

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2015) OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN

3RD Sitting

Friday, 26TH June, 2015

Assembly convened at 2.11 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MOTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OR SITTINGS OF THE ASSEMBLY AND MOVED BY A MINISTER -

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO. 54

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That Standing Order No. 54 be suspended to enable the Assembly to proceed at its sitting on Friday, 26th June, 2015. with the second reading and the remaining stages of the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (Amendment) Bill 2015 —Bill No. 4 of 2015.” *[First Vice-President and Prime Minister]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have given consent in accordance with Standing Order No. 30 (d) for the following motion to be proceeded with at this sitting. Hon. First Vice-President and Prime Minister will move the following motion.

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: “Be it resolved that Standing Order No. 54 be suspended to allow the Assembly to proceed at the sitting today, Friday, 26th June, 2015, with the second reading and the remaining stages of the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (Amendment) Bill 2015 – Bill No. 4/2015.”

Question put, and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

APPROVAL OF GOVERNMENT’S POLICY IN PRESIDENT’S ADDRESS

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly expresses its sincere thanks and appreciation to His Excellency the President, Brigadier David A. Granger, M.S.S., for his Address to the National Assembly which was made on the occasion of the Ceremonial Opening of the First Session of the Eleventh Parliament of Guyana on Wednesday, 10th June, 2015, and approves of the policy adumbrated therein.” *[First Vice President and Prime Minister]*

Assembly resumed debate on motion.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the Assembly will resume the debate on the following motion. The first speaker today is the Hon. Member Ms. Amna Ally.

Minister of Social Cohesion [Ms. Ally]: Hon. Members of this House let me take this opportunity to join with my colleagues to congratulate His Excellency President David Arthur Granger for his address to this National Assembly at the ceremonial opening of the Eleventh Parliament on 10th June, 2015. I can assure you, Sir, that we were all inspired by his presentation.

His Excellency David Arthur Granger is a man with foresight, a visionary leader who has his country and its people at heart. His vision is one for development, individually and collectively.

Evident in his speech was his wisdom to establish a new Ministry called the Ministry of Social Cohesion, and many of us wanted to know what this Ministry is all about. Hence, let me hasten to say and to adumbrate a conceptual framework and forward-looking plan for this Ministry.

On May 11, 2015 Guyana held yet another General and Regional Elections. Significant strides have been made in recent years in consolidating democratic governance, peace and development by most accounts. From both local and international observers and standards, it was deemed to be a free and fair election and it reflected the will of the people. Although we have a new Government, our country is still divided along ethnic lines. The gains, which we have previously gained, are still fragile. The discovery of discrimination and inequalities were evident, hence the fragility of our gain, a perceived standstill and a threat to the development of our country.

Let me say very clearly that the A Partnership for National Unity+Alliance For Change (APNU+AFC) Government campaigned on the platform of national unity and pledged to work towards unifying this country. President David Granger pledged to be the President for all the people of Guyana and not just the constituency that voted for the coalition. As a result of which our attempt is to bridge this gap so that we can proceed along the unity path for the development of Guyana.

The situation is evident by the results of the 11th May Elections, as I said, this country remains ethnically divided, an upsurge of inequalities, divisiveness in society, too many discriminatory practices and an unacceptable rough and hilly cricket pitch. Hence, this new Government, under our visionary David Granger, the appointment of a Minister to address all of the above issues and more so to take a front burner to foster national unity, to bring about the change that Guyana needs to promote the creation of safe spaces for Guyanese to dialogue, for Guyanese to heal, for Guyanese to reconcile and aspire to harmony are upper most in our agenda.

Social cohesion is not a new concept; it manifests itself internationally. In Europe, for example, it is considered to be the flagship concept which reminds people to be collectively attentive to and aware of any kind of discrimination, inequality, marginality or exclusion. Right here, in Guyana, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) started work on social cohesion but the APNU+AFC coalition will take Guyana to another level in fostering national unity and cohesiveness.

I must tell you that social cohesion is a complex, cultural, psychological and social phenomenon which demands broad treatment. Let me say that there is an obvious nexus between social cohesion and nation building. Our Guyana has people with diverse origins, histories, cultures, religions, even languages and certainly it is a challenge to bring all of them together so that Guyana can move forward. I am confident though that the APNU+AFC coalition Government will successfully pilot the unity train to bring together the Guyanese people on the same and one platform - the cohesion platform.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to crave your indulgence to quote a section of His Excellency's speech.

“...Government will introduce measures to promote social cohesion and protect vulnerable groups. We shall work towards healing the rifts between social groups in the country. We shall re-establish cordial relationships with civil society, religious organisations and trade unions. We have the responsibility to restore the integrity and viability of working people's and non-governmental organisations which have been gravely undermined.

Guyana cannot become 'One Nation' if gross disparities persist between the hinterland and the coastland, between the educated few and a semi-literate mass and between the very rich and the very poor. We shall foster growth in a united nation in which cooperation prevails, over confrontation”.

2.26 p.m.

I will now put forward a forward-looking plan taking into consideration the words of His Excellency President Granger.

Sir, being cognizant of the ills of our society and having regard for the establishment of this key Ministry of Social Cohesion, with its objectives in mind, it is intended to develop a five-year strategic plan. The five-year strategic plan will emanate from a roundtable scheduled for 3rd September at the Arthur Chung Convention Centre, and this forum will include the involvement of international stakeholders; the involvement of faith-based organisations working closely with commissions, especially the Ethnic Relations Commission. By the way Comrades, I understand

that Mr. Juan Edghill took issue with me on the Ethnic Relations Commission, but I have news for this goodly gentleman, that Mr. Juan Edghill - my colleague Mrs. Lawrence said “His Bishop” - does not have the *locus standi* or any moral right to challenge me on what to do and how to do it, for this Ministry. It was Juan Edghill who politicised the Ethnic Relations Commission and he caused a plethora of problems and did not allow for its independence. I will leave the grass for the animals to eat.

We, in the APNU+AFC, know what we have to do, and we will do it without fear or favour. We will develop programmes with our schools, with our cultural organisations, with our social protection agencies, with our indigenous organisations, with our human rights activist - we will not strip them, Sir - and many others to ensure that our programmes are geared to achieve the objective of cohesiveness.

Let me proudly acknowledge the input of international organisations, embassies, faith-based organisations, civil society and many others which have come forward and expressed their desire to support the Ministry to achieve its objective. People are just overwhelmed with the idea of working together.

Guyanese must be serious now. Sir, the President has said in his speech that we are over with campaign and the hustings; it is now time for nation building. It is time for social cohesion to underpin all national and local government priorities; it is time for the inclusion of integrated, economic and social development; it is time for us to end discriminatory practices; it is time that we eradicate inequalities; it is time to promote and preserve all indigenous cultures and knowledge. It is important that this APNU+AFC coalition Government accelerate this change since it will improve the quality of life of all people - our youth, our women, our folks with disabilities are all important components for the development of Guyana.

The Ministry of Social Cohesion will build capacity to drive the socioeconomic agenda in the country and we must continue the fight against all forms of discrimination. Discrimination is a threat to social cohesion. The respect for human dignity and equality, the promotion of freedom, the rule of law and democracy, the improvement of material well-being and economic justice, the enhancement of sound family and community values, upholding honesty, integrity and loyalty,

ensuring harmony in culture, belief and conscience and peaceful coexistence are all indeed vital ingredients for the success of social cohesion.

Social cohesion should be perceived as national importance, therefore, leadership at all levels should sanction it. Whether you are politicians, church leaders, private sector, civil society, individuals, collective, all, we must want it. It must come from within us. I want to make it very clear this Ministry is talking about uniting all Guyana, all political parties. We live in one country and our work must be to develop the one country.

In conclusion, let me call on all Guyana to let us make this work. Let cohesion start with us; let it start from the politicians; let it then branch off to every strata of society and then it will bear the fruits of social cohesion and nation building.

Mr. Speaker, the future of Guyana lies in our hands; the hands of David Granger and his team are safe hands. I, therefore, commit the President's address for your approval.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Minister of Finance [Mr. Jordan]: It is an honour for me to be addressing this honourable and noble House. I cannot help but to recall, whilst growing up, accompanying my dad to listen to budget speeches, most often in December. Right out there, they used to be, just as today, heard on a loud speaker. He would have brought me along to listen to famous people such as Dr. Ptolemy Reid, Mr. Hope, and others. Those were the good days when the presentation of budgets used to come out before the actual fiscal year started. I will be saying something a bit more about getting back to those wonderful days. I often used to wonder what went on in this majestic building. Now, I have the opportunity I pledge to do my best to continue the high tradition of those who have left their indelible footprints, not in the sands, but on the mats of the National Assembly.

Sir, I also wish to congratulate you, on your elevation to high office. I know you well. You have served with distinction in every activity you have attempted and I know you will bring that same discipline and distinction to your new office.

Mr. Speaker, His Excellency President David Arthur Granger, the Eighth Executive President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana – by the way, he said that we should be addressing Guyana

as the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and not Government of Guyana - on the 10th June, gave to all those who were here...Unfortunately our Comrades to the west – wise people came from the east - were not here to listen to his sterling and wide ranging address in which he outlined, in for the most part, the 20/20 vision. Now, we all know what 20/20 means; it does not only mean, in this case, five years from 2015. It means that, as he said, he is looking forward to Guyanese having a good life, a life in which all Guyanese can feel that they are sharing in whatever cake we are able to produce, and not some getting more than others. He was looking at Guyana being transformed over the next five years, as the first part, in what we all know will be many successive five years. He talked about policies and programmes to put us on a formal path of economic growth and development. He talked about long-term national economic planning to tackle poverty, to reduce inequalities across regions, across sectors and among various classes of people.

Indeed, he spoke of so many things in his wide ranging, all-embracing address that we can spend all day and all of next week, perhaps even all of the five years, just going through them in depth. We do not have that time; time is always a constraint and I propose only to address two of those broad themes – poverty and accountability.

There is clearly a nexus between poverty and accountability, as we have come to know in the past 20-plus years. We have seen that unaccountable government goes hand in hand with increase poverty. Although we have a deficit in our data gathering, which I will also speak to, anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that poverty has been on the rise in Guyana. Poverty remains pervasive, especially in the hinterland and several pockets of urban and rural areas.

2.41p.m.

The question is: What will we be doing over the next five years to address poverty and accountability issues? I think we have to speak to the Address itself, where His Excellency spoke about national economic planning. Indeed, for a country with so limited resources, planning will take on even more importance.

Planning in Guyana usually has a bad name. We have tried planning, famous development plans of the 1970's and, more recently, we have had the National Development Strategy (NDS). None of which appears to have acquitted themselves well. Yet, as I said, with the binding constraints

we have, including limited financial and human resources, we must plan how best we can use them. So, I think, it was a master stroke to actually have been able to recruit the eminent Prof. Dr. Clive Thomas to lead that role of national planning. Before that announcement I had indeed told myself that we do not know all the answers in the Ministry, we would need help. So, I got Cabinet to agree to the establishment of a Ministerial Council of Economic Advisors, who will be advising the Minister of Finance on a wide range of fiscal, economic and financial issues over the next five years. This Council will comprise eminent persons in their fields and we hope they will bring to bear, in their competence, academic training and experience in helping us to tackle the many problems in this society, of which my Ministry plays a leading role in solving.

To help in the reduction of poverty, we have to concentrate on several things as it relates to my Ministry. Indeed, at the top of the list must be achieving stable macro-economic growth. We have known that the economy has been growing – indeed it has been - but at very small rates, sometimes 2% to 3%, on average 3% over the last decade. This growth, in many respects, is oftentimes mere recoveries, as opposed to what is known as growth. I suppose growth has to be something where, if you have 10 today and 15 next week, you have grown; and if you have 15 next week and 20, you have grown. But to have 10 today and grow to 15 next week, then back to 12 the following week, up 13 the next week, back to 10 the next week, I do not know whether one can consider that growth. In a sense, this is what the economy has been doing for the last two decades. It has been up-down, up-down, down-down, up-up, so in a sense one is always trying to play catch-up. I was telling someone recently that some of the achievements, or what we are calling achievements today, were actually surpassed in the 1970's. We talk about achieving 350,000 tons of sugar, but that was achieved also in the 1970's. A couple millions of tons of bauxite were achieved in the 1970's. Now we happily report achieving numbers in the bauxite industry which are significantly less. If we really want to lift people out of poverty, in as much as we only have 700,000 plus people, we cannot continue to be growing at these minimal rates of 2% to 3% annually, and crow about it, when for example, one of our neighbours in the more developed category of CARICOM might have barely grown 0.5 % or even have not grown itself. Those people are way ahead of us. One cannot compare a country with a per capita income of US\$1,500 to a country with a per capita income of US\$12,000 and talk about growth, when we are only growing at 3% and those are only growing by 1%. I suppose it sounds good, but that is what statistics is meant to do, if one uses it incorrectly.

We do have to grow at rates of a Singaporean or of a Malaysian or of a Chinese type, consistently 8% to 10% for prolonged periods, if we really want to make a dent into poverty. Our traditional sectors, as you know, have not been doing well over the past decade, in particular, sugar, which has served us well over time has been on bad times. In good times, it helped, especially with the sugar levy. In bad times, we are expected to help sugar return to, if not to its glory days, viability and sustainability.

Rice has been doing exceptionally well, achieving rates that were once achieved in the 70's. The issue here is markets; tons of rice and very little markets to sell. That suggests to us that we need to redouble our efforts to find markets, so that farmers will continue to be encouraged to produce more and add more value.

Beyond the traditional sectors, we need to carefully observe and manage the emerging sectors, especially our oil that we have found. I am going to Venezuela tomorrow, so I will not say anything else, except to say that we need to exploit all the resources that are within the defined boundaries of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana.

We also have to be wary of what is called the *Dutch Disease* in Economics. I think learning from countries that had this great oil wealth, we have, at least, been making and saying the right things. One of the right things that we have been saying was the creation of a Sovereign Wealth Fund to ensure that we do not fritter away whatever wealth may be coming from the oil. I think it was good for His Excellency to also relate that we do not have to wait for oil to establish a Sovereign Wealth Fund. We also have wasting resources in the mining sector and in forestry, where we should not be consuming all of the income that is coming from those sectors to date, leaving nothing for our children and inter-generational families.

If we want to keep our economy attractive, we will also have to look at other areas in macro-economic as such as the interest rates and the inflation rates. No one wants to come to a country that consistently chooses high single or double digit rates, which means whatever they are earning is being eaten away, almost immediately. We have to do better in doing business in Guyana. I do not want to steal my Colleague's address, Colleague Mr. Gaskin, but, perhaps, we have to do better in doing business. We must be able to sell Guyana; sell our comparative advantages - our geographical situation, our geographical location, our warm people, our multi-

cultural mix or the fact that we are English speaking. We must position Guyana as the gateway to the Caribbean, South America and Africa. We must remove the bureaucracy in doing business. Great complaints at the moment of how many things are piling up at the wharves because we seem to be moving as molasses going uphill. We have to reduce the time taken for processing peoples' goods through the Customs and other areas. In fact, in 2014, we were 90 out of 189 countries in the doing-business framework. This has now moved to 99 out of 189 countries. I think we are actually going in the right direction, I hope these numbers are, but still well below where we should be.

The judicial system, Mr. Williams, has to also be improved efficiently. People must be able to accept and have confidence in the system, both in its rulings and capacity to hear cases on time. We have to remove the deficits in our country that is obstructing major inflows of investment outside of the extractive industries. We have boasted of how much investment we have had in Guyana, but when one does the analysis, most of these investments have gone into the extractive industry - bauxite, gold and other minerals and, of course, forestry. We have to remove the major infrastructural gaps that we have; we need to link the coast to our hinterland. If we have a human capital deficit, we need to improve our training and target our resources in education to produce those skills that are required now and for the emerging economy. We need to partner with our local and private sectors to overcome some of these deficits and we need to engage the diaspora in more ways other than just talking it, we need harness that capital, both human and financial. We need to engage in more public and private partnerships. We also need targeted interventions in the social sector so that there will be greater access, improved quality, there will focus on women, the elderly and children and there will be more gender-based budgeting. I must admit that as part of my consultation for the upcoming budget, yesterday, I met some lovely women from Red Thread and some other organisations, who gave me a lesson in gender budgeting and how to target the poor and needy; how we must target our budget expenses to the poor and needy. It was quite an eye opener for which I am happy.

In all of this, planning and policy formulations would be nothing if we do not have proper information and proper data. Our Statistical Bureau has languished in the vineyard of thorns over the past 20 years to such an extent that it has become an unreliable institution, as it relates to data. I am sorry if I appear to be knocking them, but this is the view of many stakeholders in the

country. One only has to think about the Census that was taken in 2012. This is 2015 and most of the information on the Census is not there. I am told that it will be available in 2016, almost half the time when the next census is about to take place. We cannot continue. There is an absence of unemployment data, there are no surveys that were done, the last income and expenditure survey was done just under 10 years ago, so there is no data on which proper planning can take place. Happily, we have recognised this and from my own technical background, this is not a situation that I could have allowed to continue. I have moved, post haste, to put the Bureau on a footing befitting of its status. The Bureau is scattered all over, in three places to be exact, so it makes management and accountability issues very difficult.

2.56 p.m.

I am pleased to report that the Bureau will soon find its home in one building, properly accessorised and creating an atmosphere for which work could be enhanced. We have been able to secure some technical assistance and they will be equipped with the necessary machinery, equipment, training for their staff and so on. We will also be looking at the legislative aspect of the Bureau to strengthen its capability to collect statistics, process those statistics and make it available on a timely manner. It will also include increasing penalties for those who either do not report or report incorrect or incomplete data. It is not always the Bureau that is at fault, but many people who shout the loudest are the ones who are also lacking.

On the fiscal side, we have already done a number of things, since coming into Government, to improve accountability. We have closed a set of accounts. I note in today's newspaper that the Auditor General had made reference to it. Even before reading his Report, we had already moved to close a set of accounts that had remained dormant and were probable cases for theft and other nefarious activities. We have instituted a large number of forensic audits and despite all the noise and hot air that are being made about these audits, we will not be moved. Indeed, these audits are not only to find whether assets were misappropriated, misrepresented, misallocated or misused, but any Government who wants to sort coming into a situation after 20 years and more would be foolish not to conduct these audits to know what they have and do not have.

So, it is not a question of witch hunting and looking for people. If we find them, by the way, they will be dealt with in accordance with the law. We have to move on from the whole harping and

carping about witch hunting and so on and to see these audits for what they are, and to also stop the abuse of some of the people who were doing the audits. Wait until one sees the audits and then determine whether they were bias or not.

The Consolidated Fund, as you know, is in heavy deficit; the old and the new one. Can you believe it? We closed the old one because we could not audit it. We open a new one and it is already in excess \$60 billion in deficit. Work has already started on trying to reconcile that deficit and also, to put funds where they belong. So, after these forensic audits would have been completed, we will move swiftly to deal with all the agencies within our remit that have those extra budgetary funds lying in accounts all over and we will move to bring them into the Consolidated Fund.

I want to repeat something, I am repeating for those who have heard before, some agencies in the sectors are collecting revenues on behalf of the Government. It is not their revenues and these in particular are the Forestry Commission, the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC), the Frequency Management Unit (FMU), among others. Those revenues are being collected on behalf of the Government. For those of you who are too young to know, back in the 70's those that are now deemed semi-autonomous agencies were actually departments of ministries. The Forestry Department was a department of the Ministry of Agriculture; GGMC was a department of the Ministry of Energy and Mines; and so on. It is only because it was felt that it would have been better to put them outside as the sector was growing and so on. It would be better policed, regulated and so on, by treating them as semi-autonomous agencies. But we did not say that the GGMC could be holding \$8 billion plus in an account and do whatever it feels like with it. That was never the intention. We will be moving swiftly to correct what appears to have been an incorrect position taken.

We will also be strengthening our internal audit offices. As you know, I think during last week, it was announced that some fellow, who was not a worker of the Ministry, but he did collude with members of the Ministry to raid some pension accounts, for which he has been adequately compensated by the legal people. I think he got three or four years. This is what we have to be doing with people who put their hands in the cookie jar or take what is not theirs. On that matter, I have ordered the Accountant General to close all accounts that he has been using for pensions

and use the Consolidated Fund, which was the basis for why we set up that Fund to pay pensions. No more offline accounts for paying pensions.

We are also reforming the national budget process. As I had hinted earlier, my intention and the Government's intention is to return budgeting to where it should be and that is that a budget should actually start and conclude before the start of the fiscal year. This is a pledge to this House that this will happen before our first five years are over.

We have also instituted Strategic Planning and Results Based Expenditure Management. Programme budgeting has featured prominently over the past eight to ten years. We will, over the next five years, take this to the next level. We have instituted performance framework, monitoring and evaluation systems, and other reforms to ensure that we are getting value for money, ensuring that allocations are properly done, and also ensuring that spending is done within the manner intended and voted for by this House.

In the area of revenue, lots of reforms have gone over on the revenue over the years, but still they are huge problems. Indeed, for every reform that we seem to have taken, there has been several steps backwards, none more so than a few years ago when a reform that was in place was removed to accommodate a certain company. We will be setting up a Tax Reform Committee that will be undertaking an extensive reform of the tax system. We have already created the terms of reference for this Committee and reform which will start shortly.

We will be strengthening our medium term expenditure frameworks for multi-year budgeting. This is important if we want to bring back budgets starting at the beginning of the fiscal year. We would not have to go through that whole song and dance for two to three months before we could actually get out the budget. We would already have indicative budgets that mean something, not just the numbers put there, because we would have to have a two or three years, but they would mean something. So it is just a review of those numbers and then we will hit the budget for the next year.

On the Integrated Financial Management and Accounting System (IFMAS) for which there have been so much talks about. There are currently five models which are being implemented, but contrary to any beliefs these models are not glitch free. There are some problems and issues. So, while we iron out those issues, the two modules that are ours, in contingent, will have to be held

in abeyance for that and any other number of reasons, including licensing. We really do not have the modules there, we need to purchase and to purchase we would need funds. Right now in the priority listing that is not affecting our work, at the moment. In terms of the priority listing that will not be a priority, until we fix the existing modules and the platform on which these models subsist.

We are also going to reform the procurement system. This has been a hot button topic. Of course, we will start where we have some control and that is with the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB). A new Board should be in place, hopefully, by the end of next week and certain of the practices will be reviewed. Of course, the setting up the Procurement Commission is dependent on our friends on the other side, but I believe it should not stop us from going as far as we can towards the establishment of the Procurement Commission; at least it will show good faith on our part.

On the management of the public debt, Mr. Speaker, as you would probably know, we were recipients of generous debt write-offs, from both bilateral and multilateral agencies. These generous write-offs, however, have put us in a category where our soft loan component has been reordered, so we have to pay careful attention to what we borrow, how we borrow and what we borrow for, because the mix or blend is a bit harder than the soft resources we are so accustomed to. I believe it would not be telling tales out of school or pre-empting my budget speech, which is to be presented in this House shortly, that the external debt alone has risen to US\$1.6 billion and the domestic debt for which I do not have the figure, I am sure it has been given to me but I had not chance to write it down, the domestic debt has also been growing appreciably. This points to a debt strategy that has to be looked at quickly and tackled frontally, lest we end up in a situation which we were in, not so long ago. We would also be moving to strengthen the institutional and legal framework for public debt and public debt management.

Mr. Speaker, those are some of the initiatives, actions and programmes that the nation can look forward to over the next five years. I will be speaking a bit more and perhaps a bit more in-depth, since I will be allowed latitude of more than half of an hour in the Budget Speech. Before closing, I just want to say, to tackle poverty, we also have to root out corruption. We must go after this scourge, wherever it exists. We must remove ourselves from that most unwanted sobriquet; most corrupt country in the English speaking Caribbean. Big or small corruption,

those who will transfer vehicles illegally or those who will get free gas, it is still corruption and we still have to go after it. We will not be side tracked with cries of witch hunting; we will pursue this task resolutely. For everyone knows that corruption is indeed a big factor in the persistence of poverty. We will remove poverty and as a corollary we will remove corruption. I thank my Colleagues and you, Sir, for listening and I hope that this is one of my many presentations to this House. *[Applause]*

3.11 p.m.

Minister of Public Infrastructure, [Mr. Patterson]: Mr. Speaker, permit me to address you in full, Dr. Barton Umax Adolphus Scotland, my colleague Ministers, Hon. Members of this side of the House, my Colleagues on that side of the House where ever they may be, I now rise to add my input to the President's address on the opening of the Eleventh Parliament, as it pertains to my portfolio as Minister of Public Infrastructure.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, let me join my Colleagues in offering you my congratulations in being elected to that position and I wish you good stead. Having being charged with the responsibility of Public Infrastructure and Energy and recognising that infrastructural development is critical to Guyana's economic transformation, my focus will be on what our President has referred to as our 20/20 Vision - our vision for the next five years.

It is no coincidence that I am immediately following the Minister of Finance because many of my Ministry's programmes depends on the assiduity in which he conducts his, so I am starting off here, as you know we are trying to get in his good books.

The Government's strategy plan for the transportation sector is premise on its belief that the transportation, infrastructure and services are central to the growth and development of the Guyanese economy, and society throughout this, its first and subsequent terms of the A Party for National Unity + Alliance For Change (APNU + AFC) Government. The plan is to expand and modernise the transportation sector, link the hinterland regions with the coastlands to support the development of value added production in a range of economic sectors and industries, where competitive advantages already exist or may be built in the future to enhance access to domestic, regional and international markets. In this regard, it is the Government's intention to fully and totally rehabilitate all the run down wharves and stellingings and to outfit the Transport and

Harbours Department with suitable vessels to carry out its mandate to facilitate the effective and efficient transportation of goods and services, thus reducing the cost of production and distribution and expanding the geographic range of our distribution markets and roots. It is the Government's intention to pursue development in these areas to make our transportation network as efficient and reliable, and very cost effective. To this end, I would like to say that we are currently examining the procurement of a new ferry to traverse the Northwest District, as well as to return the ferry service along the Berbice River.

Our Government will focus on land, air and its maritime transportation systems to make them more viable and productive entities. The transportation system also will greatly increase social well-being by improving access to social and recreational services, facilitating community development and contributing to the exercise of individual rights, such as freedom of movement and association. We envisage the development of a modernised public transportation system. This will be a priority and as a priority, the construction of the southern corridor, which will be pursued with the input and assistance of international funding agencies. To that, I refer to the Lethem to Linden road, a long overdue promise. Within this Government's first five years term, we do intend to make concrete steps to making this a realisation. We will also facilitate building linkages along other corridors, such as the Molson Creek to Orealla road, the East Bank Berbice linkage and the north to south linkages across our country. We have, as the President had stated in his speech, to link our hinterlands to our coastlands.

We will develop a road transportation policy to increase the provision, efficiency and safety of our road transportation services. To this end, the Government plans to reintroduce big buses on long routes and force appropriate speed and weight restrictions on heavy vehicles and expand road safety programmes in schools and elsewhere. We intend to establish a Public Transportation Authority that will be responsible for consolidating public transportation functions currently scattered across many agencies, as well as coordinating with all other stakeholders involved in the provision of public transportation services.

In the area of sea-defence, the Government will be addressing this section in a more proactive manner. We intend to streamline the agencies involved in this important task to ensure that in moving forward, we do so in a more effective manner. To this end, all sea-defence works,

inclusive of sluice and other such structure will now come under the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, thus providing a more coordinated and costal protection unit.

In the area of our maritime administration, the Maritime Administration Department has a responsibility for dredging, pilotage, hydrographic surveys, accident investigations and several other maritime issues. Over the next five years, this department will pursue deep water harbour projects, in alliance with suitable partners, both private and public. This is in the line of the expansion and modernisation of the transportation sector to support the development of value added products. We will intensify dredging in the ship canals through the accusation of well-equipped dredger with the requisite facilities to perform at its maximum. This comes with the recognition that this activity is a year-long exercise, cheaper freight costs will lead to a better life, by reducing the costs borne by all people and ensure that it lives up to the President's mandate of a better life for all Guyanese.

We will continue, in collaboration with the United State (US) coast guard, in relation to the capacity building and training seminars for post security officers. We will also be seeking assistance from our regional sister countries in providing training for our local mariners.

The number of river accidents continues to be a concern to this Government. Actually, only this morning, I was informed that there was yet another river fatality in the country. To this end, I will ensure that maraud will enhance the safety features on boats, provide better training to our captains and work with the coast guards to provide a better safety mechanisms for our seafarers.

We intend to develop the ports and shipping industry through drafting and implementing a port master plan on a phase basis, cumulating in the infrastructure development and effective dredging and maintenance of all our ports, harbours and rivers, on which national and international traffic depends. We will also, in our 20/20 Plan, commence to fashion a national policy for the development of marine infrastructure, which will be link to the establishment of a regional marine freight network.

There is a high risk of a potential accident occurring on the existing Demerara Harbour Bridge from a vessel hitting and putting it out of operation. Since there is no alternate capacity to move vehicles across the Demerara River, this poses a serious threat to businesses in Regions 2, 3 and 7, who depend on this structure. To this end, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure will be

carrying out a full feasibility study to determine the most suitable option for bridging the Demerara Harbour Bridge with the aim of increasing the capacity to meet future demands. This study will be link to a greater study that looks at new approaches to expanding the city and its environs, also expanding the infrastructure on the West Demerara area. This is part of our 20/30 Vision and beyond, since we fully intend to be serving the people of Guyana in 20/30 and beyond.

In keeping with the vision of linking communities, the Government will review the Cheddie Jagan International Airport (CJIA) Expansion Project with a view of expanding the runway, and renovating and extending the existing terminal building, to ensure that our needs will be served for the next 10 to 15 years. On behalf of the Government, I would like to inform the resident of Timehri North that this proposed expansion of the runway will be done without the mass relocation plan that was threaten by the previous Administration. In fact, no more than 15 houses may need to be relocated. If this happens, required and suitable lands close by will be found and developed for anyone dislocated. Plus, assistance will be provided for this relocation.

Coupled with the proposed streamlined airport expansion, the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) will be striving to ensure that during the first term of this Government, our country will attain category one rating for the very first time in the country's history. To ensure this is accomplished, we will be upgrading our personnel and equipment, and implementing all the necessary requirements to achieve this goal.

Briefly touching on the energy sector: Our vision for the Guyana Energy Agency (GEA) is the provision of reliable supply of energy, at the lowest cost possible, in an economical and environmentally and socially sustainable framework. To this end, GEA will continue to manage, facilitate and monitor fuel imports, along with licencing activities of the various fuel insulations across the country. The Government will support the implementation of wind farms to supply energy to the national grid. Wind energy to the residential and commercial levels for off grid applications will also be encouraged.

3.26 p.m.

In fact, shortly, we will commence a study for the possibility of the provision of wind energy to the Essequibo Coast. It is our hope that, at the end of this study, a wind farm can be implemented

in the Essequibo Coast to resolve the long out woes that that county suffers with unreliable electricity supply.

Public education and awareness programmes will be conducted, thus providing consumers with information and tools for reducing energy consumption and expenditure of energy. Notwithstanding the plans by the Guyana Energy Authority (GEA), the Government will set up a multidisciplinary group to review, analyse and recommend a national and holistic approach to the development of our new and renewable sources of energy.

Mr. Speaker, as you may be well aware, the Government is in the process of reviewing the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. Notwithstanding the results of this review process, we are committed to hydropower. Should this particular Project not proceed, several other holistic sites will be examined to ensure that, in the future, Guyana will be able to tap into this vast potential. The Amaila Falls Hydropower Project was not only intended for Demerara, but also for the whole country. If the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project does not continue in its current format, we will examine available options for the meaningful use of the access road. As you are aware, Sir, the country has expended over US\$40 million on this road. We do not want it to become a road to nowhere, so, on that end, we will look at cost recovery measures which we will put in place for that road so that the country can recoup some of the moneys spent on that road.

Irrespective of what source of renewable energy will be utilised, the Government is fully aware that the Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL) will have to be upgraded to receive and to deliver, in an efficient manner, this resource.

Measures will be implemented to reduce the technical and commercial losses in this entity. This will require upgrading of our existing distribution network, reorganising the existing management structure, as well as combatting commercial loss. Our Government is well aware that, with the provision of cheaper and more reliable electricity, the need for commercial loss or commercial theft will be greatly reduced.

Mr. Speaker, His Excellency the President reported to Parliament that his Government will be introducing a national infrastructural plan aimed at linking our communities. It will be the mission of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure to execute this plan.

Thus, I join with my Colleagues in commending His Excellency the President's speech and the visions contained therein. I commend his speech to this House.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Minister of Social Protection [Mrs. Lawrence]: Good afternoon to all.

Hon. Speaker of this Eleventh Parliament and of the National Assembly, Dr. Barton Scotland, please allow me to offer you my congratulations on being elected as the eighth Speaker of this honourable House. Your vast academic prowess and experience, as well as the high esteem in which you are held, are well known in national and international circles. I do look forward, with great anticipation, to the conduct of the sessions of this legislative forum, for I know that you will preside over this august body with astuteness and professional decorum and will ensure that the discussions and decisions herein deliberated be in the interest of this nation and our country. Congratulations, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members of this House, we have been entrusted with the responsibility of governing and protecting the rights and interests of the Guyanese nation, one nation, not a fraction of the population but the entire nation, irrespective of race, creed, colour, situation or circumstance. We have pledged our allegiance to uphold the high principles of this Office and to serve our citizenry with integrity, impartiality and probity. I, therefore, wish to congratulate all the Members of this honourable House and pray that we would exercise our duties, ever conscious that we have an obligation to ameliorate the lives of our people and, in so doing, enhance the image of our great land of Guyana.

Our country has been caught in the throes of negativity over the past years. We have been swamped with alarming episodes of crime and corruption, a high incidence of domestic abuse, murder and suicide, not forgetting the demoralisation of our people as poverty engulfs a substantial section of our population, while unscrupulous gold diggers cart off the resources and bleed our country of its wealth. But, Mr. Speaker, there has been a wind of change signalled by the inauguration of His Excellency the President, Brigadier David Granger, MSS, and his Address to this National Assembly on the occasion of the Opening of the Eleventh Parliament of Guyana on Wednesday, 10th June, 2015.

I wish, Sir, to join in support with the First Vice-President and Prime Minister in his motion titled, *Approval of Government's Policy in President's Address*. I would like to voice my appreciation of that Address and congratulate His Excellency the President for restoring pride and prestige to this honourable forum. The President was eloquent in outlining, at the outset, the changes that were critical to the fulfilment of the aspirations of the Guyanese nation. He emphasised the pivotal role this august body had to play in forging the path towards the achievement of national unity and making Guyana one nation.

The President referred to the enhancement of local, municipal and parliamentary democracy. He cited the elimination of ethnic insecurity and the deepening of national consciousness, among other issues. There is no doubt that these issues underpin the fabric of our society and could only result in the enrichment and sustainability of our country if duly addressed and resolved.

I would like to endorse the course that the President has so lucidly chartered and to say that the message therein attests to his will and determination to promote cohesion and equitable distribution. It underscores that each of us, as a collaborative force, as Members of this National Assembly, has to intensify our efforts and commitment, as a team, to restoring our sovereignty from the hinterland to the coastland and to ensure that the future of our country is not jeopardised.

Upon the swearing in of His Excellency, the President gave the assurance to the Guyanese nation that it would be apprised of the Government's policies and initiatives. The President did not forget this assurance. In addressing this honourable House, the President showed respect for the people's wishes. His speech focused on all the relevant matters and areas of concern and indicated not only the Government's intentions, but also the need for the nation's involvement, leaving no one in doubt about the agenda of strengthening the democracy and fostering and enhancing the quality of Guyanese life. The transparency of the Government's plan of action was greatly highlighted.

I would like, with your permission, Mr. Speaker, to address, in particular, the areas of concern which are closely linked to the Ministry of Social Protection. The President, in his Address, alluded to the pauperisation of our nation and the intention of introducing social policies that will enhance the safety net for those in need of support, inclusive of better pensions for the elderly

and increases in public assistance to support poor families. The President also mentioned the Government's intention to harness and develop the creative energies of our people and support the development of our women and youth through the creation of jobs and educational opportunities in an effort to stem this crisis of poverty. He committed to the development of our youth by releasing 60 youths from prison on the occasion of Guyana's 49th Independence celebrations.

As the staff and I, with the Minister within the Ministry of Social Protection, take up the challenge of meeting the commitments given by the Head of State at the Opening of the Eleventh Parliament, we have begun our task of restructuring and strengthening the various departments, filling long outstanding vacancies and prioritising our programmes, reviewing the programmes offered by our departments, such as the Women's Institute, the Women of Worth, the Trafficking in Persons Department, the Co-ops Unit and the Board of Industrial Training (BIT) Programmes offered to our youths. The Ministry is working to establish two new units, namely a public relations department and a statistical department, for the time has come for the public to be kept *au fait* with the work and assistance offered by the Ministry, notwithstanding the need to base our programmes on information and transparency.

Our child welfare services – our children homes - will be refurbished to ensure that our babies are placed in a homely setting and not one, Sir, that, upon your visit, will move you to tears. The same is anticipated for our indigent home which needs to be demolished, and I speak, Sir, of the Palms Geriatric Institution. To erect a new building, we need lots of money and we certainly do not have that money to pursue this.

3.41 p.m.

However, it does not mean that we must not plan for the same. While time does not permit me to outline all of our proposed plans, I must mention that our commitment to the re-opening of a Legal Aid Clinic in the Town of Linden is real and so is our commitment to building a halfway home for women. Moreover, it is our intention to ensure that those persons who seek shelter at our various homes are assessed and given second chances through the use of the Hugo Chavez Centre.

During the month of August, the Ministry will be opening a probation and child welfare office on the East Bank of Demerara. This will facilitate our citizens who reside on the Soesdyke/Linden Highway and, of course, those who also live on the East Bank of Demerara. Even as I speak, the Ministry is exploring the establishment of a children's home in the township of Linden also. This, Sir, the people of Linden would tell you, is at the top of their list, for our children who are taken off of the streets or who come in contact with the law remain at the police stations at which there are no provisions for them, they stay at the Linden Hospital or they seek shelter from one of the staff members. This is not the way in which this Government, the A Partnership for National Unity + Alliance For Change (APNU+AFC) Government, will make provisions for our children.

We are also looking at new methods of payment to pensioners and public assistance recipients. All of us in this august House know the story that takes place every single month at various post offices.

Our commitment to families and support to families is high on our agenda. However, notwithstanding the aforementioned, the Ministry is forging ahead to have a national mapping of our social issues, to prepare a strategy to address these issues and also to develop a plan of action with our national stakeholders.

The despicable conditions under which our womenfolk exist, the daily struggles they face in an attempt to combat domestic abuse, trafficking in persons of their gender and the dire financial constraints which leave them at the mercy of the unscrupulous exploiters, have become increasingly clear and worrying. In the same vein, we witness the callous way in which some of our elderly are treated and how deprived they are of some of the social amenities. Our youths are just as vulnerable and it is lamentable to see them sitting idly at the street corner. As the President stated, charitable handouts would not resolve this situation; the youths need to be mobilised for entrepreneurial purposes and policies need to be implemented for the development of our womenfolk and the elderly.

The President also intimated the need for a vibrant labour movement which would engender social security, thus providing for effective governance and national development. You are no doubt aware of the rifts that have led to social conflicts resulting in a lessening of productivity.

Our human resources are the source of our empowerment. All need to be involved. Our labour must be organised for social good. Our workers' needs must be fully addressed to avoid erosion of their real wages and one step in facilitating this is the re-establishment of cordial relationships with our Trade Unions, which has already begun. We cannot divorce them from the social process, thus the intention to revise relevant labour legislation and to support all legally constituted and functioning Trade Unions so that they can better represent workers' rights cannot but augur well for the labour movement.

I am extremely happy that this honourable House will restore the annual subventions to the various labour unions. The Ministry has already removed the ban on the visitation and inspection by labour officers to places of employment. The Ministry of Social Protection is committed to both employer and employee. It goes without saying that a happy worker, well represented and protected, will be a productive worker. We believe that, once families are adequately supported, the task of social protection becomes easier and our country certainly needs this kind of worker and family to ensure its viability and social aggrandisement.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I wish to refer to and applaud the Government's intention to reaffirm the autonomy of this honourable House. I am extremely elated that measures are being taken to bring the Office of the Clerk of the National Assembly Bill, a Bill that I brought to this honourable House as a Member of the Opposition but which was defeated. That Bill gives credence to this Government's vision and choice of having an independent and professional Parliament. There is no doubt that the Eleventh Parliament, with its own Budget Office and Parliamentary Counsel, will function much more effectively as it allows greater independence with regard to its appointment of staff.

The Address by the President is visionary and proactive. He has clearly outlined and enunciated what the Government intends to do in every sector to ameliorate the quality of life of all Guyanese. We know that the Government cannot do it all alone and that it needs the cooperation and collaboration of all stakeholders. I want to reiterate that this honourable House has a mandate to restore Guyana to its former glory.

We know that the challenges are innumerable and that some issues will and can be addressed much faster than others. Be it as it may, we cannot shirk our responsibilities. We owe it to our

constituents to use our expertise and experience to forge and create an atmosphere of prosperity and unity.

We, as a united team, have the opportunity to equip our country with prestige and integrity so that we no longer hang our heads, but proudly proclaim *One People, One Nation, One Destiny*.

Social Protection is often equated with social justice and this Administration will work fervently to bridge the divides among gender, people living and working in the hinterland and coast, ethnic groups and the poor to ensure equitable access to opportunities for development.

Some of the key areas of focus will be equitable access to health care, education, housing and job opportunities. These efforts will also fall under the much anticipated social compact that will be birthed from an inclusionary process to charter the course for Guyana for the next five years. On this course, Guyana will need the participation of every man and woman, boy and girl. The country can ill afford the consequences of violence, abuse in its many forms, illiteracy, school drop outs, teenage pregnancy, suicide, poverty and dysfunctional families, to name a few. We, in the social protection sector, therefore, commit to the task of rebuilding Guyana to a state where every citizen will feel socially protected, economically empowered and motivated into productivity.

I pledge to work with all stakeholders to ensure that all Guyanese achieve this goal of social protection. Thank you, Mr. President, for such an inspirational Address. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May the deliberations of this honourable House contribute and impact positively on the lives of all Guyanese. *[Applause]*

Vice-President and Minister of Public Security [Mr. Ramjattan]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, before I do get into the gist and core of my presentation, let me, like others before me, congratulate you on your ascension to the high Office of Speaker of this honourable House. Of course, we go back a long time and I would like to tell you that your tempering methods and your reconciliatory approach are going to be assets in an assembly that will soon exhibit the aggression that we have done over the years. I am hoping that all those assets of yours are going to come in play so that we can bring the decorum to this noble House but still, as it were, carry on with our ways that are very popular out there - I can tell you.

Mr. Speaker, we are here today to commit this wonderful Address, one that is characterised by the intellectuality that we know that His Excellency Brigadier David Granger can bring to this House for its support and approval. In dealing with the issues that I, in my portfolio as the Minister of Public Security, would want to deal with, I would start by announcing what His Excellency did say on that occasion of his inaugural Address now that it is published in a beautiful handbook under the subtitle, *A Secure Guyana*.

Just to remind Members here - and it is unfortunate that we do not have our Opposition Members here to have them reminded of what great words the President had to say in his inaugural speech. I suppose that the elections victory of APNU+AFC has stunned them into silence and absence. But I am certain that they will listen to the rebroadcast on the television.

3.56 p.m.

This is what His Excellency had to say, and I must say that these are formidable instructions from a Brigadier General and a President to those of us who will have to execute upon them.
Page 10:

“Your Government will introduce measures to reform the defence and security sectors to ensure that our defence and police forces protect our citizens and our territory, allowing Guyanese to feel safe as they go about their daily lives.”

Then he goes on, more specifically, to a matter that I will have to deal with:

“Your Government will refashion the Guyana Police Force into a more professional and better equipped law-enforcement agency. We shall pay policemen and women better so that they are not easily led into temptation.

We shall suppress serious crimes and stanch the spate of armed robberies. We shall reduce other everyday crimes – including banditry, murder, piracy, fatalities on the roads and interpersonal violence that are scaring foreign investors, driving away the educated élite, stifling the manufacturing sector, strangling local enterprise, scuttling the economy, undermining economic growth and impeding social development.”

As I indicated, this is but a formidable set of instructions that we have to execute upon so that we can make Guyana a safer place, a more secure place, and one that is going to ensure the happiness of all. As you are well aware, Mr. Speaker, we have, at hand, a crime situation that has left me somewhat embarrassed and concerned. Notwithstanding that, as good soldiers, we have to do the task that was given to us by our President. It is my address here, this afternoon, to bring to you that which will be done, that which will take some time and that which must get the support of all and sundry on this side of the House along with that side of the House. I hope and pray that their absence will be merely temporary because I like their company. Hon. Amna Ally and I just love their company.

In relation to the spate and spike, I had an urgent task and that was to call up some of the Commanders in the important Divisions - I could not call all - and the Commissioner of Police and started a conversation, first of all, as to what were some of the reasons for this because, as you know, Mr. Speaker, this concern with criminal activity in our society runs from “suites to the streets”. I have been to the more lavish hotels in and around the city and I have been to the streets. Literally, everybody - from “suites to the streets” - has a big concern about it. So I had to call them in and we had a very serious conversation. It does appear that there are a number of reasons why for this spike. I have made some notes and I want to let this be recorded here. I cannot state all the causes as it would be very difficult to go into all of them. But to state, some are increases in drug use; of course, the ready availability of alcohol; the growth in some areas of juvenile gang activities; decades of high unemployment in our country, especially Georgetown; increase in the number of children growing up in violence prone homes and general exposure to violence by those young ones; and an increasing sense of frustration and futility of not only the young but others who just cannot find jobs. To that extent, it was important, after getting those reasons, that a number of recommendations be made.

Before I go into some of the recommendations that were made and that have been generally applicable to situations that we have at hand, I want to state, too, that one of the big categories that I had to inform them about was that a lot of this crime comes about because of a terrible human condition called greed. It recently was seen with some eight cars and certain persons who used to be in high office. Of course, there are others who are driven to crime as a consequence in that broader category of “desperation” because they do not have the jobs, as I mentioned just

now. So, a continuous reproduction of this desperation is going to be that breeding ground for more crime, more murder, more mayhem. And so I think, this is where we have to endeavour to put resources, personnel and better policies, so that we can stop this crime problem. The search for solutions ought then to be directed as to how offenders are nurtured in our community, not the nature of the offence or the quantum of the sentence.

We have to do lots more in bettering the socio-economic circumstance of our people, as a whole, before we can get a measure of reducing plenty this spate that we have at hand. On that score, I am glad that a number of the previous speakers who have spoken on matters – economics, finance and social - have mentioned that, indeed, we are on the right track in dealing with those socio-economic circumstances.

There are a number of other things that are short-term that are required and that had to be done, one of which was ensuring that there are lots more patrols by our policemen in and around those areas that were shown on a diagram as to where there are clusters of criminalities and illegalities. On that score, when we checked as to why there are not better responses from police stations, we saw, immediately, that they were without vehicles and that there were vehicles for some other aspect, namely Community Policing Groups. I had to, in view of the fact that it was recommended, ensure that, immediately, those that were available, some 28 of them, be given to the police for their immediate use. And I hope that there is more patrol in and around those areas where the vehicles are going to be distributed... I will be soon ensuring that they be properly distributed, of course, in association with the Commanders and the Commissioner.

We are going to have, immediately, certain things being done. Getting rid of rogue cops is another. There have been, over the years, a number of rogue cops who have come our way and rather - these are strong words - disgustingly, we have noticed them getting promoted and being retained. I have indicated to the Commissioner and I have written a very strongly worded letter to the Police Service Commission, indicating that that ought not to be the course of action to be taken whenever, especially, judgements out of senior judges from our High Court are going to pronounce that torture was committed on certain vulnerable people, like a child who is 14 years old, in our society. More than that, to get at rogue cops, too, will require policemen of integrity who are going to try to catch them because, more and more, I see newspaper letters and other pieces and bits of statements coming my way as to who and who are misbehaving and nothing

seems to be done. Well, I want to assure all policemen, especially the rogue cops out there, that we have a plan to ensure that they be caught and be removed forthwith from the Police Force and that plan will be soon executed. It will require some technology to get the evidence as to what they have been saying to some of the vulnerable citizens of our country. But it must be done.

Also an immediate task at hand that will ensure that we help the Police Force will be getting certain resources bilaterally. I must say that, since coming into Government, this Administration, somehow, has managed to hype up the confidence of our supporting countries that understand our predicament and they have come forward to help. Only yesterday, we got the Chinese Ambassador - speaking to me - indicating, clearly, that China is going to help in relation to a number of equipment that are going to go to the Police Force, almost US\$4.5 million or thereabout, and it has to do with a lot of the equipment that is going to ensure better patrols, the safety of policemen and all the other paraphernalia that go with better security.

Even this morning, having mentioned to the Argentinian Ambassador, who came to pay a courtesy call, our needs, he extended that he, too, would like to see whatever his country can assist us in. He indicated as much.

Our friends in the ABCE countries, that is, America, Britain, Canada and the European Community, have been there with us for a long time. And, having spoken to them, they too have indicated that they will continue that support. Just before I close, I will talk about the citizen's security programme which is going to be big support for especially the Ministry of Public Security which has, under its portfolio, the Fire Service, the Prison Service and, of course, the Police Force, among a number of other organs. It is important that I bring this in this honourable House as to what we are going to do.

4.11 p.m.

Because we have noticed that alcohol intake and drunkenness on our roads have been such big problems, what sometimes become very unpopular has to be done. It is true that the licensing arrangements for all liquor restaurants have a clause which states that the restaurants should not operate beyond 2.00 a.m. I intend to work out a policy and the execution of that policy to ensure that some of these liquor restaurants close on time, especially those that are open and not

enclosed like certain others. The Ministry has to ensure that it does something about those late hours.

I also feel that it is necessary to bring to the attention of this House that there have been a number of suggestions in relation to another very serious area – piracy. Our fisher folks have been constantly attacked. Some of them have been thrown overboard and some of them have been murdered, and the mayhem seems to be continuing. Following a journey up to the Corentyne recently, I had cause to speak to and I got some suggestions from these fisher folks. The Chairman of the Upper Corentyne Fishermen's Co-op Society came forward - I would have to speak to a number of them. In this consultative exercise, a number of suggestions came up and, as a short-term remedy, it would be required that they be given some arms and ammunition when they are going out on their fishing trips. Of course, when they come back, they would have to deliver the arms and ammunition, whatever they took out, to the police station. At least they would have the capacity to defend themselves on the open seas and wheresoever they fish. Some have indicated that that might be a little too dangerous for them, but a number of them have indicated that they would prefer, at least, to give a fight and not be thrown overboard. To that extent, this policy would have to be realised by getting the equipment for the fishermen so that the piracy can be abated.

There are some other things in relation to this that have been suggested, which I find very attractive, appealing and acceptable. One is the provision of pieces of equipment that can state the fishermen's position in times of crisis whilst they are fishing. Some of them have indicated to me that it would cost some money but I had to make the argument to them that, to save lives, it is important that money be spent on handsets and positioning equipment for their boats. So, if, indeed, there is an SOS or a 911 call, there can be responses from the coastguard or other police divisions that can handle the situation or carry out hot pursuit.

The other aspect of it has to do with registering all boats so that we would have a fair idea, through that registration system, of who the owners of boats are, who use them and at what time. It is known for a fact that some of the pirates are Guyanese, most of them actually, and, to that extent, we can be in a better position... It is something akin to the registration of motor vehicles; a certain number or identification mark would be placed on them.

The Ministry has to consult with the Upper Corentyne Fishermen's Co-op Society, as it is going to consult with communities that are heavily targeted, for their ideas too. It is all part of the democratic process of coming up with the best solutions so that we can win this battle.

Important, too, is getting the community involved. Without the confidence of the community in the Police Force or its members who are there to serve and protect, the Police Force is not going to get the necessary information of who the "bad Johns" in the community are, who the ones selling the "dope" on the corner streets are, and who the ones violating liquor licences laws by selling liquor to young children are. That kind of confident community, which can speak to members of the Police Force in a one-to-one relationship, is needed.

On that score, I wish to say that, though it will be just supplementary, it will be an important supplement to the Police Force, and that is the continued support for the Community Policing Groups. It is important. We have seen that they have grown. A number of regions have Community Policing Groups. They have been supported but policing has to be brought to the community. We also would want to have a certain element of scrutiny of the police by civilians at the station level so even those police who are committing acts of misconduct could be told by the community that that is not the way. It might be a difficult thing to start with but the trouble is that it has to be done. I believe, as a matter of principle, that, once there is civilian scrutiny and the police, like Station Sergeants, are instructed that they must give answers when citizens ask them certain questions, it will promote that confidence that community and police relationship could have.

It is important, too, that there is better training of our policemen. This is not only going to be for the short term, but for the long term too. There is need for a more educated police force that understands better crime scene management, that understands something about human rights, that understands gender violence and that understands leadership roles in the community. This will ensure better policing. It will reassure members of the community of the confidence they have in their police when someone can go out there and win the confidence of that community by his or her activity. To this extent, I must commend the efforts of Commanders such as Mr. Mansell. In his Division, a project was done to ensure that young people understand, be educated and be aware of what policing is all about. It is an important and very purposeful project which is

going to ensure that people are made aware that the policeman is not a bully, but he is a leader and a good person. That project is going to help in the process.

We, in this Administration, feel, too, that it is important to execute on the policy statement, which was made by His Excellency, by doing something about our prison. I did speak on the issue. A number of strategies came up. I am going to list just a couple of them in the larger framework for this honourable House and not go down to the nitty-gritty. One of these under the subtitle of 'Prison' is how to modernise and secure better prison infrastructure. It will seek to strengthen buildings, improve servicing and maintenance of searching and surveillance technologies, information technology (IT) infrastructure, provision of clothing and improving the working environment in prisons to make it safer and more humane. It will also improve staff welfare.

In relation to this aspect of my portfolio, there is also a strategy to modernise penal legislation and have a total restructure of human personnel in the Prison Service. This is to enhance the specific and general training of staff to adequately execute their multidimensional task to make them more efficient and to generally enhance the organisational efficiency of the prison system.

Also, there are plans to promote a successful offender reintegration into society programme, that is, to provide adequate resources and facilities and other appropriate materials to provide a wide range of retraining programmes to enhance prisoners' effective reintegration into society. To this extent, constructing trade shops at the Lusignan Prison, at which carpentry, joinery, plumbing, welding and automobile repairs would be done, so that there is a more structured environment that is going to help in that reintegration. Of course, this will require resources. I have spoken to a number of supportive friends overseas and, of course, our good Minister of Finance. I am hoping that the Ministry is going to be provided with some resources to ensure that this kind of training, which will promote reintegration into society, is done.

Of course, it would also rebuild the public trust and confidence in the prison system. A lot of people feel that nothing good comes out of the prison. That feeling has to be changed. It is going to be difficult in a third world scenario, as we have it, but it is a task that we must, at least, attempt, and attempt this new Administration will.

I want to make some points in relation to the Guyana Fire Service which also comes under the Ministry of Public Security.

Mr. Speaker: May I...

Mr. Ramjattan: I would not be too much longer. I would try to finish off in about five minutes, if I may. I know that there may be some...

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member.

Mr. Ramjattan: In relation to the Guyana Fire Service, there has been a strategy to continue training fire fighters and auxiliary fire fighters in the hinterland areas, conduct more fire prevention inspections countrywide, and undertake public awareness programmes and new initiatives in and around the country. Very importantly, again, resource is required to ensure that vehicles and equipment are made more accessible. Of course, when they are going to be accessed, they are going to be properly maintained. The Ministry feels that the support for the Guyana Fire Service is necessary. I must say that China has helped tremendously in this regard. I think that 14 fire fighters a couple of years back...

4.26 p.m.

The other aspect of the road traffic situation is very important. A strategy has been worked out by those in charge, and they have handed me what are largely the objectives they would like to see, to be supported by the new Ministry, and that is -

- To strengthen road safety systems, the management and enforcement at the national and regional levels in Guyana through enhanced capacities for agencies and stakeholders involved in addressing road safety.
- To make roads safe and easy to use by all road users in Guyana, and that is by trying as best as possible to enforce the laws, and very strictly to do so.
- To improve the behaviour of road users in Guyana through comprehensive education programmes starting even at high schools.

- To enhance response to post crash emergencies because, as has been said, road accidents is the number one cause of death among persons between the ages of five and 14 in Guyana, and the number two cause of death among persons aged 15 to 24.

That is shocking. I did not even realise we were in that bad situation.

All of this, in relation to the bad traffic, the crime situation, helping our fire service and prison service, will, to a certain extent, be supported by what is called the Citizens Security Strengthening Programme which has a total funding amounting to some \$15 million. There are three core components of that Citizen Security Strengthening Programme – community crime and violence prevention, strengthening the Guyana Police Force crime prevention and investigative capacity and strengthening the Guyana Prison Service rehabilitation and social reintegration services. I have spoken on those already. I would not want to go into any more remarks about those.

Suffice it to state that the actual disbursement of these moneys depends on certain conditions which I have asked our ministerial staff to fast-track. The first condition is that we have to hire persons for certain positions – Project Manager, Procurement Specialist, Financial Specialist, Community Action Specialist and Monitoring Specialist. I understand the deadline for their submissions of application have been done and to that extent we are in the position of ensuring these positions be filled so that we can start at least the foundation for the disbursement.

It is going to be an arduous task. It is not going to be easy. I will be urging that all and sundry, as I started out, support this initiative, support that which the President direly wants and desires, as mentioned in his inaugural address. I think we can all do it. I feel that once we put the special effort into it, it can be done, and we can have a country that is going to be safer, a country that is going to be far more stable than it is presently, and one in which citizens are going to feel far more comfortable.

In concluding, I wish to state that the inaugural address to us by His Excellency be committed to this noble House for approval and support.

Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member for his presentation.

Hon. Members, it seems to me that this is a good moment for the suspension of our sitting. I thank you for your forbearance. This sitting is adjourned for one hour.

Sitting suspended at 4.31 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 5.35 p.m.

Minister of Communities [Mr. Bulkan]: I rise to make my contribution to the motion before us, the one standing in the name of the Hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Moses Verasammy Nagamootoo, a motion titled “Approval of Government’s Policy in the President’s Address.”

Mr. Speaker, before doing so, allow me please to join my colleagues who preceded me in offering sincere congratulations to you on your accession to this high office. I have no doubt that in the execution of your duties you will do so with firmness and fairness. You are already in receipt of the highest endorsement, and that is, from His Excellency when he spoke in this chamber recently. He was referring to you when he said:

“He is a public servant of professional eminence, academic experience and unquestionable allegiance to our country. He will add lustre to the highest legislative forum in our land as the Speaker of this Assembly.”

I have no doubt that the National Assembly will benefit from your wisdom and your guidance.

Permit me please to pause and pay tribute to your predecessor Hon. Member Mr. Raphael Trotman who presided over the Tenth Parliament. It is common knowledge that that was not an easy task, given that for the first time in our history we had a minority executive and one, to boot, that the Members did not understand that they did not command a majority in this National Assembly but sought to behave as if they did. Your predecessor, however, navigated his tasks and functions with dexterity and efficiency. As a freshman, I benefited from his guiding hand. Thank you very much, Sir.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, if you will permit me speaking of freshmen, I will like to offer my warmest congratulations to all the new Hon. Members in this House. I congratulate them and expect that they will find their work and the contributions that they will make in this honourable

House to be as enriching and rewarding as I have found my experience in the short time that I have been here.

Two weeks ago, on 10th June, His Excellency President David Granger, President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, opened this Eleventh Parliament since we became an independent nation 49 years ago. In his address President Granger outlined what are the priorities of the administration that he leads for the next five years, until 2020. These include:

- the elimination of one-party domination of the government;
- the enhancement of local, municipal and parliamentary democracy;
- the elimination of ethnic insecurity;
- the expansion of economic enterprise;
- the enrichment of cultural life, and
- the deepening of national consciousness.

In his presentation on the debate of the address by President Ramotar, at the opening of the Tenth Parliament, Brigadier David Granger, then Leader of the Opposition, said the following:

- “The ceremonial opening of the Parliament should be more than a spectacular event. It should be an opportunity to present an outline of the priorities, the policies and the programmes and, particularly, the proposed legislation for the new session.
- It should embrace, in a serious way, the intentions of these 20 honourable Ministers of the Cabinet.
- It should inform the nation about the policies which it can expect during the course of the Tenth Parliament. It is a serious exercise. It is not an exercise in frivolity.”

This is precisely what His Excellency did two weeks ago in this chamber. It is now up to the Cabinet Ministers to elaborate on the policies and programmes, as well as the proposed legislation, for the years ahead, and for their respective Ministries.

The majority of my colleagues have already presented their vision and an outline of the policies and programmes of their Ministries. It is now my turn, for the Ministry of Communities.

By now it may be well known that a new Ministry has been created, that is the Ministry of Communities. This Ministry encompasses what were formerly the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development as well as the Ministry of Housing and Water. The Ministry comprises four departments. These being the Department for Housing, the Department for Water, the Department for Local Government and the Department for Regional Development. It is quite a large portfolio. In fact, when I was offered by the President if I was interested in accepting the position, which I now hold, that was the very comment he made. However, I am ably supported in my tasks and endeavours by having two capable and competent Ministers in my Ministry, these being Minister Scott and Minister Dawn Hastings.

The obvious questions are why there is a new name and why there is the combining of those two Ministries. The brief answer is that it is a new philosophy or new mindset. The focus, therefore, is that from a governmental perspective it is not on the provision of individual services, for example Housing or Water, but on a larger objective which is addressing human needs or the human condition. The Government therefore sees its responsibility to those in need as more than the provision of shelter but rather as delivering a community experience. A community by definition goes beyond a collection of houses. It has to have certain amenities to so qualify. His Excellency puts it best. In his address he said:

“Your Government aims at providing accessible and affordable housing in sanitary and safe communities, with the necessity for wholesome and dignified living, for citizens in need. We shall ensure that all state-sponsored housing developments are provided with recreational, educational and sports facilities in addition to basic infrastructure services such as electricity, telephones, roads, solid waste disposal and pure water supply.”

Hon. Member Raphael Trotman, when he spoke yesterday, referred to how economical, with words, is our President. With those few words it is already captured in essence and in detail what

is the mission of this Ministry. I could easily refer and rely on those words alone and end my presentation but I will not do so.

The answer to the second part of the question now becomes self-evident, that is, why combine two Ministries into one?

5.45 p.m.

Local government, regional development, housing and water all relate to people's quality of life, of which the condition of one's community is a major component. Central coordination will now result in a more rational formulation of policy and more effective delivery of governmental services. Following on the foregoing, it can be said that the Ministry is created to influence the conditions that fulfil the vision for more cohesive, empowered and sustainable communities (CESC). In pursuit of CESC vision, the Ministry will implement a strategy for sustainable communities by empowering and equipping local democratic organs to deliver satisfactory services, promote integrated water resources and sanitation management and provide quality, affordable housing solutions to satisfy the needs of communities and residents across Guyana.

Some key objectives of the Ministry:

(i) It will promote decentralisation and democratic engagement and we will end the era of top-down government by finally honouring constitutional provisions relating to local governance and local democracy.

The constitutional provisions, to which I refer to, came into being in the year 1980. It was actually strengthened in the year 2001, with new additions to our Constitution and the subsequent process of local government which reforms, refines and defines a clearly articulated role for local democracy and local government organs.

(ii) Strengthen the regional administration mechanism in keeping with the foregoing.

(iii) To operationalise the Local Government Commission

(iv) To create a national solid waste management plan to secure a sustainable solution at the level of the communities.

The plan will result in an integrative solid waste management system that is efficacious in the storage, collection, transportation and disposal of waste. It will explore initiatives resulting in marketable by-products for the agriculture, energy and construction sectors.

It is disgraceful that in the year 2015 our country does not have a single landfill site, one that provides for environmentally safe disposal of municipal solid waste. The Haags Bosch facility, on which huge amounts of money was spent, has never operated the way it was conceptualised. It functions as a dump site. Improper management of municipal solid waste results in blights on the landscape, countrywide. It is a problem that exists on the coast as well as in the hinterland. We have shown callous disregard for waste management. This administration will treat this issue with the seriousness which it deserves. This administration will solve the problem of managing solid waste.

- (v) Re-establishment of the National Water Council to promote integrated management water resources.
- (vi) Development of a national waste water management plan to transform current national waste water practices and achieve international compliance.
- (vii) Development of a housing policy and strategic plan that target provision of cohesive communities in which housing solutions are complemented with educational, health and recreational amenities. Affordable alternative options, direct housing and land divestiture will be incorporated in this plan.
- (viii) A loss reduction and energy efficiency plan to improve operational efficiency at the provision of potable water service.

Mr. Speaker, it might shock you as well as Members of this honourable House and the wider public to learn that it is estimated that approximately 70% of the water, which is pumped to customers in Georgetown, is calculated as being wasted. The term that is used by the agency and the authority is non-revenue water, water for which no revenue is recovered.

- (ix) Institution of a hinterland water strategy to mitigate the impact of climate change and mining on the provision of safe water in remote and indigenous areas.

- (x) Strengthened community disaster risk management mechanisms to build capacity for early warning and early response to droughts, floods and other disaster impacting on the well-being of the community.

Central Housing and Planning Authority (CHPA): This agency has presided over the changing face of our capital and many other communities across our country. It is not for me to pronounce whether this changing face, which I have alluded to, is for the better or for the worse. That would be uncalled for. In fact, that would be impertinent. I will say, however, that it needs to stop and take stock. It needs new energy as well as an infusion of expertise and it will receive this from the central Government. In this regard, its strategic direction, vision and mission will be brought into line with those of this administration. Its vision will now be “A nation housed in sustainable and cohesive communities.” Its mission will be, as I have alluded earlier, “To improve the quality of life of Guyanese by establishing new, cohesive communities and consolidating existing settlements, through the promotion of integrated planning, land divestment and affordable housing.”

For the fiscal year 2015, its activities will include:

- Community planning and design
- Community infrastructure development
- Land Divestment
- Community Development and
- Squatter Regularisation

These activities will see the commencement of the planning phase for the establishment of a new cohesive community and the consolidation and expansion of the 1,000 homes project at Perseverance on the East Bank of Demerara. The installation of infrastructure will continue in 28 existing housing areas, with completion targeted for about 90% of the areas, by year end. Approximately 800 households will benefit from the allocation of service land and turnkey homes, with three community plans targeted for implementation and 200 households benefiting from squatter regularisation.

For the remainder of 2015 year, the Ministry will focus on implementing the third phase of installing infrastructure and the commencement of construction of the fifth batch of 50 two-bedroom houses also at Perseverance. These two-bedroom houses i.e. (house and land), are being sold for \$4.9 million.

Additionally, 200 serviced lots will be allocated at Diamond/Grove, Farm, Covent Garden, Herstelling and Providence, all on the East Bank of Demerara, and Kilcoy, Chesney and Bloomfield in Region 6, by the end of this year.

Strategic objectives 2015 – 2020:

(i) Increased access to serviced land and housing.

Outputs being:

- New cohesive communities developed.
- Existing housing schemes transformed to cohesive communities.
- Serviced lots allocated.
- Titles transferred.

I may add efficiently and expeditiously.

(ii) Promotion of public/private partnerships to facilitate the provision of housing, social infrastructure and community services

Outputs being:

- Designs of neighbourhood centres (e.g. shopping centre or market) and community facilities (e.g. multipurpose complex, bus terminal) completed.
- Partnership agreements and Memoranda of Understanding signed, and other.
- Construction of neighbourhood centres and community facilities completed by private sector, other civil society organisations and donor agencies, and other.
- Neighbourhood centres and community facilities utilised.

- Housing solutions constructed by private developers.

(iii) Fostering of community involvement for the identification and implementation of community projects.

Outputs being:

- Formation of communities.
- Regular community meetings held.
- Community projects identified and implemented.
- Capacity building training implemented.
- A mechanism established for linking communities with local government organs and our local democratic organs. This is an issue that the Ministry will play an active role, will engage, facilitate and be a catalyst.

In this regard, I am pleased to inform you and Hon. Members in this honourable House that since my appointment to this office I have been approached by many individuals across our country offering and volunteering their services to play such a role in leading community revival in many of our regions. I would like to single out one individual, a gentleman who lives at La Parfaite Harmonie who took the time to contact me and also to write a long letter about a number of problems that beset that large community of La Parfaite Harmonie. Among the issues, which are of concern to this young man, is the inadequate level of policing coupled with the high crime rate in that community; that there is no recreational facilities or playgrounds for the young and not so young and that there is an anti-social tendency whereby many of our youths are being recruited into drug use. Mr. Leroy Haynes, which is his name, has offered to volunteer his time and his services to be active in leading a revival and addressing those problems that beset his community.

(iv) Coordination of programmes/projects through collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organisations.

Outputs being:

- Inter-agency coordinating committee expanded.
- Mechanism established to improve information sharing among stakeholders.

(v) Integrated development planning.

Outputs being:

- Community development plans prepared.
- Housing profile study completed.
- Housing policy and strategic plan completed.

(vi) Squatter regularisation and containment.

Outputs being:

- Comprehensive squatter regularisation and relocation plan developed.
- Squatter households regularised.

(vii) Improve quality of housing in hinterland communities.

Outputs being:

- Subsidies disbursed
- Housing improved in Hinterland communities

6.00 p.m.

(viii) Review and prepare urban development plans for new towns.

Mr. Speaker, the House and this nation have already heard His Excellency's announcement that before the commemoration and celebration of our 50th Independence Anniversary, next May, our country will have four new towns, these being Mabaruma, Bartica, Mahdia and Lethem. In this regard, the Lethem plan is being reviewed as well as the Bartica plan and plans will be prepared for Mahdia and Mabaruma. In addition to the legislation, which will be needed, priority will be

given to remedying much of the infrastructure deficiencies that are present in all four of the mentioned communities.

Secondly, these new towns will provide governmental services that are currently unavailable. In fact, my colleague, the Hon. Member Mr. Felix, yesterday alluded to what will be some of the governmental services that will be provided as part of the process of decentralisation and devolution that I alluded to earlier, among these being the availability of birth certificates, passports as well as land titling, to name a few.

The programme over the next five years, as far as this agency is concerned, the Ministry will focus on providing serviced lots in addition to constructing houses and establishing new cohesive communities, where there will be emphasis on providing social infrastructure and other amenities that are consistent with improved quality of life for ordinary Guyanese.

The following locations are being considered for the development of physical and social infrastructure in these communities, to realise the target of providing shelter solutions for approximately 4,000 families and households over the next five years. These will be across our country.

- Region 1 –Mabaruma,
- Region 2 – Onderneeming
- Region 3 – Stewartville, Edinburgh, Anna Catherina and Cornelia Ida (West Coast Demerara)
- Region 4 – Prospect, Perseverance, Great Diamond, Little Diamond (East Bank Demerara), Good Hope, Cummings Lodge (East Coast Demerara)
- Region 6 – Williamsburg
- Region 8 – Mahdia
- Region 9 – Culvert City
- Region 10 – In the case of Linden, new lands will be identified for house construction.

These new communities will offer a range of housing solutions, including starter houses, rent to own apartments, two-bedroom and three-bedroom houses to cater for the needs of the low and moderate income persons. In addition, consideration will be given to providing shelter solutions for the differently abled as well as the elderly. The Ministry is currently working on designs, in terms of layout, infrastructure, housing and other community amenities as well as expanding and strengthening partnerships to stimulate investments in the sector and build strong, sustainable and cohesive communities.

I would like to add as well as on the question of the new communities, which will be developed, that much attention will be paid to the aesthetics of the communities. In this regard, one of the focus will be to move away from this grid pattern that we have inherited and which we seem to have such a liking for, I am referring to the straight lines. In the establishment and development of new communities, we will try to soften out those harsh straight lines by introducing curves. All of us who have travelled abroad have seen how much the look of a community is enhanced when we move away from these regimented straight lines. Those will be some of the new features that will be a part of our new communities.

Mr. Speaker, you and other Members of this honourable House might feel that that is a tall order, which has just been articulated, but I say that it is better for us to be ambitious. I am of the firm view that those plans and policies are grounded in reality. It is said, on the question of setting of goals and targets, that if one does not know where one is going any road will get one there. It is not the philosophy of this administration. I would like to add as well that in the execution of those activities, which I have outlined a moment ago, that key and central to their execution will be the elements of transparency, efficiency and accountability.

The Department for Water: The immediate and five-year plans for the agency responsible for water, namely the Guyana Water Inc. (GWI), has nine priority areas of focus. These key areas will target reduction of water wastage, improvement in operational efficiency, a focus on sustainability and preservation of water resources, increase research and development, waste water treatment, expansion of water supply, provision of improved services across the country, as well as the financial viability of the agency.

These nine key areas are:

- (i) The reduction of non-revenue water: the target is to reduce that non–revenue water (NRW) from its current 60% to be reduced by at least 5% per year.
- (ii) An increase in treated water coverage to 75%: the target being to construct six new water treatment plants, of which there are three presently under construction under a programme funded by the International Development Bank (IDB) to take that coverage to 60% and another three plants are proposed.
- (iii) Study on the performance of the underground aqua fans: the target being to complete a comprehensive study on the performance of the aqua fans and recommendations on their sustainability.
- (iv) Alternative sources of energy: target being to investigate the cost for powering offices with wind, diesel, and hybrid systems at Port Mourant, Better Hope and Lima on the Essequibo Coast.
- (v) Energy efficiency: target being to improve the pumping system efficiency to achieve conversion efficiency between 55% and 60%.
- (vi) Water shed management: target being a feasibility study on the use of surface water in GWI, in its operations and development of water shed management plan to protect water resources.
- (vii) Construction of waste water treatment plant: completion of construction of waste water treatment plant for the treatment of the sewage in the city of Georgetown.
- (viii) Provision of potable water in the entire Georgetown to the World Health Organization (WHO)'s standard, with rehabilitation of the shelter belt water treatment plant, expansion of Sophia and central Ruimveldt water treatment plants and replacement of deteriorated mains and an upgrade of service connections.
- (ix) An improvement of services and increased coverage in the hinterlands: target being to increase hinterland coverage to 95% and recovery of operating cost in the small towns.

His Excellency has spoken in this House, and on many different occasions and venues, that one of the aims of any administration that he heads will be to bridge the gap between the hinterland and the coastland.

Given the formation of this Ministry, the following legislation and legal documents will be required to be revised and there are three:

- The Water and Sewage Act
- Licence to supply water and sewage services
- Regulations under the Water and Sewage Act

Department of Local Government: Yesterday, the House heard the first reading of the Local Government (Amendment) Bill, a Bill that will have its second reading in this House very shortly and in the debates – when that Bill is debated at the second reading - the opportunity will be offered to speak at length and in greater detail on the administration's intentions and programmes relating to local government. Permit me on, suffice to say, however, Mr. Speaker, that so far in local democracy, local administration, and where local democracy is concerned, that this administration will reverse course. We will remove that ubiquitous hand of control and domination that characterised the previous administration and we will replace it with a hand of support, a hand of cooperation. I recall saying in this House, when the four Local Government Bills were debated, I believe it was on the 7th August, 2013, and in describing the actions of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, that sought to exercise that hand of domination and micromanagement, that namely the Ministry cannot do the work of 81, which is our local democratic organs, and I believe that I described such a situation as insanity.

The mission of this administration and of the Ministry, under my stewardship, will be to build capacity in our local government organs; will be to equip and empower our local democratic organs to discharge their constitutional roles, responsibilities and functions, provisions that are specified in our Constitution, as well as the legislation.

Local Government Elections, as it is well known, was last held in 1994. They were last due in 1997, which means that it is some 18 years overdue. It has resulted in normal local administration being paralysed. Our councils are largely dysfunctional. The previous

administration had shown little interest in empowering our people. In fact, it has presided over the degeneration of the system of local government.

To add insult to injury, it demolished duly elected councils and replaced them with unelected Interim Management Councils, also known as IMCs. In many cases, the democratic principle was not adhered to and those IMCs were largely peopled with friends and favourites of the former administration which has compounded the problem of the degradation, destruction and the dysfunction of the system of local government. It has procrastinated, so far as, the need for the holding of Local Government Elections.

The People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) made what many thought was a solemn promise in its election manifesto for the 2011 Elections, that is, to hold Local Government Elections within one year, if it had returned to office.

6.15 p.m.

Subsequent events made a mockery of that pledge and promise; it did not happen. This Administration, however, is committed to the early holding of Local Government Elections. We are committed to a democratic renewal, insofar as our local government organs are concerned.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to advise you and Members of this honourable House that yesterday I met with officials of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) and I indicated to them that we would like, ideally, for these elections to be held in November of this year. Earlier today, I was trying to make contact with GECOM and I learnt, by the way, that they were having a retreat. I am unsure if that retreat was planned before they were alerted to the desire of this Administration to have Local Government Elections in November. But, in any event, whatever would have been the items to be discussed in their retreat, I have no doubt that now that they are aware of the desire of this Administration to hold Local Government Elections this year, it will be a major item for discussion on their agenda.

It brings us to our absent friends, those empty chairs across there. They have made public statements; Hon. Members, they have made public announcements that they have no intention of contesting Local Government Elections, unless, this, that and the other happens in GECOM. Well I believe that somehow or the other, they are still under the impression that they have

Executive authority, but they have to learn to come to grips with the fact that they are now in the Opposition.

When we examine their track records, insofar as local democracy is concerned, it establishes clearly that they do not believe in people being empowered and having the right to manage and develop their respective communities. I believe it is out of a recognition on their part, that they know they will be rebuffed or rejected at the level of our communities, when those Elections are held, that they are looking for this distraction and diversion and a red herring, saying that they do not have any confidence in GECOM and this is why they do not want to have Local Government Elections. The simple truth of the matter, I believe, is that they are afraid of what those Elections would reveal; that people, after decades, will have a Central Government that will respect their constitutional rights to manage and develop the affairs of their communities, which is what will lead to a renewal in communities all across our country.

The Department for Regional Administration - the Ministry will oversee the coordination of our 10 administrative regions, by eventually divesting itself of the responsibility for interfering or managing the affairs of the 71 local democratic organs (LDCs), which I referred to a little while ago. The Ministry will be able to focus more on supporting the activities of our 10 Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs). Strong administrative coordination and support will be given to our Regional Democratic Councils.

In particular, special attention will be given to our four hinterland areas in accordance with the exhortation of His Excellency, that the hinterland must proceed with the same pace of development as our coastland. It is no secret that our hinterland region and areas are in crisis. Our Leader, President David Granger, in one of the many booklets that he has authored, there is one here titled *Another Country* subtitled *Crime, disease and poverty west of Fort Island*, I believe it is what he refers to as some of the horsemen of the Guyanese apocalypse. In this publication, and I like to quote, insofar as the hinterland's condition is concerned, this is what His Excellency says in the opening paragraph:

“The hinterland comprises over three-quarters of Guyana's territory. The Barima-Waini, Cuyuni-Mazaruni, Potaro-Siparuni and Upper Essequibo-Upper Takutu (Rupununi) and

parts of the East Berbice-Corentyne and Upper Demerara-Berbice Regions - might be the most picturesque parts of the country but they are the poorest”.

It goes on to say:

“Central Government Policy over the past two decades...”

Incidentally, Mr. Speaker, this booklet was authored last year, in the year 2014, so he is referring to the two decades prior to that.

“... has been dangerously dividing Guyana more deeply into two countries. It is creating an East-West divide that separates the land west of Fort Island on the Essequibo River from those to the East. That policy has perpetuated the disparities, divergences and divisions which hinder development.”

It goes on to say in, relation to the hinterland economy...

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member, the Leader of the Government Business, may wish to ...

Minister of Social Cohesion [Ms. Ally]: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Bulkan: Thank you Mr. Speaker. The very booklet goes on to say, in relation to hinterland infrastructure:

“Hinterland infrastructure is inadequate and could be unreliable and unsafe. Safe, sturdy structures are necessary for present-day heavy-duty vehicular traffic. The collapse of the Moco-Moco Bridge temporarily halted travel in the Rupununi. The Kumaka-San Jose Bridge became an expensive nightmare for Moruca residents.”

It goes on to say:

“Isolated, but potentially productive communities are heavily dependent on airstrips...”

His Excellency refers to the need to upgrade those airstrips. He then goes on to zero in on the root of the problem, in relation to hinterland underdevelopment and the lack of proper infrastructure in the hinterland. This is what he says:

“The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development - MLGRD - is the major source of hinterland development problems. The MLGRD seems to be obsessed with the day to day micro-management of local organs. It seems not to have comprehended the complexity of, or to have seen the need to discharge its long-term responsibility for, encouraging economic enterprise and development.”

This Administration and this Ministry will reverse this state of affairs. We will work to eliminate the extreme poverty that exists in our hinterland regions. We will utilise the abundant natural resources to bring about material prosperity in our hinterland regions, to transform the lives of the people in our hinterland regions.

In closing: What do our people expect; what do they deserve? It is my belief that our citizens expect fairness, transparency and accountability. They expect that there will be rules and that those rules will be followed. It cannot and must not be that knowing or having access to officials will be the way to receive attention and governmental services.

Ever since I have assumed this office, I have been approached by many persons. In fact, even within the last two days. Here in the National Assembly, I have been approached by both members of the public, as well as staff, making representations for services that they have applied for. I believe, however, that it is unfair to the majority who have no such access and that therefore, the system must be able to deliver equity and efficiency to all our citizens. I am not suggesting that I will ignore the representations that have been made to me. The Ministry will work to bring an end to such a situation, that there must be, as I said, equity and all must be treated equally, as well as efficiently and with courtesy.

In relation to the work of the Ministry, I remind myself why I am here; why I hold this Office, for the time that I do. It is to make the lives of ordinary Guyanese better, so that when 2020 dawns, this is the standard, I believe, by which collectively we will be judged. It is up to us, therefore, to turn the words that I have just uttered into actions.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to place on record, my gratitude to His Excellency, Brigadier David Granger, President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, for his illuminating, inspiring and comprehensive address given to the National Assembly. I commend this motion to the honourable House for its unanimous approval. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Minister of Business [Mr. Gaskin]: Mr. Speaker, I stand before you and this National Assembly today for the very first time to speak on the motion brought by the Hon. Prime Minister, for this Assembly to express its thanks and appreciation to His Excellency the President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, for his Ceremonial Opening address to the Eleventh Parliament and to approve of the policies adumbrated therein. The great honour of having this opportunity does not escape me, as I share with the Hon. Members of this House my perspective on this motion, both as a Member of this Assembly and as a Minister with responsibility for Business and Investment.

Mr. Speaker, before I get down to business, please permit me to offer my warmest congratulations to you on your election as Speaker of this Assembly and to wish you a smooth journey as you guide us through the Eleventh Parliament.

His Excellency was crystal clear when, early in his Address, he identified crime, disease, ignorance and poverty as the real enemies of our people. This sets the priorities which the people of Guyana can expect to become the basis for his Government's policies over the next five years. There can be no mistake in the enormity of the effort required to defeat the real enemies of the people, as described by His Excellency. The strong reaffirmation of the one nation policy, underscored by national unity, is recognition at the highest level of our country's leadership, of the need to harness the totality of available energies to win this war.

Moreover, by pointing to good governance as a weapon against poverty, His Excellency has highlighted a nexus between the conduct of Government and the well-being of the people that has managed to escape Executive attention for too long. I am therefore guided that the principles of accountability, integrity and transparency must be fundamental to all that I do, as a Member of this Assembly and as a Minister of Government, over the next five years.

6.30 p.m.

His Excellency's recognition that charitable hand-outs and trickle-down economics are no match for pauperisation and privation, along with his emphasis on tackling youth unemployment, gives strong and early direction for policy formulation within the new Ministry of Business.

Also timely, is the identification of microenterprise promotion as a mean of establishing young peoples' economic independence. The recently released Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) study, which estimates the rate of unemployment among Guyana's youth at approximately 40%, underscores the urgencies with which this problem needs to be addressed. A well administered programme for developing small and microenterprises can see the emergence of a new culture of entrepreneurship among our young population and provide Guyana's next generation of business role models.

The inclusion of civil society, the private sector, organised labour and political parties in the development of a social contract that will guide the economy for the next five years, until 2020, is consistent with His Excellency's commitment to national unity and will provide the broad-based inputs required to assure all Guyanese that their interest will be represented in the future development in our country. This will indeed harness the talents of the broader constituency in pursuit of the economic transformation that must now take place.

At this stage, I wish to point out that with the consolidation of a number of departments and agencies into a single Ministry of Business, we now have in place an effective and dedicated organisation that is committed to the growth and development of the business and investment sectors. This is imperative if we are to wage a serious war against those four real enemies of the people of Guyana. The Ministry of Business must play a key role in shaping the future of this country's economy by encouraging and facilitating the development and growth of a strong, vibrant and competitive multi-layered private sector that can provide opportunities for advancement to all Guyanese, and generate the increased revenues required for improving and expanding Government's programmes for achieving a better life for the Guyanese people.

The mantra of this new Ministry will be *Guyana means business*. This will shortly become evident when we implement our five years strategic plan for the Ministry of Business. This plan will be ready before our Government completes its first 100 days in office. Perhaps, at this point, I can take a cue from the Hon. Minister of Public Infrastructure and express or perhaps report my

fervent hope that the most Hon. Minister of Finance will see it fit not only to bless, but to fund this five year strategic plan, until 2020.

I noted carefully His Excellency's call for the expansion of economic enterprise, the reduction of inequalities, the opening of opportunities for the disadvantaged, providing jobs, particularly for young people and establishing their economic independence. It is in this light that the Ministry of Business will seek to promote His Excellency's vision of one nation to the business sector, by emphasising the principles of inclusiveness, fairness, and equality within its five year plan.

The immediate priority for the Ministry of Business is to develop its own capacity to deliver its long term objectives throughout the period in office. This would include examining projects of the previous administration, such as support for competitiveness programme, as well as exploring new initiatives, to strengthen operations.

The Ministry of Business would seek to provide businesses with the opportunities and the Government's support, which they need to grow and flourish. This will include facilitating the implementation of policies and programmes to attract both local and foreign investment and foster business development in Guyana.

Our priorities for the next five years will include, improved facilitation, largely by removing obstacles placed on business by Government; support for improved competitiveness, mainly by providing specific assistance to businesses to help them grow and become internationally competitive; entrepreneurial development, focusing on innovation and technology at the small and microenterprise level to ensure sustainability, as well as creating the appetite for big business at an early stage; actively promoting Guyana as a good place to do business; and preparing small businesses to access the public procurement pipe line.

It is important to note that many of the issues affecting businesses are cross cutting ones that require broader Government attention. The Ministry of Business will therefore play a critical role in facilitating national dialogue on how to grow our businesses and attract investments into Guyana. This includes sharing data, facilitating engagements with the private sector, constantly upgrading the legal and regulatory framework within which businesses operate and developing projects in collaboration with other Ministries.

As we prepare our strategic plan, we will be reviewing our organisational structure for the work ahead. Currently, the Ministry of Business includes the following five departments and agencies:

- The Commerce Division, which helps facilitate domestic trade by carrying out research and consultation and processing import and export licences;
- The Industrial Development Division, which supports the industry and the development of industrial policies and manages the implementation of programmes, such as industrial estate management;
- The Small Business Bureau, which provides specific assistance to small businesses, including loans, grants, training, and resource services. It also helps to promote policies and projects to make the business environment fairer and more inclusive for small businesses;
- The Guyana National Bureau of Standards, which helps Guyanese companies reach the standards needed to compete and provide consultancy service to businesses to improve their internal services; and
- Guyana Office for Investment (GO-invest), which has a mandate to attract investment, promote exports, develop capacity to monitor and research investments and market Guyanese businesses.

These will all play critical roles in the work of the Ministry of Business.

Additionally, the National Exhibition Centre will be incorporated into the Policy Implementation Programme of the Ministry of Business. Our Ministry is also represented on various inter-ministry councils, where we will continue to work closely with the other Ministries on areas of competitiveness, including support to legal and institutional reforms, which would enhance the ease of doing business in Guyana.

We are prepared to work with the private sector to better understand how to address the needs and aspirations of the business community. We aim to establish and sustain an environment that is conducive to legitimate businesses and we will pursue the necessary reforms to achieve this. It would be extremely remiss of me not to give praise to the staff of the earlier mentioned

departments and agencies, as well as the administrative and other staff within the existing Ministry structure, who have shown a dedication to the work of our new Government and have already demonstrated to me that they mean business.

In closing, I would like to assure this House and the people of Guyana that I understand the vision contained in His Excellency's presentation and that I, along with the Ministry of Business, will work tirelessly and effortlessly to overcome crime, disease, ignorance and poverty, the real enemies of the people of Guyana. Mr. Speaker, I support this motion. [*Applause*]

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Williams]: If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in support of this motion of the Hon. Prime Minister for the approval of the Government's policy in the President's address on the opening of the Eleventh Parliament of Guyana.

At the outset, I thank His Excellency, Brigadier (Ret'd) David Granger for his presentation to us, recognising that article 67 of our Constitution provides that the President may, at any time, attend and address the National Assembly. I trust that His Excellency will avail himself of the opportunity to visit with us, even more, in this Eleventh Parliament.

It would be remiss of me, if I did not extend my congratulations to you on your election as Speaker of the Parliament of Guyana and express the belief that it is an Office in which you will discharge the business of this Assembly honourably. Equally, I extend felicitation to all Members of this new Parliament, especially the new Members of Parliament and my Ministerial colleagues. I enjoin you to keep upper most in your minds that we are first and foremost the servants of the Guyanese people and ours is a higher and perpetual retainer to ensure that the decisions we make in this hollow Chamber be done to their welfare and well-being.

As for me, I joined this august Assembly in 2003, on the vacancy created by the death of the former President Hoyte and Leader of the People National Congress Reform (PNCR). Already then, the ideas of inclusiveness had taken root, the PNCR, the People's National Congress Reform—One Guyana (PNCR-1G), Joint Opposition Political Parties (JOPP), A Partnership for National Unity (APNU), and now APNU + Alliance for Change (AFC). I harboured no doubt about the demise of one party rule and winner takes all politics in Guyana. Therefore, staying the course was never an issue for me, being secured in the knowledge of this scripture:

“Except the Lord builds the house, he that builds it labours in vein.”

So, we are in this House that inclusiveness built. However, our stubborn comrades in the People’s Progressive Party /Civic (PPP/C) are a major part of this House and must return to it to be about the people’s business. I have seen on my phone a short while ago that they attempted to submit their names for the Regional list for the Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs) and the caption said that that list was rejected. Apparently it was rejected on the ground that they had, in the first instance, to submit their names for this National Assembly. It is clear that they were trying to get into the RDCs. I suppose it means that they will now put themselves in order and come into this honourable House to discharge their responsibilities.

6.45 p.m.

I consider it a privilege and an honour to serve the people as the Attorney General and the Minister of Legal Affairs. I am humbled that the President has reposed this confidence in me. I accept the challenge of making Guyana a better country, where there is respect for the rule of law, our Constitution and institutions, the doctrine of the separation of powers, the independence of the judiciary and the independence of this Parliament. This is essayed in the President’s speech, under the caption “*Well-governed Guyana*”. It is without doubt that good governance requires respect for the rule of law and also for our legal institutions.

Guyanese must be assured of the protection under the law and, therefore, we set our faces against arbitrary arrest and unlawful detention, unreasonable delays in criminal matters and backlog in civil cases. Therefore, the question of the application of paper committals, for example, must be revisited. But it is important that I give the Guyanese people an insight into the remit of the Attorney General’s functions.

Under the Constitution of Guyana, article 112, the Attorney General is the principal legal adviser to the Government of Guyana. And under article 185, if the Attorney General is an elected member of the National Assembly, then upon his or her appointment by the President, the Attorney General, *ipso facto*, is a Minister of the Government. With that, the President in his remit to the Attorney General and the Minister of Legal Affairs, has put, for example, the administration of the Criminal Justice System and the General Legal Assistance to Government of all matters, except assigned by law of another authority. The departments under this remit

includes: the Minister of Legal Affairs, the Attorney General's Chambers, the Deeds Registry, Public Trustee/Official Receivers Department, the Department of Civil Liberties and the Department of Justice.

Emphasis will be place on improving access to justice, judicial reform and institutional strengthening in this new Parliament. In this regard, we thank the Canadian Government for the grant of US\$750,000. This will be spent in the area of institutional strengthening of the prosecutorial and investigative process in Guyana. Crime scene investigations will be strengthened. Also, the skills of prosecutors to organise and present cases; magistrates and judges would be trained also.

The Canadian Government has two tranches of \$20 million each in this region, from which we have benefited already. This fund is administered by the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) in one instance and that deals with training and capacity building for judges and members of the magistracy, and one at the University of the West Indies, which relates to legislative drafting. Already we have a number of persons who are benefitting from that. Likewise, the American Government offered assistance under the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative to assist in the improvement of the justice system. We are grateful for the type of assistance that these countries have given to us on the advent of our coming into office, and we trust that we will take advantage of the type of offers that have been given to us.

The Family Court - this is a court that had been essayed for some time now, but is expected to be operational in a short space of time. Judges of the court have already been identified and it is opposite that this court comes at a time when emphasis in the region, indeed in the hemisphere, is being place on international family law, in the context of private international law related to cross-border family issues. Guyanese would know that we have borders with Brazil, Venezuela and Suriname, where large numbers of Guyanese migrated there and live there, they marry there, they have children there and they had issues that develop, for example, if they wish to return to Guyana and their spouses are not of the same mind, a lot of issues develop. In this context, we must I believe. Look at the whole question of the Hague Conference and the Hague Conventions relating to the child abduction, maintenance, adoption and custody, and the overarching question of protection of the Rights of the Child.

The Family Court is one which requires that the physical orientation of courtroom be situated in such a way to protect victims of sexual abuse and other sexual crimes. I trust that special attention would be paid to something like that and the other consequential measures that are necessary by the time the court is up and running.

According to the correspondence I received on the 24th June, from the Council of Legal Education, which I had to write to get an update on the status of our law students being unable to find any files, in that regard, in the AG's Chambers. I have been informed that there is a negotiation going on in relation to the collaborative agreement between the University of the West Indies, the University of Guyana and the Council of Legal Education, but they are claiming that a new proposal, that was put up by the University of Guyana, is stalling the negotiations. In 2013, they took a decision that 25 graduates from the University of Guyana would enter the law school automatically in 2014. I have seen no reference to 2015. The former Attorney General had indicated to me that the situation would be the same for 2015, but I do not see anything like that in this missive from the Council of Legal Education. Therefore, it is of the utmost urgency that I must engage the University of Guyana's administration in relation to this matter. Suffice it to say that this situation I have inherited is untenable and the uncertainty surrounding the continuing of their legal education at Hugu Wooding Law School must not continue to plague our law students.

The previous Government has left this new Government burdened by horrendous debts. Serendipitously, on a recent visit to the CCJ, I was informed that the previous Government, represented by the former Attorney General, had occasioned a judgement in the matter of the RUDISA Beverage Company's case of \$1.2 billion or US\$6 million. That judgement has not been paid by the previous Government. I should make this very clear because the next thing one knows is that by next week, this new Government would be blamed for the question of non-payment of that debt.

In addition to that, the sum of \$57 million was awarded against this Government in the Trinidad Cement Limited (TCL) case; that too had not been paid by the previous Government. Perhaps, the former Attorney General can tell the Guyanese people why his Government did not pay these sums.

Increasing the complement of judges - most practitioners, maybe even the members of the public, would appreciate and recognise that certain divisions of the High Court are overburden; certainly the commercial court with one judge or the Constitutional court with one judge again. There is no question about the competency of the judges, but they are just swamped with work. Therefore, it is important that the addition judges are appointed. I know, when we talk about these things, we got to keep an eye on the Minister of Finance.

At the Court of Appeal, they are also short of Judges. They need additional justices of appeal; they need, at least, two judges of appeal. Our Government must look at remedying this situation, so that we can enhance the delivery of justice in Guyana. We will have our new Civil Procedure Rules; we had been cogitating on those rules, - the Guyana Bar Association and members of the Bar. We had been exposed to those rules and we will have to look at the question of when we implement them.

The Deeds Registry - which I visited today, and I must say that I was very impressed with their operations. They are now a statutory body on an authority, governed by a Board. I found that their operations have become computerised to a large extent and a lot of the records have been digitalised. So the delivery of this service to the people has been vastly improved and us lawyers know that. We have recognised now that a lot of matters which took a long time, within a matter of two to three days, one could have those matters completed. It is intended, since there is now a dichotomy between the Deeds Registry and the Commercial Registry that we would move the commercial registry over to the New Building Society (NBS) building which is on the Avenue of the Republic, so there would be more room for the Deeds Registry in the Supreme Court building and more room over in the NBS building for the Commercial Registry.

I do not know why people keep thinking that the Attorney General is responsible for the Land Registry. I need to place this on record. I think there was some draft Bill or something in that regard to bring it in the same manner as the Deeds Registry. For now, the Land Registry is under the remit of the Ministry of the Presidency, but lawyers have been asking for that be corrected and for the work of the Land Registry to come under the Attorney General and the Ministry of Legal Affairs.

The question of constitutional commissions - my Hon. Colleague, Mr. Trotman, spoke about some of the commissions, but it is clear that we have to constitute our constitutional commissions. In fact, in the case of human rights, just as in the case of the fundamental rights where the High Court has exclusive jurisdiction in cases of breach of the fundamental rights of the Guyanese people, on the other hand, in the human rights aspect of our Constitution, there is a provision for a Human Rights Commission, which would have exclusive jurisdiction to hear breaches of human rights provisions. There was never any attempt by the previous administration to address the issue of constituting the Human Rights Commission.

7.00 p.m.

We know that all of the other Commissions have to be constituted before the Human Rights Commission can be constituted because representatives must come from the other human rights bodies to sit on the Human Rights Commission. Of course, we know how tardy the previous Government had been in that regard.

The very first instruction I got from the President related to the question of pardoning a number of young people between the ages of 18 and 25 who would have committed and were undergoing sentencing for nonviolent offences. In pardoning them, it was not to release them willy-nilly but to stream them into a programme that would make them better citizens by the time they re-enter society. In that regard, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) had approached me and had offered the Skills and Knowledge for Youth Employment (SKYE) Project, a skills and knowledge based programme, which I shared with my Hon. Friend, the Minister of Public Security. That programme is up and running.

I wish to congratulate the President of this country, Brigadier David Granger, for his insight in recognising that being in jail for the stealing of a cellphone and the like is no place for our young people. People think that this act of pardoning could be one that encourages young people but I do not believe so because no one can say, at any given moment, when there is going to be a pardon. One cannot steal, go to prison and then feel that one will be pardoned the next day or within the next week. It is laudable that we try to capture a lot of our young people and rehabilitate them before they, in fact, conform themselves to a life of crime.

In this regard, the President has also appointed me Chairman of the Advisory Council on the Prerogative of Mercy and that is the body that deals with advising the President on the matters of the pardoning of people who are serving sentences or are otherwise engaged in the processes of the law.

Mr. Speaker, we are well into the night and I know my Comrades and Colleagues know that we have a budget presentation coming up in a couple of months, so I will leave the rest of my presentation for that occasion.

I would like to thank the President for his speech of guidance to us. The vision and quiet assurance that he has, I could tell you, is a quality that one has to be born with. He does not talk much but he projects way ahead. I have discovered that when the President comes to a meeting and talks about something to be done and asks questions about what we think of certain issues - I feel to myself - he already has the answers, in his head, as to what he wants to do but is consulting with his colleagues. The President is a serious forward planner. We thank the President and we are grateful to him for the advice and the direction he has given us, in his presentation, on the way forward for this Eleventh Parliament, so that we will be able to avoid the pitfalls of the Government of the past. In this regard, Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to commend this motion to this honourable House for its approval.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo] (replying): Mr. Speaker, it is most tempting to say that I have nothing to say in reply, though it would be correct to admit that I am tempted to repeat what some of the speakers have said because of the importance of each and every one of them bringing to Parliament and to the people of Guyana their own plans and visions and expanding on the policies announced by the President in his brilliant Address to this National Assembly.

Your Honour, I just would like to place on record my congratulations to all the Vice-Presidents and senior Ministers who have spoken to this motion, who have been very candid in their presentation, and to say that they have done so with a deep sense of sincerity. One could see the exuberance with which they presented their Ministries' plans for Guyana. It is with some trepidation that I feel, for too long, Guyana has been denied access to these fertile minds who

came to this House without arrogance or any attempt to embellish what they have to say. In presenting their plans for their respective Ministry, they did so with only one purpose, which has been spelt out by President Granger, and that is to promote the interest of one Guyana.

I would like to say that they have all done exceptionally well on their first outing and it augurs well that the confidence that they exuded in this House would, in fact, be a boon of strength to the Government.

However, referring to the trepidation, we would have rather have these green chairs, on the other side, filled. This has been the only debate, I can recall in many years, where speakers were not greeted with big, bright teeth or the bleating which appears to be... From what my learned Friend, the Attorney General, might have been tempted to say, it is no use thinking that the Opposition would come; it is like beating a dumb goat. From what the Attorney General just announced, it seems as if this House will soon have the Opposition taking its rightful place. Like the nursery rhyme, we are reminded of the line that reads, “And they will come home and bring their missing vehicles and hidden bank accounts with them.”

I wish to commend this motion:

“Be it Resolved:

That this National Assembly expresses its sincere thanks and appreciation to His Excellency the President, Brigadier David A. Granger. M.S.S., for his Address to the National Assembly which was made on the occasion of the Ceremonial Opening of the First Session of the Eleventh Parliament of Guyana on Wednesday, 10th June, 2015, and approves of the policy adumbrated therein.”

And I so move the motion for acceptance.

Question put, and agreed to.

Motion carried.

BILLS – Second and Third Readings

ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING AND COUNTERING THE FINANCING OF TERRORISM (AMENDMENT) BILL 2015 - BILL NO. 4/2015

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Act.” *[Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs]*

Mr. Williams: I rise to move that the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (Amendment) Bill 2015 – Bill No.4/2015 published on the 19th June, 2015, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill has had a chequered history in this august House. It seeks to amend the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Act, Chapter 10:11, and related legislation by strengthening the regime for combatting money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism.

The Bill was first presented in the National Assembly on the 22nd April, 2013 as Bill No. 12/2013. It was debated and read a second time on the 7th May, 2013. Following the second reading, the Bill was committed to a Special Select Committee of the National Assembly for consideration. At a meeting held on Friday, 2nd August, 2013, the Special Select Committee agreed that its Report should be presented to the National Assembly. I must say that that agreement did not include Members of the then Opposition. The Report was accordingly submitted.

On the 7th November, 2013, the Bill was defeated at the stage of its third reading. The defeat stemmed from the fact that it was the view of the majority that the Bill was not properly dealt with in the Select Committee.

The Bill was again introduced in the National Assembly and read for a first time on the 12th December, 2013 as Bill No. 22/2013. It was read a second time on the 19th December, 2013 and committed to a Special Select Committee of the National Assembly for consideration.

This Bill was subjected to examination and comments by persons, including Mr. Christopher Ram, Professor Clive Thomas and the Guyana Bar Association. The Insurance Association of

Guyana made written submissions and the Committee was in receipt of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force's (CFATF's) advisory on jurisdictions with strategic Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AMLCFT) deficiencies.

The Committee had, for consideration, around mid-2014, a Bill from the then Government and one from the Opposition. The Committee later adjourned with a view to going back to their principals to ascertain whether there could be a common ground achieved to move forward with a Bill that is acceptable. This proved futile and matters came to rest with the recess of Parliament in August and a subsequent prorogation and then dissolution.

The Bill being presented is that of the immediate past Opposition. It is now the Government's Bill. This is our version of the Bill. The amendments to this Bill and the consequential amendments to the related Acts were based on recommendations made by the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force.

We are now at this position where this Bill is before this honourable House for passage, minus the Members of the Opposition, who, it would appear, from my vantage position, are waiting anxiously for us to pass this Bill without them.

7.15 p.m.

The main changes that we had proposed to the parent Act related to the question of governance. We added the new sections 7 and 7A to correct a situation where the Director of the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) was appointed by the Minister of Finance - we all know who he then was at the time - and he could be dismissed by the President. We also know who he then was.

This, obviously, was an untenable situation in light of the fact that, since 2000, there was the Money Laundering (Prevention) Act and nothing happened under it and under that administration. No one was ever, as far as we know, investigated or charged. Certainly, no one was ever convicted.

In 2009, that regime was enhanced with the addition of Countering the Financing of Terrorism. Therefore, we had the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Bill in 2009 and it created this institution of the Director of the FIU which had, largely, investigative powers. Equally, nothing was done under that Act. As we said, that person was totally under the

control of the People's Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) Government. We propose to change that by putting in an independent authority over the FIU and its Director.

We proposed that there would be an authority with 10 members and we have certain criteria for those 10 members. They must be of good character, integrity and so forth. And there are qualifications that they must satisfy. In addition to that, they would be appointed by a transparent process, that is, by the Committee on Appointments (COA) of the National Assembly of Guyana. The nominee or the persons identified by that Committee of this honourable House would have to come to the floor of the House for ratification and approval. So it is a transparent process. I do not know where the criticism comes from that 65 people cannot be better than one person, if you are thinking that they could be corrupted. We are then assured and quite convinced that this approach is the right approach and, as I said, that approach has been embraced by many right-thinking members of our society and the world at large.

The Director and the Deputy Director of the FIU would be appointed by that transparent process: the Committee on Appointments of Parliament and then the nominees are sent to the floor of the House for ratification also. They must also be qualified. They have certain qualifications criteria stipulated there in the Bill, which means that, when we operationalise this Act, there would have to be wide consultations. The positions would have to be advertised and the COA would have to deal with the names that are thrown up in the process. I do not know where one could find a better or more transparent process than that as against one person appointing and one person dismissing.

In addition to that, we want to make it abundantly clear that this authority, in no way, is intended to rob the FIU of its independence. In fact, the provisions state clearly that the authority would not interfere in the operational day-to-day business of the FIU. It is mainly there to give policy guidance to the FIU.

The two other major amendments relate to the amendment of section 37 of the Act and the addition of 37A. Under the CFT part of the 2009 Act, there were a high customs official, a rank in the Police Force of Superintendent or above and a person authorised by the Director of the FIU who could seize and detain cash anywhere in Guyana if he or she suspects that the cash is a product of terrorist activity and terrorist financing. But on the AML side of the Act, there was a

lacuna in that the appointee authorised by the Director of the FIU was not under that part of the law, only the customs official and the police. But they operated, largely, at the points of departure and entry into Guyana at the Airport where the whole question of declarations of cash in excess of US\$10,000 must be made if you are going to take that out of Guyana or bring it into Guyana. They were tied there and it was thought that it was not effective enough, that they should not be limited to points of entry and departure but, like under the countering the financing of terrorism part of the Act, they should have similar powers. That is what our proposed Bill has. It has added the person authorised by the FIU and it has said also that the person could seize and detain cash above the sum of \$10 million anywhere in Guyana, which is not to be done whimsically or capriciously.

The Act requires that there is cogent evidence before any such seizure or detention could be made - cogent evidence. And what does that mean? It means that it seems to be even higher than reasonable suspicion because the person would have to have reasonable suspicion also. It appears that, in order to have cogent evidence...because the person cannot seize cash that is in the possession of persons in the course of business, commerce, trade and such activity. So it is clear that the person cannot wake up one morning and decide that he or she is going to target Mr. A or Mr. B. It has to be that the person is armed with information and evidence given to him or her by the FIU and Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU); so, if anyone is approached, it must be that the authorised person is armed with that intelligence and evidence given to him or her by those two bodies. If the authorised person is not and a whimsical detention and seizure was done, then he or she cannot be spared. He or she would be exposed - as all lawyers know - to the question of malicious prosecution.

It is believed, notwithstanding the naysayers, that the ability to seize and detain cash suspected to be the proceeds of serious crime - money laundering, trafficking in persons and trafficking in narcotics - should be given to those special persons appointed for that purpose anywhere in Guyana in order for us to have a very serious and effective weapon against money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism and terrorist groups.

Sections 67A, 67B and 67C are also important because they make provisions for freezing of assets and delisting and listing persons, which are very important weapons in this war against money laundering, serious crime and terrorism. And there are regulations. I am in possession of

draft regulations which are requirements of the Americas Regional Review Group (ARRG). The ARRG has stipulated that we must produce those regulations to address the question of the methodology of freezing assets of listed people. Listed people are by the Security Council of the United Nations Security Council which designates people who are terrorists or those fingered for money laundering and the like. When the persons are listed, there is a duty here for us to document those names, *et cetera*. In that regard, unfreezing is also relevant and so they would have to be able to have a methodology which the regulations would contain.

The regulations could be laid by negative resolutions in the House so that is something that is a working progress, as I have said. The Chief Parliamentary Counsel (CPC) handed me the draft today and we have to get that draft up to the ARRG. We are supposed to meet with CFATF in August and it would have to see the Act that we would pass in this honourable House. It would also have to see the regulations and it would determine the question of whether we have corrected the deficiencies that we were supposed to correct.

After that, it would go to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which is the world body which has the final decision as to whether Guyana would be blacklisted or not, sometime in September. So, I believe that, with the passage of this Bill, we would be well on our way to achieving that purpose of avoiding any blacklisting for Guyana.

With those few words, I urge that this honourable House joins in supporting the passage of this Bill.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Speaker, in rising to support my Colleague, the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, Mr. Basil Williams, on his presentation of the AMLCFT Bill – it is a long name to remember - I am acutely aware of the tremendous interest the Bill has generated both locally and overseas, so much so that the ordinary folk, unfamiliar with the clauses, would have been forgiven for thinking that Doomsday was near, if he or she believes some of the scary and ill-informed comments that emanated from certain quarters.

As far as I am aware, and I have not been shown wrong up to now, this Bill is the result of tremendous efforts and inputs of a wide cross section of people and entities that are involved in

the fight against the evil twin of money laundering and financing of terrorism. These legislative amendments, therefore, represent our Government's firm resolve to fight the scourge of money laundering and terrorist financing.

The impact of money laundering on a country's financial system can be quite severe. It can lead to large-scale insolvencies which can arise if financial institutions' balance sheets are not properly valued. If sections of the financial system are owned or controlled by criminal elements, the authorities may encounter difficulties supervising these institutions or identifying problems where financial stability is compromised. Reputations may be put at stake.

7.30 p.m.

There are reputational risks for recipient financial institutions. Customers, borrowers and depositors, even investors, can cease doing business with these institutions. Funds placed on deposit with a bank by money launderers cannot be relied upon as a stable source of funding for intermediation which is a key function of the banking sector. Indeed, large amounts of laundered funds are often subject to unanticipated withdrawals from a financial institution through wire transfers or other transfers, causing potential liquidity problems.

The impact of money laundering on the broader economy is no less daunting. If the illegal sector forms a significant part of the economy and criminal proceeds are withheld from the formal banking system, then official data on such things as employment, consumption, foreign exchange movements, *et cetera*, will not reflect the economic reality in the country because policymakers will have a difficulty understanding the state of the economy and formulating appropriate economic policies. In other words, a paralleled economy will be operating alongside the official economy and, in many respects, to the detriment of the official economy.

Money laundering also poses problems at the international level for the international financial system. Indeed, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is especially concerned about the possible consequences of money laundering and the financing of terrorism on its members' economies. These include risk to the soundness and stability of financial institutions and financial systems, increased volatility of international capital flows and a dampening effect on foreign direct investment.

There, obviously, therefore, are tremendous benefits that can be gained from the passage of this Bill. We can, of course, expect an enhanced stability of our country's financial system. Many will know already that we are being 'greylisted', I think, and some countries, including our neighbour, have been reticent in doing business with our country. Indeed, I met our well-known investor who came to see me two days ago and he was offering everything but he was imploring passage of this Bill before his offer could fructify. So, there is added advantage of quickly passing this Bill. It has gone through tremendous pain and I think we are past the stage of birthing.

The passage of this Bill will also positively impact our economic growth and development. Clearly, we can expect more investment, the fuel of our economy's growth, as earlier said in this House when we were debating His Excellency's Address. Equally, therefore, if we do not pass this Bill, consequences will follow and they will be severe and swift; not least among them would be blacklisting. Those who would have been tagged with being the black sheep of the family will know what blacklisting can do. One would become an outcast, in short.

Other consequences include increased transaction costs of doing business, including financial costs and time costs; it would become extremely time consuming to deal with a country that does not have such an advanced Bill in progress. Indeed, we will obviously be delinked from the international financial system and all the other consequences will follow, including decreased investment which will impact negatively on our economic growth.

Therefore, our presentation to this Parliament is the combination of our resolve to address the deficiencies that have been identified by CFATF and, more importantly, our decisions to strengthen the anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism regime of Guyana. This Bill is the combination of the fine-tuning of the Principal Act of 2009 and the strengthening of the Financial Intelligence Unit. It also introduces enhanced penalties and sanctions and provides more authority to a number of supervisory authorities.

While the traditional focus of the anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism effort has been on the licensed financial institutions, such as banks, cambios, money transfers and other financial entities, we have now increased the scope to include what is now called the designated non-financial businesses and professions. These entities include a wide range of businesses, from used car dealers, gambling and co-operatives, to gold traders and pawn

brokers, who will now be supervised and regulated as a result of amendments in this Bill that simultaneously amends other legislation. These amendments will also correct the deficiencies that have caused Guyana to be on the Financial Action Task Force's list of countries, commonly identified as the 'greylist', but, more precisely, as "the jurisdiction which strategic anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism deficiencies that have provided a high level of commitment to address the deficiencies through implementation of an action plan developed with the FATF." Once again, this Bill is in conformity with the FATF approved plan.

There are a number of clauses in this Bill. I do not propose, at this stage, to go through each of them. It is quite comprehensive. I guess there will be opportunities for this to be done. So, I just want to be brief and say that I support my Colleague and urge that the passage of this Bill be swift.

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

Mr. Williams (replying): If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker, I will like to thank the Hon. Minister of Finance for his support for this Bill and I urge that the appropriate stage of procedure in relation to the Bill be adopted now and that the Bill be read a second time.

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed as printed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today but, before we take the adjournment, there is a statement which I would like to present to this honourable House. Hon. Members, it has been brought to my attention that a local news website, *The Mosquito*, has posted a photograph under the heading "ministerial misnomers" purported to be taken from the Parliament's website, www.pariamentl.gov.gy, showing images of Members of this House with incorrect names. After careful research and investigation by the consultant, who designed the

Parliament's website, it was determined that the information posted on *The Mosquito* is incorrect. It was also found that the Office posted images of the new Members of Parliament captioned with their correct names on 10th June, 2015 and this information remains unchanged to date, the only exception being the addition of three Members whose images were made available sometime after that date.

7.45 p.m.

The Parliament Office would like to urge members of the media to be more responsible in their reporting and to liaise with the Public Relations Department if, at any time, they are unsure of any information published or if the media believes the Office may have erred in the dissemination of any information.

I thank Hon. Members for their attention. That concludes our business for today, Hon. Members.

Hon. Prime Minister, you may move the adjournment of the Assembly.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Nagamootoo: Mr. Speaker, I move that this House be adjourned until 9th July, 2015 at 2.00 p.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 7.46 p.m.