr. Nadir and with the Civil Society Representative Ms. La Rose.

The struggle to reach the language and to pass these Constitutional Amendments, the struggle to get the Standing Orders, the struggle to make legislative changes occurred during a matter of only a few years ago; it is only 8 years. Therefore, we all sit and we hear about United States’ democracy, British democracy and Canadian democracy. They have been struggling with it for...

[Mrs. Backer: Who spoke about that?] I have sat in Parliament long enough to have heard it. These countries have taken 200 to 300 years to reach where they are and the reversals of those democracies are going on in those countries.

My greatest concern when dealing with this budget is that there appears to be a mood, a language, that is bent on unraveling these gains fought so hard for and, in appearance, to recklessly want to throw the baby and the bathwater out together.

Our society is not only about bread and butter issues; it is about where we are going as a people. When I have listened to the speakers on the other side they are right to make their representations as geographic MPs, as Members of their Parties, as Members of APNU or AFC but the grand design of Guyana is about where we are going as a country. We have positioned Guyana at a point now where internationally and regionally – and I will come to the figures to show – we have done well. Therefore, we do not have to be living from day to day; we can now be looking 5 years up the road and talking about hydropower, when hydropower was a dream of this country for the last 40 years or so – since the 1960s.

We talked about oil and gas and yet we are now seeing that the horizon is closer and not just a pipe dream – when people laughed. I remember the days when Mr. Burnham said to the people in the National Park “hydropower or \$14 a day” and the people did not get hydropower and they did not get \$14 a day; I remember.

We have the power to allow these changes to be implemented. The Hon. Member, Dr. Roopnarine spoke about a number of issues; he referred to Public Procurement Commission as, I believe, one of the agencies and so did Mr. Williams and other speakers, about not being established. It is on the list of items for the IPPD (Interparliamentary Political Party Dialogue) discussions and it is in the Parliament/Constitution Sub-Committee of which both Dr. Roopnarine and I are Members and it is listed as the third item for discussion. And we have given ourselves five months to deal with it, I believe.

We also talked about other appointments. Reference was made to the Chairman of the Integrity Commission and to the Ombudsman, through a number of constitutional appointments. I have files here from Office of the President going back to 2007, 2010, 2011, with the former Leader of the Opposition in relation to appointments of the Chairman of the Integrity Commission, of all

these different posts. The present Leader of the Opposition again raised the issues and Mr. Granger received a letter on the 22nd February listing all of the appointments – all of which, or most of which Hon. Member Dr. Roopnarine talked about:

The submission of the six names for the Chairperson of the Human Rights

Appointment of the Chancellor of the Judiciary and the Chief Justice

The appointment of the Chairperson of the Integrity Commission

The appointment of the Ombudsman

The appointment of the Public Service Appellate Tribunal

The establishment of the Public Procurement Commission

Appointee of the Leader of the Opposition to the Board of the Guyana National Broadcasting Authority

Appointee of the Leader of the Opposition to the Board of the Protected Areas Commission

Appointee of the Leader of the Opposition to fill a vacancy in the Guyana Elections Commission as a result of the passing of Commissioner Robert Williams

Appointee of the Leader of the Opposition to the Advisory Committee on Broadcasting

So, I believe a meeting did take place with the President and the Leader of the Opposition however no names have been forthcoming. I know that the President named some of his names. Mr. Harmon did refer to the fact that there was a code. I have looked at the code having seen it for the first time today but it does not have anything much to do with constitutional appointees; it has to do with criteria for board selection and when one talks about that one is talking about letters that have gone out both electronically and hard copies to the Leaders of the AFC and the APNU as well as Members of the Committee that deals with Boards in the IPPD discussion – again, those are all pending. Whilst I realise the Hon. Dr. Rupert Roopnarine is anxious to have all of this done, all these issue have been incorporated, some were removed to be exclusively in the domain of the President and the Leader of the Opposition meeting, some were referred into the IPPD general or plenary, as we call it, and others were put into Sub-committees; boards were

put into the Sub-committee of Governance, the ones with the PPC and Parliamentary changes are in the committee that the Hon. Member and I sit on.

We are talking about operating in good faith. We must operate in good faith. We cannot come to this House and talk about partnership and a new dispensation and at each step of the way the path is strewn with no movement, little movement, no negotiation or a “take it or leave it” attitude. I will not, as a Member of this Parliament for the last 19 years, allow statements to go unchallenged in relation to the way in which Parliament operated in the 8th and 9th Parliaments. The 9th Parliament was a success, is a success and in the annals of history will be a credit to both sides of this House. It will be because people worked hard in this House. We were able to put into place for the first time Constitutional Reforms with the New Standing Orders. It is the credit to the MPs, the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, the staff and Clerks of this House that we all showed that this could work.

When will a time come when we as Guyanese will not undress our country as we do? When I look at Jamaica and Trinidad they have major problems. When one looks at the latest paper – many people seem to quote a number of papers... [Mrs. Baker: They did not file an action in court against Parliament] Yes they did when there was Mr. Manning, you forget, because they did not appoint a Speaker for an entire year and they went to court. We will no longer discuss that. Mr. Speaker. I ask for your protection. The latest report, 8th April, 2012, “Trinidad Business: 200,000 persons are placed on the breadline as a result of...” This is a statement by the San Juan Business Association in relation to strike action taken by the workers of TCL and that 200,000 people are on the breadline.

We have to be able deal with the issue of building trust and confidence. We have to deal with issues of ethnicity and protect ourselves from attempts to balkanise our country. When we have people in this House making references that to me at best are ethnically insensitive – in which it is said that in one particular Ministry one ethnic group was removed and replaced with another and now it is being reversed and therefore we can now expect a professional and better Ministry, I shudder when I think of that and I feel pained and revolted by this. Because I believe that we in this House should feel ashamed because Guyana is multiethnic and we all have a place here. There is no Region in this country, Guyana, that can be said to represent one ethnic group – not one. One of the things of the Housing programme which no one has spoken about here is that we

moved away from the violence of the 1960s, villages being ethnically stratified, into new communities, new schemes where people can live together of different ethnic groups, classes, religions, different geographic locales. I challenge you to go to Diamond; try to find out. People come from all different regions of Guyana. This is a new Guyana being born and you seem somehow to want to be stuck in the past. You want to hold us to the past but Guyana and the new young people are moving ahead. So, comrades, this attempt to balkanise us and to try to show that “this” Region is not getting over “that” Region because of some unstated innuendo is not going to move this country forward.

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

Mr. Rohee: Mr. Speaker, may I ask that the Hon. Member be given fifteen minutes to continue?

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, do I have your approval?

Mr. Speaker: I do not know. There was an arrangement between the two sides that backbenchers, including yourself, would be given 5 minutes extension so that would depend on cooperation of Members of the House.

Ms. Teixeira: I agree. I want to see the good faith now at work. [Mrs. Backer: You all did not give us time.] I did.

Mr. Speaker: What I will urge is that we recognise Ms. Teixeira as a very senior Member of this House – longstanding – who has, in a sense, reserved herself for last so that all of her colleagues could go before her. Her 20 minutes are up; under the time provided to me by the Chief Whips she would have 5 minutes thereafter but, as I said, it would have to come with the consent of your colleague, the Chief Whip on the Opposition side.

Ms. Ally: Mr. Speaker, we agreed that backbenchers will get a 5-minute extension and so we stand to our word.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker that is what I talked about, good faith. Mr. Speaker, I am a very disciplined person. I negotiated with Ms. Amna Ally for two backbenchers to get 45 minutes on their side but this is the new dispensation you all want. Mr. Speaker, I will abide with it.

Let me just wrap up. One cannot dispute the image of Guyana in terms of how we are looked at. All the statements by the IMF (International Monetary Fund) by the fact that they are saying in the last sentence: “The future looks bright and despite many challenges Guyana must lock in the gains from recent years of fiscal consolidation, prudent sustained macroeconomic policies and have resilience in the face of economic shock.” Mr. Speaker, this country has made a name for itself at an international level – the UN (United Nations), LCDS (Low Carbon Development Strategy), climate change, REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation). We should be proud as Guyanese, proud!

We have passed the test of media freedom. The Freedom House Report of 2012 has this as a free country with the press. The reports of freedom of religion we passed the test. At the Universal Periodic Review, Human Rights Council, we passed the test. At the OAS (Organization of American States), Inter-American Convention against Corruption we passed the test.

Mr. Speaker, I say to the Opposition: Can we do better? Yes. Can we be more efficient? Yes. Can we improve the quality of our work? Yes. Can we be more productive to face global competition? Yes. Can we continue to work towards poverty reduction? Yes we can and we must! Can we improve the efficiency and accountability of the judiciary and the rule of law in this country? Yes we can and we must. Can we tighten up on our oversight to ensure that there is greater transparency and accountability? Yes we can and we shall.

I sincerely hope that when all the things are done... I heard people say that this budget has no purpose, no vision but I have not heard one person say what the vision of APNU (A Partnership for National Unity) and the AFC (Alliance for Change) in relation to the budget.

I want to close on one thing. I did not know that two parties went to the elections; I thought three did, but I have heard comments by Mr. Harmon appearing to say that he has lumped together the votes of APNU and AFC and made them one. That is a problem for AFC and APNU, not me; that is not a problem for the PPP/C! However, let me just say this, Mr. Speaker, I sincerely hope that APNU and AFC do not blow this opportunity to approve this budget to allow Guyana to continue on the path of progress – to allow our people to get on with their lives and their businesses – because whilst we “pampozet” in here – someone used the word “pampozet” in here

earlier – the ordinary men and women of this country are organising themselves, they are doing things to improve their lives and they want to see more of it so we would have to deliver.

We are at crossroads. This country is at crossroads. Which way will we go? Will we go on one side of the House or the other? Do we decide to approve a budget in which nobody has, in principle, found a problem with the vision? They have had problems with implementation, they have had problems with administration, but they have not had problems with the vision. So when Mr. Harmon said that people rejected the vision he did not advise me on what the vision was that the people wanted. However, we are at the crossroads as a country, as a people and in this Parliament. We can decide to approve the budget, or as Mr. Moses Nagamootoo said “use the scissors and not the sledge hammer” or as other people have said, but whichever side we choose to be on – you choose to be on – we in the PPP/Civic are clear that history will be on our side. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, thank you very much for your patience. This concludes our business for today. Tomorrow is our final day for the debates and so I call on the Minister of Home Affairs, leading Government’s business, to move the adjournment motion.

Mr. Rohee: Mr. Speaker, I would like to move that the House stands adjourned until tomorrow, 17th April, 2012, at 1.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Members, and have a good night.

Assembly adjourned accordingly at 9.19 p.m.