

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2015-2016) 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

49TH Sitting

Tuesday, 6TH December, 2016

Assembly convened at 10.17 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

A visit from students of the Bina Hill Institute Youth Learning Centre

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, 35 students and five teachers of the Bina Hill Institute Youth Learning Centre are attending today's sitting as part of an ongoing United Nations/Food and Agriculture Organization (UN/FAO) project on gender and development, good governance and leadership. During their visit the students will be viewing the sitting from the commencement to the suspension. I have agreed that the students should be accommodated in Committee Room 1 after the suspension and, if the opportunity presents itself, I will invite Hon. Members to interact with the students. I know some of that is taking place, and I will encourage Hon. Members to do that. At an appropriate time the patron of the institute, the Hon. Vice-President and Minister of Indigenous People's Affairs will address the Assembly to mark the occasion of the visit. It is also my understanding that the students would wish to offer a song to the Members of Parliament. This is to be done at the commencement of the suspension. I have allowed that it be done in the Members of Parliament's lounge. Hon. Members, I would now ask the students to stand and be recognised. *[Applause]*

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS, INCLUDING POLICY STATEMENTS

Message of welcome to the students

Vice-President and Minister of Indigenous People's Affairs [Mr. Allicock]: Mr. Speaker, Members of this august Assembly, I am pleased today to be able to share with you a very special moment.

Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members of Parliament, I am delighted to present to this National Assembly a group of very important young people. These young energetic ambitious students of the Bina Hill Institute Youth Learning Centre have joined us today to experience the process of decision making which touches their lives in particular and the lives of all Guyanese, in general, in our 50 years old democracy. It is my hope that they would leave here with a positive impression of us in this National Assembly, whose collective duty it is, to provide leadership at this the highest decision making forum in the land.

The Bina Hill Institute Youth Learning Centre, situated in the North Rupununi district, was birthed out of the need to fill the void created by the absence of that element within the education system which ought to provide for the technically inclined and for those who have unfortunately not been able to benefit from a secondary education.

There was a meeting of minds and the emergence of a spirit of volunteerism fuelled by the passion for the desire to see the fulfilment of the true potential of the indigenous young people of Region 9. The volunteers included, at that time, among others, Vanda Radzik, Norma Bubier, Fred Fredericks, George Simon, Colin Edwards and others. The result was that in 2001, the institute came into being. In the years which followed, several citizens of quality with significant achievements have emerged from the institute and proceeded to carve out their own success stories along life's pathways.

The young people in this chamber today understand and fully appreciate the commitment and sacrifices of the pioneers of the institution of which they are now beneficiaries. They are equally aware of the significant support that the National Assembly has offered to the institution and its beneficiaries over the years. They recognise that this support is an outpouring that flows from both sides of the political divide in the National Assembly.

It is in large measure the recognition of these facts that have encouraged them to take the initiative to present themselves in the National Assembly, both as a show of appreciation and as an opportunity to learn more about the inner workings of the National Assembly of the Parliament of Guyana.

It is an honour, therefore, for me to welcome them and to ask that all of my honourable colleagues of this House, with the leave of the Speaker, to welcome the students of Bina Hill Institute Youth Learning Centre to this sitting of the National Assembly and to wish them continued success in their individual and collective endeavours. I wish to also thank publicly all of the volunteers, teachers, staff and every individual, organisation or group along with Government of Guyana for those contributions over the years that have facilitated the growth and development of the institute and its beneficiaries. I thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I have also been asked to read a message on behalf of the students of Bina Hill Institute Youth Learning Centre. Is that okay?

Mr. Speaker: Please proceed.

Greeting from the students

Mr. Allicock: This is from the student government and students of the Bina Hill Youth Learning Centre, Annai Region 9, to the Hon. Speaker of the House, Dr. Barton U.A. Scotland, O.R., C.C.H. Hon. Speaker of the House and all Hon. Members of Parliament. We the students of the Bina Hill Institute Youth Learning Centre and our own elected student government greet you and thank you for allowing us this privilege and opportunity of meeting you and observing this 49th sitting of the Eleventh Parliament.

We are indigenous youth from many different regions and communities in Guyana in our second and final year at the Youth Learning Centre at Bina Hill in Annai, North Rupununi. We are studying gender, governance and leadership as one of our courses and this visit to Parliament is part of the practical component of the course which is supported by the FAO of the United Nations and by the Ministry of Indigenous People's Affairs.

Our other courses include sustainable forestry, organic agriculture – we manage our own small farm, environmental management, basic business, ecotourism and traditional skills and crafts and

music. We elect our own President, Prime Minister and Ministers from our own ranks to practise good governance. We aim for gender equality and respectful relations as part of our practice of human rights for all.

We, as youth, the leaders of today for tomorrow's development, pay our sincere respect to you all, on both sides of the House to invest fully in development of the youths of Guyana with special emphasis on indigenous and hinterland youth. We look forward for improved education, and education that is relevant and meaningful to our lives and future, building our capacities, improving the health and safety of youth, enabling our leadership and our rights and listening to our voices and needs.

We ask you to work together with us to keep our environment clean and green and to make strong policies for climate change, our forest, rivers, savannahs and wetlands, conserving, preserving, sustaining our pristine environment, and repairing where it is also so badly damaged.

In this season of goodwill and peace on earth we look forward to better unity and harmony among you and strong joint action taken together by you, our leaders, so that we can always be proud and confident in our Parliament, its decision and its example to all youth in Guyana.

We wish you blessings and happiness in this season and a productive bright and prosperous New Year guided by justice, peace and wisdom for all Guyana.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Vice-President for his statement. I will request the Hon. Vice-President that you convey to the students our appreciation for the message which they have sent to us and to know that our sentiments for continued success of the institute and for their welfare are strong and we wish them well.

10.32 a.m.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

MOTION

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2017

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

AND WHEREAS the Constitution also provides that when the Estimates of Expenditure have been approved by the Assembly an Appropriation Bill shall be introduced in the Assembly providing for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet that expenditure;

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2017 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 2016-11-28.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2017, of a total sum of two hundred and thirty billion, three hundred and forty-nine million and seventy nine thousand dollars (**\$230,349,079,000**), **excluding nineteen billion and seven hundred and seventy four million, and eighty seven thousand dollars (\$19,774,087,000)** which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in the undermentioned schedule, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to make further provision in respect of finance". [*Minister of Finance*]

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will continue our consideration of the Budget, the debate which was started yesterday. Today is day two and the first speaker is the Hon. Member, Ms. Indranie Chandarpal.

Ms. Chandarpal: Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, Teachers and students of the Bina Hill Institute of Learning, I wish to, on behalf of this side of the House, also express our warm wishes for your participation in today's debate in the National Assembly.

I thank the Minister of Finance for delivering the Budget document titled, *Building a Diversified,*

Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese. I see, from the Government's perspective, that the good life means increased taxation to the hardworking Guyanese and joblessness. I am reminded of another period in Guyana's history when Guyanese were asked to eat less and sleep less because they were too lazy.

In the space of one year, we have had about 185 different tax measures proposed by the Government. I now know why the Members of the Government's side were thumping their desks so loudly. They were celebrating their achievements of 185 different taxation measures.

What is interesting about the time we live in is that almost everything we do is captured on social media. The Guyanese people, especially the young people, are speaking out about the problems they face, living in Guyana at this time. They have a lot of things to say about this year's Budget which promises a good life to all Guyanese but failed, in a monumental way, to convince of anything close to that.

The Guyanese people have raised some major issues that have been affecting them. The slothfulness of the Government in addressing the economic decline; taxation; joblessness and the crime situation are some of the major topics that are worrying issues among all Guyanese. Instead of going the extra mile to help to resolve these pressing issues that the people are losing sleep over, you have chosen to make their lives even worse. You have now compounded the problems with a budget that takes another piece of what they have worked for.

Guess who will be singing more this time around - the selected few who are close to the Government, many of whom are retirees who were hired into lucrative positions under the Government.

In the process leading up to the Budget presentation, we were advised that several key stakeholder groups made proposals on the Budget and submitted these to the Minister. These groups include: the Opposition; key private sectors bodies such as the Private Sector Commission, the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce, the Tourism and Hospitality Association of Guyana and the Trades Union Congress (TUC)

I would like to ask the Minister of Finance, through you, Mr. Speaker, to indicate the following: how many of the recommendations made by these stakeholders were incorporated into the

Budget and whether, in Budget consultations, he followed the principles outlined in the Manifesto of the Coalition, on Page 39, with respect to consulting the various stakeholders on proposals to implement tax relief?

The Government has a penchant for doing investigative research. I would like to propose that it finds out what other countries in the world, with the population, size and level of development as Guyana, have 28 Ministers, three Vice-Presidents, a Prime Minister, a President as well as numerous Advisors to the President and the Ministers. We also cannot forget the 33 Honorary Advisors.

I would like to refer to the Manifesto of the Coalition which included a grand list of things promised to the Guyanese people. With regards to governance, the preamble states:

“APNU+AFC is committed to ending winner take-all politics and building responsive and accountable governance”.

It also states that they will move vigorously to stamp out the scourge of corruption. Let us look at how they have been dealing with accountability, transparency, good governance and, hence, the stamping out of corruption in the last 19 months of the Government in office.

Their campaign was centred on the term “change” and things did change since they came into power. There was a change for the worst. In the month of May, 2015, two key issues became known to the public. The first issue is related to the Inauguration Ceremony of the President. The Government gave conflicting reports about the cost to host the Ceremony. Initially, they indicated that the cost was covered by friends and well-wishers. Eventually, after much probing from the Opposition, they finally admitted that the Ministry of Education had made millions of dollars available for the Inauguration. My question is, why is there such secrecy on that matter?

Secondly, eight containers of steel worth millions of dollars were removed by the BK International Inc. from the Ministry of Public Health compound during the first week of the Government coming into office, in violation of a Court Order. What was the Government’s response to it? “You did nothing to retrieve the containers; neither did you say anything about it”.

When the APNU/AFC ascended to power, the President announced that his Government will grant presidential pardons every year to prisoners for misdemeanours. He then released 60 prisoners back into society. The Opposition, on several occasions, requested information regarding the names of those who were released and the crimes they committed.

The Government has failed to provide this information. In light of the upsurge in crime, which the Government does not acknowledge, we believe that it is necessary, at this stage, for them to provide this information as it may help to address the crime situation. Again the question is, what is there to hide?

In August, 2015, the public became aware of a contract which was given to Fedders Lloyd for the construction of the Specialty Hospital, even though it had lost out on the earlier bid. This was done without going to tender at a price yet unknown and in violation of the procurement laws.

Despite public outcry...

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, what do you rise on?

Minister of Finance [Mr. Jordan]: On a point of clarification, Standing Order 40(a). Mr. Speaker, I think false information has been presented to this House. There was never a contract given to Fedders Lloyd to do anything.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member.

Mr. Jordan: If the Hon. Member is in possession of information to support that, then I think she should give it to the House or withdraw the statement.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I thank you. It is a point of elucidation. I thank you for it.

Ms. Chandarpal: Mr. Speaker, it was a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) so I withdraw that aspect and correct it.

Mr. Speaker: Please proceed.

Ms. Chandarpal: This was done without going to tender, at a price yet unknown and in violation of the procurement laws. Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, if you withdraw, then there is no reference to tender, if there is no contract.

Ms. Chandarpal: Okay.

Mr. Speaker: Let us try to stay on track.

Ms. Chandarpal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the first acts of the Government was to give itself enormous salary increases between 50% to 100% of which former Government Ministers received. This was quietly done in September, 2015 and we, on this side of the House, had to wage a struggle in Parliament to bring a motion to reverse this. When the motion was finally heard in December, it was defeated by the Government. Additionally, leaked information was revealed last year, suggesting that the Government was planning to increase the salaries of the President, Vice-Presidents and Ministers. Minister Trotman, on behalf of the Government, denied that the Government was contemplating any salary increases for the Ministers. This was also denied during the debate on the 2015 Budget in August.

Having gone into recess mid-September, the Government stealthily published Order No. 6 of 2015 in the *Official Gazette*, dated 25th September, increasing their salaries and making it retroactive to 1st July, 2015. We recall the rationale which was being touted then that Ministers needed more money because they were making a sacrifice since their self-employment was very lucrative.

While hardworking public servants had to wait for their salary increases, the Government, with alacrity, went ahead and gave themselves a hefty increase. This increase was done without the establishment of the constitutional salaries review commission which was proposed in the Coalition's Manifesto to review, periodically, the salaries, pensions and other conditions for persons appointed to Constitutional Offices, including the President, Prime Minister, Judges, Members of Parliament and other special offices.

Between September and December of 2015, another issue related to transparency in the Government was brought to the public's attention. The Government initially refused to provide

information on the private company which was in charge of the D'Urban Park Development Project which was developed for the Jubilee Celebration. The Opposition requested information on the source of funding for the Project, including on those who gave donation. We are still awaiting information on the companies that gave donations and how much was paid to the private company. Again, it took another motion by the Opposition to get more information; still there are a lot of unanswered questions. I am sure the Government has nothing to hide.

Then we had the Rudisa Beverages and Juices case at the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) and the subsequent pay-out to that company. The Government settled to repay the entire amount without any negotiations for a debt repayment schedule, despite the fact that the company owed and appears to still owe millions of dollars in taxes to Guyana. The first payment was made late last year and the second provision in the 2016 Budget.

Continuing in the same vein of transparency, again, hundreds of millions of dollars was spent by the Government and the Mayor and City Council (M&CC) of Georgetown on the clean-up campaign without public tendering. Companies were handpicked. In some cases, new companies were created with no experience to undertake the work. There has been no accountability of the amount of moneys spent and the Mayor and Town Clerk have rebuffed efforts to allow the Auditor General's Office to do a forensic audit.

10.47 a.m.

In 2016, billions of dollars owed to the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) by Demerara Distillers Limited (DDL) were written off. The country would not have been informed had it not been for the press statement issued by this company. We learnt of another set of write-offs by the Town Council to many companies for millions of dollars owed in rates and taxes for undisclosed amounts.

The Guyanese learnt of yet another scandal and, this time, it involved the parking metre contracts which were given with no public tendering, no involvement of the Georgetown Mayor and City Council and no consultation with citizens. This contract is for a period of 49 years.

Again, we learnt of another transgression which relates to the three-year drug bond contract between the Ministry of Public Health and the Linden Holding Company. When questioned, the relevant Minister admitted that the contract was not tendered for.

Then there was the unresolved matter related to the sale of the Guyana Telephone and Telegraph Company's (GT&T) shares. I remember the media referring to the controversial trip undertaken by Minister Harmon. We were told then that the Minister had, in his possession, documents to show that US\$5 million were owed to the Government for the sale of GT&T's shares. This was nearly a year ago. Up to now, the Guyanese people were not shown these documents. The people of Guyana need to know the truth on this matter. The Government needs to provide these documents to the people. We are being told, by one side, that the money has been paid and, on the other side, the National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL) has indicated that it never received the money. This matter should be investigated urgently.

I wish to continue my presentation which showcases how the Government has managed to deliver the "good life" to some Guyanese. I have outlined some of them. I wish to provide some further examples: two fuel scandals relating to the issuance of fuel licence for the importation of fuel to companies that are made up of persons related to top officials or who are top officials in the Government who have no fuel bonds, no storage facilities and no offices; the refurbishing of the Kitty Market to the tune of \$240 million without any tendering; and awarding of contracts for boxed juices provided to the School Feeding Programme to a Surinamese beverage company owned by Rudisa, and that was not the lowest or even the second lowest bid.

In addition to that, we had then the Prime Minister Hamilton Green Pension Bill which seeks to provide a pension, benefits and other facilities to Mr. Green from 1985 to 1992. Mr. Green currently receives a statutory pension under the Pensions (President, Parliamentary and Special Officers) Act which provides for pensions to be paid to the President, the Prime Minister and other Parliamentary and Special Officers. The Government is now seeking to create another Bill which seeks to provide full benefits and facilities to Mr. Green, comparable to what is provided to a former President, a position that he never held.

The Coalition Government, when in Opposition, was consistent in their attacks on the PPP/C Government regarding the wages and salaries of public servants. They promised to increase the

salaries of all Government workers by 10% across the board in the first instance as a prelude to the restoration of collective bargaining throughout the Public Service. However, a Commission of Inquiry was set up to undertake a number of matters and there was a public perception which was created that a new salary package would have been made by the said Commission. The Report was presented in May, 2016 and the public servants are yet to receive a wage increase.

The Government, while in Opposition, spoke against the hiring of contract workers. In 2014, there were 287 contract workers in the Public Service. The current Budget for 2017 proposes to increase this figure to 569. Parallel to this, the Budget for contract workers has increased from \$9.2 billion to \$11 billion, an increase of \$1.8 billion. The average cost, excluding benefits such as gratuity, has increased from \$2.2 million per person to \$2.6 million per person or by 20.9%.

On the topic of social cohesion, in this Budget, \$90.1 million is allocated for social cohesion, to support the consultation process and other social cohesion activities. It would be interesting to know how many groups were involved in the beginning of the consultation, how many more stayed to the end and to what extent other sections of the population were involved. We are being advised that five themes related to social cohesion were identified and these are: economic equity and opportunities, citizens' safety and security, social inclusion and tolerance, inclusive and participatory governance, and harmonious ethnic and race relations. I wonder, in this new dispensation, what would be the role of the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC). If you want to create harmonious ethnic and race relations, Minister, you need to create the enabling environment to facilitate this. Minister, can you please advise us how you intend to move forward on economic equity and opportunities when there is evidence to suggest that the Government is more interested in taking care of the needs of its supporters?

I wish to refer to the three Bs – bicycle, boats and buses - where the buses and boats are named after a very senior Government functionary. We hope that there is equal access to all school children through this initiative as we were told that there were cases where buses did not stop in certain communities.

We must not forget the 1,972 Amerindian Community Service Officers who were dismissed and another Programme, which has no employment component, was introduced to replace this initiative.

The impending closure of sugar estates will put thousands of workers on the bread line. Not only will workers lose jobs, but cane farmers as well will also go bankrupt, and this will cause social unrest in communities where people will not be able to take care of their families. We would like to know what measures are in place to provide economic opportunities for persons displaced.

Minister, since you are dealing with citizens' safety and security, I wish to suggest that the first thing you need to do is to bring to the Government's attention the urgency of addressing safety and security for all Guyanese. Every day, the citizens of Guyana are under threat of being robbed and killed. The Government continues to deny that there is an upsurge in crime. The first step in dealing with a problem is to accept that there is a problem. If the Government continues to deny this issue, the lives of many more innocent Guyanese people will be lost. And I would like to know, Minister, what plans you have to ensure that those prisoners who have been pardoned are getting the necessary assistance to prevent them from committing other acts? Additionally, the citizens are concerned that more prisoners will be released in upcoming months. And if this is the case, what programmes are in place to ensure that such persons are monitored? And may I enquire about the measures that are in place to help citizens to defend themselves in the face of the crime situation?

Another interesting allocation is the \$650 million in the oil and gas sector. It is anticipated that capacities will be built in various fields and disciplines, including petroleum engineering, fiscal accounting and analysis, *et cetera*. Minister, I will like to know what measures are in place to ensure that a wide cross section of Guyanese from different geographic locations are given an opportunity to participate in these fields and disciplines.

We welcome the developments which are taking place in urban centres. We have seen the improvements in the city and all the grounds which are in good condition. We applaud the Government for finally getting its City Council to do what it should have done a long time ago to enhance the City.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 25 minutes.

Ms. Chandarpal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I hope that the City Council can keep up the good work and, when there is a change in Government, I hope the City Council will continue to give that support. [Ms. Ally: When is that?] It is in 2020, my Dear.

We are happy that the people of Georgetown are getting added benefits and opportunities. I would like to see some of that happening in the rural communities where the roads are covered with overgrown bushes. We welcome the creation of more industrial areas so that people who are living outside of the urban centres can have the opportunity to have a job. They do not have the luxury of flood lights nor street lights to play games.

The Information Communication and Technology (ICT) Centre, which was started in Enmore by the PPP/C Government, must be given the necessary support to become operationalised. With the influx of large sections of new home owners in that community, there is a dire need for job creation for the young people of that community.

I have noted the four programmes that target youth unemployment in the Budget. I would like to know what measures are in place to ensure that a wide cross section of youth from different geographic locations is given the opportunity to participate.

On this side of the House, we will be monitoring all these projects very closely and we hope that they are designed in a transparent and inclusive manner.

With the economy on the decline and traditional export earners, like rice and sugar, not doing very well, the Budget focuses on taxing an already poor nation. This is an affront to the ordinary citizens who are already experiencing hardships.

In concluding, we wish to see a fair budget that caters for all Guyanese and not a selected group. We trust that the Government, which has promised to deliver positive change to Guyana, will ensure that this happens.

11.02 p.m.

I wish to call on the Government to withdraw the Budget as it will have serious negative consequences for all sectors of Guyana.

I thank you. *[Applause]*

Minister of Education [Dr. Roopnaraine]: Mr. Speaker, Hon. Colleagues on both sides of the House, and students from Bina Hill Institute of Learning, I wish to welcome you to the National Assembly and hope that you are stimulated by the debate.

My task today is not to defend the Government's plans for expenditure on education over the next year. For the second year in a row, the importance of investment in education has been underscored by a commitment of over 17% of the national Budget towards this sector, a commitment underscored by Government's hardnosed recognition that there are things that are institutionally wrong with the system and that we cannot skimp on investment on education.

My task, today, in the relatively short time allotted, is to provide information on, and the context of, some of our key strategic interventions in the upcoming year and how they are intended to lay the foundation for the arduous task ahead of us all, that is, building a solid education infrastructure as a central pillar of the country's survival in this still new century.

I will begin with a review of the activities of the last year. In 2016, in keeping with the sector's mission, the Ministry of Education embarked on new interventions designed to improve access to and quality of education across all regions. Recognising the need to improve school attendance, the Ministry launched its pilot breakfast programme in nine East Coast Demerara schools. This was roughly equally divided between the communities of Buxton and Enmore, a project that benefited 657 pupils. Further, the expansion of the hot meal programme in another 50 nursery and primary schools in Regions 1, 7, 8, 9 and in the Pomeroon River benefited an additional 4,000 students. As such, in 2016, a total of over 70,000 pupils would have received some form of nutritional snack or meal through the National School Feeding Programme. Coupled with this, the Ministry continued its support service programmes, which included the issuing of school uniform vouchers, of which 133,000 students benefited across all levels, and the distribution of footwear and bicycles to students, particularly in the hinterland and riverine communities.

In an effort to cushion the cost of transportation for our students as well as reduce the rate of drop-outs in the postsecondary level, a monthly stipend has been given to students of the Leonora and Mahaicony Technical and Vocational Centres and the Upper Corentyne Industrial Training Centre. Currently, over 500 such students are benefiting from this initiative.

In keeping with the thrust of balancing expressive arts with academic excellence, an additional 52 primary teachers were trained, this year, in the delivery of the music programme, giving a total of over 135 music teachers in our schools. Further, an additional 1,000 pupils have been introduced to the playing of the recorder across Regions 2, 3, 4, 6, 10 and Georgetown. At the secondary level, a total of 80 students were introduced to the playing of the steel pans at three schools, namely, Stewartville Secondary, Diamond Secondary and Bladen Hall Secondary.

The Ministry has recognised that there is a need to address the increased rate of psychosocial issues in schools. To this end, initial efforts have been made to construct counselling rooms in 10 Secondary Schools, namely, Cummings Lodge, Richard Ishmael, St. Mary's, Lodge, South Ruimveldt, Tutorial, Dolphin, East Ruimveldt, Tucville and Charlestown, to provide a space for remedial psychosocial sessions with students.

We also continue to recognise the invaluable role parents play as partners in education. In this regard, for example, we launched the read, play, love, mass media campaign which, through print, video, radio and web-based interface, will inundate communities across Guyana with the core message that primary caregivers and the community, at large, have a critical role to play in the education and socioemotional development of young children.

We recognise that curriculum is the cornerstone of any education system. This year, the Ministry took steps towards conceptualising the revision of its curriculum, including stakeholder consultations, curriculum review and assessment, curriculum development, training for curriculum pilot programmes, and implementation and development of national development for the curriculum.

In this era of rapid technological change, the Ministry has a mandate of ensuring that all secondary schools are adequately equipped for the teaching of ICT related subjects. In addition to its ongoing work in providing a growing number of schools with new or upgraded computer lab facilities, 2016 also saw the launch of the One Laptop Per Teacher Initiative. Further, in collaboration with the E-Government Unit, 82 secondary schools, eight Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions and six Departments of Education were provided with internet and network connectivity, while 33 additional secondary schools and seven Cyril Potter of Education (CPCE) sites are in the process of being connected.

Under the Secondary Improvement Project, Grade 7 students from the eight pilot Secondary Schools of North Ruimveldt, Diamond, Bladen Hall Multilateral, Annandale, West Demerara, Leonora, St. Ignatius and Bartica were recipients of 1,120 tablets, all fully loaded with Mathematics software, with the aim of enhancing learning through the use of technology. The teachers have been trained to utilise this new methodology and the schools have been equipped with projectors and servers to facilitate this process. Further, three science laboratories were completed at Vryman's Erven, Canje and Annai Secondary Schools so as to enhance the delivery of the sciences in schools.

Consistent with the drive to embrace the fundamentals of a green economy, the Ministry of Education has partnered with the Guyana Energy Agency (GEA) in an attempt to reduce the usage and cost of electricity. The GEA has conducted energy assessments at 29 secondary schools across Guyana and has conducted energy saving awareness exercises at three schools in Georgetown. The GEA has also provided support to the Ministry of Education through the rehabilitation of photovoltaic systems at five hinterland schools in the hinterland regions. The GEA has also installed solar, photovoltaic systems at seven schools, all in an attempt to ultimately conserve the use of energy and electricity cost.

In 2016, two new schools were completed, Parfaite Harmonie Primary and Smyth Street Nursery. Additionally, the process for the construction of three additional nursery schools commenced, namely for Mocha, Turkeyen and Carmelita.

In 2016, we continued to position our national university as a centre for innovation. Under the University of Guyana's Science and Technology support, 15 Bachelor's Degree Programmes in the Faculties of Natural Sciences, Technology, Agriculture and Forestry, and Earth and Environmental Sciences were reformed and introduced in the 2015 and 2016 academic year. In addition, 13 buildings were rehabilitated with laboratory equipment and furniture. These were installed in the Faculties of Science and Technology, and the fibre optic ring and wireless network were installed. Research projects in the areas of mining on biodiversity, alternative medicine and the integration of environmental education in the Mathematics curriculum were completed. Research in other areas, such as the carbon storage potential of the mangrove forest in Guyana, the effects of corila on primary and secondary cancer cell lines and the impact of mining on fish diversity and diet in coastal and inland rivers of Guyana, continued.

In terms of general administration, in 2017, we will continue our commitment to improving the managing of the administration of the education sector in increasingly more efficient ways, both in terms of oversight of the 11 education districts as well as setting benchmarks for the dozens of private schools that are scattered across Guyana. Some of the key objectives of the upcoming year will be to improve teacher training in keeping with our priority areas for education, to increase instructional time for students, to improve upon monitoring and evaluation, better monitoring/supervision of capital projects, and to enhance the internal efficiency of the Ministry.

All our initiatives in this regard are in recognition that there are three critical fronts from which we need to engage in the education sector enhancement. These are pedagogy, service delivery and innovation.

Pedagogy: As the Minister of Finance highlighted in his presentation, and which has perhaps become an all too familiar refrain over the past several years, our education system is in a crisis. When I first took up the privilege of this position, I spoke to the need for the creation of an evidence-based intervention into stemming the situation and adequately retooling this sector for the invaluable role it is to play in our development. The Commission of Inquiry into the Education Sector, which launched its first public consultations in April of this year, is wrapping up its investigations this month and will be presenting its findings to the public by the end of the first quarter of 2017. Without prejudice to the recommendations of that report, there are certain preliminary presumptions that we can make, indeed that we have to make, with regard to improving service delivery in the sector, and the Budget for 2017 has been crafted with these in mind. This is true, particularly for those that deal with the area of pedagogy.

The Hon. Minister of Finance spoke about the \$307.4 million allocated for the Programme for Emergency Education Reform, the PEER Initiative. This follows on from several measures initiated by the Ministry since 2015, with the central component of it being the first significant and most sweeping curriculum reform in almost two decades.

11.17 p.m.

Why this is important is that, when it comes to education, 20 years from the beginning of the new millennium is exponentially different from the 20 years prior, when it come to the advances made in the crucial education areas of science and technology.

We are not only confronted with a plethora of new areas of knowledge, but an almost equally dazzling array of ways to avail ourselves of them. Considering that underlying much of this new knowledge is one area in which we have had cause for serious concern, Mathematics, the Programme for Emergency Education Reform (PEER) initiative will focus heavily on improving Math performance through comprehensive diagnosis of current constraints, methodology review and the recruitment of a cadre of specialists for targeted interventions. This does not mean, of course, that work has not started in other areas, work which, in some, aids the presumptive directions in which we need to take curriculum development. The invaluable progress that the National Centre for Education Resource Development (NCERD) has been making in 2016 will continue in 2017 in the core areas of curriculum development, special needs education training and awareness, literacy and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) integration.

In November of this year, a total of 50 participants, including head teachers and Deputy Education Officers (DEOs) from selected regions, were trained in an Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) initial workshop. One that was designed to generate awareness and support for the implementation of a pilot for ESD, linking the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Micro-Science Experiments Programme, Climate Change Education for Sustainable Development and the UNESCO Sandwatch Coastal Erosion Awareness Programme.

In 2017, we will see not only the approval of the ESD Policy and the implementation of a supporting action plan, but also closer collaboration between the Science Unit and the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE), in addition to a stronger public awareness programme on the importance of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education. Even as we push forward with a strong STEM programme, we will not lose sight of the important role that arts education has to play in creating a well-rounded civic-minded student and in laying the educational foundation for our future creative leaders, hence, our preference for Science , Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM), rather than just STEM.

While in 2016, we saw some increase in students enrolling in the expressive arts, sports education accounted for the vast majority of that increase, while visual arts saw a worrying trend in decreased enrolments. In 2017, we intend to target this decline with the training of 132 teachers in multiple visual arts disciplines and across more than half of the education districts. We

will also continue to enhance our teachers' training programmes in music, drama and dance, and we will equip another three schools with steel bands, bringing the total, so far, to around 24.

In 2017, we will seek closer collaboration between the University of Guyana (UG) School of Education and Humanities, NCERD and the CPCE. These initiatives will form the basis of a medium term sector review plan 2018/2020, which in-turn will necessarily be, simply, another phase in what has to be a process that fundamentally reforms and restructures the pedagogy at the heart of our education system, in order to provide long-term centralised integration within the National Sustainable Developmental Agenda.

As the Minister of Finance outlined, we will continue to look at ways in which we can make our service delivery of existing programmes in education better, even as we are focussed on reforming pedagogy. Permit me, in this regard, to focus on a few of those highlights. During 2017, we will continue the coordinating, monitoring and evaluating activities of the 2014/2018 Strategic Education Plan, with particular focus on the implementation of the regional plans, enhancing our programme to ensure that schools are certifiable as child-friendly spaces, integrating climate change education more meaningfully into the curriculum and strengthening the working relationship between our international partners, United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) and UNESCO, in particular.

With regard to the latter, in particular, we will re-establish the long missing national commission and use it as a framework for policy derived actions on culture youth and sport. As Minister Jordan spoke to this during his presentation: Technical Vocational and Education Training (TVET) will benefit from an investment of \$2.5 billion, one that will fund the expansion of TVET programmes into our four hinterland regions and place special focus on improving access for persons with disabilities.

In 2017, we also expect to see the strengthening and greater autonomy of the National Accreditation Council (NAC) and an increased capacity for accreditation and determining equivalency under this entity. In 2017, we will expect continued improvements in students' welfare. For example, considering the critical work it has conducted, particularly over the past year, we will be looking at transitioning the School Health Nutrition and Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) Unit into an

official implementing unit within the Ministry, equipping it with the tools to continue to expand its scope of work in collaboration with partners like UNICEF.

As Minister Jordan addressed in his presentation, Government would be expending some \$1.9 billion in the School Feeding Programme and providing \$578 million towards the provision of textbooks. In the upcoming year, we will also, significantly, increase the number of counsellors in the school system.

Recognising that infrastructure is an invaluable component of education service delivery, in 2017, we intend to, as the Minister announced in his speech, expend over \$3.5 billion on the construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of schools, teachers' quarters and other buildings. Additionally, we will be exploring a programme of linking specific recreational grounds to schools, either individually or in clusters, and we will be upgrading the facilities of existing grounds in specific catchment areas.

At the University of Guyana, we are currently finalising the construction of a new 300 seat lecture theatre, as well as a new student services building. In 2017, we will be commencing the construction of a new school of medicine on the UG campus, as well as under the Yesu Persaud Endowment, a facility for clinical services attached to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC). In 2017, we will also be looking at ways in which we could intensify and diversify the work undertaken by the Monitoring, Evaluating, Reporting and Development (MERD) Unit. This means not simply reviewing its internal operations and engagement with schools, but also exploring ways to solicit information, more directly, from those our education system is meant to serve - the communities in which these schools exist. If any lesson the past year has taught us is that we have to find more efficient ways, beyond even the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) system, of listening to people on how they feel the education system is working and how it is not. It is only then that we can really develop and implement holistic solutions to our many and increasingly complex challenges.

Innovation, particularly that which harnesses the tremendous power of information and communication technologies, remains at the heart of our plans for improving the education sector in service of national development. The Management information Systems (MIS) Unit is a central agency in our plans for ICT based innovations in the education sector, tasked with

building the infrastructure for our education MIS Programme. During 2017, the unit will be tasked with implementing or upgrading Information Technology (IT) labs in a total of 80 primary schools and providing internet access or classroom interactivities resources to another 100 schools. Among the general deliverables of this unit are plans to create email solutions for client agencies under the Ministry, expand the current infrastructure and create programming assistance to address literacy, language and Math competence.

The One Lap Top Per Teacher (OPLT) initiative, which will see a total of 9,500 laptops being delivered to teachers, reflects our philosophy that we need to equip our frontline people in the education system with the tools for navigating within an increasingly digital learning arena. At the Cyril Potter College of Education, training will continue to rollout in the newly established smart classrooms, as well as in the new language laboratory. We can expect both improved internet connection on campus and a new website, which will feature content and will be created by students. This is a core part of our commitment to improve the competence and qualification of our teachers, even as we establish high-level standards of teaching that we expect them to adhere to.

At NCERD, of particular focus in 2017, will be the Learning Resource Development Unit, which has the mandate of ensuring the application of new technologies into the teaching curricula. I have already addressed the micro-science and applied science interventions at the University of Guyana.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you have been speaking for 25 minutes.

Dr. Roopnaraine: I will soon finish, Mr. Speaker. If we are to consider this general thrust in the education system, in addition to initiatives such as the programming stimulation push from the Ministry of Public Telecommunications, the establishment of four new hinterland radio stations to aid language preservation in Amerindian communities, and the newly announced Youth Innovation Fund, what we have is a clear programme designed to move us beyond the rhetoric of innovative thinking, towards the laying of the groundwork for the sustainable incorporation of innovation international development. I am proud to recognise that the Ministry of Education is providing the necessary leadership in that regard.

In closing, I put forward that there is arguably no other area of public administration as intrinsically challenging as that of the education sector, but also none so critical to national development, particularly when it comes to charting our course towards a greener and more diversified economy. I understand that the key purpose of a political Opposition is to oppose and I allow that there will be differences of opinion on how the business of certain sectors is administered. Education, however, is not an area that should be a target of unnecessary politicking and partisanship for partisanship. The inputs which will inform this year's allocation do not only reflect the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change's (APNU/AFC's) policy directions, but the technical competence of education officials, research by learning experts, strategic recommendations of international partners and the expressed desire of parents and guardians of the children and young people who are the primary beneficiaries of what it is we strive to achieve.

I do not expect unanimity nor do I expect the absence of stride and critique. I do, however, expect that whatever criticisms are made will be done from an informed perspective and in good faith. In that regard, I will be only too willing to be receptive to meaningful and constructive interventions.

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

11.32 a.m.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, students of Bena Hill Institute, Colleagues all. I feel obligated speaking just after the Minister of Education, culture, youth and sport to say a few words.

I recall that Dr. Jagan had a very famous saying, that one's ticket out of poverty is through a good education. We are very happy to see that the APNU/AFC Government has continued this tradition of investing in education.

Listening to the presentation, we were all told before that we have serious problems in Mathematics and English. I would have like to hear a little more about what concrete steps would have been taken to alleviate these problems. There were some generalised issues that were

brandished about, but nothing concrete. If we do not get to concrete solutions, then I am afraid that we would not solve the problem of Mathematics and English in our Country.

Earlier this year, the Minister of Education came to this House and asked us to provide money for the accreditation of the University of Guyana's Medical School. One would have thought that, in this Parliament, having passed that money, we would have gotten a report about the status of accreditation of the Medical School. But, nevertheless, I am extremely happy to hear that the National Accreditation Council would be working, assiduously, over the next year to, perhaps, accredit the institutions in our country.

I know that the Hon. Member has a passion for the arts, but I did not hear him touch much on the arts. Save and except that he spoke about STEM and STEAM programmes, which is good. But I wanted to hear, since, in previous budgets there was a commitment that we would get from the other side the construction of the 1838 Monument at Palmyra. I would have thought that we would have gotten an update that the monument would soon be unveiled. More so that, next year, we would celebrate or commemorate 100 years since Indentureship was abolished and we would have thought that the Government would have, at least, wanted to unveil the monument on that occasion.

Also, one of the initiatives that we had started, which was very well received by the artistic community of this country, was the visual arts exhibition and competition. It was scheduled to happen this year, but apparently there was no money in the budget for this, and so we did not have it this year. I only hope that we will have it next year. I could go on and on about a lot of things that are still missing.

One of the things that I find quite amusing in this year's budget is that there was an attempt to remove the Walter Roth Museum from its current site and put it in some other place. It was only because of the vigilance of the people of this country that we were able to prevent such an action. The National Trust of Guyana, which was there to protect the intangible and tangible heritage of this country, we understand that that too is under threat of being removed from its location.

[**Mr. Nandlall:** It has been removed.] Oh, it has been removed to another location. What are we doing when we are talking about culture and that we want to protect the cultural integrity of our country? Yet, this has been removed.

When I read the budget and when I heard the Minister of Finance speaking, one of the things I heard him say was that, we will now have an Institute of the Creative Arts. I recall that, two years ago, at the National Culture Centre (NCC), I had the pleasure of giving a speech at the Convocation of the Institute of Creative Arts. Also, at that time, I had invited Professor Vibert Cambridge, to give the feature address. Yet, we are talking about the Institute of Creative Arts as if it is a new intervention or a new thing. It is not. It has been there and it has been working and I could tell this House all those who were a part of the Faculty of the Institute of the Creative Arts. But I understand that they do not want to give credit, but that is okay. This is because I am not looking for credit.

One of the things that we could say about this year is that this year has been quite an historic year. It is the year when we celebrated our 50th Anniversary as an independent nation. It is a year also when we had two APNU/AFC budgets. But what the people will remember most is that this was the year of taxes. Between these two budgets there were close to 200 different tax measures. This must be a first in the world. What a gift for the 50th Independence Anniversary from the APNU/AFC Government to the people of this country. What a change? This was the change that we were hearing about.

What is it that the people are thinking about this APNU/AFC gift to the nation? Yesterday's *Stabroek News* Editorial stated:

“The Government’s decision to affix VAT to utility bills must be seen as one of the most oppressive and uncaring budget measures by any Government in recent years.”

A person wrote on Facebook:

“What do Budget 2017 and the death of Fidel Castro have in common?”

The answer was:

“They both made me cry”.

For me, this budget is visionless, it is ruthless and it is careless, for this Government to make such hefty tax impositions on the people of this country. One of the most grievous issues in this budget is the 14% Value Added Tax (VAT) on medicines and medical services. What does this

mean? Medicines and health services which were previously zero-rated will now attract VAT. Medical Services, including those provided by a qualified medical practitioner would now attract 14% VAT. Obviously, when persons go to a private practitioner, the consultation fee would probably go up by 14%. A registered hospital would now have to pay VAT on all the services that that hospital provide. Imagine, one is sick and lying in a bed in the hospital recuperating, one would now have to pay 14% VAT on that service that the hospital is providing. If one goes to a private hospital to get a surgery, one would now have to pay 14% VAT on the surgical services that is being provided.

It is not only the hospitals, but maternity homes. If a woman goes to a private maternity home to give birth to a child, she would now have to pay 14% VAT on the services. We like to talk about reducing neonatal and infant mortality, but for a new born, at any one of these private institutions, from the time the baby is born, any service provided - 14% VAT.

Nursing homes are not exempted. If one goes to a nursing home to recuperate, what does one thinks will happen? Any service that is provided by that nursing home - 14% VAT. **[Mr. Greenidge:** You had imposed the 16% VAT.] The Hon. Vice-President, Mr. Carl Greenidge, should know that none of these services previously attracted VAT. They were all zero-rated. So, I do not know what he is getting so anxious about. I know that it is hitting home, but let me tell the people how they are being taxed.

If one has to go to convalescent homes to recuperate, any service that is provided - 14% VAT. If one goes to any one of the clinical laboratories in Georgetown or anywhere, and wants any test done - 14 % VAT. We know that, very often, when one visits the public sector for services, many times the laboratories are not functioning and the doctors would actually send persons to the private labs to get those tests, but when persons go there, it is going to be 14% VAT. That is what we are getting from this Government.

What about radiology services? Very often, when one visits the public institutions, one cannot get an x-ray done. Persons are sent to the private institutions to get it done. When persons go there now - 14 % VAT. If one has to do a Computerised Axial Tomography (CAT) scan, he/she has to pay 14% VAT. I know that we would be told that they are now buying a CAT scan for the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. It was in this year's budget, but the CAT scan is not

functioning as yet. There was an non-governmental organisation (NGO) that was bringing in two CAT scans equipment for this country; one was supposed to go to the New Amsterdam Hospital and one would have thought that the Government would have placed the other one where there is a big population. But that other one is going to Bartica. There is nothing wrong with having it in Bartica, but what happened to the Linden Hospital Complex, the Suddie Regional Hospital or the West Demerara Regional Hospital? But as of now, when one goes to do a CAT scan it will be 14% VAT. If one has do an ultra sound.... [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members we cannot have a debate and hear the statements of Members if both sides continue to speak at the same time.

Mr. Nandlall: It is not both sides.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall, I did not ask a question of you. Hon. Members, allow the speaker to make his statement in silence. Thank you.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you Mr. Speaker. If one has to do an ultrasound and one goes to a private institution, 14% VAT would be charged on that. If someone is hospitalised, the meals that they eat in that hospital would now attract 14% VAT. These were all previously zero-rated.

11.47 p.m.

Nursing care and the personal assistance that one would get at these institutions, for all of those persons would now have to pay 14% VAT. This is what this Government has done to the people of this country.

In addition to all of that, when one goes to get optometric services, that is, to check one eyes, he/she has to pay 14% VAT. If one has to get a spectacle, 14% VAT. If one goes to a dentist in private practice, 14% VAT on that. What is worse is that prescription drugs would now attract 14% VAT. That is what is going on. Over the counter drugs would attract VAT. If one gets diarrhoea and he/she has to get Imodium, 14% more VAT on it; if one has high blood pressure and he/she needs Atenolol, 14% VAT more on that; if one wants to do a pregnancy test, 14% more VAT. [*Interruption*]

[Mr. Speaker hit gavel]

If one wants to have safe sex, 14% more VAT on the condoms. Panadol, 14% more VAT and we could go on and on. All the prescription items would now attract VAT. What is worse, on 3rd December, 2016, the world celebrated World Disability Day and guess what is in the budget? That wheelchairs will now attract 14% VAT; medical services, if one goes for treatment, a diagnosis, if the doctor has to do some prevention strategy, all of these, 14% VAT; if one has to get counselling, whether it is for suicide prevention or for an HIV test, all of these will now attract VAT. Hearing aids will now attract 14% VAT.

I am totally at a loss to describe this level of callousness that has been exhibited by this Government. Where is the compassion? The World Health Organisation (WHO) has been advocating that taxes must be removed on all essential drugs and medical supplies. For many years, we have had this and we have been complying. Now, we have moved from complying with what the WHO and the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) want, and we have now reversed all of that and we are taxing drugs and medical supplies. Where is the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change compassion for the elderly? Where is the APNU/AFC compassion for the children of this country? Where is the APNU/AFC compassion for the poor of this country? Where is the APNU/AFC compassion for the sick of this country? These measures speak to the nature of this Government.

This budget has 57 tax measures. Did the Government study the impact of these measures? What it would do to the people of this country? If it did, could the Minister tell this House how many money the Government will make by adding 14% VAT on medicines and health services? Could the Minister explain to this House what would be the economic impact of 14% VAT on medicines and health services? Could the Minister tell this House, what would be the impact of 14% VAT on medicines and health services will have on individuals and households seeking medical care? Could the Minister explain now about affordability, equity, equality impact and what this would mean for people living in different parts of this country? Could the Minister say what impact this would have on health, businesses, hospitals, laboratories, pharmacies and other businesses in this country? Could the Minister tell us how many jobs would be lost by these measures? This is the Government that we are dealing with.

It is my firm belief, that the APNU/AFC's policy of taxing medicines and health services will have a negative effect on the public health gains of this country. Preventative and punitive programmes and the prevention of HIV would suffer, since we now have to put 14% VAT on condoms, on antiretroviral drugs and on many more things. For family planning programmes, one will now have to pay 14% VAT on contraceptives. It would also limit the treatment that people can receive because many of them would not be able to afford the treatment. It would also slow economic growth and development and lead to the unnecessary suffering of thousands of people in this country.

In addition to the higher price in the private sector, it would mean that more people would be forced to use the public sector health services. What would happen there? It would lead to longer waiting times, more frequent drug shortages, more man hours would be lost to care seeking and probably, in the long run, it would cost the Government more than this 14% VAT imposition on the people of this country.

I urge this Government, to urgently repeal these exploitative tax measures. The Government needs to repeal it in the interest of the people of this country. The Government needs to withdraw it. Over the past year, drug shortages have plagued the public health system. At the main referral hospital, at the regional hospitals, at the district hospitals and at the health centres and the health posts, all of these have experienced systemic drug shortages and medical supplies. In the last budget, this was highlighted, but little or no corrective measures or actions were taken, and so by mid-year, the shortages escalated to a full-blown crisis. When we had brought a motion here, the Minister came here and told us that there was no such shortage.

The Minister seems to be performing one of these mannequin challenges. He froze up because he was not able to come with solutions to this drug shortage. He came to this House, when we were debating the motion, and he said that there was no truth in the alleged persistent shortages of drugs and medical supplies in the public health system. But the first step in solving a problem is that one must acknowledge that the problem exists. The Minister's insistence that there was no shortage flies in the face of reality and the experiences of patients who have been using the public health system.

If one talks to the patients, one could see that they get prescriptions from the various health clinics and none of those drugs are available, so one has to go privately and buy them. This is just one example and there are many more where this came from.

Let us look at what is going on right now in the system. At the end of November, there were 62 medicines that were short at the Georgetown Public Hospital Cooperation and they included aspirins. The hospital needed about 200,000 aspirins per month. That is what it uses. Do you know how many it had? It had 16,000. For Vitamin C, the hospital uses about 60,000 per month. How many did have? It had 19,000. Atorvastatin, which is used to lower cholesterol, the hospital needed about 60,000 per month. What did it have? It had zero. Diclofenac Sodium, the hospital needs 150,000 per month. What is there at the hospital? There is about 20,000. Septrin, the hospital needs 30,000 per month. What is there right now? There is about 4,000. And there is a long exhaustive list. Doxycycline and Erythromycin have the same problems and iron tablets, which are very cheap and widely available, the hospital does not have that either. The hospital needs 60,000 a month. It has about 10,000. This is what pregnant women use to ensure that they do not have anaemia during pregnancy. One of the drugs that the diabetic patients use is Metformin. The hospital needs about 150,000 Metformin tablets per month. The hospital had 10,000.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 25 minutes.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is an additional 79 medicines which the hospital does not have. There is zero. Yet, this Minister would come here and tell us that there is no drug shortage. We know and people are telling us, so I want to know. It is because, in this year's budget, at the start of the year, the Minister of Finance said that there was \$6.5 billion set aside for drugs and related medical supplies. The big question is, where have all this money gone? If they are spending these budgeted sums the right way and for the right purposes, why is there a shortage? I would urge that the newly established Public Procurement Commission (PPC), urgently, launch an investigation into this matter.

If we look at this morning's *Kaieteur News* newspapers we would see an article about the political interference at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. One of the things that the previous Board of the hospital did was to try to get a Deputy Chief Executive Officer (DCEO).

Now we hear that that is going to be undermined. When we look at what is happening in the health sector, there are a lot of political apparatchiks that are placed at different levels of the health sector. We have political expediency over technical competence. That is why this Government is going to end up with mismanagement of the sector which is taking place now. That is why, at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, the New Amsterdam Hospital and at many other institutions we are seeing it. So, if the Government wants to get out of the health crisis it has to put technically competent people to manage the institutions.

Right now, at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, the Accident and Emergency Unit is overcrowded. Many times patients go there, they are admitted into the hospital and there are no beds in the wards for them.

12.02 p.m.

So they have to spend their time at the Accident and Emergency Unit, sitting on a bench, waiting for a bed in the hospital. One would have thought that it is a simple solution, if there is overcrowding, to put more bed in the hospital. What has happened, instead of investing in more beds at the hospital, we see a big fat budget to build the head office of the Ministry of Public Health for cushy offices for the Minister while thousands of patients would suffer. Something must be morally wrong.

I conclude by saying that there is no joy this Christmas. When we look at the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) style of “good life” the people of this country would be having a difficult life. Value Added Tax (VAT) on spectacle is a tax on the partially blind; VAT on hearing aid is a tax on the deaf; VAT on wheelchairs is a tax on the disable; VAT on condom is a tax on safe sex; VAT on contraceptive is a tax of family planning; VAT on laboratory services is a tax on diagnosis.

These taxes are literally taxing sick people. I urge the Government to withdraw this budget and let us be considered proper measures for the people of this country. [*Applause*]

Minister within the Ministry of Communities [Ms. Patterson]: I wish to first recognise and express admiration for the great work of the Minister of Finance and his team which resulted in a

super presentation in Budget 2017. This budget promises to continue to build on the previous two Estimates to ensuring the continued growth and economic development of our country.

Please allow me a few quick comments before I zero in on my Ministry.

Anyone who has managed a company knows that proper planning is not just about what you do but when you do it and timing is an important element in prudent management. This is encapsulated in the sentence from the Minister's presentation:

“In recognition of the importance of timely budget presentation and passage to the delivery of government's projects and programmes and, with due regard to public confidence and support which this will engender, the Government is considering a fixed date for the delivery of future budgets.”

I look forward and wish to commend the Government of Guyana for this excellent development.

I really did not want to go down this line, but my colleague, or my fellow friend on the Opposition side, Hon. Mr. Gill, yesterday really drove me to pick this up. I hear so often of the Opposition side of the House about the increased salary of Ministers, increased benefits, and all of that. I want to say that the Opposition Members of Parliament also received increases in their salaries and they came to this House and said publicly that they are not going to take it. They are going to open an account and put the money, and give it back to this National Assembly, and to charity. I want to ask the Opposition Members of Parliament to say to the people of Guyana how many charities they have donated money to. Have you refused the increase from the National Assembly?

Ms. Teixeira: The Point of Order, Standing Order 40 (a). The parliamentary Opposition never said any such thing. We went on record in a public statement that we...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira, what we are going to do on this occasion is that we are going to quote the Standing Order, we are going to say the offending issue, and then we are going to resume our seats. We are not going to have speeches now. You have stated the Standing Order, and then what you will do is to say what the issue you are raising is.

Ms. Teixeira: I hope this goes to everybody.

Mr. Speaker: There will be no speeches. You may please proceed.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, with due respect, I hope this ruling of yours goes to everybody.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you may please proceed with what you have to do.

Ms. Teixeira: The Hon. Member misled the House. It is untrue what she said. We have public statement in the media, which was reported, that stated completely opposite. The Minister said that we agreed to give back the increase to the National Assembly. We never said any such thing. We could bring the public statement we made to the media. [*Interruption from the Government Members*] Mr. Speaker, do I have your protection or not?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, are you rising on a Point of Order?

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: If it pleases you, Your Honour...

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I am on the floor on a Point of Order.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, you have to allow the first speaker to complete her Point of Order.

Mr. Nagamootoo: The Point of Order has to do with the Point of Order raised. It is an erroneous Point of Order. She could not seek the protection of this House - she could not - if she rose on a Point of Order. That is not a Point of Order.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, it is entirely possible for the Point of Order, being made by the Hon. Ms. Teixeira, to be heard, and then the other Point of Order.

Ms. Teixeira: Point of Order, Standing Order 40 (a), the Hon. Member said that we agreed to return the money to the National Assembly. The Minister is misleading the House. We never said any such thing. We have public statements in the media to the opposite.

Secondly, point of elucidation, Standing Order 40 (b), the Clerk of the National Assembly has letters from Members of Parliament on this side deducting \$23,755, which is the increase we received, and putting it on a bank account in the name of the parliamentary Opposition. That is a record of this House.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, do you have a Point of Order you wish to speak?

Mr. Nagamootoo: The Point of Order, under Standing Order 40 (a), is, as you would have said, Mr. Speaker, to state the Point of Order and not to make a statement. Question is, whether the moneys are placed in account or taken home and spent, it is Members of the Parliament who are drawing down this money. It is misleading this House.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we are going to try to tell ourselves that we will work by the Standing Orders. You will not attempt to tell the Speaker how he must rule. You will tell the Speaker what you wish to say in relation to that Standing Order and you will leave it to the Speaker. That is what we will do from this moment on. Hon. Member Ms. Patterson, you have the floor.

Ms. Patterson: I heard the Hon. Member Dr. Anthony spoke about the VAT on medical care. I want to say to this House that there is a public hospital, which is free, that offers all the services to the poor people of this country. If anybody wishes to go to a private hospital it means that that person has money. If you want to have cosmetic \$2 million expense at the dentist, then you must pay VAT. Mr. Speaker, as you know, sometimes it appears as though we suffer. My colleagues over the other side I can see that they suffer from a cute amnesia. They forget so many things. I guess changing of sides causes that, and I can understand. There are so many things that I do not want to waste my half an hour on because there are important things for me to talk about.

Presented under the theme, *Building a Diversified, Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese*, Budget 2017, in my humble view, underscores my Government's efforts to find a way to place the nation on a sustainable path to growth and calls upon all of us to work together to achieve the kind of Guyana we want to see.

As the Minister responsible for the Ministry of Housing, I would use the time allotted to me to speak to the question of how the housing sector would contribute in 2017 and beyond to satisfying this theme. As I start, it would be remits of me not to comment albeit briefly on our stewardship for the ensuing year. Starting with our allocations under land administration, we have allocated 1,992 house lots for 2016. We have processed 2,065 transports and titles and have issued 4,642 transports and titles throughout the regions. We have also allocated 200 lots to squatters under the squatter regularisation programme.

During the period March to May 2016 we had the Fifty-fifty Jubilee Payment Plan. Two thousand eight and eighty-one allottees benefited from the plan of which 2,186 were low and middle income earners and 695 were high income earners. This has increased the cash flow of the agency by \$590 million. With the discounts, which the allottees received, they were able to commence buying housing materials to start their housing projects. We have had a Jubilee Home Improvement Subsidy, in recognition of Guyana's 50th Anniversary. Ministry of Communities, Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA), announced the distribution of 300 home improvement subsidies and this was done in all the regions except Regions 5 and 8. Region 8, it is because we do not have any of the settlements or housing scheme there. For Region 5 only four responses came and they did not fit the criteria. The programme offered beneficiaries of a maximum of \$50,000 worth in building materials redeemable via vouchers to effect approving improvement works to their existing buildings.

12.17 p.m.

Youth policy: Budget 2016 presentation alluded to the fact that there are a number of things that an 18 years old can do legally, but applying for a house lot is not one of them. During the months of September to November, I embarked on a number of consultations to garner the view of the public, from Annandale to Belladrum, from New Amsterdam to Rose Hall, from Bartica to Anna Regina, and from Georgetown to Diamond to Linden. The public is overwhelming in its support of changing the minimum age requirement from 21 years old to 18 years old to be eligible to apply for a house lot. In actual fact, a young person from the 3rd January, 2017 can apply for a house lot once that person reaches the age of 18 years with an allocation at 21 years, notwithstanding, the measured success mentioned above. The sad state of affairs of the housing sector was aptly described by the Minister of Finance when he said, and this is not a secret:

“...construction declined from a budgeted 10.5 per cent to a projected 3.2 per cent in 2016. This performance is related to a decline in activity in the housing sector and PSIP.”

I quote that from page 8 of his speech. This is better understood when the following is considered. The approved budget for the year 2016 is made up to \$5.8 billion. This amount budgeted was to be spent from the CH&PA Housing Fund since no subvention for capital and current expenditure was requested from the Consolidated Fund. I am definitely not happy to

report to this honourable House that the agency has only spent 19.9% of expenditure and achieve 30.5% of revenue. I am bringing this to the fore because I know that the Opposition has its information, so we have no secret.

This agency has been plagued with numerous challenges and the challenges were in the areas of human resources, alleged corruption, lack of capacity, in some regard, and untimely decision making. However, I am confident that this scenario would not continue in 2017 and the budgeted sum would be fully expended by 31st December.

The Minister of Finance about housing pointed out:

“The Central Housing and Planning Authority (CHPA) has reviewed the process of allocating house lots, given the approximately 25,000 applications on file, of which almost 18,000 are low income individuals. Concerns about the low occupancy of many housing developments/areas have led to reviews of the mechanisms used to enable home ownership. What has been revealed is the lack of a holistic approach in providing quality, affordable housing in safe, well-serviced communities.”

He continues to say:

“Many recipients of house lots remain unable to start construction, while others have been allocated lots in areas that are woefully under-developed and without basic infrastructure. Still, many more are saddled with poorly constructed turnkey homes.”

The Minister of Finance mentioned low occupancy. CH&PA has developed 380 housing areas prior to May 2015 inclusive of the regularisation of squatting areas which yielded a total of 66,124 lots, of which 63,257 were allocated. However, occupancy level is only 55%, since 28,200 lots divested to households are still unoccupied. This situation was further compounded during the 2011 – 2015 period, where 38 housing areas were developed which yielded 20,015 lots of which 16,273 lots remain unoccupied. It took 4,260 acres to yield this 20,000-plus lots at a cost of \$12.78 billion and requires a further \$16.6 billion to complete these areas. The low occupancy point to factors such as lack of ability to access mortgages, which speaks about their lower affordability, inadequate or non-existent infrastructure, lack of social facilities and

services, loss of family support to poor households and challenges associated with individuals undertaking their own construction.

It must be said that this inability to start construction is not some new phenomenon that was visited upon the people since May 2015. The record will show the sum of these people have these house lots for years. We have found in the system that some have these house lots for ten, 15 and 20 years and over, and have not occupied. As a matter of fact, it was the jubilee payment plan that extended by the A Party for National Unity and Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government which enable many of them to pay off their house lots.

Secondly, in an effort to correct the mistakes inherited with a turnkey programme - I think last year, I went into details to say what these problems were - a project manager was hired to supervise that project. Of the 200 turnkey under construction, 51 were completed when we took office and handed over prior to May 2015. These houses had a range of problems, which I could now say, that had been rectified and owners are now satisfied. Let me say to the Hon. Members that they are rectified and the owners are now satisfied. Currently, the 141, which are in progress, with this new manager, completion has been taken place in batches and we are handling them over to the beneficiaries. By the end of December of this year we would have no disgruntled homeowners and the turnkey project.

Looking ahead - you cannot look back, you would turn a pillar of salt - a new model and I am quoting from the Minister of Finance speech:

“...a new model for providing for the housing needs of the thousands of low income individuals is being considered, in recognition of the critical links between housing construction, home ownership, consumer spending, revenue generation and economic growth. Going forward, the mode of providing affordable housing will include a mix of multi-storey apartment buildings, duplexes, and single family homes within sustainable community structures.”

I could give a brief overview of the CH&PA medium term strategy. Budget 2017 proposal was prepared within the framework of CH&PA medium term strategy, which is embodied in its housing plan of action 2016 to 2020. The main thrust of the agency strategy within its plan of action is to place emphasis on CH&PA planning function with respect to settlement development

and land use control and management. The days of haphazard allocation of house lots and selection of housing areas are over.

We focus, in accordance with its legislative mandate, on low income earners, state employees and we recently added youth for housing. Mr. Speaker, you would have known that our state employees are the ones with low income earning and they cannot afford the \$1 million, \$2 million, \$3.5 million and \$4 million house lots of which there are a numerous amounts. The low cost ones for \$92,000, \$150,000 and \$200,000, I could say this, that there were in selective areas in Region 6, more particularly in the Corentyne. We are looking to meet the need of every Guyanese, regardless of which region they are from, regardless of races and political affiliation. We are going to look at the need of all Guyanese.

We are also going to enhance collaboration with the local democratic organs in the land development and upgrading process and to enhance public participation in the housing and community development process. In this regard, the CH&PA would seek to improve the housing delivery system by pursuing a range of settlement development initiatives which include, and, just to name two of them, construction of various housing solutions for low income households to partnership with a private sector and civil society organisations. There would be the implementation of an integrated and comprehensive approach in planning and design of settlements and the regularisation of squatting areas.

The strategic direction of the CH&PA, which embraces the notion of creating liveable and hold sum communities, has to be taken within the context of local governance currently being promoted by the Government. In this regard, one of the primary measures that would be adopted in this medium strategy is enhancing collaboration with these local democratic organs (LDOs) and public participation in the housing and community development process. To achieve the long-standing goals of expanding the supply of housing, improving affordability and ensuring access to housing and infrastructure to poor families in the context of the development of sustainable and cohesive communities, actionable policy recommendations would be released through the development of a national housing strategy for Guyana. There is none. We met none and we are going to put one in place.

The thrust to give prominence to planning, awareness and renewed the interest at national, regional and local levels is critical to the work of the CH&PA. In this regard, the national planning forum would be helped during the first quarter of 2017 with major stakeholders to initiate dialogue and action to enhance the current fragmented planning framework. Currently, there is - as you would know in the media - the confusion with city council, CH&PA. It is this body and that body say this and we cannot agree, so this planning forum would assist. It creates dialogue and it would bring cohesiveness. Also, as mandated under the Town and Country Planning Act, the CH&PA would initiate and support the preparation of development scheme in collaboration with the LDOs and other key stakeholders.

The consolidation of areas would not only focus on investment in physical infrastructure, but a revitalisation programme that includes social services and community development projects in keeping with the commitment to create wholesome and cohesive communities.

12.32 p.m.

These proposals are part of Government's broad midterm strategy that was presented to the delegation of the Islamic Development Bank. This strategy articulated a multipronged approach to ensure inclusivity and proposed the following components:

- Supply of 10,000 housing units to eligible Guyanese between 2016 and 2021.

I want to stress on 2021 because we are going beyond 2020.

- Expansion of the current hinterland housing programme to other indigenous communities and households.

Currently, there is only this Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)/Government of Guyana (GOG) programme in Regions 1 and 9, and it is only some communities.

- Implementation of an urban renewal programme in the capital city in the form of relocation and resettlement of squatters to facilitate the restoration of previously occupied sites.

As it is known, this is a disaster and some of it was allowed, or all of it, particularly in Sophia and in East and West Ruimveldt.

With respect to new communities these will offer a range of housing solutions, we will introduce the rent-to-own concept, two bedroom and three bedroom houses that cater for the needs of low and moderate income persons. The construction of wooden houses is part of the strategy in keeping with Government's plan of pursuing the path to a green economy and the local materials industry. I know that the Minister of Finance is very passionate about this. It is envisaged that the implementation of the various housing solutions will be achieved through partnership with the private sector. This is how we plan to achieve the foregoing: \$2.3 billion will be spent on 2016 rollover projects for ongoing infrastructure works in Regions 3, 4, 5 and 6; procurement and installation of electrical networks, \$471.3 million for electrical programmes for 16 existing housing schemes. Sixteen housing schemes, which are occupied, are without electricity in Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7. One hundred million of the \$225 million for the hinterland housing project, \$2.5 billion consolidation of existing housing schemes, \$1.6 billion for new infrastructure development, \$13 million to host a housing solutions exhibition where 25 housing developers were each put on exhibition at an identified location to model houses; \$31million for the strengthening of a CH&PA planning function, \$120 million for installation, construction and upgrading of social facilities, \$30 million for policy review, \$85 million for institutional strengthening and \$669.5 million to cover current expenditure.

The Minister of Finance profoundly stated in his budget speech, "The authority is expected to access its own funds to undertake this ambitious programme". CH&PA will fund \$8 billion and that is a plus.

Speaking about the "good life for all Guyanese" and the "green economy", the "green agenda", spans social, environmental and economic sustainable issues, and that can be found in paragraph 4.6 of the budget speech. Our President, Mr. David Granger, often expressed forms of the green agenda namely the "green economy, "green development" or "green pathways". In pursuit of the green state development, the Ministry of Communities will leverage the provision of Budget 2017 to propagate the green agenda in the LDOs. The remodelled Community Infrastructure Improvement Project, that we refer to as the "CIIP", which previously included the community enhancement workers programme, will now be targeted at promoting the green agenda in capital towns and will encompass six key thematic areas for green development. These are the green

pathways, in which there will be boulevards and trees lining the walkways, which are among the initiatives to be taken. Just picture it as I speak.

The Minister of Finance spoke in paragraph 4.7 about making energy smart decisions. In the Government's national energy efficiency programme, we are going to replace the inefficient light with light-emitting diode (LED) lamps and other initiatives. Green open spaces are for great benefit to our environment and residents. They filter pollutants and dust from the air. They provide shade and lower temperatures in urban areas and even reduce erosion of soil into our waterways.

Greening economy training: Pursuing a green economy which aims at sustaining and advancing social, environmental and economic well-being, necessitates building capacity of LDOs to navigate the green development agenda. Green development plans for Neighbourhood Democratic Councils are similar to the work completed under the Caribbean Local Economic Development Project (CARILED) and the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) programmes. This component of the CIIP will focus on local economic development that encompasses all elements of the green agenda.

The final one is the green community generated initiative. The inaugural celebration of the National Day of Villages was held on Monday, 7th November, 2016 in the village of Victoria. It reflected our nation's recognition of the courage and foresight of the former slaves to craft a different course for the development of themselves and future generations. It celebrates the local government as a whole, in that it underscores residents' participation on the management and development of their communities.

We are awarding \$5 million to National Day of Villages throughout this country. We are going to have effective supervision where we have value for money because this is key to the implementation of the project.

Listening to Budget 2017, I want to say that it is a budget for all Guyanese. It is a budget that all Guyanese can experience the "good life". I think that if we do not commend this budget to the House, we are going against our conscience. I say that I commend Budget 2017 for approval.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now take the suspension. The suspension is for one hour. We will return at twenty-five minutes to two o' clock.

Sitting suspended at 12.40 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.51 p.m.

Mr. Dharamlall: Good afternoon everyone. I must say that I enjoyed lunch today, because as of Sunday, 1st January, 2017 a lot of food, which I will be eating, will be paid for by taxpayers, an additional 14% VAT on the lunches and snacks that our parliamentarians will be eating. I did enjoy lunch except that it hurt me that I could not fill myself to the extent with which I would like to fill myself.

As we move forward in our debate of Budget 2017, I would like to join with my colleagues in expressing my profound disappointment with the budget. That despite the hurrahs of the Government in rejoicing that we have two budgets in one year, I think it would be more commendable if this Government would take an about-face and have this budget properly consulted on, reprogrammed and re-presented to our people. The description of this budget from across all sections of our country, especially the working poor, the vulnerable, the disadvantaged and the jobless is a worrying sign, a matter of deep concern which we must all take on board in our management of this country.

I am terrified, as are almost all the citizens of this country, with what is presented to this nation as the budget of Guyana. Having spent three attentive hours listening to Hon. Minister of Finance Winston Da Costa Jordan, I am compelled to say that Budget 2017 is a national disaster that this People's National Congress (PNC) regime is gifting us for Christmas. How my beloved fellow citizens, and country at large, will come out of the outrageousness and the unconscionable measures, which certainly can only bring us out through divine exhortations and miracles?

As it is known, I am one of the outspoken persons on social media and many times I am certain that I may have overstepped the boundaries. Now, based on Budget 2017 proposed measures, are my Facebook posts and Whatsapp calls...? By the way, I hardly use my phone to do texts and make phone calls because I am fearful, as are almost all Guyanese, that the Government is

spying on our calls. I am now using Whatsapp to make calls and I am wondering whether the Government is going to be taxing my freedom of speech and my freedom of expression.

Unfortunately, I would like to report on behalf of our citizens that Budget 2017 is a hard core disdain of the people of this country. The basis of this budget, based in all that I have read, all that I have listened to, is filled with contradictions. The Minister of Finance said that prices of rice and sugar will not increase in 2017 which is a signal to our farmers that better days are not coming for them under this Government. Whilst the economy was forging ahead on the strength of gold, the Minister said that there are going to be downward pressures in 2017. Still yet, Minister Charles-Broomes and others who are closely associated with the gold sector will sit and allow this Government to impose a 3% reduction on gold prices, even though the price is expected to decline in 2017. This is an affront to the thousands of people who were in the mining industry. That is why we have been saying, including the Leader of the Opposition, since November 28 that this budget is ominous and unimpressive.

The Minister further validated the regimes incomprehensibility by masking this terror budget with rising oil prices, derisking and climate change. The Minister even went to the extent to make an excuse for the retrogression we will have next year by stating that our economy is undiversified. In his review of the economy, the Minister said that real growth, growth rate for 2016, would be 4.4%. That is what was presented in the budget earlier this year.

1.57 p.m.

At mid-year, it is now 2%. He is expecting real projected growth by the end of 2016 to be 2.6%. That is more than a 50% negative growth that this economy has or had over the past 10 months, based on the figures that the Minister presented; we have moved from a projection of 4.4% and we are struggling at 2%.

What does this mean? It means that the Minister - and apparently this is the third time running - has badly and erroneously projected the potential of our economy. The economy, like I said, had a negative growth. The Minister pointed out that inflation rose from 1.1% to 1.3%, which is a 13% increase in inflation. That is a telling sign. The currency that the Hon. Minister used in his Budget presentation used the GRA exchange rate as at 1st November. As of this morning, the Bank of Guyana exchange rate is greater than what this Budget 2017 is premised on.

The Hon. Minister also spoke about the declining interest rates for Treasury Bills. The reason for that - and I am certain that the Hon. Minister will validate what I am saying - is because there is a recession in our economy. All economists, all experts, and all text books will tell you that. I am certain Minister Broomes will not understand what I am saying.

The Minister also said that the total public debt will rise by 3.6 %. Again...

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, we will avoid personal references. I will remind you only once.

Mr. Dharamlall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When public debt is high, what is the Government inclined to do? The Government is inclined to impose unpleasant taxes on people. The taxes enumerated in Budget 2017 are going to be a drag on our economy.

When the PPP/C left Office in May, 2015, it left hundreds of billions of dollars in the accounts. Today, I am sad to tell this nation that the APNU/AFC, which is, of course, the People's National Congress (PNC), has now, once again, spent the moneys out. From all indications presented in Budget 2017, our once prosperous and progressive country, up until May, 2015, as I said, is now bankrupt and in Kaieteur-type regression. There is no money left, so what can the Government do? The only thing that the Government is doing now is taxing our people.

Mr. Speaker, when I was growing up in West Berbice, to which I still have a deep connection, the older people used to tell us that we must never let other people's things full our eyes. Unfortunately, what is taking place in this country right now, the mere fact that we now have over 180 new taxes or almost 200 new taxes in less than two years, the Government's eyes are filled with the pockets of the people of this country? That is why they are diving into our pockets to fund their corruption, their incompetence, their extravagance and their fancy lifestyles.

Mr. Speaker, I must share with you some comments I garnered from the men in the street. These are some of the comments. One person said: "This Budget is a massive fraud perpetuated on our citizens." A second person said: "This Budget promotes a class war where the rich will get richer and the poor will become poorer." The third comment was: "This Budget smashes our families' budgets." The fourth comment: "This PNC regime has betrayed our women, young people, pensioners, military veterans, joint services, farmers, sugar workers, Amerindians and public

servants.” The fifth comment I received was: “This is a \$250 billion Budget for a selected rich few over the poor who battle for their daily lives.” The sixth comment I received was: “This Budget renders a blueprint of mass economic depression and signals a visionless Government offensive to the Guyanese people.” The seventh comment I received was: “The fundamental truth is that this regime, in its quest to aggrandise itself, should at least be creating wealth simultaneously.” Of course, they are not doing this. The eighth comment I received was: “This is an ignobility perpetuated by an unworthy regime”. The ninth comment I received was: “This regime should seek to protect the vulnerable, rather than enrich themselves.” The tenth comment I received was: “The Budget needs to enhance the financial wellbeing of the thousands of small businesses which mortgage their homes to create jobs, rather than harass them into bankruptcy. The 2017 Budget is harassing us into bankruptcy.” The eleventh comment I received was: “Those of us who have worked hard to save for a rainy day should at least not be burdened by higher taxes.” The twelfth comment was: “We need more successful Guyanese with greater access to opportunities to succeed but the overarching policy of this Government is: the harder Guyanese people try, the harder the regime will make it for them.” The thirteenth comment was: “The long and short of Budget 2017 is that it presents no plans for jobs for people, nothing to promote investment and no plan for economic growth.” The fourteenth comment was: “I saw the blushes of flattery on the face of the Hon. Minister of Finance when his Comrades complimented him with two Budgets in a year”. What they have all missed is the level of consternation in the faces of our citizens. The fifteenth comment I will reserve because it is not in English. I will go to the sixteenth one: “This Budget is like a mythical sweet sack. The regime presents mythical sweets and reaches into the sack for real ones.” That is exactly what this Government is doing to us. The seventeenth comment - and apparently they read this somewhere - was: “After the Government takes enough to balance the Budget, the taxpayer has the job of budgeting for the balance.”

This is what George W. Bush, former President of the United States of America said:

“It’s clearly a budget. It’s got a lot of numbers in it.”

Indeed, that is what many of you are reading across there. It is a budget that has a lot of numbers.

The remuneration increments spoken to in Budget 2017 are an illusion. They cannot counter rising prices and the levels of inflation that will occur. This is actually now a financial burden on the salaried and working class and the regular “Joe” in this country. This is what Budget 2017 is. It is not something that we must look forward to, but it is a burden on our poor people.

Because of the negative growth experienced over the last 17 to 18 months of this Government which, of course, was famously imposed upon us, there is a decrease... When you go to a market, supermarket or a shop... A week and half ago, I was in the Rupununi. Real income has decreased; higher unemployment is taking over our land; there are low levels of industrial and manufacturing production; and, of course, there is a massive decline in wholesale and retail sales.

This Budget, therefore, is a budget of slogan and rhetoric. It has nothing regarding consistent economic policies and nothing about long-term growth. This is what some people in other countries would call a “wow budget”. You hear about \$250 billion and you say, “Wow.” There is nothing in this Budget that can speak to positive achievements. This is what one would call a U-turn budget – secretive and surprising, non-consultative, non-transparent and non-progressive. This Budget is a clear indication that the PNC, which makes up the majority of those on the Government side, lack political credibility. I shall not speak about moral credibility and spiritual credibility today.

The eighteenth comment, which is what an Economist from the University of Guyana told me, was: “The reason the Hon. Minister has cut VAT is really a trick on the citizens of this country. Cutting VAT creates the illusion of reduced prices and, when you have reduced prices, you have more spending. When there is more spending, the Minister uses that as an indicator of positive growth in our economy.”

My recommendations to this Government include: put the 2017 Budget on hold; engage stakeholders, including the PPP; remove the burdensome taxes; reallocate resources to enhance jobs; if I am using this word correctly, ‘garnish’ VAT on electricity and water; go into the Budget and take out the VAT on electricity and on water; review the exempt list and return to the zero-rated list’s *status quo*; make all salaries a 28% Pay As You Earn (PAYE) because, as you

are aware, Minister, those who are earning \$180,000 or more are going to be earning less than the day before this Budget...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 15 minutes.

Mr. Dharamlall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be done shortly. Pay sugar workers their bonus and Annual Production Incentive (API); set aside resources for rice stabilisation fund; withdraw the 3% price reduction on gold; allocate resources to conduct a forensic audit of the D'Urban Park and of the Drugs Bond so famously debated a few weeks ago; investigate the billions of dollars spent on medical supplies in 2015 and 2016. In fact, Dr. Anthony said that there is a massive shortage, there is short supply and there is probably massive unavailability of billions of dollars' worth of medical supplies. Develop and present a plan for Region 10, especially Linden, consistent with the levels of subsidisation. This year, the subsidy on electricity to Linden is \$1.8 billion. In 2017, it is being raised by an additional \$300 million to \$2.1 billion.

My other recommendation is: return lands that are taken away from farmers, especially those in Berbice. I hope that a certain Hon. Vice-President is listening. Stop pardoning criminals who wreak havoc on our daily lives and the economy. For the Amerindians, replace the Hinterland Employment and Youth System (HEYS) with the more productive, the more consistent, the more successful CSOs programme so that economic activities can be enlivened in Amerindian villages; recall the Hamilton Green Pension Bill which will cost us tens of millions of dollars per year; conduct a polygraph test on all Government Members of Parliament to determine what their exact position on Budget 2017 is. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, if that test is done, all of them are going to fail.

I would like to close with three quotes from our great leader, the late Dr. Cheddi Jagan, and these quotes embody the philosophy of the People's Progressive Party/Civic.

The first quote, Dr. Jagan said:

“I am the son of sugar workers who has not forgotten his roots. Many politicians like me have forgotten where they came from but Jagan will never forget and you can be sure of that.”

Maybe he was referring to a certain Comrade on the other side.

Secondly, he said:

“Democracy can only prosper in an environment of economic, social and ecological development. Poverty atrophies the vigour and initiative of the individual and deprives the society of incalculable human resources. If left unattended, the expansion of poverty with hunger and the hopelessness it engenders will undermine the fabric of our civilisation and the security of the democratic state.”

I am certain that Minister Jordan can use that to good effect.

2.12 p.m.

Finally, the third quote:

“I believe that my first charge is to raise my people from the mire of poverty in which, for too long, they have suffered. I have never made secret of my views. I have been thrown out of office. I have been subjected to violence, indignity and jail. I am willing to face these things again, and, gladly, in the fight to free my people and aid them, here I stand. Here I will stand until I die.”

Thank you, very much. [*Applause*]

Minister within the Ministry of Public Health [Dr. Cummings]: Good afternoon, Hon. Members of this august Body. Mr Speaker, I rise to register my unremitting support of this transformative 2017 Budget, presented by my most erudite Colleague, the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan.

Within the 19 months since this APNU/AFC Coalition Government was elected by the majority of Guyanese to manage the affairs of this country, a third Budget is presented. Every Budget that we have crafted since taking office has been done for the welfare and benefit of the people of Guyana.

The Budget 2017’s theme, *Building a Diversified, Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese*, remains consistent with the APNU/AFC Government’s promise of providing the good life for all Guyanese. When this Government builds a diversified economy, it is launching a full-scale technologically savvy society where entrepreneurship breeds people driven prosperity.

The APNU is expanding our green economic horizon because we know that any future wealth must be predicated upon the health of our environment. As a united Government that represents people of different ethnicities, we are determined to get along; we will stand strong to right the wrong; we will stand back to attack the lack; and we will stand tall and give the call that this Government, under the leadership of the good Minister of Finance and the President, David Arthur Granger, will spread the quality of life to one and all. Hence, our university healthcare must care. There can be no productivity without resiliency. There can be no preventative medicine without preventative policies and practices that deliver better quality life rather than stir up strife.

We are aware that national budgets do have complicated constructs that seek to itemise public expenditure for a specific period of time. This catalogue is done in a strategic manner to ensure that funds are allocated where they are most needed; to ensure that maximum benefits are derived by those persons for whom particular national initiatives were undertaken. Revenue streams must be maintained and enhanced where necessary.

Our fiscal policy is undoubtedly an expansionary one that is designed to grow our economy exponentially. The understanding of the national Budget can be challenging. Careful attention must be taken to recognise where the benefits are situated within the national Budget. The more perceptive minds know very well that Budget 2017 is a budget for the people.

After the initial hangover of misinformation has subsided, Guyanese are recognising that they will benefit more from Budget 2017 than any other Budget in the history of this beautiful country. The social media mathematicians and economists have all withdrawn into obscurity now that their pseudo-economic theories have been debunked by ordinary people who simply took the time to read and understand this Budget.

This APNU/AFC Government, within the 19 months, has set about working assiduously to maximise the potential of Guyana on all fronts. All sectors are being given strict attention to ensure that they all function optimally for the benefit of the people of Guyana. The fresh approach is one that embraces transparency, accountability and good governance, and seeks to ensure that there is value for money. As the Government, we are working tirelessly to strengthen public institutions across Guyana through a meritocratic bureaucracy in order to make these

institutions efficient and effective. Budget 2017 is one that will further move Guyana forward towards prosperity and development.

The Government has an unswerving commitment towards the development of the public health sector. Valuable to any nation is its human capital; Guyana is no exception. This APNU/AFC Government values the welfare of the citizens of this nation and has consistently been investing meaningfully in the health and wellbeing of our people. Budget 2017 has allocated \$31.2 billion towards the public health sector. This figure represents the most funds to have ever been allocated to the public health sector in the history of Guyana. For the sake of accurate reporting, let me repeat the statement again: this figure represents the most funds to have ever been allocated to the public health sector in the history of Guyana. The provision of the best healthcare to all Guyanese remains a national priority which this present Government recognises and acknowledges. With such significant investments being made in public health, we are able to boost capacity in all areas of the public health sector to meet the growing demands of the population. As a Government, we are committed to reducing the inequities and inequalities to access of quality healthcare, as we strive to make a universal primary healthcare a lasting reality in this country.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF):

“Investing financial resources to help children survive and develop to their full potential is, first and foremost, a moral imperative.”

Our Government strongly believes that investment in children and youth can yield substantial, positive economic benefits as well as contribute to the further development of our society. Investing in children and youth is arguably one of the best and most valuable long-term investments a government can make. That is why our APNU/AFC Government will continue to collaborate intersectorally and with stakeholders to engage in programmes that invest in early childhood and youth development. We recognise that this period in a person's life is the most fitting time to work towards breaking the cycle of poverty or, better yet, preventing it from beginning. Often times, there is a tendency to think of money spent by Government on hospitals and schools as costs. I urge persons who think that way to rethink and to reshape their perspectives. When Government spends money on the development of the public healthcare

sector or on education, those are long-term investments that accrue dividends to the economy and the society over time. Therefore, I exhort everyone to support the 2017 Budget and be on the side of progress and development to move Guyana forward.

Health Sector Budget 2017

In an effort to ensure that all health facilities at the levels are structurally sound and aesthetically pleasing, a sum of \$2 billion has been allocated for infrastructure works within the public health sector in Budget 2017. In this regard, some of the healthcare facilities will be transformed to better accommodate the people of their communities, including the differently abled. Particular emphasis will be placed on upgrading health facilities at the district level, along with the establishment and improvement of comfortable living quarters in an effort to attract the best medical personnel to work in areas like Baramita, Kamarang, Bartica, Mahdia, Port Kaituma and Annai. Improved living conditions are a significant motivator since it satisfies one of the basic human needs in our hierarchy of needs.

Regional Health Services

Through our Regional Health Services Department, the Ministry of Public Health has already commenced an initiative that allows for specialist doctors to be sent to certain regions to treat with particular illnesses. This meaningful enterprise will be upscaled, significantly, in 2017, as particular focus will be on providing specialists in the fields of Paediatrics, Internal Medicine, Gynaecology and Obstetrics, Dental Health and General Surgery. Initially, the doctors will be deployed specifically in Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9. With the use of specialist within the Regions mentioned, the Ministry of Public Health will be saving enormous sums of money on medical evacuations which, for 2016, was pegged at an alarming \$48.4 million.

Laboratories

As we continue to build capacity within our regions, our laboratories will be upgraded in all of our regional and district levels to ensure that we utilise world-class best practices in our testing, regardless of location.

The National Reference Laboratory will embark on a rigorous programme to strengthen its quality management system in an effort to achieve International Organization for Standardization

(ISO) 15189 accreditations for its quality management systems. With our National Reference Laboratory properly accredited, Guyana will no longer have to depend heavily on foreign testing which, at this moment, is an expensive dependence.

The Food and Drugs Department is also working on gaining accreditation for its laboratories with certified food product manufacturers, exporters and repackagers. To this end, the sum of \$110 million is budgeted for the Food and Drug Department to begin construction of a new laboratory and administrative building. An additional \$65 million will be used to procure laboratory supplies, quality control aids and proficiency testing materials.

Maternal and Child Health

The institutional strengthening of the Maternal Child Health Component of the Ministry of Public Health is another key area of focus for 2017. Through a variety of innovative capacity building exercises, the Ministry of Public Health will be working at strengthening the primary level healthcare provided in Regions 3, 4 and 9. This provision of this enhanced healthcare in this area will commence through a US\$8 million project that will contribute significantly towards the reduction in maternal, perinatal and neonatal deaths in Guyana.

Some of the key components of this project will be to improve the supply chain for new types of contraceptives - we are doing implants now - for drugs and blood products, and, while I am talking about blood, I would let the mothers know that sanitary napkins are now being zero rated and exempted from taxes. The Government will continue to upgrade the maternity waiting homes; improve, significantly, health literacy; train more health workers; and engage in substantial capacity building within the entire Maternal Child Health Unit.

Mental Health Unit

Another area of focus within the Ministry of Public Health is the Mental Health Unit. Within the 19 months since this APNU/AFC Government has been in Office, the Ministry of Public Health has established, for the first time in the history of our nation, a Mental Health Unit. This Unit was established early this year and is adequately staffed with qualified personnel to competently handle mental health issues. This year, 250 healthcare workers were trained by the staff of the Mental Health Unit, using the World Health Organization (WHO) Mental Health Gap (mhGAP)

curriculum. As we move into 2017, the Mental Health Unit will train an additional 300 health workers and, in the very near future, the Ministry will be establishing a mental health institute. I want to throw out for our pastors and community leaders that, if you want to come on board, we are willing to train you.

It is very important that we continue to address mental health issues holistically so that the stigma and discrimination can be removed and persons can feel free to seek the help they need.

2.27 p.m.

Moreover, the Ministry of Public Health recognises the value and necessity of the intervention so as to reduce and, perhaps, eliminate the scourge of suicide.

The Budget has allocated \$6.5 billion for the procurement of medicines and medical supplies. Let me assure you, Mr. Speaker, and the House that money allocated for the procurement of medicines and medical supplies will be judiciously spent and meticulously accounted for as we venture confidently into 2017. The Ministry of Public Health has embraced a new procurement paradigm called open competitive bidding. No more sole sourcing of medicines and medical supplies will occur, as a routine, within the Ministry of Public Health. I have listened to and noted the concerns raised by the speaker on the other side who spoke about the challenges of procurement. However, it is important to note that a procurement department is currently being established within the Ministry of Public Health. For 19 months, we have wrestled with this beast called procurement. Sole sourcing, this creature from the past, has been the bane of the Ministry since its inception. The Ministry of Public Health is finally removing sole sourcing from being its sole option for procurement of medicines and medical supplies.

The Ministry of Public Health will address the problem of storage in a comprehensive manner, as well as with the distribution system, with the help of the supply chain management systems, using data driven health information for us to have a consistent supply of drugs, while simultaneously eliminating wastage.

Communicable Diseases

The Ministry of Public Health will continue to work with our local, regional and international partners to ensure that 90% of persons living with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) are

tested, that 90% of the persons tested are on treatment and that 90% of the persons treated will be virally suppressed. We will begin to roll out the test and treatment programme as Anti-Viral drugs are procured to service the 7,800 plus persons living with HIV, including the key populations.

While emphasis is being placed on the neglected tropical diseases, like filariasis and leprosy, the topical emerging and re-emerging diseases, like Dengue, Chikungunya and Zika, are placed on the front burner as testing and surveillance methods are being beefed up.

Non-Communicable Diseases

Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) carry a huge cost. Currently, about 70% of the Ministry of Public Health's budget is spent on NCDs. The NCDs carry a burdensome cost on families and caregivers who are tasked with caring for persons suffering from NCDs. Therefore, it is imperative that we develop healthy lifestyle choices and practices early so as to avoid falling prey to NCDs. The Ministry of Public Health has just concluded a STEPwise approach to surveillance (STEPS) Survey, – a disease risk factor survey – a surveillance system to monitor and fight NCDs. Guyana has been the only country to include a mental health component in the survey while obtaining baseline information on sickle cell and thalassemia.

The APNU/AFC Government, through the Ministry of Public Health, has put in place a number of strategic initiatives to prevent and treat NCDs. These initiatives will effectively address the future burden of disease, promote healthy lifestyles, and increase the potential benefit of a healthier population, thus contributing to economic development. Adopting policies that promote healthy eating and discourage smoking, for example, are areas in which the Ministry of Public Health intends to reshape the social consciousness of NCDs.

With robust health promotion activities by the Ministry of Public Health, the key messages of healthy living will resonate with the population and have a positive impact on their lives. One major contribution to a significant amount of NCDs is smoking. Very soon, the Ministry of Public Health will be piloting stringent tobacco legislation in Parliament, aimed at significantly reducing the use of tobacco in Guyana. This legislation is a lifesaving one that will certainly preserve the lives of many Guyanese in years to come.

The key risk factors for cardiovascular disease and diabetes, namely, obesity, physical inactivity, and unhealthy diets, require interventions to change unhealthy lifestyles. We acknowledge that these changes are most likely to occur with implementation of a coordinated range of interventions to encourage individuals to maintain a healthy weight, participate in daily physical activity, and consume a healthy diet.

As I conclude, many individuals have had quite a lot to say about Budget 2017. I was astonished to hear the profound malarkey, emanating from the Opposition benches, relating to Budget 2017. This Budget, like it or not, is a budget from which the people of this nation will benefit comprehensively. Workers will be taking home more money as a result of Budget 2017. Old age pension, in 2014, was \$12,500 but Budget 2017 has shown an almost 50% increase in Old Age Pension, which takes it to \$19,000. Value-Added Tax has been reduced, as promised. These examples are all stark evidence of the value-added initiatives that Budget 2017 offers.

Some persons have posited that this Budget will bring undue hardships to the people of Guyana. I say, unreservedly, "It will not." Over the past week, a lot of misinformation was created and peddled by some unscrupulous intellectual authors. Guyanese are a resilient people; we are a smart people. Guyanese out there know that they are better off with this 2017 Budget. While there are some who, for obvious reasons, would like to spread doom and gloom, we pray for them that they may soon see the light.

This APNU/AFC Government is working assiduously to better, considerably, the lives of all Guyanese. It remains a work in progress and requires the input of each and every one of us to do our part in nation building. While I know human nature will present various levels of impatience in some sections of our society, I ask that you work with us individually and collectively as we continue to steer this beautiful nation on the right course towards development. Many of you may be familiar with the saying, *Rome was not built in a day*. The Roman Empire was surely not built in a year, neither two nor even three. Change is a process. It is a process that requires time. I urge all my Guyanese brothers and sisters to carefully manage and temper their expectations, and embrace the changes that have begun as we work indefatigably together to achieve the good life.

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

Dr. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, this year, Old Saint Nick is not coming to Guyana. Instead, Mr. Scrooge is coming for Christmas. The notification of this pending unpleasant visitation came to us on the 28th November, 2016. It came in the form of a rather large postcard which was brought by Mr. Winston Jordan, the Hon. Minister of Finance. A closer perusal revealed that this notification of such a bad Christmas and an uncertain New Year is really and truly his Budget speech. The front boldly proclaims, *Building a Diversified Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese*. The inner pages bore the signature of each and every Member of the APNU/AFC Cabinet. That is to say that the Budget comes from the entire APNU/AFC Coalition. Especially prominent among the signatures here are those of the Hon. Members, Mr. Moses Nagamootoo and Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, bringing to the nation this “Scrooge Budget” of miserliness and misanthropy.

This is a Budget of added taxes and hardships on the rank and file Guyanese citizen. This distress is more brutish, coming as it does, in the wake of other similar harsh impositions by this said clique, this said APNU/AFC Cabinet only a few months ago, immediately after assuming office in May, 2015.

My Colleague, the Hon. Dr. Frank Stanislaus Anthony, related the tale of the 14%. He underscored the fact that, for the first time ever, through this very Budget, there will be a 14% VAT on medicine, health services and numerous other basic services and items; 14% on every conceivable item needed by the rank and file Guyanese citizen. Recall, too, that upon assuming Office, the coalition Cabinet of Mr. Granger, Mr. Nagamootoo and Mr. Ramjattan immediately withdrew the \$10,000 allowance to each school child. Recall, too, the callous withdrawal of the \$10,000 water and electricity subsidy already given, at that time, to each old age pensioner. Yes, we must recall these things... because I will show to you, Mr. Speaker, how this is a drastic Budget that comes after a period of taking away benefits and now putting taxes on the people. Recall, too, that this financial support to key subpopulations - I am referring to the \$10,000 to the school children and the \$10,000 to the old age pensioners - was instituted or initiated by the PPP/C Administration. Recall, too, that the initial \$10,000 to each school child was scheduled to increase annually by an additional \$10,000 up to a maximum of \$50,000. The financial support was welcomed by our pensioners and parents of school-age children. This financial support was removed with a vengeance by the APNU/AFC Coalition. These contributions represented the

success of the popular pro-poor policies of the PPP/C and had to be dismantled. The hastily cobbled together replacement programmes suffer from hiccups born of the haste with which they were implemented or created.

The budget for the health sector - the expenditure for that section of the Budget is expected to be about 12% of the Budget as presented for 2017. This has been the approximate level over the past decade of the PPP/C Administration. That is to say that there is a marginal increase in 2017 to some \$332.2 billion. Under the pre-1992 dispensation, the Health Budget accounted for a paltry 1% or less of the then national Budget. Note too, that, in that period, this token representation of the health budget occurred in National Budgets which, in themselves, were miniscule in size when compared to the size to which they grew over the 23 years of the PPP/C Administrations.

The miniscule pre-1992 health sector investment led to severe deterioration. We had to address it and solve it when we came to Office. On the other hand, it is a fair and reasonable deduction that this proposed small increase, described in the Budget speech by the Hon. Mr. Jordan, for 2017, will build on a firm, solid and very visible foundation, designed, created and nurtured by successive PPP/C Administrations.

2.42 p.m.

Suffice it to recall the Diagnostic Centres at Diamond, Lenora, Suddie and Mahaicony and the National Ophthalmological Centre at Port Mourant. Added to this list is the new Linden Hospital Complex, the new 100-bed in-patient ward at the cost of \$92 million, along with the \$92 million that is in the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation which was commissioned a few years ago under the PPP/C and the numerous health centres.

On the other hand Budget 2017, as we heard only last Monday, is devoid of any major health infrastructure expansion or significant upgrade, save and except for a few. I welcome these proposals - too few - but at the same time I still welcome them. I lament the failure to present proposals for key infrastructure to keep apace the momentum and the thrust of the past PPP/C decade of glorious and transformational changes in the health sector.

The recreation of the headquarters for the Ministry of Health may be needed. The drawings and the consultations for this were completed in the final year of the PPP/C Administration. While the PPP recognises the need for a new headquarters, we also recognised that this is not of urgency and that the expenditure, at this time, may need reconsideration. Especially, at this time, when the Hon. Minister of Finance has indicated that all productive sectors are in dire straits, simultaneously. Besides the headquarters' project and the welcomed Mental Health Institute, I find in the Budget 2017 proposal no other significant health infrastructure initiatives.

This is where I would like to suggest that the Minister of Public Health could have better suggested infrastructure that would have resonated well with the Guyanese public and with the taxpayers, generally. The construction of a large in-patient block at the East Bank Demerara Regional Hospital, also known as the Diamond Hospital, is long overdue. This was under active consideration by the Cabinet Health Sub-Committee of the last PPP/C Cabinet. The space for this logical expansion was incorporated into the original project design. Note the large tarmac in front of the hospital and the large empty space to its northern side; I am referring to the East Bank Demerara Regional Hospital. It is a gem, as I used to say. It is one of the achievements of the PPP/C in the Health Sector.

Any proposal to build in 2017, 100 to 150-bed In-Patient Ward Complex at the East Bank Demerara Hospital will resonate well with the PPP and the widest cross-section of Guyanese, especially those living in the fast developing East Bank Demerara area. This project would resonate well with the PPP's design to have a full-fledged hospital serving the evolving Grove/Diamond Township, which was already taking shape with the opening up of the large Diamond Housing Scheme and the award of thousands of house lots in that scheme. The numerous other housing schemes in similar areas along the East Bank Demerara were captured in this consideration. That is, the consideration to have 100 to 150-bed in-patient facility there. These are the considerations that should be going, the logical continuation of the momentum created by the PPP/C's Health Policy.

The advent of the expanded Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) was also a driving consideration for the construction of a large full scale multi-storeyed in-patient facility. The changes at the level of the political directorate prevented further rollout. This budget is the poorer for the omission of a provision to construct and equip an in-patient complex at the East

Bank Demerara Regional Hospital. It would be remiss of me if I were not to ventilate this weakness. This budget stymied the momentum that was generated in the health sector under the PPP/C.

The huge sum of \$1 billion spent on the D'Urban Park extravagance would have been better spent on this key health infrastructure. It would not have only addressed the immediate health needs, but it would have been a "wealth creator" - by healing and putting back into the active workforce tens of thousands of Guyanese over the foreseeable future. It is time to insert the East Bank Demerara Regional Hospital in-patient complex. The emerging development of the entire East Bank demands this. That was the plan. The time for the execution of phase two is now. The budget must maintain a logical momentum. It has failed to do so. I do not think that it is too late for the Minister to rectify this.

I am proud of the Health Sector's Seven Year plan, Vision 20:20. This was adumbrated as a full multi-year plan with multi-sectorial inputs. Under this seven-year plan, the health workforce was scheduled to expand, exponentially, to cater for the rollout of Vision 20:20 to make Guyanese among the healthiest anywhere in the world. To this end, President Bharrat Jagdeo negotiated with Cuba, an enhanced programme of training of large numbers of young Guyanese as medical doctors, sometime in February 2006. I was proud to have been included in the team that visited Cuba. The graduates of this initiative – the Jagdeo/Castro Initiative -are home in large numbers and are serving well. I congratulate them. They need to put their best feet forward.

Options of continuing these programmes must be explored. This budget does not speak to this and this must be rectified. Unfortunately, the APNU/AFC coalition Government, in contradiction of its Minister of Finance, has undermined the very nice sounding pronouncements in his Budget Speech regarding the need for a qualified and well treated health workforce. I recall that the Hon. Minister Jordan, in his budget presentation, indicated that:

“...we cannot hope to achieve this vision without an efficient, modern health system, with adequate human resource capacity...”

These graduates are now in quandary caused by recent moves by the Administration, without any consultation, to revert them to the traditional public service pensionable establishment and scrapping the existing contracts with six monthly gratuities, as currently exist. This was an

arbitrarily unilateral decision. These Cuban scholarships, predominantly in health, were negotiated by President Jagdeo. The young graduate doctors, while employed in the health sector, that is locally here when they returned, in pursuit of their post training obligations, received a six monthly gratuity of 22 ½ % of a monthly salary. This arrangement allowed them financial room to build their young lives and to build families. The financial space allowed for the purchase of a car, a house, to pursue higher studies and so on. These options are now shattered with the reversion to the pensionable establishment, which will force them to wait until the end of their professional lives to receive a lump sum in the form a pension. This s a short cited approach to human resource management and development; it is moving backward and is just *cavemanish*. This will result in an early exit of this category of costly, skilled workforce to more enlightened human resource environments. This must be prevented.

The budget must be tailored to cater for this expenditure. The cost of not doing so is too great. The reversion to gratuity payment must be reflected and reworked into the Budget 2017. If the arrangement is not continued in this budget and if it is not addressed now, Guyana, most likely, in a short few years, would be without adequate numbers of doctors again. Probably, who knows, Cuba may have to be approached to send Cuban doctors to Guyana again.

This matter has alarmed the entire group of graduate doctors who have returned recently and even their predecessors. There is disquiet and this needs to be addressed. The budgetary provisions to provide for their six monthly gratuities must be incorporated. The current budget does not entertain any such calculation. In that dispensation, the brain drain will continue. Take remedial action now! Withdraw the budget or alter it to facilitate this inclusion! We need our young doctors now and for the foreseeable future.

Minister Jordan stated that the Government was attracting skilled doctors to the hinterland to address the needs of those communities and the indigenous population. They will be on shaky ground if these doctors are not given the option of gratuity contract and decide to terminate their sojourn in the system, sooner rather than later.

The significant gains of the Maternal and Child Health (MCH)...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have spoken for 15 minutes.

Dr. Ramsaran: Thank you Mr. Speaker. The significant gains of MCH, over the past five to seven years is, in a great part, due to the presence of the large army of doctors. We need to take note of that. We need to take note of the fact, too, that the large army of nurses, trained by the PPP/C, was part of that plan and success. We need to make sure that they continue to be treated well and that more moneys are allocated in this budget to take care of the facilities in Kingston. The one that we had initiated and which had incurred such wrath and criticism.

The Speciality Hospital is now back in vogue, the flip flopping continues. Again, the \$1 billion that was wasted on the extravagant facility at D'Urban Park and other such facilities could have been dedicated to the Specialty Hospital. It could have been called a Speciality Hospital Jubilee project.

In closing, I would like to end as I had begun, by recalling the everlasting tale of Charles Dickens' 1843 novella - *A Christmas carol*. I call on the Minister of Finance to recognise that he too, like Scrooge, can be redeemed. I call on him and the entire APNU/AFC Cabinet to seek redemption and forgiveness. You have collectively erred by presenting this murderous budget and you can, collectively, be forgiven by the entire anxious and nervous Guyanese nation.

I remind Minister Jordan, Members of Parliament, the media corps, NGO's, faith-based organisations and the wider Guyanese populace that there is still considerable time in which to review the proposals of Budget 2017. The budget can, legally and lawfully, in full consonance with the Constitution, be presented early in the New Year. Do like a good Christian would, Mr. Jordan, seek redemption, repent, withdraw the Budget 2017 proposal or excise from it the vicious numerous added taxes and draconian anti-people measures.

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

Mr. Adams: Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to the debate of Budget 2017. Please allow me, from the onset, to offer words of congratulations to the Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, and his hardworking team at the Ministry of Finance for crafting Budget 2017. They must have worked beyond the normal call of duty and they deserve our commendations and congratulations.

Budget 2017 has in it, various components that cater for every Guyanese. *Building a Diversified Green Economy: Delivering The Good Life to All Guyanese*, this theme sets out to identify various strategies and plans to deliver a good life to all. Budget 2017 seeks to bridge the gap between rural and urban, as it seeks to bring development from the mark of point of player to Corentyne's lush sands.

Budget 2017 has in it much more than the increase of taxes. We must look at all the developmental projects that are proposed in this budget.

2.57 p.m.

It must be noted, however, that this David Granger lead APNU/AFC Government will deliver a good life to all Guyanese.

Even the blind can see that, from the time this Government came to office, a mere 19 months ago, we have made many strides in every sphere of development. Things have changed yes, but changed for the better.

Budget 2017 is a clear plan of where our Government wants us to be by the end of 2017. These are not plans merely to set records, but it is in keeping with our promise to the Guyanese people. What this Government has delivered in 19 months has never been delivered in 23 years.

Lest we forget, before we came to Office, we heard of all the glorious things, we heard how well Guyana was doing and that it was positioned as, if not the best, one the best in this region. We thought that all was well with our economy, but on our arrival after the 11th May, 2015, we found out otherwise. We found out that sugar had lost its sweetness; we found that the Petro Caribe deal was almost gone; we found that large companies were robbing the Guyanese people. This Government had no other choice than to hit the ground running.

Bailout for the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) cost this Government some \$23 billion in less than 2 years; the rice sector cost \$5 billion plus. These amounts could have and would have done much more for the Guyanese people.

Despite all of the above, our Government was still able to give a 40% increase in salaries within 7 months and a tax free bonus of \$50,000 to every public servant. For 23 years we paid income

tax on our National Insurance Scheme (NIS) contributions, this APNU/AFC Government has removed it. Old age pension has never been this high. In 2017 our seniors will receive \$19,000, monthly.

We will see development in every sector, in every region, in every village and in every town. No more would Region 6 be more important than Region 9. Gone are those days. Budget 2017 will ensure that all Guyanese be given equal opportunities, irrespective of their geographic location.

In 2017, Guyana will see much transformation. There will be the commencement of the first phase of the Linden to Lethem Road Project, which will span from Linden to Mabura Hill. We will see the commencement of a permanent fixed bridge across the Essequibo River at Kurupukari. Also, provision is also made in the Budget 2017 for a new model that will provide housing to thousands of low income earners. No more will we see house lots being acquired and left to *run bush* because the holders cannot afford to build. There will be expansion in almost every sector. Budget 2017 will, by the end of 2017, deliver a better life for all Guyanese.

The several measures mentioned in this budget seek to bridge the gap between the haves and the have nots. Public servants will pay less tax, thus allowing them to take home more. Our less fortunate brothers and sisters will receive an increase in public assistance. Children left in foster care will now receive \$20,000, monthly. Our Government is a caring one and through the various measures and developmental programmes, all Guyanese will benefit.

We have already seen a network of roads being rehabilitated in our country. For the first time in Guyana, there will be a pedestrian over pass. We will see a reduction in VAT from 16% to 14%. It must be noted also that Region 3 was not left out of the developmental programmes proposed in this budget. First of all I would like to assure my Hon. Friend, Ms. Indranie Chandarpal, that the Ministry of Social Cohesion had two programmes in Region 3, one at Wales and one at Uitvlugt. At those workshops, there were individuals from Governmental and non-governmental organisations, the Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC), the Regional Democratic Council (RDC) and faith-based organisations. They were well-attended. Region 3 has done well in 2016 and it is my belief that we will do even better in 2017. For we have seen an increase in the budgetary allocations in 2017, thus allowing us to perform even better.

It will be an indictment on my part if I fail to highlight some major achievements for Region 3 in 2016. Despite the odds, we were able to bring relief to the thousands of residents of Region 3. In 2016, Region 3 has made strides in every sector.

Education - we saw the construction of a brand new Primary school at Philadelphia on the East Bank of Essequibo; extension of Zeelugt and Belle West Primary Schools; extension of the Home Economics Department at La 'Venture and Essequibo Island Secondary Schools; the construction of the Moroshie Primary School; and a contract has already been signed for the construction of the Department of Education building in Region 3 and it must be noted that this building was destroyed by fire since 2009.

Through the President's 'Three Bs' initiative, students from La 'Venture Secondary School, Patientia Secondary School, Wales Primary School, West Demerara and Leonora Secondary Schools received in excess of 200 bicycles. On the 13th December, 25 students of the La Parfaite Harmonie Primary School will receive their bicycles. Gas stoves were delivered to the Patientia and La 'Venture Secondary Schools. Education is important to us.

The Regional Education Department also received a 32-seater bus, which would be used to transport the children to and from school, irrespective of where they live.

In 2017, the education sector will see the construction of a special needs school at Schoonard on the West Bank Demerara. Also, the construction of a cold storage at the Department of Education, so that the juices would not spoil anymore.

The construction of a boat house at Parika; installation of gas lines for the Home Economics Departments at the Patientia and Essequibo Islands Secondary Schools; and construction of revetments at Northern Hogg Island and Upper Bonasika Primary Schools.

We are going to ensure that, although it is a PPP RDC, this Government is going to continue to fund Region 3. We are going to ensure that, when we send teachers to the riverain schools, they are provided with quarters. We will see the construction and the enclosure of living quarters at Great Truli Island, Northern and Western Hogg Islands, and Bonasika Primary Schools.

Health - in 2016, significant strides has been made in the Health Centre also. The much needed modification to the x-ray lab at the Leguan Cottage Hospital was completed and we are awaiting

the led glass, which has already been procured. Upon its instalment, x-rays will be done at the Leguan Cottage Hospital.

There was an expansion to the drug bond and dispensary of the Lenora Diagnostic Centre. The electrical works and modification of the theatre at the West Demerara Regional Hospital has been completed and we are awaiting the ventilator, which will be purchased from the 2017 Budget. Upon its instalment, both theatres would be in operation at the West Demerara Regional Hospital. This has not happened in years.

There was the commissioning of the Neonatal Clinic also at the West Demerara Regional Hospital - done. In 2017, we will see the extension of the health centres at Upper Bonasika, Lanaballi and Den Amstel, and the construction of incinerators at the Vergenoegen, De Willem, Morashie and the Vive La Force Health Centres.

With public works not wanting to be outdone in this sector, a concrete heavy duty bridge was constructed at Patientia on West Bank Demerara. Bridges were also constructed at Farm, Vergenoegen, Belle View and Mc Gilvary Canal One. Roads were constructed at Patientia Housing Scheme, Goed Fortuin and, Stewartville. Maria Johanna in Wakenaam also benefited from chip seal road. I must, on behalf of the residents of Region 3, and more particularly the residents of the Island of Leguan, commend the Ministry of Public Infrastructure through its Ministers, for the first time, in the history of Leguan, there will now have asphalted roads. I believe that the Island of Leguan is surprised much more than the people of Leguan.

Agriculture - the Regional Administration constructed revetment at Sisters Side Line Dam, a control sluice at Meter Meer Zorg/Pouderoyen, a culvert at Leonora and the rehabilitation of the Bagotville sluice door. In 2017, we will see the construction of control structures at Schoonord, Zeelugt, Endeavour Leguan and the upgrade of the sluice at Maria Johanna. It can be said that the Regional Administration of Region 3 has done exceedingly well.

Despite the doom that was overcast upon the agriculture sector, rice performed well also. The state of sugar has not changed. It must be noted, however, that after a number of years, the Wales Sugar Estate has met its target. Sugar was once one of our major export earners. It is widely known that it is not so now, we must do something about sugar and it must be done now. It is my hope that my Hon. Friend, Mr. Komal Chand, would not only tell this House about the woes of

the sugar industry, but that he would come with suggestions as to how we could salvage the industry.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 15 minutes.

Mr. Adams: In conclusion, Region 3 is expected to see more works being undertaken in 2016. We are convinced that our young people, if they do not have enough space to recreate, will find themselves being engage in activities that run contrary to the law.

3.12 p.m.

This APNU/AFC Government, through the Regional Administration, proposes to undertake the following works before 31st December:

1. Fencing and land filling of the Den Amstel Community Centre Ground;
2. Fencing and the construction of a concrete stage at the Stewartville monument site;
3. Fencing and repairs to the washrooms and rehabilitation of electrical fixtures at Nismes Playground and Community Centre;
4. Landfilling, grading and levelling of the Boerasirie Playground.
5. Construction of a foot path bridge to the De Kendren Playground.
6. Fencing of the Vergenoegen Secondary School ground.

All of the above are in keeping with our Government's vision of building a diversified green economy and in so doing deliver the good life to all Guyanese.

I now commend this budget to the House for passage.

I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Chand: Cde. Speaker, I wish to offer a comment or two on the speech of the last speaker. He referred to all these developments, but he failed to also say that it was under the PPP/C Administration, in Region 3, that there were all these developments. He failed to say that the people are so persuaded that, for the tied NDCs such as, Malgre Tout-Meer Zorgen, the People's

National Congress (PNC) Councillors voted with the PPP Councillors to elect a Chairman from the PPP. That happened yesterday. [*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Speaker hit gavel.*]

As I refer to my speech about the Wales Sugar Estate, I take the floor to make my contribution to this 2017 Budget presented by Minister Jordan. At the onset, I must register that the budget will certainly propel our people and our country down a perilous path. It can, without fear of contradiction, be rightly described as an anti-working people budget. And, as a friend of mine had remarked, It is a vampire one, literally set to suck the ‘blood’ of our people, from every walk of life. While the Government talks about some improvements, in truth, this budget, by the APNU/AFC Administration, is set to take away much more with one hand than the little it is giving with the other hand. It is worthy to note that even the likes of Mr. GHK Lall, writing in the 30th November, edition of the *Stabroek News* newspapers, succinctly stated:

“Instead of the 2017 Budget bringing some cheers, it has prompted more tears”

It is shocking, disturbing and vexing for the Guyanese people to now be told of the number of items, previously VAT exempted or zero rated, that will now attract VAT. As many as 50 items will now be taxed, thus, aggravating the already hard and difficult times in our land. The hiking of a number of fees for Government services and licenses and the introduction of more taxes, as well as the increases in others, will make the heavy burdens of our people unbearable.

The APNU/AFC Manifesto and the promises of those who now walk in the corridors of power are proving to be hollow. It is, without a doubt, a betrayal of the commitments and undertakings made by the coalition, during the 2015 Elections. Promises of a good life, a bright future, the creation of new and stable jobs, improved incomes and a more equal and safe society were repeated *ad nauseam*. Clearly, those promises, turned out to be insincere and merely vote-getting gimmicks. Increasing economic pressures have gone hand-in-hand with heightened crime occurrences country-wide.

The momentum of general and hopeful development have slowed, if not stalled. Our country is going down and Budget 2017 will be accelerating the pace. In the almost 19 months of this Administration, the workers, farmers, pensioners, youth, women, the business community and

miners, have had their dreams of a brightened future transformed into a virtual nightmare. In this short period, we have seen withdrawn several initiatives which benefitted the ordinary people. Living costs are going up and living standards are on the decline. The Minister of Finance, in his Mid-Year Economic Report, revealed that food prices have risen by as much as 3.2% for the first half of 2016 and in the Ministry of Finance's monthly economic bulletin for September, 2016, we learnt about:

“...increased prices for food, clothing, footwear and repairs.”

Even more disconcerting, is that the Government appears oblivious or uncaring of the plight of the people that they have brought on. Already, parking meters in Georgetown are being installed. There is talk about the hiking of rates and taxes and an increase in land rentals for farmers.

We need to note that State support to the Demerara Harbour Bridge has been significantly reduced, Cde. Patterson, according to the Estimates, undoubtedly to be followed by a rise in the tolls sooner than later. Why did you not announce it Cde. Minister of Finance? Why wait? The pressures on our people are mounting. These measures will undoubtedly not only put the poor, vulnerable and working people at a severe disadvantage, but will surely undermine the gains enjoyed over recent years.

The Minister spoke rather glowingly about the Government's commitment to collective bargaining in the public sector. But this is far from the real situation. Though, there have been a few engagements this year between the Government and the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU), one can recognise that those engagements were not in earnest and what the employees got was 1-10% differential pay rises, which were imposed by the Government. Outstanding still, are the concerns surrounding de-bunching and the different allowances. Also, strikingly, there has been no bargaining between the unions and the semi-autonomous agencies and corporations, where hundreds of workers are employed. The Government, through the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of the Presidency, Department of Public Service, in Circular No. 3/2016, titled:

“Increase in Salaries/Wages for 2016”

This was dated 6th September, 2016. It instructed that those agencies must obtain the permission of the Finance Secretary (FS), to pay increases similar to those given by the Government in the

public service. Thus, collective bargaining is but empty talk and trade unions are simply sidelined.

The promises of a “bright future” and a “good life” are now pushed down the drain by this budget. For the employees in the sugar industry, they are meaningless and delusional. It should be recalled that, during the 2015 Elections campaign, both the APNU and AFC speakers had promised the sugar workers a 20% increase and other niceties. Today, we face the painful reality that sugar workers’ purchasing power has, in effect, been decreasing by no pay increases for two years now. At the same time, the workers’ long standing benefits and time-honoured traditions and practices are being whittled away by some of those very spokesmen who now hold high positions. It must be asked, what is it that those workers have done to the Administration to be treated so shabbily and inhumanely? Such treatment, only feeds workers demotivation and deepen their alienation. Such treatment will only undermine a motivated and dedicated workforce, critical for the turnaround of the industry. One wonders whether this is purposeful. It is baffling that the APNU/AFC Government can be so unconscionable.

If they were not enough, the Government seems to want to condemn the sugar workers to even greater hardship and deprivation through the sale and closure of estates. The Minister indicated that the Government would soon make known its intentions for the industry. More and more there are signs that the sugar industry’s re-privatisation or denationalisation is being pursued with great speed. Such a step, I believe, will be a monumental mistake and one that will haunt us in the future. It is recalled that former Prime Minister, Mr. Forbes Burnham, in nationalising the sugar industry with the full backing of the PPP/C and the trade unions, 40 years ago, among other things, alluded to the repatriation of the industry’s profits by its then foreign owners and their lack of investment in the country. In these times, when neo-colonialism is raising its head in the world, re-privatisation can very likely do much harm to our people, our economy and our independence. The Jamaican experience, whereby the new owners failed to live up to their promises and just simply, earlier this year, decided to close operations, an act which put at risk the livelihoods of thousands of workers and farmers there. I urge the Government to carefully consider the decisions of divestment and closure of estates. This will be condemning the affected workers to even greater distress and misery.

From all appearances, Cde. Speaker, the Skeldon Sugar Estate, the best and most valuable asset

of the industry, is attracting an interested buyer or buyers. If it is a time bomb and possesses all the negative characteristics made by certain officials, we still hear of interested buyer or buyers Cde. Vice-President. There is *something rotten in the state of Denmark*. The facts on hand do not justify selling. Selling, therefore, cannot be supported.

I wish to advise that the prized Skeldon Sugar Factory and its rich cane lands, along with the two co-generation turbines have the potential to make a major contribution to turnaround the sugar industry. Selling this estate, which might be very cheap, will be a great blunder of the APNU/AFC Administration. Already, it is understood that a memorandum of understanding (MoU) is in place with respect to the sale of the Skeldon Sugar Estate. Where is the transparency - an important national asset? Say that is not so.

3.27 p.m.

I ask: Are we given the full and real story about what is going on regarding Skeldon Sugar Estate? Where is the transparency?

Now, we are told, too, by Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) officials that the Rose Hall Sugar Estate would be closed. Yesterday, it was Wales' factory. The Comrade talked about Wales factory making its target. Shamefully, he said that, and yet he is supporting the closure of Wales' factory. Now Rose Hall Sugar Estate is identified which may follow. Like Skeldon, suddenly Rose Hall Sugar Estate has become a liability. Going this way has several repercussions for the people and communities, including those of Providence, East Bank and Berbice. In the Rose Hall Sugar Estate area there are simply no alternatives which can readily accommodate the large number of workers that would be displaced.

The corporation is touting non-sugar diversification at Providence as a means to offset the harsh consequences resulting from closure. It may be of interest to note that there was an article appearing in the *Kaieteur News* of November 26, 2016 which referred to a recent study by the FAO. According to the article, that study found that as much as 30 per cent of food produced locally is either lost or wasted. Thus, it is perplexing that the authorities are tending towards such a direction at this time. Clearly, there is confusion regarding sugar. The course the Government has apparently set will not only see the destruction of the sugar industry but that of the workers and their families who will be pushed into a life of poverty and despair.

It is said that the Government's approach to the industry is because billions are required. Indeed, it brings into question whether the right persons are managing the industry. Or is it managed in such a manner to deliberately engender a certain outcome? This year, production has been revised now to 188,000 tons, according to Minister of Finance, recent disclosure, from 242,000 tons projected in Budget 2016. What a significant drop from last year when the Government and GuySuCo boasted of a production of 231,000 tons. The Minister, in his address, sought to lay blame for this year's production shortfall on strikes and the last *El Nino* weather conditions. Such utterances are misplaced and really showed the Government's disconnection from reality. The *El Nino* phenomenon was quite known when GuySuCo set its target at 242,000 tons. Moreover, there were scores of work stoppages in the past when sugar production climbed to an average of about 320,000 tons between the year 2002 and 2004. I must also point out that the union and GuySuCo's agreement acknowledges that the workers have a right to withhold their labour in the event of an unresolved price dispute. The weather and the workers are but scapegoats for GuySuCo abysmal mismanagement of the industry, especially this year.

The Minister said money invested in sugar is wasted. I interpret this as one of the most anti-workers statements from my fellow countryman Minister Jordan. It would seem that the Minister and the Government have forgotten about sugar's contributions, past and present. Would it be right for me to say that the nearly \$70 billion, at today's exchange rate, paid as sugar levy, which went to support this country, is it also wasted money? What about the nearly \$30 billion received from the European Union (EU) for sugar and not spent in the industry, is that a waste? What about employment created, directly and indirectly, is that a waste? What about the industry's dependable foreign exchange earnings, is that a waste? What about the long-standing subsidy of the local sugar price, is that a waste? How about the drainage and irrigation and other services for communities, are they a waste? No. They are not for us. These contributions, among others, have redounded to the well-being of this country and its people in all times. They alleviated the pains in many difficult situations, and still do today.

I agree, obviously, something is not right. The sudden poor performance of the industry this year is to be questioned, especially as possible a fire sale of the industry's valuable and expensive assets are being pursued. In passing, allow me to urge the Government to compensate the corporation the \$1.9 billion for the Ogle's property it has taken over for the Public Service Staff

College. At this time, only a small portion would be required for workers' Annual Production Incentives (API) benefits, who are being deprived of same this year, the first time in 64 years.

The miniaturisation or divestment of the industry is not an option in the best interest of Guyanese and Guyana. It is one which will affect our working people greatly. The current options floated presently significant risk and will negatively impact our people's lives, communities, and will shatter their aspirations and hopes for a better future. The Government is hereby advised not to go down this road.

This important contribution of our sugar industry was aptly put in perspective by Mr Tony Vieira in his letter which appeared in the November 16, 2016, *Stabroek News*. Mr Vieira pointed out that:

“All of the pundits who say abandon it, can't possibly be serious, the loss of the foreign exchange alone from our sugar would ruin Guyana even now.”

He reminded us very importantly that:

“Everything we are as a nation today is due mainly to the sugar industry.”

He continues:

“The levy, the subsidy of the local selling price for sugar and the EU developmental funds which contributed to the economy of Guyana are more than all the billions of dollars given to the industry in bail out money thus far...”

In conclusion, sugar has a viable future. The diversification into electricity production, specialty sugars, refined sugar, and alcoholic production offer good prospects for the future. To miniaturise the sugar industry is in effect to undermine the economy and the workers' future.

I cannot support the course being mapped out for sugar. Likewise, Budget 2017 brings added hardships on our people and neither can I support it. I urge strongly that the APNU/AFC Government withdraw this horrendous budget. [*Applause*]

Minister of State [Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon]: I am indeed pleased to rise and support Budget 2017 under the theme *Building a Diversified, Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All*

Guyanese. The Hon. Minister of Finance Mr. Winston Jordan and his team of hard-working officers at the Ministry of Finance must be congratulated for this comprehensive outlined of Government's plans and proposals for 2017. Also to be congratulated are the technical staff of the various Ministries who laboured into the night with the Ministry of Finance to clarify programme and policies in their Ministries and helped to crunch their numbers. Budget 2017 presents what I would call a continuum of the programmes and policies which started in 2015 aimed at strengthening institutions and restoring confidence. These are works in progress even as we address the building of a diversified green economy and the delivery of a good life for all.

This budget is demonstrative on the strength of our Government to take hard decisions to build our economy. [Mr. Nandlall: You have agreed. It is hard decisions.] Yes. The complaints by the Opposition that the budget is murderous, it will lead to suicide and other form of violence, portrays an Opposition mindset that it is a rebellion against order. We have an Opposition that had this country in a state of lawlessness. The disregard for rules of the road, the granting of licences to persons who are not qualified, but will give a top up and get it, wreaks carnage our road today and yet we wonder why so many death. When you examine it, those persons, who were given licences, never went through the test, but they were given licenses.

The deliberate under invoicing of containers on our wharfs and the ostensible display of wealth by persons in Government's service, and then we stopped to wonder how it happened. It was this environment of lawlessness which was the hallmark of the previous administration. As a strong administration, we have to make the tough decisions. We have to restructure this country so that our laws, our orders and our systems are compatible with a country that sets a solid foundation for the economic future.

The Guyanese people have become accustomed to the scare tactics of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) and the little 'c'. They are aware that the PPP has always and continued to utilise fear as an element of control of their dwindling support base. They aim to galvanise their support base for congress, which is scheduled for next week, and this is really what it is all about.

The Guyanese people will recall similar language at the time of our debate on the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Finance of Terrorism Bill in the Tenth Parliament. They mobilised the same choir boys who we hear singing about this budget. It was doom and gloom if

the Opposition, at that time, did not agree to the PPP provisions in the Bill. All across this country they went about scaring people, telling them that business will shut down, no money transfer can come in, that families abroad cannot come and bring any money for you, and contractors cannot walk around with more than the equivalent of US\$10,000 to pay their workers because the provisions under the law was making it possible for a senior police officer to go and seize their money. These were their fear tactics and my dear friends over there. That is what they did.

3.42 p.m.

Who would forget the statement about blood on the hands of the Leader of the Opposition in the 2015 Elections made by a gentleman on that side of the House? The PPP and the small ‘c’ is a party that has been known to raise the spectre of violence to gather in the flock and now it is no different than they are attempting to vilify a well-crafted budget for the narrow political agenda. “Withdraw the budget” is their rallying call for a party whose numbers are dwindling.

Page 20 of his budget speech, Minister Jordan, our Hon. Minister of Finance, said, this is at paragraph 4.13:

“In 2017, the Government has made a budgetary allocation of almost \$1 billion to implement a series of renewable energy and energy efficiency projects, following the charge given by His Excellency President David Granger for the public sector to lead the way in transitioning towards greater renewable energy use. These interventions will be channelled through, and managed by, the Guyana Energy Agency (GEA)”

“Additionally, under the renewable energy programme, in 2017, we will install the first ever solar farm, on a large scale, in Mabaruma.”

“...an annual cost saving of approximately \$193 million, and avoided carbon dioxide emissions of 1,674 tons per year.”

As a result of these interventions as well as the further saving of \$158 million by replacing 5,000 inefficient street lamps are indeed commendable, and we must commend the Minister for that.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to give this House a further elucidation of His Excellency President David Granger, who in his address to the National Assembly on 13th October, 2016, stated thus:

“Guyana’s ‘green agenda’ will promote ‘green’ economic sectors such as the development of climate-resilient agriculture, ecotourism and information communications technology and promote renewable energy generation. It will ensure a diversified and resilient economy while promoting ‘green’ growth and ‘green’ employment and secure a clean and healthy environment for future generations.”

The importance of the green agenda to the Government of Guyana is underscored by the fact that the institutional arrangement for its realisation falls within the remit of the department of environment within the Ministry of the Presidency and, therefore, it is under the direct supervision of His Excellency the President.

The mandate of the department was also outlined in His Excellency address to the National Assembly on 13th October, 2016. In this regard, I want to address this matter of the green pathway as it seems as if there is some confusion on the other side as to what it is all about and where, in fact, it is the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) come clothed in another colour. I want to say this, that earlier this year, right here in this House, in a Select Committee, Professor Thomas, who was part of the delegation, which I led here in this House, made it clear that in every generation there would be the ideas as to where a country ought to go, that the LCDS would have been equivalent to environment 101, but the green pathway is environment to 505. What is happening as generation move on, experience is built on the previous generations. I have no doubt that in many years to come the other generation of Guyanese would take this a further stage because that is their experience. While we do not knock the LCDS for what it is or what it did, what we are saying is that it was a narrow vision of what Guyana’s potential is, we have to broaden it, and therefore the green pathway and green economy is that vessel and that is the vehicle that we are using.

The importance of the green agenda to the Government of Guyana, and the people of Guyana, is underscored, as I said earlier, by the institutional arrangements. While for the previous administration, the LCDS was merely a concept, was an idea that could have never translated into actionable reality on the ground, I would wish to say that the President’s elucidation of the

green economy and the green pathway, which is what we are doing here now, is moving from concept to reality.

The Department of the Environment would ensure a more effective communication, cooperation and coordination among all the agencies concerned with climate change, energy generation, environmental protection, forest conservation, national parks, protected areas, rivers and wildlife protection. The department is being tasked with developing a master plan to achieve the objectives of the green agenda. It is within this context that I make my contribution to the discourse on Budget 2017.

The new green pathway will positively transform our economy and to guide this process the Government of Guyana will develop this green state development plan. This plan will reorient the structure of our production base, not only in the transition to low emission resilient platforms, but also by diversification of the economy that reduces reliance on the ailing traditional sectors such as sugar, rice and bauxite. It would be aligned with the 2030 sustainable development agenda, which articulates the rights and responsibilities of our people to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all the people. Indeed, the green state development plan will propel Guyana as a paragon of sustainable development and environmental security worldwide.

The Government of Guyana is in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on the development of the green state development plan framework. In this regard, a team from UNEP would be in Guyana between the 12th December, 2016 and the 15th December, 2016 to meet with stakeholders who would provide inputs that would help with drafting the framework for the green development plan. That is action we are talking about; this is transforming concept to reality. Further, the United Nations country's team would support the development of the full plan. This opportunity is taken to encourage all partners, including the Opposition to support Guyana in achieving its sustainable development goals which this plan would involve.

Our green state development plan would be predicated on the following pillars:

- a clean and renewal energy, so as to decarbonise the economy and the society;

I believe sometimes we really need to decarbonise to get some of the gunge out of our thinking.

- improving the health, education and livelihood of all Guyanese;
- sustainable management of biodiversity and environmental services;
- establishing green towns and resilient infrastructure, rural and urban development; and
- policies to trigger innovation, enterprise, new markets, green jobs and competitiveness.

The scope and the utility of the green state development plan would elucidate a mix of new and traditional growth pathways, including the ecosystem services and environment, tourism, natural resources, health, transportation, fisheries, energy, waste, water, housing, towns and urbanisation. Additionally, grass roots programmes for vulnerable and at risk groups will be prioritised along with solutions for unemployment through new and green jobs, business opportunities and new growth pathways. That is the green economy and the green pathway we are talking about.

In the event that my dear friends over there did not understand it, let me elaborate a bit more on three key areas of the green pathways. In this regard, I would address certain issues as highlighted by the Leader of the Opposition in his debate of the budget on the television. He had his debate already on the television on the budget, so I would address some of the issues he raised in his debate. I would address three major pillars of the green pathway.

- These are the expansion of protected areas.

He wanted to know how is this going to be done. Well, I would tell you this afternoon.

- The centre for biodiversity that is Iwokrama.
- The main streaming of our sustainable land management and development in Guyana.

I would tell the gentleman, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition about some of these things.

Firstly, the protected area system: Although Guyana has made some progress recently with regard to protected areas development, we still fall short of international target. Approximately 8.5% of the country's terrestrial area is committed to area status and when compared to the rest of the Guyana's shield it has one of the lowest proportion of protected area coverage. In order for Guyana to achieve the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) target

for terrestrial protected areas, almost two million hectares of land would be added to our national protected area system. Therefore President David Granger committed to achieving this target in an address at the United Nations headquarters on 22nd April, 2016. In a groundbreaking speech the President pledged to dedicate an additional two million hectares of terrestrial and fresh water ecosystems for conservation under the Guyana national protected area system.

Our Excellent President has further stated that these areas would be established across Guyana's ten regions - this is what I think the Leader of the Opposition wants to hear about also - in order to ensure that conservation is national in scale and covers all our ecological zones in scope.

3.57 p.m.

This commitment is a key component of Guyana's Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCS). Under the 2016 Paris Climate Change Agreement, the conservation of these 2 million hectares represent a transformative moment in Guyana's history, as it would not only preserve the country's natural patrimony for future generations, but will also cement Guyana's role as an international leader in finding green solutions for a sustainable world. With this vision at the forefront, 2017 will see the launching of a comprehensive process to identify important areas for biodiversity and potential protected areas. This process will be based on broad stakeholder consultation and will be done in partnership with local communities, conservation non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the universities and the donor community. Efforts will be made to ensure that areas selected are spread all across Guyana's various regions and that current land use and development potentials are also considered.

Rather than just conserving our shared natural patrimony, these protected areas will become spaces for learning and innovation, building on experiences such as the work of the Iwokrama Institute. The President's vision will allow us to develop uniquely Guyanese tools and knowledge which can be replicated across the country and significantly advance national efforts at economic development with a green economy framework. The GOG was also successful in finalising the project concept for a \$1 billion protected area system project, phase three. I had the distinction of signing that agreement on behalf of the Government and people of Guyana. I was very proud to have done so. This project is funded by Germany under the German Development Bank (KfW). This project will finance much of the infrastructure and equipment needed to

effectively manage the Kaieteur National Park, the Kanuku Mountains protected areas and Shell Beach protected area. The agreement for the commencement of the project was signed on October 2016 with funding becoming available from the first quarter of 2017.

The project runs for four years and will also transform the management of Guyana's protected areas system. The project will focus, as I said, on Shell Beach, Kaieteur National Park, the Kanuku Mountains and a new guest house. Several things that will happen under this project include three sites, and it includes a new guest house at Kaieteur National Park and other administrative structures. **[An Hon. Member (Opposition): Upstairs or downstairs?]**

You do not know the difference between upstairs or downstairs. It includes site offices, ranger stations, outposts, and others. The project also includes support for capacity building at the community level as well as the training of staff within various environmental agencies, including the Protected Areas Commission (PAC). Specific areas of training will be identified through consultation with target groups, but will generally focus on natural resources management, community driven land use planning and sustainable enterprise development.

The project is also designed to support the multi-stakeholder consultation and the development of integrated land use plans at an ecosystem level. This will go beyond just the targeted protected areas and will support surrounding communities and other land owners in the development of sustainable resources. At this point the project also makes some provision for the formation and utilisation of what are called wardens. I believe Minister Trotman did allude to that, and I believe he had elaborated on it at a press conference, the establishment of wardens who will basically look at all of our protected areas, our mining communities and our forest communities. This question of establishing order, bringing back order to systems, is one of the key elements of this project. The wildness that takes place in the hinterland will be brought to an end.

The implementation of these plans will reduce the negative impact on the areas and improve the ability of local communities to maintain conservation and compatible livelihood. Other state agencies with a mandate for environmental and biodiversity management in areas adjacent to protected areas, specifically the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the soon to be established wildlife commission, will also benefit from the project. As part of strengthening site level management, the project will also support extensive training programmes focused on the staff of protected areas, environmental officers and community members to enforce the law in

these areas. Work will commence on a joint project with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to learn more about Guyana's marine territory and its important biodiversity.

This marine spatial planning project will see the PAC and WWF engaging fisherfolk and other stakeholders of Guyana's marine resources to generate a better understanding of our marine diversity and its distribution. The information collected will allow for Government to develop better informed plans for the long-term sustainable use and conservation of these resources and will also play an important role in preparation for the impact of climate change. The project will also see building of a three-dimensional (3-D) model of our marine territory for use in education and awareness activities.

The continued upgrading of our urban parks and strengthened Government educational programme will remain important priorities. Our biodiversity garden in the Botanical Gardens will be designed to serve as a window into Guyana's interior and will house Guyana's plant collection. The garden in particular will be a central focus for the Government moving forward. This urban jewel plays host to around two hundred species of birds, a group of endangered West Indian manatees, countless varieties of amphibians, reptiles, fish and countless other species. The entire space will be organised into six simulated forests and grassland ecosystems. The forest will be represented as well in a permanently flowered coastal zone, seasonally flooded low coastal forest and highland forest. A partnership between the Tourism and Hospitality Association of Guyana (THAG) and the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA) has already resulted in the contribution of over \$700,000 towards large signs marking the access point to each of these ecosystems. Additionally, educational efforts will be made to strengthen the development of these interactive tools.

Permit me to make two points on our Iwokrama, Mr. Speaker. As you may well know, Mr. Speaker, Iwokrama is due to be the centre of our biodiversity. It will host a biodiversity institute that will be the focal point of biodiversity learning in Guyana. It is going to be a place where the world will see Guyana. The Commonwealth Secretary-General has been there and was loud in praise for it and has committed to ensuring that they can find funds for it. Only recently, a few days ago, Prince Harry had his visit there and he was loud in his praise for this... [Mr.

Williams: Like his father.] ...as was his father, who he said had more hair than him at the time when he visited.

These are matters of concern for us; these are matters which require elaboration. I am sorry that the time is so short because the green pathway is such an exciting pathway that one can speak forever on it.

I would wish to commend this budget to my friends on the other side of the House. Reason will resume its seat when you allow for emotions to take flight. I am asking, and I am pleading to all of you, understand the realities of Guyana, that Guyana will be a better place for this budget. I ask that you support this budget as I do.

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

Ms. Selman: I rise to offer my contribution to Budget 2017 presented by the Minister of Finance, the Hon. Winston Jordan under the theme *Building a Diversified, Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to all Guyanese*.

This budget comes after the celebration of Guyana's golden jubilee and just a few weeks away from Christmas, a season of goodwill to all mankind, at a time when all Guyanese are anticipating measures that would enhance their lives and the lives of future generations. This budget crushes dreams of a "good life" and will enhance nothing but hardship on the Guyanese people. One of the more burning issues for me is that of pensioners. This budget is a slap in their faces and an outright *eye-pass*. I note with concern the pronouncement of increasing old age pension by \$800. What can \$800 purchase? For sure, not a proper meal, probably, it is just a bottle of water at then Marriot Hotel.

I will suggest to the Hon. Minister of Finance, through you, Sir, to restore the grant on utility bills for pensioners thereby making a reality of the budget's theme "Delivering the good life to all Guyanese". Our senior citizens deserve so much more and \$800 more to their merged pension is just unacceptable. How inhumane and unkind it is to have effectively raised the pensions of these persons by \$800 when they have not been exempted in any way from VAT. The tiny reduction in the value added tax thrown at the Guyanese people can in no way benefit pensioners. I call on the APNU/AFC coalition to exempt our senior citizens from paying all taxes, including the value added tax.

It is unconscionable that out of a whopping \$250 billion scheduled for spending over the next fiscal year, those who have toiled for this country, those who have helped to create such a large budget being enjoyed by Members on the other side of the House, are not worth an increase of far more than \$800 on their pension.

Given inflation and the rising cost of living during the past fiscal year, the elderly have gained nothing. In fact, they are definitely going to suffer, and increasingly so with each passing month as cost of living continues to increase. I wish to call on the Hon. Minister of Finance Mr. Winston Jordan, through you, Sir, to provide this nation with an explanation of the rationale to impose VAT on the water bill when Guyana is known as the land of many waters. Can a family of seven or ten persons realistically spend \$1,500 on water every month?

4.12 p.m.

This along with the preposterous proposals given by the Hon. Minister of Finance with regard to VAT on electricity ought to be rejected by the Guyanese. Further, this Budget comes at a time when our population is screaming in pain over the rising crime rate, poverty, high food prices, crises in the health and education sectors, problems with infrastructure, traffic congestion on the East Coast and East Bank of Demerara Highway and the lack of jobs which the coalition promised will come when it takes office. Eighteen months into their term, we are still waiting. Yet, citizens must pay VAT on water and light. This Budget does nothing to directly ease the pain of our people but, on the contrary, Budget 2017 drives us further down the road of poverty and disaster.

This Budget is a clear indication that the Granger Administration has become numb to the needs of the people and deaf and unresponsive to public outcry. How can the Minister of Finance have the nerve to present a national budget under the theme, *Building a Diversified Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese* when our senior citizens, in addition to having the subsidy removed from their utility bills, will be saddled with the imposition of the 14% in VAT on their water and electricity bills. It is difficult to comprehend how such measures could contribute to the good life. It is more difficult to understand how the garnishing of funds out of the bank accounts of citizens without a court order can even be remotely considered as part of the good life of citizens. It is obvious that the Granger Administration has a passion for catchy

sounding phrases which bear no resemblance to the policies and programmes they so confidently announced to the public.

This year's Budget is titled, *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: the Good Life Beckons*. The one before that was titled, *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*. The Coalition Administration likes to use that 'good life' phrase but talk to the man in the street and he will tell you that life is far from good. Eighteen months after the Coalition's ascension to Office, we are still suffering from blackouts, water shortages, bad roads, flooding, garbage woes and the inability to meet basic living expenses. This is a burdensome budget. The passage of this Budget will result in adding undue burden to our people, many of whom are already finding it difficult to live on a daily basis. This Budget is a rich man's budget. They will not suffer. It is the poor and hardworking ones who will feel the squeeze and we will have to pay the ultimate price. This certainly is not a Christmas budget, as referred to by the Hon. Minister, Mr. Keith Scott. This Budget is anti-Christmas. In the spirit of goodwill, I hope that this Coalition Government will withdraw this Budget and remove those measures which will create undue hardships on the Guyanese people.

I, as someone who is actively contributing in some small way to moulding our nation's children, wish to turn my attention to education. The importance of education to the immediate and future wellbeing of our society is well known since both our current and forthcoming development hinges primarily on it. That our country's learners are performing so poorly in almost every strategic area in numeracy and literacy speaks volumes of the attitude of the persons whose responsibly it is to advocate the policy. Not so long ago, when this Administration was in Opposition, it almost continuously bemoaned the performance of our students. As part of its campaign rhetoric for the 2014 General and Regional Elections, it made minced balls of our students' results and promised to implement programmes that would bring about instantaneous changes in outputs. Eighteen months of the APNU/AFC's ascension to Office, the performance of our students has become worse with the pass rate in Mathematics falling to an all-time low of 14% for boys and girls at the National Grade Six Assessment level. Where are we heading? If as a nation our children do not possess basic numeric skills and if not tackled, we may get a 10% pass rate at the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examinations from this very batch of students.

The Minister of Finance revealed, on page 59, paragraph 4.126 of his Budget presentation that of the 14,386 pupils who wrote the 2016 National Grade Six Assessment, only 14% or 2,014 pupils were able to achieve a passing rate in Mathematics and less than 50% achieved passes in English Language. The Hon. Minister of Finance must be congratulated for admitting that there was a crisis. He pointed out that over 12,000 of our children were not numerate while more than half of those writing English could not sufficiently comprehend our official language to attain a 50% score. What I fail to understand is why now? Why keep this information from the nation for more than four months? No one knew the figure until the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, announced it in his Budget presentation. What message is being sent to the nation? I would say that it is nothing short of *eye pass* and that this dismal result is due solely on the Coalition Administration's clueless approach to this very important sector of society.

I wish to ask the Hon. Minister, through you, Sir, what changed between last year and this year? Is it that Teachers are not sticking to the syllabuses? Were they not given the right syllabuses or was the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) just brutal in setting that paper?

Being a Teacher for most of my working life, I have never encountered situations where some of my brightest students came out of the examination visibly distressed and in tears. That was a crisis. What has changed from five years ago? Tell the nation that, Hon. Minister? Stop *beating around the bush*. No amount of money would solve this problem unless you are forthcoming and truthful to the public. What we need is a breakdown by regions. We need to see an analysis of schools' performances. Unless we know these things, it is a wasted effort. I can only imagine the performance of the Hinterland students.

The Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, Ms. Garrido-Lowe, could not be serious when she mentioned that they have implemented the playing of scrabble and chess, which she claimed would result in improved knowledge in English Language and Mathematics.

The Hon. Minister of Education identified several initiatives. We, on this side of the House, however, demand that the Coalition Government specifies, in unambiguous terms, the expected results of each intervention and tabulate, in reasonable detail, each aspect of its policies and programmes.

While it is commendable that an effort is being made to reform the curriculum, it is also necessary that plans be made to have teachers prepare workbooks vital to the reformed curriculum. It is the PPP's considered view that improvements in Mathematics and English Language to at least comparable standards with our Caribbean counterparts will not be achieved until the Coalition Administration embarks on equipping the students with a requisite stimulus material, which include having our own tests and textbooks written by our Guyanese Teachers so that our children can have ample practice to strengthen concepts grasped.

We also call on the Coalition Administration to establish a joint-select committee of Parliament to review the targets and assess the implementation of the Budget promises. According to the local media, the last time the pass rate for the National Grade Six Assessment for Mathematics was made public was in 2014 when 31.52% of the 15,207 candidates who sat the examination that year achieved 50% or more in the subject area. The question which begs for an answer is, what has changed from 2014 to now? What is even worse is that the same faith has befallen our 2016 CSEC students. In other words, this year was a disaster for Guyana when it comes to Mathematics performances across the board. In a world driven by technology and science, this is a bad sign.

According to *Stabroek News* dated 18th August, 2016, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Ms. Delma Nedd, announced the country's bad performance at CSEC Mathematics. She said that only 38.37% of the local students were able to secure a pass. This per cent is almost 7% less than the 45.07% pass rate for the core subject in 2015. It is also less than the 38.75% pass rate that was recorded in 2014.

Under the previous PPP/C Administration, huge investments were made to implement projects and programmes which serve to ensure the education of our children. What has happened to those projects and programmes which were obviously working? Education is the nation's wealth. At the rate things are going, before long, we will be doomed. I do hope that, for the sake of our children, there will be a turnaround and that better results will be seen next year with the proposed new initiatives.

So far, I have heard the Hon. Member, Ms. Priya Manickchand, being referred to by Members on the opposite side of this House as the worst Minister of Education. Let us look at facts. Under her

tenure, there was a 31.52% pass rate. Under the Hon. Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine, it is 14%. Based on the foregoing statistics, the nation will judge who the bigger failure is. Dear Hon. Ministers on the other side of the House, do not throw stones knowing that you live in glass houses. An apology is in order for the Hon. Priya Manickchand.

Under the PPP/C Administration, results of these very important examinations were far better than we are seeing now. The PPP/C made an effort; I cannot say the same for the Coalition Government. While the programme...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member...

Ms. Selman: Mr. Speaker, I hear the sound of misery and blindness in the air.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have spoken for 15 minutes.

Ms. Selman: Thank you, Sir. While the Programme for Emergency Education Reform Initiative shows an interest in tackling aspects of our plights, it is necessary to remind this APNU/AFC Coalition that correcting weaknesses in English Language and Mathematics is no quick-fix. It is incumbent upon this Administration to conduct careful studies to identify the root of the problems, and proper and even painstaking strategies should be implemented to bring about a feasible solution. The Government must recognise that the specialists who will be employed cannot be the same old tired Teachers imposing 19th century strategies on 21st century on the ever so often hyperactive learners. It simply will not work as the generation gap will do more harm than good. The Coalition Government must understand that the new learner needs vibrant, energetic and caring teachers who are committed to healing our educational wounds in order to catapult our children to the excellence they once enjoyed under the People's Progressive Party/Civic. Unless this happens, fanciful budgetary allocations would be made but nothing will happen because the programmes are too idealistic to impact positively on the performance outcomes of the students.

In concluding, I wish to point out that Guyanese are intelligent men and women. They know that this Budget will cause the inflationary spiral which will rob them of their incomes. They know that the promises made by the Coalition are never kept. They know that the poor and the working

poor will be made worse off and that Budget 2017 nor the ones before have offered any solutions.

4.27 p.m.

What leaves this nation more hopeless is that the Coalition's Ministers, during their presentations, boasted of their accomplishments but the public knows their failures. We know that our standard of living will continue to deteriorate; our children will have no real future; our pensioners will be worse off.

I therefore wish to appeal to the Minister of Finance through you, Sir, to reconsider the draconian measures outlined in Budget 2017 and to withdraw this Budget now.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Ms. Wade: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tabled before this National Assembly is the 2017 Budget. It is before us for debate and passage, thereafter authorising the Government to expend these sums in the various sections. Let me commend the Hon. Minister of Finance and his hardworking team for a task well done in presenting to this National Assembly the third Budget of the Coalition Government in 19 months and, more so, presenting also the 2017 Budget before the Fiscal Year begins, rather than waiting until the constitutional deadline of 90 days into the fiscal to do so like what took place during the previous Government's tenure.

Agencies are given eight months to execute programmes and activities in a 12-month period. That is why, in most cases, the significant amount of the Budget allocations remains unspent and balances have to be returned to the Consolidated Fund. The APNU/AFC Government is saying that that will be a thing of the past.

In 2015, we said, "*A Fresh Approach*"; in 2016, we said, "*Stimulating Growth*" and, now in 2017, we are saying, "*Delivering the Good Life*". The emphasis and objective of this Government is the happiness of the people of Guyana and this 19-month old Government has begun to demonstrate that we are passionate about a 'good life' for all Guyanese.

For the Hon. Members of the Opposition, who are pretending to have all the answers to develop this great nation of ours, a nation which suffered under them for 23 years of their rule, I want to remind them that development does not happen within one, two or even three years; so, give this Government space to govern. Do not lecture to us now on how to solve problems. You had your chance and you failed.

I wish to turn my attention to 2017 Budget under the theme: *Building a Diversified Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese*, that was presented to this National Assembly on the 28th November, 2016 to the tune of \$215 billion.

In Region 5, agriculture is our business and this Government will ensure that there is appropriate level of food security through a sustainable approach in addressing the key obstacles the Hon. Minister spoke about on page 71, paragraph 4.2. Paddy farmers in the rice industry are aware that the previous Government mismanaged the industry. I spoke about the crisis in the rice industry for years, sitting over there. I said that there is a need for the implementation of a plan to aggressively market Guyana's rice. Nobody listened. Today, the same problems are before us. In 2015, this Government had to make \$4 billion available so that poor farmers could be paid. Likewise, the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) had to be provided a total of \$23 billion for bailout, all because of mismanagement of the previous Government.

This 19-month Government is aware that we have an obligation to assist in stabilising the process to benefit farmers and also ensure that the necessary systems are in place to protect their livelihood. The rice industry remains challenged in terms of cost of production and competitiveness. This Government will continue to support the industry. We have already started to access new trade partners, following the collapse of the Venezuelan market. On page 54, paragraph 4.111, the Minister made mention that, in the area of drainage and irrigation, in excess of \$2.3 billion is allocated, in 2017, and so I say to the farmers of Region 5 that they will be benefiting greatly.

Under the previous Government, farmers protested in front of this Parliament. Farmers told Dr. Ramsammy – these farmers were from Essequibo – “You take us for babies that you can say *dawn baby, dawn?* We are here with our families. There are my wife, my daughter and my son. We beat water and come from Essequibo because we did not receive payments in a year and a

half.” This Opposition has shallow memories. Now you are coming to lecture to us about the rice industry. We received a collapsed rice industry. I say that with no apology. We are 19 months old and we are going to fix it but we need time to do so.

Minister Valarie Patterson distributed house lots to policemen, women, nurses, teachers and other residents of Region 5. They will now have their own homes; they did not have that over 23 years. It did not stop there: Hopetown Co-operative Land Society was approached for 43 house lots by Food For The Poor Guyana Inc.; Block K Onderneeming South was made available; and also a Community Centre was built. The 43 families chosen are three men and 40 single women. The applicants were interviewed and chosen by Food For The Poor Guyana Inc. Visits were made to each applicant’s place of abode for verification. These homes were handed over to the families and the Government is now putting water, lights and roads in place in the housing area. In other areas in Region 5, families also benefited and received homes. *The good life beckons.*

In summary, for the Fiscal Year 2016, \$390 million was allocated under the Capital Expenditure for Region 5 while a total of \$2.273 billion, inclusive of emoluments, *et cetera*, was allocated under Current Expenditure, giving an overall total of \$2.663 billion for 2016. Mr. Speaker, I want to tell this House how those moneys were spent.

Works were done in areas like No. 8 Village Secondary School, Waterloo Nursery School, construction of a Diabetic Foot Clinic at the Mahaicony Hospital, remodelling of the laboratory at Fort Wellington Hospital, renovation of the regional boardroom and the Regional Democratic Council’s (RDC) main office, amongst others, to the total sum of \$122.086 million. I will go on: maintenance was done to most regional buildings, living quarters, 15 health centres in areas such as Ithaca, Woodley Park, Number 28, *et cetera*. The two hospitals as well as most school buildings such as Bygeval, Fort Wellington, Bush Lot, Calcutta, *et cetera*, and also living quarters within the Education Sector to the tune of \$93.7 million were done. This is now a level playing field; it never happened before.

A total of 10 deplorable streets and mud dams were rehabilitated to all-weather surfaces in areas such as Novar – listen to the areas – Ithaca, Hope, Paradise, Number 12 Village and Hopetown, just to mention a few, all to the cost of \$75.011 million. Likewise, 22 residential streets and farm to market access roads were also maintained and rehabilitated. Works were done in areas such as

Fellowship, De Hoop, Esau and Jacob, Abary, Number 28 Village, Bath Settlement, Number 9 Village, Bush Lot, *et cetera*, costing a total of \$57.168 million. The clearing of dams and canals and empoldering of some 1,300 acres of land at the left bank of the Mahaicony River to accommodate approximately 3,000 heads of cattle was done. Also Mahaica–Mahaicony–Abary Agricultural Development Authority (MMA/ADA) executed some drainage and irrigation works in the rice cultivating areas and the 10 Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) received assistance to clear and de-silt canals and trenches to the total of \$77 million, the sum allocated to the Region. *The good life beckons.*

The RDC constructed greenheart bridges, concrete structures in areas as Dundee, Airy Hall, Fairfield, *et cetera*, all to the allocation of \$13.5 million. Also, eight residential farm to market access bridges were done in Number 2 Village, Waterloo, Number 10 Village and Trafalgar, costing \$19.3 million; not forgetting Number 10 Village Primary and Nursery Schools to keep the flood waters of the Mahaica River out of the area. A parking lot and a boat house constructed at central Mahaicony Wharf to facilitate residents of Maraikobai and local fishermen to store their engines and fuel, *et cetera*, totalling the sum of \$13.5 million, were done. [*Interruption*]

I want to touch on the furniture and equipment of the public health sector's Education Department and Regional Administration. Purchases were done to the sum of \$61.866 million.

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

Mr. Speaker: I must ask Hon. Members to, at least, be courteous to the speaker. Members are reaching across the aisle and across to their Colleagues who are in front of them to speak to other Members on the other side of the aisle. There is nothing to prevent those Members leaving the room if they must speak. But I must ask them to not disturb the speaker and the other Members who are here. I will not call any Member's name now but, please, we are getting perilously close to that time.

Please proceed, Hon. Member.

Ms. Wade: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

These included desks, benches, blackboards, chairs, tables for schools, photocopiers for the RDC, Electrocardiography (ECG) machines, blood pressure apparatus, *et cetera*, for the

hospitals and health centres. The RDC purchased a cold storage center to transport drugs and medical supplies for Public Health Department in Region 5; two 15-seater buses and a boat and engine for the Education Department, all totalling \$32.297 million; and not forgetting the repairs and maintenance works done to drains and sluices at Ithaca, Rosignol, De Edward and Mahaicony, also external sanitary blocks and fences at schools and health centres, concrete drain at the RDC compound, all totalling \$40.987 million.

We told the nation, in 2016, that we were going to stimulate growth, restore confidence and that the good life beckons. I can say to Region 5 that we are receiving the benefits from this Government. *We are not only talking the talk but we are walking the walk.* The RDC did it and we are going to continue to do it.

I am surprised and disappointed that the Hon. Member, Mr. Gill, living in Region 5, did not tell the supporters and this House what took place – all the developmental aspects. Mr. Gill, you need to visit the areas and keep yourself aboard with what is going on in the region. You have work to do, and I guess you will do so in 2017.

Women Development

Guyanese women are very hardworking and progressive. This Government respects this and will place much emphasis on the empowerment of women across Guyana, including Region 5.

4.42 p.m.

To this effect, the First Lady empowered women to manage small business in Region 5. They are already involved in many skilled programmes, creating employment for themselves and other villagers.

Let me remind this honourable House that, under the former Administration, the minimum wage was \$39,540. Under this Government, the minimum wage increased to \$55,000. Under the Coalition Government, the minimum wage has been increased by 36.4%. With an overall increase of 36.4%, the minimum wage worker is taking home \$15,460 more every month than under the former Government. In only 19 months, *the good life beckons.* The Hon. Member, Ms. Selman, noted the \$800 increase for the old age pensioner, but we took the amount from \$13,000

to \$19,000. That is a big increase, Hon. Member. The increase for persons receiving public assistance also gives them a good life. They never received that amount before.

Youth, Sport and Culture

This is our Government's concern. Youths are given the opportunity to keep fit, to focus and to be active. Recreational facilities in villages are being upgraded throughout the region. The Government's Youth Policy, on page 64, should be applauded because it focuses on reducing risk factors. Our programme will generate support and allocate resources to make youths comfortable in all the regions. The Hon. Minister will tell us about that.

In summary, for the fiscal year 2017, the Ministry of Finance has proposed, under the capital expenditure for Region 5, an allocation of \$395.72 million while a total sum of \$2.611 million, inclusive of emoluments, *et cetera*, has been proposed under the current expenditure, giving an overall total of \$3.006 billion for the RDC of Region 5.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 15 minutes.

Ms. Wade: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The budgetary allocation for Region 5 is before the House. I can safely say to the region that the sum allocated will be spent wisely throughout the region, in all areas allocated, as we did in 2016. I am proud and excited about the prospects of delivering the good life to all in Region 5. The Government delivered in 2016 and it will also deliver in 2017.

In conclusion, the national Budget of 2017 is before the House and the debate is ongoing while the entire nation watches and listens with keen interest. The Opposition's refusal to be part of the Budget consultation process is not shocking because they are Opposition by name and nature. Why come to ridicule now, and to lecture. You had your chance to make your input but you refused and that is what is distasteful.

We heard about the blood spree, the killings and all sort of things. The Opposition needs to get its act together and to do better. The Opposition should tell the nation and its supporters that it refused to be part of the Budget consultation process when called upon.

Budget 2017 is under the theme, *Building a Diversified Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese*. Region 5 welcomes this fresh approach in charting a new development plan for Guyana. To my fellow Guyanese, I want to assure you and the people of Region 5 that this APNU/AFC Government, that is 19 months old, will deliver the good life.

The scripture reminds us in Proverbs 16:3 to ask the Lord to bless your plans and you will be successful in carrying them out. This Government is created to succeed, designed to win, equipped to overcome, anointed to prosper and blessed to receive all the blessings.

I thank you. *[Applause]*

Dr. Mahadeo: Mr. Speaker, I want to start my presentation by saying, “*This too shall pass.*” It may take three years, but it may take less.

First I want to bring a message from the people of Canje to my fellow Member of Parliament (MP) who spoke yesterday and told us about representing some people from Canje where the use of water and electricity was concerned. I cannot relate the language because it is unparliamentary but I just want to tell him that the people said that he is not representing them. In other words, he is a pseudologist.

Mr. Adams said that the APNU/AFC achieved, in 18 months, what the PPP/C did not achieve in 23 years. Yes, we did not raise taxes. They have achieved over 200 of those. The Hon. Member, Ms. Wade, listed all the achievements of the PPP/C controlled RDC, Region 5. What she did not list was what the APNU/AFC Government did: that was to take away the land that was allotted to farmers in Fort Wellington and to take away the street lights from the people of Bath Settlement. She did not say that but claimed what the PPP/C controlled RDC did in Region 5.

I heard several Members on that side of the House saying that it is such a great thing to present two Budgets in six months. The Hon. Minister of Finance congratulated himself for three Budgets in 18 months. Well, congratulations are due to the hardworking staff of the Ministry of Finance - great job. The staff are not to be blamed for the Budget. They followed the orders of their boss. In talking about computers, my friends used to tell me, “*Rubbish in, rubbish out.*” I am saying that it is not the quantity of budgets that you bring; it is the quality of the budgets you bring. These Budgets lack quality. Let us look.

The year 2015 was the year of meat for the boys and girls and bones for the workers. There were 26, but now 27 Ministers and a battalion of consultants; and huge salary increases – up to 50% - and the workers received 5%. A bit more graphic: one gentleman sitting on the other side of the House gets a salary of \$1,700,000 per month plus perks, and they are boasting that the ordinary health worker gets \$50,000 per month minus perks. Mr. Ronald Regan, past President of the United States of America, said:

“The problem is not that people are taxed too little, the problem is that government spends too much.”

Earlier this year, they presented a Budget. We could name that Budget the “*tax from man to mule budget*”, with over 140 different taxes and fee increases, some up to 500%. After hearing that Budget speech, I thought things could not get worse and that there could not be a budget that would make life worse for the vast majority of Guyanese. But, the Hon. Minister of Finance outdid himself this time. He has managed to increase the hardships meted out to the Guyanese populace even more. Some of my constituents say that this is the “empty de poor man pocket budget”. Some say it is the, *sleight of hand Budget, giving an ounce and taking a pound.*”

The “*tax from man to mule budget*” saw an immediate increase in suicides in Guyana. Suicide was mentioned 14 times in the speeches of the Ministers of Public Health during the last Budget debate. But that could not beat the Budget blues, especially for those 16 years to 35 years old. Guyana had a high suicide rate before 2016 but, in 2016, it exploded. In the first three months of 2016, there were more suicides committed than for the whole year of 2015. I do not know what will happen when these cruel measures in this Budget begin to bite. But, I want to assure Guyana that *this too shall pass.*

This Government is a failure by its own standards. This was admitted to by the Minister of Finance in his presentation. The pass mark was set at 4.4% at the beginning of 2016. It was reduced to 4% by mid-year. They have failed and failed miserably, even by their own calculations. It was just 2.6% out of the original 4.4%.

The PPP/C knows how to set targets and achieve them. The Hon. Mr Jordan would have worked with his boss for years, setting targets, crafting budgets, monitoring and evaluating and strategizing on how to achieve the set targets. He would have worked with his then boss in more

difficult and trying international constraints than now exists and still achieved over 4% growth every year. It does not seem he has learned to do it by himself. His old boss is here and lessons can continue. Cde. Jagdeo is still here. He is still willing to teach others and willing to help Guyana get out of the deep hole this Government is getting us into.

After accepting failure, the Minister of Finance proceeded to lay blame all over: Barama Company Limited is to be blamed; Demerara Timbers Limited is to be blamed; and the workers of this country are to be blamed. Everyone else was blamed except the guilty party. The only one to be blamed is this incompetent APNU/AFC Government. This Government does not have the skills and does not have the know-how. They employed the wrong people as heads of agencies and departments; there is no transparency in their transactions; and there are numerous questionable transactions, like the now famous “bond gate”. There are empty promises, no vision, no plan, but *this too shall pass*.

To quote from the Budget speech:

“All across the public sector, we are faced with issues of sluggishness in implementation, poor inter-agency coordination and cooperation, and a deficit of strategic planning and management.”

Who are now the Heads of Agencies? Who are now the Heads of Departments? Who are the Permanent Secretaries (PSs)? Who are now the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and the Directors? They are all hand-picked by this same Government; most of them not for their abilities, but as payment for services rendered to put this cabal in Government.

The heads have changed but these are the same public servants who, a few years ago, with the PPP/C Government, worked and delivered a far superior service than is being delivered now. The PPP/C Governments never blamed the public sector employees and never called them inept, sluggish and deficient. I strongly disagree with this Government. The public servants are not sluggish. They are not inept. They are hard workers. Most of them go beyond the call of duty. The hand-picked unqualified Heads of Programmes, Departments and Agencies do not provide the necessary guidance and leadership. In fact, they do not have the capacity to do so. They are to be blamed. But *this too shall pass*.

Look at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) Board. Interviews were done for a Deputy CEO. Maybe the names that were submitted did not meet the satisfaction of the Hon. Minister so he fired the Board.

I am a geographic MP for Region 6. Let us look at health for Region 6, as a typical example of this Government's failure. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, that Region 6 does not have a Regional Health Officer (RHO)? This Government wanted to appoint a specific person to head health services in the region. That individual has no qualifications related to health or management.

4.57 p.m.

By no stretch of the imagination could that individual fit the job description (JD) of Regional Health Officer (RHO). So, a position was created, with a specific JD, to suit that individual. What is the outcome so far? There has been a dramatic increase in suicide because all of the suicide and anti-suicide programmes were thrown overboard. Region 6 had the best immunisation coverage, from 2008 to 2014. Where does it stand now? Region 6 is definitely not at the top, not even the second or third best. The Care of the Elderly Programme in Region 6 was scrapped; the Geriatric Mega Clinics were scrapped; the Men's Health Programme is non-existent; the Community Feedback Programme is non-existent; the Home Nutrition Programme is dead. That is the achievement of this person who was placed there as RHO. The internet library is closed and I can go on and on.

Let us move on to the New Amsterdam Hospital, where another party hack was put to head. What obtains there? Dr Ramayya, the Regional Executive Officer (REO) selected by this Government, visited the institution because he was told that shoddy works were on-going. As the REO, he had the purview; he had to verify the works, if he felt he needed to. But, in his own words, he was put out of the hospital by his party hack who is the RHO.

A Japanese constructed hospital...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I must tell you that I am not partial to references to persons to whom you refer to in unflattering terms, when they cannot answer you in this House.

Mr. Damon: It is the REO. He did not mention a name.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Mr. Damon, I have not spoken. You will be Out of Order if you continue. I am not partial to that. I am sure that you can find another way to express that, in fairness to the people who are not here and who cannot respond to you. Please proceed.

Dr. Mahadeo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The person who is the head of the New Amsterdam Hospital, who is not qualified for the job, and if I am go with the definition given by my Colleague Member of Parliament (MP), who said that, one might be a doctor but if one is trying to do an engineer's job, then he/she is unqualified – well the uneducated CEO.

Let me tell this House what happened at the New Amsterdam Hospital. This was a state of the art hospital, constructed by the Japanese. They did different types of studies before the hospital was constructed. The main theatre in the New Amsterdam Hospital has been non-functional for six months; the sewage has been back-flowing into the maternity wards and other departments for over six months now; the doctors send patients to the private labs to do tests, including electrocardiographs (ECGs), ultrasounds, general lab tests, advising that the equipment were not working well. This is because, for the entire year, that equipment has not been serviced. Now, they have to pay 14% VAT on that. The incinerator at the New Amsterdam Hospital, which caters for the entire Region 6, has not worked for 2016. Sometimes there is no running water in the hospital. The previous weekend, some of my constituents called me from the institution asking me what they should do because there was no water at the institution. They took a patient to the Accident and Emergency (A&E) Department and were asked to purchase a five-gallon bottle of water and bring it to the hospital.

Quite often there is no oxygen in the institution. Imagine an institution with a theatre, labour ward, Intensive Care Unit (ICU), Neo-Natal ICU and there is no oxygen. The Central Oxygen System has not been working for the entire 2016

Quite often there is no fuel to run the brand new generator that was bought. Two weekends ago, there was blackout at the hospital for 12 hours and we know that there are a lot of blackouts right now, thanks to the Guyana Power and Light (GPL) Company for that. Anyone, who knows the New Amsterdam Hospital, knows that the theatre, the labour ward, the ICU and the labs are all in total darkness without electricity.

The sad thing in all of this is that there are moneys in the system. They could have bought all of

these things. When the staff, who are manning all these departments, report that the departments would run out of oxygen on a particular weekend or that they would run out of fuel, they are not listened to. This is simply a management problem and incompetence.

The ultra sound equipment and the main echocardiograph machine are not working. A computerized tomography (CT) scanner that the Hon. Dr. Anthony had referred to, that was donated, it is an expensive and much needed piece of equipment, and it is sitting in a container in the sun in the compound of the hospital. When that is opened, it will not work because it is a computerised system. I can go on and on, but these are all management problems. The Japanese-trained Facilities Manager was sent home and now, like the Hon. Bishop Edghill is saying, I do not know what is working.

A Critical Care Unit (CCU) was being constructed. It was said to me by the doctors that the CEO of the hospital made the decision as to where it should be constructed. Mr. Speaker, do you know where it is being constructed? It is being constructed out of the hospital, a separate little building at the front of the institution. This structure needs to be near to the theatre, near to the laboratory, near to the x-ray department. It needs to be located near to these departments where a critical patient could be dealt with at any time. Now, the doctors are saying that they will not use it.

Now, on to the Skeldon Hospital, Dr. Chand was doing an excellent job and was transferred out. A doctor with zero management skills has gone there. That doctor rarely ever works at the Outpatient Department or at the Accident and Emergency Department. The doctor rarely ever sees any patient.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, you have spoken for 15 minutes.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, may I have your attention please? We just had your ruling in relation to calling...

Mr. Speaker: Do you rise on a Point of Order?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, Sir, I need...

Mr. Chairman: Then please quote the Point of Order and tell me what the Point of Order is and then leave it with me.

Ms. Teixeira: Standing Order 40 (a). The Hon. Chief Whip made a scathing comment about a doctor whose name was referred to, although it is an interruption of a speaker. I asked that she withdraws the statement because she called the doctor a “quack”. You, Sir, just, personally referred to a person who was unnamed not being named in this House.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am trying to follow the Point of Order so that I can respond to it. I wish that you tell me what the Point of Order is and then...

Ms. Teixeira: The Point of Order is that, while listening to the Hon. Dr. Mahadeo speak, when he referred to and give a name of doctor, the Hon. Chief Whip called the doctor a “quack”. I am objecting to that because the person is not in this House to defend that they are not a “quack”.

Mr. Chairman: I thank the Hon. Member. The term “quack” is not an acceptable term in this House. The Hon. Member who used that term should withdraw it immediately. There is no room for discussion about that. It is not language that is acceptable in this House. Who did you complain against, was it the Chief Whip? Hon. Member, Ms. Amna Ally, that epithet must be withdrawn.

Minister of Social Cohesion [Ms. Ally]: I am sorry Mr. Speaker, but I did not hear the Chief Whip. I did not make any comment of that nature.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Dr. Mahadeo, please continue.

Dr. Mahadeo: Let me continue. So, a hand-picked, unqualified person in management was put in charge of the hospital. A position was created there, someone was sent bullying the staff and telling them that she will be the Administrator of the hospital. Subsequently, the position of Administrator was created at the Skeldon Hospital, when there was no such position in the establishment to accommodate that person.

What happened? There are four incubators, none are working; the electrocardiograph (ECG) machine, is not working; in the lab, the spectrophotometer is not working; the theatre is not functioning; the ICU is not functioning. These are the achievement of these managers.

I will move on. I will talk a bit about drugs. The Hon. Minister of Finance said

“Although we have been budgeting adequate sums of money, our population continues to experience frequent non-availability of drugs and medical supplies at almost every public health facility, suggesting a number of problems”

When we said so, we were told that we were wrong. Where are all the moneys that Region 6 had as far, as I can see in this book? In 2015, Region 6 got \$195,400,000 and in 2016 it got \$385 million and more. Where are the drugs? The region had drug shortages throughout the year.

I want to quote from both Ministers of Public Health last budget speeches.

The Minister within the Ministry of Public Health said:

“The game was ‘there is a brown girl in the ring’. We all would shout ‘show me your motion’ before ‘we tra la la’. Today, I am happy to report that the APNU/AFC Government was placed in the ring...”

This was followed by the Hon. Dr. Hon. Norton, who said:

“Twenty million dollars is earmarked for buildings, which includes remodelling and equipping the Head Office... so that the Hon. Minister, Dr. Cummings, could show us her motion without limitation. This Minister would not be doing a tra la la la, she would do something more appropriate like *don't hold meh back...*”

I do not want to state the rest.

Let us give credit where credit is due. The ministers did as they promised. They danced the whole year through, going around in circles, achieving nothing.

I want to close by analysing what happens to some of my constituents. A single parent street vendor with three children asked me what she will do. The \$10,000 grant per child was taken away and now she has to pay VAT on school books, transportation costs will be added in, and on everything she has to pay 14% VAT on. How will she manage?

Look at a pensioner who went to the Skeldon Hospital, and this is a real life scenario. A Random Blood Sugar (RBS) test was ordered for her. She could not get it, so she went across the road and paid \$300 and return with the results to the doctor. The doctor then gave her a prescription. She

hurried to the pharmacy and was told that there was no insulin, no Panadol, no Captopril, no Lasix, No Valium. She was given five multivitamin tablets as treatment for the month. She is troubling with high blood pressure, diabetes and a skin condition. When she goes to the pharmacy next year, she will pay: Insulin is \$4,500 before VAT and with VAT an additional \$1260 will be added. Where did the \$800 go. For the entire year there was no insulin. I found out from a private pharmacy that on her bill of \$15,500 she would have to pay for her supplies and it will add up to \$17,670, when VAT is added.

I would like to say, referring to the statement that was in the press, recently, about the doctors, that I am proud to say that I have worked with some of those doctors and I have trained some of them, and I am proud to say that they are my colleagues and I will defend them.

In closing, I would say that this is one of the worse budgets that were ever presented to this National Assembly. The intellectual authors of this budget produced a great horror budget. At the end of the presentation by Minister Jordan, the people of Guyana were left petrified and scared. Just what a good horror movie does. In this case, this horror will be your fruit. It did not end with the performance in this House, but it will haunt the people of Guyana for at least one year. I do not think that, like my Colleague Mr. Chand stated, that this is the end of it.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you must wrap up now.

Dr. Mahadeo: I will close with a quote from Mark Twain:

“Patriotism is supporting your country all the time, and your government when it deserves it.”

The patriots are over here and we will always support our country but we will only support the Government when it deserves it.

5.12 p.m.

This budget needs to be worked over. It is anti-working class, anti-poor, anti-children, anti-elderly and anti-people. It is anti-Guyanese. But this too shall pass.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this seems to be a good time for us to take the suspension. It is now 5.10 pm, we will return at 6.10 pm.

Sitting suspended at 5.10 pm.

Sitting resumed at 6.10 pm.

Mr. Figueira: I rise, at this hour of the night, with great confidence and soundness of mind, to join in support of my Colleagues on this side of the House to give my unwavering and firm support for Budget 2017. A budget I would say, without any compunction, is not only historical in it being the earliest national budget to have ever been presented in post-independent Guyana and the first in almost 40 years to be presented before the start of the fiscal year, but it is also the largest to have ever been presented to this honourable House; 8.7% or \$20 billion more than budget 2016 and \$29 billion more than budget 2015. This budget, presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance, is not only transformative, but revolutionary.

With that said, kindly permit me to congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance and his very competent staff at the ministry, for once again providing, on behalf of this Government, a well put together budget that will continue the developmental mission of transforming this country. The budget's theme: *Building a Diversified, Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese*, are beautiful timeless words that will be put into action. This budget is one that is Indigenous to the needs of the Guyanese people and it was prepared on the premise of the social and economic realities of our country.

I support this budget and I want to make it abundantly clear, that my support is not because it is being presented by the Government. No Sir, I have my own independent thoughts that are in sync, with what this budget aims to achieve and more importantly, what it provides for the Guyanese people.

The Government has been elected to serve and govern on behalf of the people of this dear land. Our supreme interest is that of the people as a whole. There will be times when we will have to take steps and implement measures that may be unpopular with a small section of the population. But on such occasions, it is important for us to remember the fundamental principles which guide us, in that, the paramount interest of the county must prevail.

I listened with keen attention to identify counter-proposals from the Hon. Members of the Opposition on Budget 2017 because I had the view that the purpose of a debate is not only to identify one's perceived flaws on a stated position, but to offer an alternative that is better or perceived to be.

I was probably like Alice in Wonderland because I have not heard one proposed measure or solution that would correct what is in the minds of the Hon. Members to be bad in this budget. Is this a Government in waiting? The Hon. Members have failed with distinction to provide alternative views; they have failed in being a responsible Opposition.

I would like to make a few remarks on some of the bleak presentations we were forced to listen to. The articulations by the Hon. Members of the Opposition against this budget and, at times, their theatrical performance in and out of the House, aimed to confuse and befuddle the people, so that they could not see and understand the insurmountable vital and advantageous benefits this document beholds.

I applaud the efforts of my Friend, the Hon. Member Mr Irfaan Ali, in his attempt to provide an economic analysis of Budget 2017, his valiant efforts were nothing but a good bluff. It was a true demonstration of intellectual masturbation. The only economics was him being economical with the truth; the truth about Budget 2017.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Joseph Hamilton, punctuated his speech with "bad", bad this, bad that and so much bad. I say with the greatest of respect that, of all the speeches I have had the privilege of hearing from the Hon. Member that was a very bad speech. It was as if I was experiencing a rum shop gaff. Sir, like "Willy" I believe that you will do better in the future.

The Hon. Member Dr. Frank Anthony, in his presentation, indeed made a campaign speech. In that regard, I bid him good luck in his party's congress next week. This Hon. Member, in his VAT laden speech, was not very accurate. He had a VAT on the truth. It was a part of the PPP/C Administration, in 2000, that introduced VAT on condoms and on safe sex. It was the PPP/C Administration that placed VAT on family planning, with VAT on contraceptives and pregnancy test kits. It was the PPP/C that placed VAT on sanitary napkins and panty liners. This is how they treated our young women and mothers in this country. It was conscientious Government that reduced VAT on condoms and contraceptives. We believe in safe sex and family planning.

This is a responsible Government. It is this Government that has taken away VAT from sanitary napkins for our women in this country. This Member, who is the shadow Minister of Public Health, is certainly in the dark with what his VAT Government was doing for the people of Guyana. It was the PPP/C Administration that was the VAT Government with its *fat cat* ministers. It was the PPP/C's luxurious lifestyle that caused two communities to be named after vehicles that they drove in, Pradoville 1 and Pradoville 2.

Of all the bad spoken of Budget 2017 by the Members of the Opposition, I am reminded of our very own Guyanese parlance, *Story got two sides*. The beautiful thing about the truth is that, despite all efforts to cover it down, like dust, it will rise.

The kinks in the economy and the anomalies in the fiscal legislation, which we inherited, have to be realigned to allow the economy to be a true reflection of legal economic activity in this country. The country had heard the clamour in the Opposition about the Minister of Finance's policy choices. But, in every option, there are advantages and disadvantages and the Government's option, with regards to revenue, remains either by borrowing or taxation. The previous Government may have been lax on taxation, based on guarantees from a parallel economy. One only needs to look at the critics of the previous Administrations in relation to what the ABC countries stated.

Neither I nor this Administration is unmindful of the concerns arising for the proposed regime of policy measures in the 2017 Budget, but we need an Opposition that is coherent in its views. For example, the PPP stated that all public servants must be paid one month as a bonus, but the PPP/C only gave the military a bonus. The audacity of the PPP is amazing, they have the boldness to say that public servants must get more than 10%, but they never paid such a high percentage, while in Government from 2001 to 2014. They have no shame. The PPP also stated that the Government must follow the GuySuCo Commission of Inquiry (COI), but should not divest GuySuCo in three years, as recommended by the COI. This is a confuse Opposition. They cannot even take a position on what it is that they really want.

I, like most Guyanese, support the lower VAT and increased tax threshold, which complements the new minimum wage proposed in the 2017 Budget. While this is not the end of the

transformation needed for a good life, it is a continued movement in the right direction. This budget is one that is Indigenous to the needs of the country.

When it comes to the drivers of our various sectors, our public servants are valued and this Administration has demonstrated the greatest of respect and appreciation for our workers. In a mere 18 months, public servants have received a 36.4% total increase in their salaries. No category of worker in this country under the PPP/C, or should I say like my Hon. Minister of State, the PPP and the small 'c' have never given workers in the past that massive increase; not a single one had ever received a 10% increase in their salary. In 18 months of the Granger's Administration marvellous things are happening and we have given such an increase.

In addition to the substantial increase paid to public servants over the past 18 months, this Government has used other means to increase workers' disposable income, including raising the tax threshold by at least a minimum of 20%.

6.27 p.m.

In 2001, the minimum wage was \$20,045 and in 2014, it was \$42,703. It took the previous Administration 14 years for the public servants to get \$22,658 more in their pockets. This Government has raised the minimum wage from a paltry sum of \$42,703 to a reasonable sum of \$55,000 which has allowed workers, in less than 18 months, to have \$12,297 more in their pockets, more than half of the 14 years it took the PPP/C Administration. Additionally, removing the income tax on the workers' contribution to the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) and paying a one-off bonus, have made life much better for our workers.

Anytime the PPP wants to comment on wages and salaries for workers, they first have to say why they did not honour the 1999 Armstrong Wages Agreement in full. They seem to want to fool the Guyanese people. The PPP's attitudinal metamorphosis is indeed astonishing. If I was a foreigner to this country, visiting this Parliament, listening and looking at the theatrical performance of the Members on the Opposition benches, I would have become a victim to the spell of care and concern, which they try to put over to the Guyanese people.

This Government will continue to engage the unions in negotiations to find common grounds on issues pertaining to wage and salary adjustments, de-bunching and allowances, taking into

consideration the state of the economy and our desire to maintain macroeconomic stability. The previous Administration had no respect for unions in this country. They were systemically becoming toothless, but it is under this Administration they are now growing teeth and are regaining their voices. We are happy for them. We need unions, and, more importantly, we, this coalition Government, respect the Constitution.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 15 minutes.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you Sir. It would be remiss of me if I fail to acknowledge Government's genuine commitment to the nation's most valuable asset, our young people. Reflecting on the words of the Hon. Ms. Africo Selman, in the *Kaieteur News* newspaper, February, 2011, it stated:

“The implementation of a National Youth Policy would represent Government's genuine commitment to implementing programmes that are critical to youth development and empowerment.”

It was this Government, the Granger Administration that has answered the call made five years ago by the Hon. Member. No one will disagree that this is undoubtedly a giant step in favour of our nation's youth. The herculean task to arrest the mask unemployment inherited by this Administration, is being tackled in several regards. The Youth Entrepreneur Skills Training Programme to Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) initiative has been allocated \$100 million in the 2017 Budget.

With regards to the Government's promise to bridge the opportunities of the coastland with the hinterland, a plan of action was designed to engage our youth population with skills training, which were alien to them, particularly, our youths in the hinterland, such as masonry, auto mechanic, electrical engineering, and information technology, to name a few.

The Youth Innovation Fund of \$50 million provides a financial platform to harness the innovative and creative abilities, vision and energies of our nation's youth. The youth of this nation is buying in to the philosophy of the Ministry of Social Cohesion in bridging the divide of this country that is being encouraged by political figures who want to remain relevant and gain political power.

I believe I am doing a duty of service to the people of Region 10 by supporting Budget 2017. The people of Region 10 welcome the number of roads that are expected to be put in places where roads were never envisaged under the previous Administration. I would like to commend the Hon. Minister of Public Infrastructure, Mr. David Patterson, who has been doing a remarkable job to this nation's road network. It is amazing, when one traverse the roadways, especially, in areas where roads were literally invisible. Roads are now visible. The community of Sophia applauds Mr. Patterson, every time they walk and drive on those roads. This Government is transforming the infrastructure of Guyana's road network and we are proud and will continue the developmental drive in 2017, under Budget 2017.

I am very thankful for the opportunity to be a part of this Administration, an Administration that is doing visionary work that the previous Administration had failed to do. Region 10 will continue to benefit, in 2017, from improvement of the Upper Demerara Regional Hospital, with the acquisition of a motor cycle and ambulance; the completion of the Wiruni Health Centre; and the construction of a reservoir at the Upper Demerara Regional Hospital. These benefits will improve health delivery in my constituency.

In like fashion, the rehabilitation of the most popular school in Region 10, the Christianburg Wismar Secondary School, is most welcomed as the Government remains true to form in ensuring that the health and wealth of the nation is in good stead.

I would also like to commend the work the Hon. Minister of Social Cohesion is doing, which is bridging the gap in all aspects, to forge national unity in this country. Her continued efforts to collaborate with the Ministry of Education cannot be unnoticed. As a result of her intervention, thousands of our Guyanese youths are benefiting from bicycles and comfortable seats on those buses and boats that traverse our network, to provide our nation's children with the best of what education can offer them. I applaud her efforts.

The allocation to the Linden Enterprise Network (LEN) will aid this institution in promoting more small businesses and business start-ups for the people of Region 10.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you will have to wrap up now.

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Speaker, like all other budget agencies, Region 10 may not have gotten all of what it wanted in the 2017 Budget, but the records will show that the region has benefited more under Minister Jordan and this Government in 18 months, than it did in 23 years. Therefore, without any reservation, I support and recommend Budget 2017 for passage in this House. *Forward ever backward never! [Applause]*

Mr. Damon: Mr. Speaker, I stand here in this honourable House to pronounce on this Budget. Before I do, let the Hon. Member, who spoke before me, know that the Hon. Mr. Irfaan Ali, whom he called a bluff, let it be known that the Hon. Mr. Irfaan Ali is a man who does not bluff. He has a vision for Guyana and its people. The Hon. Mr. Hamilton, whom he referred to also, was at his best, but Mr. Jermaine Figueira was at his worse in this debate. The Hon. Dr. Anthony, a man whose shoe Mr. Figueira would hope to wear in his lifetime, stands dignified and produces a prodigy in learning, whose chair the Hon. Mr. Figueira cannot repose on in his lifetime. Let it be known that the PPP/C never promised anyone 20%, Mr. Figueira. You spoke plenty garbage. I understand...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member.

Mr. Damon: Alright, I withdraw Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you spoilt it twice, with Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira and then with the other word you used, which you have withdrawn already.

Mr. Damon: Okay, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, it is not okay.

Mr. Damon: I do withdraw.

Mr. Speaker: Then you will proceed.

Mr. Damon: And I apologise. I will proceed now. You spoke plenty. I understand you being so loquacious towards my Colleagues. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit gavel]

Mr. Damon: I had missed the Hon. Minister of Finance, but I feel happy he is back. This is because I just saw on *Inews* that someone got shot in the Ministry of Finance's compound. *Building a Diversified Green Economy...* through the overtaxing of Guyanese people. All MPs sitting in this honourable House, may I also acknowledge the press and other persons present in this hollow Chamber of this Parliament, as I stand here, today, to debate this Budget, presented in this House by the Hon. Minister of Finance... [*Interruption*]

[Mr. Speaker hit gavel]

I am shocked to know how much is stated in this budget. How could the Hon. Minister of Finance, and his budget team craft a budget with a world of taxes in a Third World and underdeveloped country like Guyana. Something is definitely wrong. Guyana is infested with poor people everywhere. Some can barely earn a living in this land of their birth, while others go hungry.

This budget lacks the consultation of Guyanese at home and abroad. A death sentence handed down to Guyanese at home. I call on Guyanese from every walk of life to reject this Budget because it is a fraud. I now call on all public servants, private sector businesses and employees, all the military and paramilitary services, the sugar workers in Guyana, all the miners, all the housewives, all the rice farmers and all Guyanese. Be brave and reject this death sentence on all of you.

We are a free people and we fought and won our independence and this 'I do not care' APNU/AFC Government wants to turn back the hands of time. Guyanese are not going back. We will not be moved.

6.42 p.m.

We will stand steadfast and as true Guyanese. Let this APNU/AFC Government understand that the masses are the Government and not a chosen few. We must have budget consultation throughout the ten regions of Guyana at all times. The masses of Guyana are the bedrock and the foundation of our Cooperative Republic as they are compelled and bound to have a say in the compilation of this budget. I wonder, were there any consultations? No. In the crafting of the

country's budget the people comes first, not a chosen few, as many African countries, they just cater for a chosen few.

How can a Government authorise its agents to deduct taxes from someone's bank account? Through our Constitution we have standard operating procedures which are guided and pronounced by the law, by our Constitution. I stand guided if changes of such magnitude are to be made for our Government agencies to be given the power to deduct taxes from one's bank account. We must hold a referendum and at least two-third of Guyana must agree or disagree before it becomes the law. Where is this country going? It is allowing Government agents to withdraw taxes from one's bank account. It is act of deliberateness and an act of deliberate intrepidity on the part of this APNU/AFC Government – 'I do not care Government.'

The Hon. Minister of Finance boasted about presenting three budgets in 18 months. No wonder Guyana has become the poorest country in the western hemisphere, behind Haiti. Hon. Minister of Finance, Haiti had one earthquake and a loss of almost 200,000 people and also had maximum destruction and loss thousands. This APNU/AFC Government has took Guyana where the Hon. Mr. Greenidge once took Guyana, the second to last poorest country in all of the western hemisphere, and beyond.

The sugar industry must be here to stay. If we sell our sugar lands and factory, it will affect more than 200,000 workers and families directly and indirectly. It is always better to have an abundance of sugar than not to have any. We need to have sugar process into more refined commodities that can be exported overseas in large quantities where the demands are. We must never let go of sugar out of our hands or we would regret such decisions for generation. Long-lived sugar! For those in this honourable House who want to have a 24-gun salute for the death of sugar, I warn you, sugar must be here to stay.

Our miners in the interior experience all kinds of challenges, especially our small miners. Our small miners need lands to work on. We must be aware that when our small miner's prospect and find work, grounds on which other miners claim, most of the time they are asked to be removed. It is hard to take. We must give our small miners their own lands and we must remember they were part of the gold production record in 2016. I continue to voice my disapproval about the Hon. Member Ms. Charles-Broomes being a Minister within the Ministry of Natural Resources.

You cannot have a vested interest in the mining industry and be a Minister. It is a conflict of interest and Hon. Member Ms. Charles-Broomes must be removed from that Ministry before it is too late.

I remember as if it was yesterday, Members on the Government side of this House, especially when there was a heated debate, raised open hands and speculated how clean those hands were. I wonder if anyone of the Government Member of Parliament could do that demonstration anymore. I doubt it. All of the clean hands have become troubled hands. Those hands are like bridges over troubled waters.

I remember the Hon. Member Dr. Norton who lied to this National Assembly about a drugs bond, so perfect...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, that word is not permitted here.

Mr. Damon: ... misled about a drug bond...

Mr. Speaker: Then, first, you will withdraw the word that you have used, and then proceed.

Mr. Damon: I withdraw the word, Mr. Speaker and I substitute it with the word "misled".

...and all facilities are intact, only to bow his head in disbelief and apologised to this honourable House. Yes, I felt the impact. The clean hands are gone - no more clean hands.

I remember the Hon. Member Bishop Edghill brought a motion to this House enquiring how much moneys were spent on the jubilee stadium. After portraying how plausible and eloquent a Bishop can be when asking questions which answers were needed for, the Hon. Mr. Patterson tossed the messy end of the stadium to Hon. Dr. Roopnarine. Several hundreds of millions were spent on the jubilee stadium and not one cent came to the National Assembly to seek approval - no more clean hands, plenty sticky hands.

There is a lot of talk about oil in the budget and to date I have not heard a single thing about an oil refinery. This means that all the crude will leave the shores of Guyana to another country. What sense does this make? We need fertilisers; we need paints; we need tarpaulin; we need tarums, and many refined products from the crude when abstracted. Come on APNU/AFC Government. Let us build the oil refinery at home that can refine about 20% of our crude of oil.

I heard about the Hon. Minister of Finance spoke about *one one dutty build dam*. Long gone are those days when *one one dutty build dam*. This is the era of science and technology. Stop bringing a snail talk to this National Assembly. Many thousands are jobless, and so many thousands are facing hunger. You must get out there and find out what is happening, this 'I do not care' APNU/AFC Government.'

Our crime rates are on the increase and the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan has no answer. Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan had 18 months to eradicate crime but he failed badly. What happened to the horses and the dogs the Hon. Minister promised in this crime fighting unit? Everyday this crime situation is getting from bad to worst. How can you pay cheap for our police to risk their life confronting sophisticated criminals with better guns than the police? I call on this 'I do not care Government' to create new crime fighting ideas to fight this upsurge of crime in the land of our birth.

The pittance the police and crime fighting unit receive is too small to risk their life to protect our people. This budget is a killer budget. I appeal to the Hon. Minister to stop at Princes Street and discard of this budget into the incinerator. That is the place for this budget because it is a killer budget. It must be dumped and burned. I said it before, when the Budget 2016 was read, that the Hon. Minister of Finance does not have an iota of an idea and the expertise in crafting a budget. There are taxes and more taxes for Guyanese. Even the great Donald Trump, who is a billionaire in America, does not pay taxes.

My fellow Guyanese, of all walks of life, we must come together to stop this killer budget. It is a budget that was done without any consultation; a budget that was designed to make every Guyanese poor, behind Haiti.

In Region 2 we need answers from this APNU/AFC Government, 'I do not care Government.' Unemployment remains the chronic by this Government. The wheel of growth in Region 2 is taking a licking. The rice industry, rice farmers and millers are wondering what next. The lending institutions, they owed billions. It is not that farmers do not want to pay. After the PetroCaribe Agreement was exhausted, the rice farmers are penniless. Our rice farmers need help in the form of fertilisers, subsidies and interest write-offs. Without rice, Region 2 is doomed. Every sector in Region 2 depends on rice.

The unemployment situation has got worst. Thousands of young people are out of a job after leaving school. Where are the jobs this 'I do not care Government' promises? We have several educational institutions in Region 2 graduating more than 1,000 children every year but there are no jobs and many times the investment becomes useless. Our young people are the future of Guyana, but without jobs there will be no future.

I call on the Hon. Minister of Agriculture to open the Rice Crip factory at Anna Regina which can create jobs for 200 persons. Stop turning a blind eye on progress in Region 2. This budget speaks very little of Region 2. As I stand here, 32 trenches are silted up. Hon. Member Mr. Rajkumar, you are aware of that. The Regional Executive Officer (REO) continues to be a misfit in Region 2. He is an expert in planting palm trees, flower plants and creating play parks. Flower plants and palm trees are everywhere. I do not know what fruits they will bring forth for Region 2. This REO and this APNU/AFC Government created eight employments last year and all of the eight are above 65 years. Some retired years ago and they are back, against the will and need of our young people.

6.57 p.m.

Our main health institutions, the Suddie and Charity Hospitals are in a mess. Can you imagine that at the Suddie Hospital the main theatre is out of order? The theatre in the diagnostic centre is risky; it is deplorable and needs urgent renovation. Hon. Minister of Health, are you human? Travel to Region 2 and experience first-hand what is down there in Suddie and Charity Hospitals. Bat droppings are everywhere. In some part of the hospital the generator sometimes is out of order.

On Friday last, the Guyana Power and Light Inc.(GPL) was down and at the same time the standby was broken down. It was confusion and chaos at the hospital. The hospital was out of electricity for four hours and patients had to be sent home because it was darkness everywhere. Hon. Minister, the Suddie Hospital needs a new standby generator. The one there has outlived its usefulness.

Marginalisation continues in this land of my birth at an alarming rate, especially to our indo-Guyanese. I now ask the Hon. Prime Minister, do you now chair the Cabinet as slated in the

Cummingsburg Agreement between the APNU and AFC? Do not answer Hon. Prime Minister. You do not.

Pressure, Almighty God, please hear our plea. Remove this killer budget or many Guyanese would die. [Applause]

Minister within the Ministry of Communities [Ms. Hasting-Williams]: Mr. Speaker, *Tengē tā pai eaik Tenamasén Winston Jordan pék. Me le tupui, takelé tetelasemasān Samanpé, wakepé te sén Budget 2017 kapé pék.*

Before I begin my presentation, I would first like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance and his hard-working team for presenting yet another astute and insightful budget, one that speaks to the delivery of the good life to all Guyanese in a diversified green economy.

We are at a critical juncture in our tenure. We are at a point where we have to take a step to wean our people off the current extractive economic model that is leading this nation downhill. The sod would be turned in 2017, towards the formation of a new economic paradigm, one that espouses economic inclusiveness, resilience and pro-growth. It is a model that will take us one step closer to the “good life” in a “diversified green economy”. Similar to any life-changing decision, whether for the best, changes always bring some level of discomfort. As the Hon. Minister rightfully pointed out in his budget speech, “it would take more than just traditional policies and approaches to turn around the downturns of the major sectors in our economy”.

The stance of the recalcitrant Opposition, with respect to Budget 2017, is not surprising. The reservation to sullen hostility and expression of pseudo logical reasons to the measures and policies outlined in the budget speech is nothing far from the fact that they are criticising for the sake of criticising. “Starving dinosaur budget”, yes, we inherited a malnourished economy in this country that was starved for 23 years. All kinds of things were said about the Budget 2017 - “I do not care budget”, “careless budget,” “bad budget.” I know there is a slang. Even though it says *it bad fa days*, it really means it is really good - a very good budget.

The wildcat reaction that the Opposition has started to go media frenzy is a cheap strategy on its part to gain publicity. What the population is not cognisant of is the fact that all of these

measures were first introduced by the previous administration, for example, VAT. VAT along with an excise tax on motor vehicle, petroleum, tobacco products and alcohol were first introduced by the PPP/C Government in 2007, after much setback and controversy, with the sole objective to broaden the tax base. The other objective that was flaunted, which speaks to the establishment of a fair tax system, was a decorative accoutrements and misleading statement to make VAT more appealing.

According to an article published by Ram & McRae on 21st November, 2010, entitled, “VAT no Burden, a different perspective”, two women’s interests organisation argued that VAT for many women is a burden, and it was beyond bearing. The Government along with its economist, in a swift and dogmatic defence, quickly stated that the women missed the bigger picture of the macroeconomic fundamentals and that they ignored the benefits of taxation to the country, as a whole, such as the availability of accessible and free education, health care, better roads and other infrastructure.

To close the debate, the then Hon. President made the bold and the insidious statement that VAT is neutral and there is no additional burden attached. Yet, at the end of 2007 VAT by itself had exceeded the taxes it was supposed to replace by a staggering 76% of which the total revenue collect for that period with respect to the previous year, increased by \$12.6 billion or 49%.

My question, is if the Government was so erroneous in their forecast of the true implication of VAT, why the people should believe them now on their grossly inflated and out of proportion claims of our proposed measures in Budget 2017? If they were indeed aware of the detrimental outcomes that would have followed, why did they choose to remain silent? Is it because they were peddling a deceitful campaign to lure the people into believing that VAT would have zero burden? If that was the case, why should the people now have to listen to their abstractive and unsubstantiated claims on the possible implication of our measures, specifically with respect to the reduction of VAT? Since we are serving the interest of the people, they should be aware of the true implication and impacts the proposed adjustment on VAT will have on their well-being.

First, let us start with VAT on water. According to data provided by the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI), the total amount of metered customer’s stands at 163,359 of which 155,011 or 94.5% currently pay \$1,500 and below. The remaining 8,348 or 5.5% pay \$1,500 and more.

After conducting the analysis, it was found that the 14% VAT would cost the 8,324 consumers, who are currently paying \$1,500, \$1,044 monthly. Not to mention that these 8,324 customers are hotels, restaurants, Ministries, malls, and others. There is no way that the 14% VAT on water charges would distort the consumption pattern with a mere additional charge of \$1,044.

In other words, this measure would achieve exactly what it sets out to accomplish, and what is that? It is to reduce inequality and better positioned GWI to finally achieve a financial break-even. This would mean that subventions currently paid to the water company would then be used to finance other social projects that would benefit the poor. Water is life, save it. I repeat it - water is life, save it. Every drop counts, we need to use it wisely. We celebrate Water Day this year with the theme “Better Water, Better Job.” The quantity and quality of water has a direct impact on workers life and health. Again, I repeat, water is life, every drop counts.

Another area, which I would like to bring to the attention of this House, is the deliberate misinterpretation of facts presented in Budget 2017. In order for us to have the “good life” - nothing good comes easy, and we all know that - as I pointed out earlier, economic and social development must take place. However, when the other side of the House would start to misconstrued our measures to suit its own devious political agenda, which is to induce fear in the minds of our people, I think it is our job as representatives of the people to clear the air.

Let us start at wages and salary. The Hon. Member in his budget speech did not spell out, he did not say “increase in salary”, instead he proposed an adjustment to the current income tax system. If one is to look at the benefits of this measure, one would see that public servant would receive an increase in salary for 2017. Persons earning a gross salary of \$180,000 monthly less would take at least \$9,000 more money in their pockets. What this tells us is that, on average, public servants would receive an increase in salary of approximately 4% for the year 2017.

7.12 p.m.

In 2017, as a result of the economic stimulus, trade will flourish, jobs will be created. I wish to commend the Ministers of Public Infrastructure, my colleagues Ms. Annette Ferguson and Mr. David Patterson for the very good works that they have done in public infrastructure. Jobs have been created; disposable income will increase; and private consumption will surge. The “good life” in a “green economy” will gather steam in 2017. Let me come to the key achievements.

Water Sector: In 2016 the “good life” did beckon and thousands of Guyanese, for the first time, received potable water. I will keep singing it, “for the first time”, all the time, because they are so many. At the end of December 2016, the Guyana Water Inc. is projected to expend approximately \$2 billion. Let alone, in providing the latest estimates, we were looking at the glass as “half empty”. However, given the fact that programmes under Budget 2016 are currently in progress, the magnitude of the impact is yet to be assessed. Nonetheless, commendable outputs were achieved. Residents in over 43 communities received water for the first time, benefiting over 43,500 persons directly. These individuals, not only benefited from potable water, but as a result of the intervention, the risk to waterborne diseases reduced significantly. Moreover, beneficiaries saved considerable amount of time and money spent on buying and transporting water for daily use.

Under the Coastal Water Programme, it is anticipated that by the end of 2016, one hundred per cent of the budgeted amount of \$585 million will be expended. A few of the many outputs that have been achieved include:

- Installation of transmission mains and expansion of distribution network at Kuru Kururu: Prior to this intervention, residents in the project area had no access to potable water. On a daily basis they were saddled with high costs to procure and transport water for their daily use. Approximately, 500 persons benefited from the improved level of service.
- There was installation of a water supply system at Waiakabra, Soesdyke: Prior to this intervention, residents were using water from the nearby creek. Residents are now benefiting from newly installed pipes and a new well. The project is benefiting at least 1000 persons.
- The completion and distribution network in Friendship squatting area was completed: Prior to this intervention, the residents only source of water was rainwater. Not to mention during the dry season, these residents sought alternative sources which exposed them to waterborne diseases. Residents can now receive potable water for the first time at a level of service of four meters. The overall beneficiaries stand at 1,250.

We must take note of the residents of ‘D’ and ‘E’ Fields Sophia, 3,000 residents are now benefiting from the project of potable water for the first time in eight years.

- The drilling of new wells and installation of transmission and distribution lines at Lima Sands Housing Scheme in Region 2. This project will benefit approximately 1,000 persons. Prior to Government intervention, residents were using water from the nearby creek.

It is very interesting to note that even though these villages are all easily accessible, one cannot comprehend why they were all ostracised in the past years. Under the Urban Water Programme, it is envisioned that one hundred per cent of the Budget 2016, which amounts to \$226.1 million, will be expended by the end of December.

To date, the following service water outputs were achieved:

- Distribution mains were supplied and installed and service connections were upgraded in Lamaha Park, along Duncan Street, Campbell Avenue and Durey Lane, which benefited over 8,000 residents. Residents from these areas can now access a high level of water service for the first time in ten years.
- Replaced distribution mains at Meadow Bank: Approximately 350 households including young children benefited from this project by way of receiving an improved quality and level of water. Prior to this intervention, these residents access water from porous distribution mains which were submerged in the surface drains. This insanitary situation was exposing the community to waterborne diseases.

Under the Hinterland Water Programme of the \$195.4 billion, it is anticipated that \$178.4 million will be expended by the end of December. To date, I am enthused to report on the following key achievements under the hinterland water sector:

- Residents from Monkey Mountain, Region 8 can now access potable water supply for the first time. The long arduous walking distance to access potable water is over. Overall this project benefited over 750 persons.
- Improved access to potable water in Campbelltown, that is another Region 8 area. Mahdia can now access potable water, even if there is a drought. Not to mention, the hospital in Mahdia is now receiving safe water in more than five years. This project will benefit more than 600 persons.

- Improved access to potable water in Princeville, Region 8. Prior the intervention by this Government, residents used to walk long distances to access potable water or rely on rainwater harvesting. The nightmare is over. Over 2,000 persons from this community can now access potable water for the first time, an initiative that will bring them one step closer to a “good life.”
- Another plausible output that will be realised shortly is the installation of mains and reconfiguration of the system at Paramakatoi. Not only will this project bring relief to the poor, but will add to the village economy since the laying of pipes will be done by residents of Paramakatoi. The residents of Mahdia, Port Kaituma, Kato, Moruka, Mabaruma, Tassarene and Karau, among others, many others, will benefit from improved water supply by the end of December 2016.

Under the Linden Water Programme, a hundred per cent of the initial budget, an amount of \$150.2 million, will be expended by the end of December. Residents within the mining town can expect improved access to potable water by way of decommissioning of old mains, construction of bypass mains, rehabilitation of overhead tanks and upgrade to transmission and distribution mains.

Under the Linden Water Supply Rehabilitation Project, \$99.4 million was expended of the initial allocated amount of \$79 million. The increase in expenditure over the budget amount was to supplement final payments under the programme. It is imperative to point out, on the ground of accountability and value for money, that the two water treatment plants constructed in 2015, that is before we took over, under this project, costing the nation a whopping \$1.8 billion, had to undergo substantial remedial work in 2016 to a tune of \$54 million.

It was noted that the newly constructed treatment plants were experiencing operational challenges. To rectify the flaws, GWI had to install additional filter nozzles, air scour systems, protective covering for chemical pumps among others. One would assume that, given the cost of the project, a price that taxpayers will now have to incur, such deficiencies should not have been resented, yet alone within a short period of time. To not impede the continuous flow of potable water to residents, rehabilitation of the Mackenzie and West Watooka treatment plants at a combined cost of \$49 million were conducted.

With respect to region development - you have heard it from the speaker before me - Mr. Figueira, what is happening in Region 10, in terms of health and education, I am enthused to report that living quarters for medical persons at Port Kaituma, Kato and Imbaimadai have all been completed and are waiting to be furnished with the Budget 2017.

For the year 2017, Government had allocated \$2.8 billion water in keeping with the 2030 agenda for sustainable development towards achieving universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water.

I am pleased to inform this House that, come 2017, Guyana will be hosting the Caribbean Water and Wastewater Association Conference where we will be deliberating on the opportunities and challenges of water in the Caribbean.

It is also envisioned that new wells will be constructed at the section 'B' Field Sophia, Vergenoegen, Pouderoyen, Westminster, New Amsterdam, just to name a few. In addition water supply systems will be installed at Hinterland locations, including Chenapau, Matthew's Ridge, Yarikita, just to name a few.

7.27 p.m.

Solar photovoltaic systems will be installed in schools, health facilities and Government buildings in Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9 and will be benefitting over 2,500 residents. The Regional Health Programme, in 2017, will be focussing on equipping and upgrading district hospitals to deliver the full suite of mandated services which would lead to greater equity between hinterland and the coastland. In addition, specialists in the fields of paediatrics, internal medicine, gynaecology, and dental and general surgery will be deployed into the Regions of 1, 7, 8 and 9.

Under the Regional Educational Programme, our emphasis will continue to focus on delivering improved educational services to the children of this nation.

In conclusion, the Government will be expending, on behalf of each child, approximately \$4,100 to improve their grades in Mathematics and English Language at both CSEC and National Grade Six Assessment examinations. Under this Programme, Mathematics specialists will be retrained and recruited. Schools administrators and teachers will be trained in content and methodology and parents' involvement strategy in every Region will be rolled out. Finally, the number of class

periods assigned to Mathematics at both primary and secondary levels will be beyond the existing meagre four periods; it will be expanding.

Given the meticulous and painstaking analysis in crafting a budget that speaks to the wellbeing of our people, 2017 will not mark the end of our economic problems but the beginning of the end as we welcome the good life in a diversified economy. I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this concludes our list of speakers for today. I thank you for your assistance and cooperation.

Hon. Prime Minister, we will receive the motion for the adjournment.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Nagamootoo: If it pleases Your Honour, I move that this House be adjourned to tomorrow, Wednesday, 7th December, 2016 at 10.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, 7th December, 2016 at 10.00 a.m. Thank you.

Adjourned accordingly at 7.31 p.m.