

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2015-2017) 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

64TH Sitting

Monday, 8TH May, 2017

The Assembly convened at 2.05 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Request for leave

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, leave has been granted to Ms. Africo Selman for today's sitting.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Report was laid:

Financing Agreement No. 2000001704 dated March 21, 2017 between the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and the International Fund for Agricultural Development for US\$7,960,000.00 for the purpose of financing the Hinterland Environmentally Sustainable Agricultural Development Project. *[Minister of Finance]*

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Written replies

PROCUREMENT OF DRUGS AND MEDICAL SUPPLIES FROM THE TEN (10) REGIONAL HEALTH BUDGETS

Bishop Edghill:

- (i) Could the Hon. Minister state what percentage of the total budgeted regional health allocations was expended on purchases of drugs and medical supplies for each of the ten (10) administrative regions (in disaggregated manner) between January 1, 2016 and February 28, 2017?
- (ii) Could the Hon. Minister state:
 - (a) The name of each supplier
 - (b) The value of each contract and date of award
 - (c) The name of the supplier/s which may have failed to deliver within the stipulated contractual period and by what amount
 - (d) The name of the supplier/s which may have delivered the inferior/substandard drugs and medical supplies
 - (e) The value of supplies delivered
 - (f) The value of sums outstanding
 - (g) The amount of monies, if any, which was unused and returned to the Consolidated Fund by December 31, 2016?
- (iii) Could the Hon. Minister state:
 - (a) Whether the tenders for the procurement of drugs and medical supplies were publicly advertised and, if so, when and where
 - (b) Whether these awardees were pre-qualified?
- (iv) In the case of each of the above, could the Hon. Minister state which entity was responsible for the evaluating and recommending of the awards of these contracts?
- (v) **Minister of Communities [Mr. Bulkan]:**
- (vi) (i)

Regions	Current Health Budget 2016	Exp. As at Dec. 2016	% Expended
Barima/Waini	\$ 80,877,000	\$ 76,256,978	94%
Pomeroon/Supenaam	\$176,099,000	\$141490,155	80%
Essequibo Islands! West Demerara	\$339,649,000	\$127,730,688	38%
Demerara/Mahaica	\$589,981,000	\$553,925,065	94%
Mahaica/Berbice	\$155,653,000	\$ 80,652,159	52%
East Berbice/Corentyne	\$394,525,000	\$394,518,623	100%
Cuyuni/Mazaruni	\$ 64,496,000	\$61,394,572	95%
Potaro/Siparuni	\$ 30,672,000	\$2,949,700	10%
Upper Takatu/Upper Essequibo	\$73,871,000	\$ 63,870,550	86%
Upper Demerara/Berbice	\$141,535,000	\$141,534,350	100%

(ii) a. The list of suppliers are attached for Barima/Waini to Upper Takatu/Upper Essequibo regions. (Except for Potaro/Siparuni which expended no funds from this line)

Names of suppliers for Upper Demerara/Berbice

Corporate Supplies

Regal Stationery & Computer Centre

Health International

LJ Shoppin Zone

Mayfil Greene Variety Store

International Pharmaceutical Agency

CMSD Enterprise

Rite Care Pharmacy

b. Please see the attached IFMAS report for Barima/Waini to Upper Takatu/Upper Essequibo regions. (Except for Potaro/Siparuni which expended no funds from this line)

Names of suppliers for Upper Demerara/Berbice

Corporate Supplies	-\$605,050
Regal Stationery & Computer Centre	-\$1,281,710
Health International	-\$840,625
LJ Shoppin Zone	-\$3,054,530
Mayfil Greene Variety Store	-\$707,360
International Pharmaceutical Agency	-\$1,360,825
CMSD Enterprise	-\$600,000
Rite Care Pharmacy	-\$3,084,250
	\$11,534,350

c. All regions reported that this was not applicable to them.

d. All regions reported that this was not applicable to them.

e. All regions indicated the drug equal to the sum expended was delivered.

f. All regions reported that this was not applicable to them.

g.

Regions	Allocation at 6221	Returned to CF by MoPH	Returned to CF by region
Barima/Waini	\$ 80,877,000	\$4,620,000	\$ 22
Pomeroon/Supenaam	\$ 176,099,000	\$ 34,908,845	\$ -
Essequibo Islands! West	\$ 339,649,000	\$ 211,918,312	\$ -
Demerara/Mahaica	\$ 589,981,000	\$ 36,003,297	\$ 52,638
Mahaica/Berbice	\$ 155,653,000	\$ 75,000,000	\$ 841
East Berbice/Corentyne	\$ 394,525,000	\$ -	\$6,377
Cuyuni/Mazaruni	\$64,496,000	\$3,104,260	168
Potaro/Siparuni	\$30,672,000	\$ 27,722,000	\$ 300
Upper Takatu/Upper	\$73,874,000	\$10,000,000	\$ 450
Upper Demerara/Berbice	\$ 144,535,000	\$ -	\$ 650

(iii) a. The Barima/Waini to Upper Takatu/Upper Essequibo regions indicated that drugs and medical supplies were not publicly advertised since they were purchased on an emergency basis or as needs arise

The Upper Demerara/Berbice region indicated that procurement for drug and medical supplies were publicly advertised in the month of February 2016 in the newspapers (Chronicle & Stabroek News).

b. All regions indicated that no pre-qualification was done.

(iv). All purchases that exceeded two hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000.00) were awarded by the Regional Procurement and Tender Board in accordance with the procurement process.

2. DELIVERY OF DRUGS AND MEDICAL SUPPLIES FOR THE PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM

Bishop Edghill: Would the Hon. Minister provide the following information to this National Assembly:-

- (i) The number and names of any contracted supplier/s which may have delivered drugs and medical supplies that were expired at the time of delivery, were close to expiry date, and/or, of an inferior quality, between January 1, 2016 and February 28, 2017?
- (ii) Could the Hon. Minister provide the specific drug, and, or medical supply, and the dollar value in each case which was procured and found to be expired, and or, of inferior quality?
- (iii) Could the Hon. Minister state if she has information that any employee/s of the Ministry of Public Health, and, in particular the Materials Management Unit, and/or the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, has/have been complicit with contractors/suppliers of pharmaceutical and medical supplies in defrauding the state?
 - (a) If so, state what actions have been taken to investigate these allegations.

- (b) State whether the Office of the Auditor General and/or the Guyana Police Force has been called in to investigate these allegations.
- (iv) Could the Hon. Minister state whether her decision to relocate her ministerial office to the Diamond Drug Bond, East Bank Demerara, as publicly announced in January, 2017, has provided the opportunity for the Minister to take a more hands on approach to the procurement of drugs and medical supplies for the public health system?

Minister of Public Health [Ms. Lawrence]:

(i) The following companies attempted to supply drugs which were close to expiry date, and these were refused by MMU - (see attachment AA)

1. New GPC
2. Western Scientific
3. Caribbean Medical
4. Global Health Care

(ii) See attachment (AA)

(iii) **Materials Management Unit - Pilfer of Drugs**

Employee found with vials of insulin in his possession, the police was called in. He was subsequently arrested and placed on bail. He never reported for duty thereafter. This matter is still engaging the attention of the police. The Ministry of Public Health has since put measures in place to stop pilfering,

West Demerara Regional Hospital

The Pharmacist and his wife were working in the main drug bond.

A visit to the bond by the ministerial task force found some discrepancies in the manner in which the dangerous drugs were being stored and accounted for. The task force returned to the West Demerara Regional Hospital on 24th February, 2017 and found that the drugs ledger had been tampered with, figures were retraced, numbers were changed. The Pharmacist could not give

account for several ampoules of Pethidine, Codeine and Morphine in his possession. The police were subsequently called in and both the Pharmacist and his wife were arrested and the matter is still engaging the attention of the police.

Suddie Hospital

Drugs sent to the Suddie Hospital never arrived.

The ministerial task force visited and found that some of the drugs never arrived at the hospital. The Pharmacist, Pharmacy Assistant and the Driver of the ambulance were arrested. This Pharmacist could not give account for several dangerous drugs and has not been making any entries in his dangerous drugs ledger since 2015. This matter is still engaging the attention of the police

New Amsterdam

The Regional Pharmacist attached to the New Amsterdam Hospital was charged and placed on one hundred (G\$100,000) bail and was never interdicted from duty. This staff member has now been sent on leave to allow for an investigation to take place.

The commission of inquiry report has listed names of employees from the Ministry of Public Health, Procurement Department, who have been complicit with Contractors.

(iv) The Minister is not aware of such a decision.

Attachment AA

RECEIPTS FROM NEW GPC INC FROM 1ST JANUARY - 31ST DECEMBER 2016

GDATE	PRODCODE	PRODUCT	PK	QTY	EXP.DAT	GRN#	PORDNO
29/01/16	DIG000189	DIGOXIN ELIXIR ORAL SOLUTION	1	3	21/07/16	2423	MMU 11-2015 P4
16/06/16	R1FA00475	RIFAMPICIN 150MG + ISONIAZID 75MG	1000	100	31/01/17	2553	MMU-19-2016 P2
16/06/16	ETHI0007	ETHIONAMIDE 250MG	10	9	31/05/17	2553	MMU-19-2016 P2
16/06/16	LEV000330	LEVOFLOXACIN	100	5	31/10/16	2553	MMU-19-2016 P2
16/06/16	PYRA00463	PYRAZINAMIDE: TAB	100	1160	31/10/16	2553	MMU-19-2016 P2

16/06/16	RIFA0003	RIFAMPICIN150MG:INH75MG:PZA400MG:ET	672	141	31/10/16	2553	MMU-19-2016 P2
12/07/2016	NEOM00376	NEOMYCIN 0.5% +BACITRACIN	1	1440	31/01/17	2590	MMU-04-2016-P2
14/07/16	RANI001	RANITIDINE TAB	100	1	31/01/17	2594	MMU-04-2016-P2
14/07/16	DOXY00120	DOXYCYCLINE:TABL	1000	35	31/03/17	2594	MM U-04-2016-P2
14/07/16	KET000319	KETOCONAZOLE	100	64	31/05/17	2594	MMU-04-2016-P2
14/07/16	LOPE0001	LOPERAMIDE HYDROCHLORIDE	100	120	31/05/17	2594	MMU-04-2016-P2
28/07/16	NEOM00376	NEOMYCIN 0.5% -i- BACITRACIN	1	1440	31/05/17	2618	MMU-04-2016-P2
28/07/16	DOXY00120	DOXYCYCLINE:TABL	1000	25	30/03/17	2619	MMU-04-2016-P2
28/07/16	RAN1001	RANITIDINE TAB	100	89	30/06/17	2620	MMU-04-2016-P2
22/09/16	VACT0007	BD VACUTAINER	100	5	31/07/17	2729	CDC-04-
14/10/16	AMOX00034	AMOXICILLIN 125MG/5ML 100ML	1	500	31/08/17	2795	MMU-14-2016 P2
14/10/16	AMOX00034	AMOXICILLIN 125MG/5ML 100ML	1	21700	31/08/17	2798	MMU-01-2016 P4
17/10/16	FERR0003	FERROUS SULPHATE 200MG AND FOLIC	1000	10	30/06/17	2801	MMU-14-2016 P2
17/10/16	LOPE0001	LOPERAMIDE HYDROCHLORIDE	100	30	31/05/17	2801	MMU-14-2016 P2
17/10/16	FERR00240	FERROUS	1000	30	31/07/17	2801	MMU-14-2016 P2
17/10/16	LID00001	LIDOCAINE HCL AND EPINEPHRINE 2%	50	112	30/06/17	2802	MMU-01-2016 P4
17/10/16	HAL000280	HALOPERIDOL(11):5 MG/ML,1MLINJECTIO	1	500	31/05/17	2802	MMU-01-2016 P4
17/10/16	MEBE00340	MEBENDAZOLE:TAB LET:1000:500MG	1000	27	31/05/18	2802	MMU-01-2016 P4
18/10/16	PROM00446	PROMETHAZINE 5MG/5ML,100MLELIXI	1	252	31/05/17777	2803	MMU-01-2016 P4
24/10/16	BLAD00086	BLADE FOR SURGICAL KNIVES SIZE 26	100	40	30/06/17	2817	MMU-01-2016 P4
24/10/16	BLAD00078	BLADE FOR SURGICAL KNIFES SIZE 11	100	60	30/09/17	2817	MMU-01-2016 P4
24/10/16	BLAD00079	BLADE FOR SURGICAL KNIFES SIZE 12	100	30	30/09/17	2817	MMU-01-2016 P4

24/10/16	BLAD00087	BLADE FOR SURGICAL KNIFE SIZE 14	100	18	30/09/1 7	2817	MMU-01-2016 P4
24/10/16	BLAD00090	BLADE FOR SURGICAL KNIVES SIZE 18	100	80	30/09/1 7	2817	MMU-01-2016 P4
31/10/16	BUTY00097	HYOSCINE BUTYLBROMIDE	200	25	30/04/1 7	2834	MMU-14-2016 P2
03/11/2016	GLUC0013	ONE TOUCH ULTRA CONTROL SOLUTION	1	105	30/04/1 7	2852	
07/11/2016	BENZ0074	BENZOIC ACID + SALICYLIC ACID 6% +	1	4	30/09/1 7	2864	MMU-01-2016 P4
16/11/16	DIME00192	DIMENHYDRINATE 250MG/5MLS	1	1000	30/09/1 7	2899	MMU-14-2016 P2
08/12/2016	GLUC00274	ON-CALL PLUS GLUCOMETER STRIPS	50	50	30/11/1 7	2931	MMU-44-2016 P2

**RECEIPTS FROM CARIBBEAN MEDICAL SUPPLIES INC FROM 1ST JANUARY -
31ST DECEMBER 2016**

GDATE	PRODCODE	PRODUCT	PK SIZE	QTY	EXP.DATE	GRN#	PORDNO
05/01/20	UNI-0001	UNI-GOLD HIV TEST	20	35	20/07/16	2395	MMU 12-2015 P2
05/01/20 16	DETE0005	DETERMINE KIT- DETERMINE,BUFFER,	100	40	27/07/16	2395	MMU 12-2015 P2
11/01/20 16	ACT20003	ACT 2 DIFF DILUENT 15L	1	9	01/07/2016	2408	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
11/01/20 16	ACT20004	ACT 2 DIFF RINSE SHUTDOWN DILUENT 500ML	1	3	05/09/2016	2408	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
11/01/20	ACT50007	ACT 5 DIFF	1	12	05/02/2016	2409	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
11/01/20	ACT50006	ACT 5 DIFF	1	12	05/03/2016	2409	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
11/01/20	ACT20001	ACT 2 DIFF	1	5	11/04/2016	2409	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
11/01/20	ACT20002	ACT 2 DIFF	1	5	30/01/16	2409	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
11/01/20	HBA1C001	HBA1C REAGENT	1	25	30/06/16	2409	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
11/01/20	CONT0037	HBA1C CONTROL	1	25	31/05/16	2409	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)

21/01/16	DETE0005	DETERMINE KIT- DETERMINE,BUFFER,	100	300	08/06/2016	2421	MMU 12-2015 P2
21/01/16	UNI-0001	UNI-GOLD HIV TEST	20	35	28/11/16	2421	MMU 12-2015 P2
26/01/16	CHIK0002	CHIKUNGUNYA IGM	96	20	31/12/20	2422	MMU 10-2015 P2(B)
01/02/20	ACT50003	ACT 5 DIFF WBC	1	110	03/11/2016	2428	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
01/02/20	ACT50004	ACT 5 DIFF FIX 1L	1	120	04/08/2016	2428	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
01/02/20	ACT50008	ACT 5 DIFF.HGB	1	60	17/11/16	2428	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
01/02/20	ACT50001	ACT 5 DIFF RINSE 1L	1	66	21/09/16	2428	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
01/02/20	ACT50005	ACT 5 DIFF DILUENT	1	12	24/09/16	2428	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
01/02/20	ACT20004	ACT 2 DIFF RINSE	1	6	28/11/16	2428	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
01/02/20	OIL0001	IMMERSION OIL	1	70	31/12/20	2429	MMU 18-2015 P2
01/02/20	INK0002	INDIA INK DROPPER	1	18	29/08/16	2430	MMU 10-2015 P6(B)
04/02/20	FDDG0006	GAMMA IRRAD	200	10	07/10/2016	2431	MMU 03-2015 P1
04/02/20	SAMP00011	SNAP PACKS FOR	100	4	07/11/2016	2431	MMU 03-2015 P1
17/02/16	HIV0007	HIV MUREX AG/AB	96	20	30/11/16	2446	MMU-01-2016 P6
17/02/16	HTLV0001	MUREX HTLV 1/2	96	20	31/01/17	2446	MMU-01-2016 P6
17/02/16	HEPA0001	HEPATITIS B HBSAG	96	25	31/10/16	2446	MMU-01-2016 P6
01/03/20	ANTI0001	MUREX ANTI HCV	96	20	31/01/17	2460	MMU 01-2016 P6
22/03/16	HTLV0001	MUREX HTLV 1/2	96	1	31/12/16	2474	MMU 02-2016 P2(A)
22/03/16	SYPH0001	ICE SYPHILIS 96 TEST	96	4	31/12/16	2474	MMU 02-2016 P2(A)
31/03/16	ANTI0001	MUREX ANTI HCV V4	96	1	31/10/16	2480	MMU 02-2016 P2(A)
25/04/16	VACU00565	VACUTAINER TUBES	100	10	30/04/16	2484	MMU-10-2015 P6(A)
25/04/16	VACU0005	BD VACUTAINER	100	10	31/03/17	2484	MMU-10-2015 P6(A)
27/04/16	ACT20002	ACT 2 DIFF	1	5	04/07/2016	2489	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
27/04/16	ACT50006	ACT 5 DIFF CONTROL	1	7	05/05/2016	2489	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
27/04/16	ACT50007	ACT 5 DIFF	1	6	05/05/2016	2489	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
27/04/16	ACT20001	ACT 2 DIFF CONTROL	1	5	07/05/2016	2489	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
27/04/16	ACT50005	ACT 5 DIFF DILUENT	1	13	17/12/16	2489	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
27/04/16	ANT10023	MUREX ANTI-HBC	480	2	31/12/16	2494	
13/05/16	MON00003	MONOLISA TM	25	5	15/03/17	2507	MMU 02-2016 P2(A)
13/05/16	CHAG0002	BIOELISA CHAGAS 96	96	1	27/12/16	2507	MMU 02-2016 P2(A)
13/05/16	MON00004	MONOLISA TM HBS	480	12	30/04/17	2507	MMU 02-2016 P2(A)
13/05/16	INN00001	INNO-LIA HCV SCORE	20	1	31/03/17	2507	MMU 02-2016 P2(A)
17/05/16	FDDS0052	3M TECRA STAPH	96	1	08/09/2016	2511	MMU-03-2015
17/05/16	FDDA0003	ANTIMICROBIC VIAL	6	10	01/11/2017	2511	MMU-03-2015
17/05/16	LIST0007	3M TECRA	50	4	31/10/16	2511	MMU-03-2015
23/05/16	ANT10024	MUREX ANTI-HCV	480	3	28/02/17	2515	MMU 05-2016 P6(B)
30/05/16	DIAC0004	DIAMED DIA	1344	2	28/02/17	2527	MMU 07-2016 P6(B)
30/05/16	DIAM0002	DIAMED ABO/D +	48	4	28/02/17	2527	MMU 07-2016 P6(B)
30/05/16	DIAM0004	DIAMED COOMBS	960	1	30/04/17	2527	MMU 07-2016 P6(B)
06/06/20	DETE0005	DETERMINE KIT-	100	200	03/01/2017	2536	MMU 12-2015 P2
16/06/16	HTLV0001	MUREX HTLV 1/2	96	6	30/04/17	2554	MMU-03-2016 P2(6)

16/06/16	SYPH0001	ICE SYPHILIS 96 TEST	96	15	31/05/17	2554	MMU-03-2016 P2(6)
05/07/20	ANTI0001	MUREX ANTI HCV V4	96	6	31/03/17	2574	MMU-03-2016 P2(6)
07/07/20	ACT50007	ACT 5 DIFF	1	7	05/08/2016	2577	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
07/07/20	ACT50006	ACT 5 DIFF CONTROL	1	6	05/09/2016	2577	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
11/07/20	ACT50007	ACTS DIFF	1	8	05/08/2016	2584	MMU-03-2016 P2(2)
11/07/20	ACT50006	ACT 5 DIFF CONTROL	1	8	05/09/2016	2584	MMU-03-2016 P2(2)
14/07/16	ACT50007	ACTS DIFF	1	12	05/08/2016	2597	MMU-02-2016-P6(2)
14/07	ACT50006	ACT 5 DIFF CONTROL	1	12	05/09/2016	2597	MMU-02-2016-P6(2)
14/07/1	ACT20001	ACT 2 DIFF CONTROL	1	5	10/10/2016	2597	MMU-02-2016-P6(2)
20/07/1	INN00001	INNO-LIA HCV SCORE	20	3	30/06/17	2606	MMU-03-2016 P2(7)
27/07/1	HTLV0003	HTLV BLOT 2.4 (36T) WITH	36	6	01/01/2017	2611	MMU-03-2016 P2(6)
28/07/1	EPIN00219	ADRENALINE(EPINEP	1	3000	30/04/17	2617	MMU-03-2016-P3
02/08/2	ACT50004	ACT 5 DIFF FIX 1L	1	130	09/12/2016	2621	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
02/08/2	ACT50003	ACT 5 DIFF WBC LYSE	1	110	14/04/17	2621	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
02/08/2	ACT50001	ACT 5 DIFF RINSE 1L	1	66	15/04/17	2621	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
02/08/2	ACT20003	ACT 2 DIFF DILUENT	1	9	18/04/17	2621	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
02/08/2	ACT50008	ACT 5 DIFF.HGB LYSE	1	65	23/03/17	2621	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
02/08/2	ACT20004	ACT 2 DIFF RINSE	1	9	27/06/17	2621	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
02/08/2	ACT50004	ACT 5 DIFF FIX 1L	1	125	09/12/2016	2622	MMU-02-2016-P6(2)
02/08/2	ACT50003	ACT 5 DIFF WBC LYSE	1	110	14/04/17	2622	MMU-02-2016-P6(2)
02/08/2	ACT50008	ACT 5 DIFF.HGB LYSE	1	63	14/04/17	2622	MMU-02-2016-P6(2)
02/08/2	ACT50001	ACT 5 DIFF RINSE 1L	1	66	15/04/17	2622	MMU-02-2016-P6(2)
02/08/2	ACT50005	ACT 5 DIFF DILUENT	1	13	17/12/16	2622	MMU-02-2016-P6(2)
02/08/2	ACT20003	ACT 2 DIFF DILUENT	1	9	18/04/17	2622	MMU-02-2016-P6(2)
02/08/2	ACT20004	ACT 2 DIFF RINSE	1	9	27/06/17	2622	MMU-02-2016-P6(2)
17/08/1	CALI0003	HBA1C CALIBRATOR	1	15	30/06/17	2646	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
17/08/1	HBA1C001	HBA1C REAGENT	1	25	31/05/17	2646	MMU 10-2015 P6(D)
17/08/1	CALI0003	HBA1C CALIBRATOR	1	40	30/06/17	2647	MMU-02-2016 P6(7)
17/08/1	HBA1C001	HBA1C REAGENT	1	50	31/05/17	2647	MMU-02-2016 P6(7)
17/08/1	CONT0037	HBA1C CONTROL SET	1	25	31/07/17	2647	MMU-02-2016 P6(7)
24/0	BL000051	PREPARE BLOOD	50	8	09/10/2016	2658	MMU-03-2016
26/0	PIMA0001	PIMA CD4	100	15	31/05/17	2669	MMU-11-2015
26/0	VACT0002	VACUM TUBE 3ML	100	10	31/05/17	2669	MMU-11-2015
26/0	PIMA0002	PIMA BEAD	1	9	31/07/17	2669	MMU-11-2015
26/0	DETE0005	DETERMINE KIT-	100	156	03/01/2017	2670	MMU 12-2015 P2
14/0	DIAM0002	DIAMED ABO/D +	48	60	31/07/17	2714	MMU 07-
19/0	CHAG0001	CHAGAS III ELISA TEST	192	14	22/08/17	2722	MMU-12 2016 P6
21/09/16	TRYP0001	TSB(TRYPTIC SOY	100	6	30/06/17	2725	MMU-03-
03/10/20	VACU0005	BD VACUTAINER	100	10	31/08/17	2766	MMU-02-2016P6(3)
05/10/20	HEPA0001	HEPATITIS B HBSAG	96	38	30/06/17	2771	MMU-11-2016 P6
05/10/20	HTLV0001	MUREX HTLV 1/2	96	36	31/07/17	2771	MMU-11-2016 P6

05/10/20	HIV0007	HIV MUREX AG/AB	96	38	31/08/17	2771	MMU-11-2016 P6
18/10/16	CHAG0002	BIOELISA CHAGAS 96	96	3	11/04/2017	2804	MMU-03-2016
18/10/16	MON00004	MONOLISA TM HBS	480	13	30/11/17	2804	MMU-03-2016
18/10/16	INK0002	INDIA INK DROPPER	1	18	21/05/17	2806	MMU-03-2016P6
18/10/16	BAN D0001	BAND AID PLASTER	100	25	31/12/30	2806	MMU-03-2016P6
27/10/16	MON00006	MONOFILAMENT	25	200	06/10/2017	2824	MMU-09-2016-P2
02/11/20	BL000091	VACUTAINER RED	1000	79	31/10/17	2843	MMU-02-2016P6(3)
03/11/20 16	ANTI0001	MUREX ANTI HCV V4 96 TESTS PER KIT	96	36	31/08/17	2845	MMU-11-2016 P6
03/11/20 16	DETE0005	DETERMINE KIT- DETERMINE,BUFFER,	100	9	22/08/17	2853	MMU 12-2015 P2
10/11/20 16	TUBE0101	TUBERCULIN PPD 5TU/0.1ML, 5MLS INJ	1	90	28/02/17	2880	MMU-43-2016 P2
11/11/20	BL000053	PREPARE BLOOD	100	2	04/01/2017	2883	MMU-03-
11/11/20	TPHA0001	TPHA IGG	100	4	31/10/17	2884	MMU-03-2016 P2(7)
14/11/16	TUBE0101	TUBERCULIN PPD	1	410	28/02/17	2891	
23/11/16	PIMA0001	PIMA CD4	100	10	31/05/17	2908	MMU-11-2015
13/12/16	FDDE0016	REVEAL 2.0 FOR	1	2	30/09/17	2937	MMU-64-2016-P1
13/12/16	FDDE0017	REVEAL 2.0 FOR	1	2	30/09/17	2937	MMU-64-2016-P1
13/12/16	FDDS0069	REVEAL 2.0 FOR	1	5	30/11/17	2937	MMU-64-2016-P1
13/12/16	FDDL0023	REVEAL 2.0 FOR LISTERIA ONE STEP COMPLETE	1	2	31/10/17	2937	MMU-64-2016-P1
13/12/16	FDDS0068	REVEAL 2.0 FOR SALMONELLA COMP SYS WITH RV&M-	1	2	31/10/17	2937	MMU-64-2016-P1
14/12/16	MONA0001	MONALISA HBSAG	25	10	15/09/17	2940	MMU-03-2016 P2

**RECEIPTS FROM INTERNATIONAL PHARMACEUTICAL AGENCY FROM 1ST
JANUARY - 31ST DECEMBER 2016**

GDATE	PRODCODE	PRODUCT	PK	QTY	EXP.DATE	GRN#	PORDNO
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09/02/2016	ESRT0001	ESR TUBES & PIPETTES 100/PK	100	1	31/03/17	2439	MMU-15-2015 P2
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**RECEIPTS FROM WESTERN SCIENTIFIC SUPPLIES INC FROM 1ST JANUARY -
31ST DECEMBER 2016**

GDATE	PRODCOD	PRODUCT	PK SIZE	QTY	EXP.DATE	GRN#	PORDNO
16/02/16	TEST0013	TEST TUBES	50	30	31/10/16	2444	
22/02/16	CU LT0007	FUNGAL CULTURE TUBE	25	40	15/11/16	2453	
31/05/16	REME0001	THERMO	1	1	24/01/17	2531	
13/06/16	FDDM0001	M-COLIBLUE24	50	15	01/12/2016	2550	MMU-03-2015-P1
13/06/16	FDDE0005	EY TELLU RITE	6	2	07/12/2017	2550	MMU-03-2015-P1
13/06/16	FDDK0001	KF	50	5	21/12/16	2550	MMU-03-2015-P1
12/08/2016	FDDH0034	METHANOL SOLUTION HYDRANAL-TI RANT 5 REAGENT 500ML	1	6	10/05/2017	2639	MMU-03-2015- P1(PRT3)
07/09/201	CELL0006	CELL PACK	1	10	12/06/2017	2701	MMU-10-2015-P6(2)
07/09/201	STR00002	STROMATOLYSE	3	10	15/05/17	2701	MMU-10-2015-P6(2)
08/09/201	EIGH0002	EIGHT CHECK	12	4	20/10/16	2703	MMU-10-2015-P6
13/12/16	EIGH0002	EIGHT CHECK	12	8	18/01/17	2938	

**RECEIPTS FROM GLOBAL HEALTH CARE SUPPLIES INC FROM 1ST JANUARY
31ST DECEMBER 2016**

GDATE	PRODCO	PRODUCT	PK	QTY	EXP.DATE	GRN#	PORDNO
05/01/2016	GLUC00274	ON-CALL PLUS GLUCOMETER	50	112	30/04/17	2394	MMU 14-2015 P2

05/01/2016	GLUC0027 2	ON-CALL PLUS GLUCOMETER	1	16	31/05/17	2394	MMU 14-2015 P2
05/01/2016	GLUC0003	ONE TOUCH ULTRA GLUCOMETER STRIPS	50	100	31/10/16	2394	MMU 14-2015 P2
28/04/16	FDDA0015	ATMOSPHERE GENERATING SYSTEM	20	10	01/04/2017	2498	MMU-03-2015 P1
28/04/16	FDDB0004	BROM CRESOL PURPLE AQUEOUS	1	1	09/01/2017	2498	MMU-03-2015 P1

**3. PROCUREMENT OF DRUGS AND MEDICAL SUPPLIES FOR THE
MINISTRY OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

Bishop Edghill:

- (i) Could the Hon. Minister inform this National Assembly what was the total sum expended for drugs and medical supplies for the Ministry of Public Health between January 1, 2016 and February 28, 2017?
- (ii) What percentage of the 2016 budgetary allocations for drugs and medical supplies was expended by December 31, 2016? If any moneys were returned to the Consolidated Fund, how much and what were the reasons for the underperformance in the procurement of drugs and medical supplies for the public health system?
- (iii) Could the Hon. Minister provide the following information to the National Assembly:-
 - (a) The name of each supplier
 - (b) The value of each contract and date of award

- (c) The name of the supplier/s which may have failed to deliver within the stipulated contractual period and by what amount
- (d) The name of the supplier which may have delivered inferior/substandard drugs and medical supplies?
- (iv) Could the Hon. Minister state in each case of procurement:-
 - (a) Whether the tenders for the procurement of drugs and medical supplies were publically advertised? If so when, and where
 - (b) If any of these awardees were pre-qualified.
- (v) In each case of the above, which body was responsible for evaluating and recommending the award of these contracts?

Ms. Lawrence:

- (i) Sum expended for pharmaceuticals and medical supplies \$1,635,070,822. (January 1 through December 2016).
- (ii) 96.1035 % was expended. (Please see IFMAS statements attached. 'BB')

One supplier was blacklisted by Food and Drugs Department

While Vaccines were received in the first quarter of 2017
- (iii) International Pharmaceutical Agency \$381,193,319.

Global Healthcare Supplies Inc. \$2,569,719.10

Ansa McAl Trading Ltd.\$12,488,630.
- (iv) 1. Procurement of drugs and medical supplies were publically advertised in the print media

2. Public Tender/Sole Sourcing/Restrictive Tendering/Shopping (3)/Rfq
- (v) The National Procurement, Tender and Administration Board.

4. PROCUREMENT OF DRUGS AND MEDICAL SUPPLIES FOR THE GEORGETOWN PUBLIC HOSPITAL CORPORATION (GPHC)

Bishop Edghill: Could the Hon. Minister inform this National Assembly what was the total amount expended for the purchase of drugs and medical supplies for the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) between the period January 1, 2016 and February 28, 2017?

Could the Hon. Minister provide the following information to the National Assembly:-

- (a) The name of each supplier
- (b) The value of each contract and date of award
- (c) The name of the supplier/s which may have failed to deliver within the stipulated contractual period and by what amount
- (d) The name of the supplier which may have delivered inferior/substandard drugs and medical supplies?

Could the Hon. Minister state in each case of procurement:

- (a) Whether the tenders for the procurement of drugs and medical supplies were publicly advertised? If so, when and where
- (b) Whether any of these awardees were pre-qualified?

In each case of the above, which body was responsible for evaluating and recommending the award of these contracts?

Ms. Lawrence:

- (i) 2016
 - Pharmaceuticals \$681,205,510 (This include \$631,000,000 for emergency pharmaceuticals)
 - Medical Supplies \$55,622,563.20

2017

- Pharmaceuticals \$1,304,439,390
- Medical Supplies \$761,060,748

(ii) (a) The names of the suppliers for pharmaceutical are: 1. New GPC

2. International Pharmaceutical Agency (IPA)
3. Global Healthcare Inc.
4. Ansa McAl
5. ChiroSyn Discoveries
6. Massy Distribution
7. Health 2000

b. The names of the suppliers for medical supplies are:

1. K.D Enterprises
2. Meditron
3. Caribbean Medical
4. New GPC
5. Global Health Care Inc.
6. International Pharmaceutical Agency
7. Health International Inc.
8. Pharmagen International Inc.
9. Scientific Supplies and Technology

(c) No awards were made to these the Pharmaceutical and Medical suppliers since July 2016, because of the delays in the Bid Process.

2016 Pharmaceutical Supplies Awardees - NPTAB # 618/2016/46

New GPC	\$90,899,445
Global Healthcare Inc.	\$34,814,730
IPA	\$36,027,989
Health 2000	\$16,875
Chirosyn Discovery	\$44,750.296

2016 Medical Supplies Awardees: NPTAB # 231/2016/46

K.D Enterprise	\$1,300,000
IPA	\$32,783,375
Caribbean Medical Supplies-	\$3,216,100
Global Healthcare	\$9,768,254
Meditron	\$11,621,003

(c) The suppliers who have failed to delivered items as stipulated within their contracts are:

1. IPA	\$1, 611,282
2. Global Healthcare Supplies	\$611,530
3. Meditron	\$11,621,003

(d) The names of the suppliers who have delivered inferior/substandard drugs are:

1. IPA - Erythropoietin (incorrect temperature)
2. New GPC - Discolored tablets, tablets with pungent odors, soda lime with incorrect granules composition.

(iii)

- Tenders for the procurement of pharmaceuticals and medical supplies were tendered, except in the instance of the emergency supplies which bidders had already purchased the bid document, in that instance it was restrictive tender. The print media was used.
- The awardees were not pre-qualified.

(iv) The National Procurement and Tender Administration Board.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS, INCLUDING POLICY STATEMENTS

THE FUTURE OF THE SUGAR INDUSTRY OF GUYANA

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Holder]: I rise to make a statement as the Minister of Agriculture to this honourable House on the future of the sugar industry of Guyana. I firmly believe that both sides of this honourable House feel passionately about this subject and there is a commonly felt need to address the situation. It is my hope that the paper helps our citizens to understand the issues and opportunities available to resolve the crisis and most importantly the Government decision on the way forward for the sugar industry.

This matter has been discussed in the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Service of this honourable House where a presentation by Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) was considered and it invited submission by stakeholders and interesting parties were received and three meetings between the Government, Opposition and the sugar unions were held.

The Guyana Sugar Corporation, GuySuCo, is a wholly owned Guyana state enterprise that operates the sugar industry. GuySuCo, instead of being self-sustaining and contributing to the revenues of the state, has encountered severe decline. Production in 2016 fell by 18.7% and foreign exchange earned by the crop declined by 15%. This poor performance follows a pattern of inconsistent output in which the average annual output of sugar declined by 14% between 2006 and 2015.

GuySuCo incurred a debt of \$82 billion by 2015. The Government, owing to the industry financial crisis, had to provide the financial relief from the treasury within less than 2 years. Since 2015, Government subsidies were estimated to be G\$32 billion.

The production of sugar in Guyana first started in Essequibo under the Dutch and was extended later to Berbice and Demerara. Most plantations were small and each had its own factory to process its cane into sugar. Progressive reduction in a number of plantations either as a result of closure and amalgamations occurred over the years. Consequently by 1829 there were 238 plantations and by 1890 that number had declined to 138. Closures and consolidations continued into the 20th Century when linked from 80 plantations in 1900 to 39 in 1922 and to 18 one year after Guyana gain Independence from Great Britain.

Sugar cultivation depended upon the labour of enslaved Africans mainly from West Africa for more than 181 years. By the time that GuySuCo was established in 1976, the industry was dominated by the labour of East Indians who had started to come to Guyana as indentured workers in 1838. Many settled in the colony with continued attachment to the sugar estates.

The sugar industry was nationalised between 1975 and 1976. At the time of nationalisation there were 11 sugar plantations country wide. They represented a fraction of the nearly 400 estates that existed in the early 19th Century, and of the 80 which existed at the beginning at the 20th Century. There were 11 estates located at Leonora, Uitvlugt, Wales, Diamond, Enmore, La Bonn Intention, Ogle, Albion, Blairmont, Rose Hall and Skeldon. The sugar industry remained at the heart of the economy despite the diminished number of estates. Sugar accounted for 63% of agricultural production and more than 20% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 1976. GuySuCo was producing 337,776 tons of sugar and had a workforce of 28,406 persons at that time. It was the larger employer and a major contributor to foreign exchange. GuySuCo was producing 246,898 tons of sugar with a labour force of 28,081 in 1992.

A decrease in a number of estate overtime is a reflection of the challenges of producing sugar in Guyana entailed. The Government of Guyana as a sole investor owns the sugar industry. Government is expected to demonstrate prudent management of the public resources under its control.

GuySuCo has faced many challenges over the years. It was able to maintain average sugar output of 328,000 tons until 1992. GuySuCo produce an annual average of 2,956,591 tons of cane and 264,983 tons of sugar in the decade from 1996 to 2005. The annual average cane output was 2,548,294 tons, while sugar output is 208,718 tons in the subsequent decade of 2006 to 2015. The change in the averages between the two time periods represents a 14% decline in cane output and a 21% decline in sugar outputs. Factory recoveries are affected in the amount of cane that had to be used to generate a ton of sugar. Factory recoveries like cane use deteriorated between the rainy periods. From 1996 to 2005, 11.2 tons of cane were needed to produce one ton of sugar. During the period 2006 to 2015 12.3 tons of cane were needed. In other words, 10% more cane was required to produce one ton of sugar.

GuySuCo began to display chronic problems, including migration of skilled and experienced managers, exhaustion of its cash reserves, deteriorating field infrastructure and factories, and an unstable and adversarial industrial relation.

The sugar industry's contribution to GDP changed between 2006 and 2015. The industry has not been able to keep pace with the changes that had occurred in the economy since 2006. GuySuCo incurred total losses of \$40 billion with sales of \$230 billion from 2008 to 2015. By 2015 the management of the company had accumulated a mere \$11 billion in internal equity and a decrease working capital by \$25 billion. It spent 8 cents for every one dollar of sales to build its long term investment base, while generating only 5 cents internal equity to do so. GuySuCo was forced to finance its long-term investment by borrowing money and by relying on subsidies through the national treasury even though all the internal equity was being put back in the business.

The sugar industry now lags behind mining, construction and the rice industry in its contribution to the nation economy. Other industries, such as the wholesale and distribution trade, transportation and storage and the information and communication technology, also contribute more than the sugar industry to the output of the country. The contribution of the industry is no longer as distinguishable as it was before. Sugar, as a result, now finds itself competing with other agricultural crops and policy in its contribution to the economy.

GuySuCo is the country single largest employer. It has been so for the entire history of independent Guyana, however, there has been a short decline in the number of workers employed by the industry over the decade 2006 to 2015. Low labour turn out has resulted in the industry suffering significant productivity losses. Employment cost accounted for 48% of total cost for 2010 to 2015, thereby observing 73% on the revenue earned by GuySuCo during that period. The dire revenue situation coincided with the loss of preferential markets and prices that the company enjoyed from 1976 to 2009. GuySuCo had to sell its sugar at world market prices after 2009 and those prices were lower than its cost of production. This meant that unless the corporation was able to reduce both factory and field cost, it would remain uncompetitive. The sugar industry operated in a largely protected market from 1959 to 2009.

First Guyana was among the nine countries that benefited from the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement. Second, along with other African, Caribbean, and Pacific states it benefited subsequently from the sugar protocol under the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) European Union preferential system. It also had access to the Canadian and US markets at preferential rates.

2.20 p.m.

The bulk of Guyana's sugar was exported to the United Kingdom, which was part of European Union. Preferential sale to the European Union (EU) market accounted for 50% of the company's sugar output and 70% of its revenue. In November, 2015, the European Agricultural Council decided to reduce the guarantee price of sugar by 36% over a four year period that that began in 2016. The EU was forced to withdraw the preferential treatment as a consequence of global pressure to liberalise the strain. In addition, some new countries produce beet that were competing for greater market share in Europe. The result was that Guyana had to sell its sugar on the world market after 2009. A decision to undertake the Skeldon Sugar Modernisation Project is made, and after the expensive of over \$47 billion that project it has failed.

The sugar industry is in crisis. The management of GuySuCo is estimated that the Government of Guyana would have to provide annual subsidies averaging \$17 billion over the next four years to keep the estates open and operating. The Government will be hard-pressed to justify such expenditure since the opportunity cost for keeping GuySuCo as a growing concern in its present

state is too high. Recognising this untenable situation, the Government decided to install an Interim Management Team to manage GuySuCo in June, 2015. A new board of directors was installed in July 2015 just providing GuySuCo with an opportunity to make an objective assessment of its condition and to decide on the way forward under fresh management.

GuySuCo situation requires emergency access. In 2015, the corporation was aware that it could have obtained \$5.1 billion from the sale of the Skeldon cogeneration plant and a portion of land under this control. These revenues were used to meet the current operating cost on a small amount of capital expenditure. GuySuCo also needed an urgent injection of \$12 billion to reap the crop that was in season and meet short-term financial obligations to workers and creditors. Failure to act would have had disastrous consequences, not only for the sugar industry, but for the entire economy, which is in excess of 16,000 workers and about 48,000 dependants would have been adversely affected immediately. The GuySuCo Interim Management Team made a request for financial help and the industry was given a subsidy. Recognising the near bankrupt position of GuySuCo, the Government appointed a commission of inquiry (COI) to examine the situation in the sugar industry and to make recommendations about its future.

The Government of Guyana is cognisant of the invaluable contribution to the sugar industry over the years. It would not allow GuySuCo to die from preventable causes. The Government, however, cannot let GuySuCo to continue to utilise a business model that is based on waste, inefficiency and copiousness, ultimately leading to its undoing. Neither option is a formula for improving the income and the well-being of sugar works while seeking to provide the “good life” for current and future generations.

The Government of Guyana had to decide whether to maintain control of the industry in whole or in part or whether to diversify its operations or sell it to a private investor or invest it. The COI recommended that the corporation should be privatised within three years. The commission of inquiry recommended also that a serious evaluation of all diversification options be conducted to avoid reliance on sugar for GuySuCo as revenue. The COI calls for an evaluation of the option.

The future of the industry is considered to lie in a smaller sugar sector with reduce losses and cash deficits with a separate and profitable diversified enterprise which could ensure a viable future. Focus on the poorly performing estates, it shifts from sugar to diversification. The

proposed courses of action are to amalgamate Wales Estate with Uitvlugt Estate and to reassign its cane to the Uitvlugt Estate since the estate was operating at 50% capacity. Sixty per cent of its drainage and irrigation infrastructure is in a dilapidated condition. The corporation further seeks to divest itself of the Skeldon Estate. The estates of Albion and Rose Hall are to be amalgamated and the factory at Rose Hall is to be closed.

GuySuCo would, then, consist of three estates and three sugar factories. The estates will be Blairmount on the West Bank Berbice, Albion/ Rose Hall in East Berbice and Uitvlugt/Wales Estate in the West Demerara. The three estates will be complete with factories and will have cane supply from all five locations. The process on the result and improving the relation with some cane cutters, estate staff, and about 1,710 private cane farmers, these adjustment means that GuySuCo will be scaled down with a more efficient entity that focuses on producing sugar and to satisfy the domestic and foreign markets that provide preferential access to our sugar. This entails taking advantage of the opportunity to merge better performing land to operate factories more efficiently.

GuySuCo plans, apart from restructuring the estates and factories, to transfer to the state charges for the drainage and irrigation and health services that it provides to the communities and around the estates. GuySuCo also proposed the preferential land to lease to employees, for them to engage in agricultural production. The resources that exist under the green economy and regional food self- sufficiency drive will support their efforts.

The Government proposes that sugar production should be contracted to approximately 147,000 tons of sugar annually produce from Albion, Blairmount and Uitvlugt Estates to satisfy the demand on the local markets, that is 25,000 tons per annum, Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and regional, that is, 50,000 to 60,000 tons per annum, the United States of America 12,500 tons per annum and the world market 50,000 tons per annum. Focuses will be on producing for direct consumption, value added sugar and providing electricity to the national grid by cogenerations. It is proposed that the Skeldon Estate will be diverted. Significant investment has been made in the new Skeldon Factory which to date has experienced numerous technical problems. It has failed to achieve its potential, thereby failing to generate returns on the investment. The corporation does not have the resources required to correct the technical

problem. It owes an excess of \$29 billion in loans due for the Skeldon Sugar Modernisation Project.

Funds generated from the divestment of the Skeldon Estate will go towards reducing the corporation's debt and support its capital programme for both sugar and its diversification initiative. The Government, pending the result of a divestment initiative proposed to implement the following plan for GuySuCo. The key elements of this plan are as follows:

- (i) Amalgamation of estates: GuySuCo sugar operation will be limited with the Albion, Rose Hall, Blairmount and the Uitvlugt/ Wales Estates with the aim of producing annually 147,000 tons of sugar with the assurances of markets at economic prices. Albion and Rose Hall Estates cultivation will be amalgamated. This will result in the closure of the Rose Hall Factory at the end of 2017. Some lands will be made available for diversification purposes. The Enmore Factory will be closed at the end of the 2017 when all cane will be harvested. The East Coast estates will be earmarked for diversification.
- (ii) Employment of Labour: GuySuCo will retain as many workers needed for all operations on the merged estate factories. Employees are to be leased land by GuySuCo to engage in crops, crops type to be decided by GuySuCo and the Ministry of Agriculture.
- (iii) Recovery of cost: Recovery of drainage and irrigation charges will be from the Government of Guyana. GuySuCo, from the inception, has been assisting with the drainage and irrigation and surrounding communities. This is allowed for approximately 40% of GuySuCo annual drainage and irrigation cost. GuySuCo, as part of its corporate social responsibility, operates a number of health care centres and dispensaries in the Berbice and Demerara regions. The options available to the corporation are a transfer of such health centres and dispensaries to the Government or the recovery of cost from the Government.

Given the financial and technical evidence presented, it is therefore feasible to amalgamate estates and factories where appropriate, for the better utilisation of the country's resources. In this regard, Government proposes to one, retain sugar production as the core function of GuySuCo, at three factories and five cultivation sites. Two, divest in the remaining parts of the

industry and three, invite sugar workers and cane farmers to undertake agro-based activities on lands to be made available to them.

Consistent with this position, the Government proposes to invite expression of interest for the divestment. A corporate vehicle will be established to manage this process on a full-time basis. GuySuCo proposes spending action on investment to proceed with a series of action intended to reduce the financial burden of a corporation. GuySuCo propose to take account of the similar experience of other countries in proceeding with the adoption.

The preparation of the Government position on the future of the industry was a long and intense process. It reflects the complex issues at stake where a proper balance had to be found between social and economic objective. I now officially circulate this statement of a state paper on the future of the sugar industry to this honourable House for the record.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READING

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

PETROLEUM COMMISSION ON GUYANA BILL 2017 – Bill No. 4/2017

A BILL intituled:

“AN ACT to provide for the establishment and functions of the Petroleum Commission of Guyana and for related matters.” [*Minister of Natural Resources*]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

MOTIONS

INCREASES IN LAND RENT AND OTHER CHARGES TO FARMERS IN THE MAHAICA, MAHAICONY, ABARY AGRICULTURE AUTHORITY (MMA/ADA)

WHEREAS Guyana’s economy is in no insignificant way based on the contributions of the agricultural sector which sustains the entire Guyanese population and provides economic activities and jobs for thousands of households and communities;

AND WHEREAS the Government has recently unilaterally imposed increases in land rent and other charges to farmers in the Mahaica, Mahaicony, Abary Agriculture Authority (MMA/ADA);

AND WHEREAS the increase in some of these charges is in excess of 600%;

AND WHEREAS the rice farmers and the rice industry, in particular, which have been under severe duress over the past year, will be additionally hit with the imposition of these increased fees;

AND WHEREAS rice farmers in the MMA/ADA will now have to pay \$15,000 per acre, an increase from \$3,500 in 2016 for land rent, and, drainage and irrigation charges;

BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly calls on the Government to immediately reverse these new increases of fees for land, drainage and other services for the MMA farmers in the best interest of the nation. [*Mr. Seeraj*]

Mr. Seeraj: I am pleased to be given this opportunity finally to present this motion for debate and hopefully support by all Members of the House, since it is of the view of thousands in the agricultural sector that this motion, will go a far way towards ensuring the viability of not only the rice sector, but also support for livestock and other crops.

2.35 p.m.

I have been here for quite a while and I must admit that I am a bit apprehensive, this afternoon, not simply because it is the first time that I am moving a motion but, as my mother used to say, “I am feeling as if I have my *heart in my hand*”. I said that because I do not know if the question would be put on this motion, prematurely, hence my apprehension. I sincerely hope that we would be able to fully debate this motion because it is a matter of “bread and butter” for thousands of persons in the farming community. They have made their dissatisfaction known on numerous occasions in the countryside, Onverwagt and Hope Estate, and in Georgetown in front of the Ministry of Agriculture, as it relates to the likely impact that the increases would have on their future.

The first WHEREAS Clause clearly states:

“WHEREAS Guyana’s economy is in no insignificant way based on contributions of the agricultural sector...”

I want to quote the Hon. Minister of Finance’s 2015 Budget presentation, on page 23, where he said:

“Agriculture accounts for approximately 25% of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and provides more than 33% of direct employment, both rural and urban.”

I think that all of us must be concerned about the situation in rural communities. It is my humble view that if rural communities do not enjoy comfortable lives and livelihoods, you would have, like we have seen in other countries, migration out of the country and migration to urban centres. This could cause additional problems and additional strain in terms of internal movements on the urban centres. We have to do our best to make lives comfortable for our rural people. We have to provide for them that which is enjoyed and taken for granted by others in urban centres.

If we provide for them in the way of infrastructural support that enables them to make a life, that would enable them to live comfortably while contributing to the development of our country, then we would have achieved something.

I think that the Hon. Minister of Finance acknowledges how important it is for us to provide for rural communities, the necessary infrastructure for them to be meaningfully engaged and for them to make meaningful contributions towards our economy and towards our overall welfare.

In 2015, when, in particular, the rice sector started to face difficulties in the latter part of 2015, we sounded a warning and we made some recommendations to the Government to arrest the decline in rice and we made a number of recommendations for the consideration and – it was hopeful then - the implementation by the Government to address these concerns.

One of those recommendations in recognition of the decline in prices for rice in the latter part of 2015 was:

“Government to suspend payments of land leases and drainage and irrigation charges”

We have proposed a menu of measures to give some support to the farming communities. If we recall, in 2015, Guyana signed an agreement with Venezuela that was valued at US\$113 million for the supply of 120,000 tons of paddy and 80,000 tons of rice to that country.

However, by June, we had only supplied rice and paddy to the value of US\$42.3 million. The future of the contract, at that time, was in some jeopardy. Suffice to say that, by the end of 2015, we were unable to complete the US\$113 million contract that was signed with Venezuela.

In recognition of that and the subsequent loss in the high prices on our export markets, these recommendations were made.

We were not alone in this. There was an article in the *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper dated 13th February, 2016 and it quoted the Minister of Agriculture as saying:

“While Guyana has the ability to produce a high volume of rice, the cost of production impedes this country’s ability to compete”.

Clearly, in February, 2016, the Hon. Minister would have recognised the difficulties that we were facing. By stating clearly that our ability to compete and our cost of production, being what it is to compete, especially with the United States of America and in these parts of the world, places us at a disadvantage, one would have expected that the Government, through the Minister of Agriculture, to address this issue in a holistic way.

I think that the entire agriculture sector was unpleasantly taken aback when the announcement was made that, in Region 5, in the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Agricultural Development Authority (MMA/ADA) area, drainage and irrigation charges would be increased from \$2,500 to \$8,000 per acre and the rental of lease lands would have increased from \$1,000 per acre to \$7,000 per acre. The sector was taken by surprise because we were aware that the Government knew of the problems we were being faced with, given the situation where, by the end of 2016, 36,000 tons of rice was exported - more than 2015 - but would have received \$29 million less, although 36,000 tons more was exported. The average price for export was reduced from some \$600 per ton on the export market by \$358 per ton by 2016.

We could not really comprehend this move against the background of this vast reduction in our export earnings. Why would the Government move towards the implementation of not a small

increase but an increase from \$3,500 to \$15,000 per acre without any consultation with the sector? That is why we brought this motion; it is so that all of us in this National Assembly and outside of it, Cabinet and so on, could debate this matter and hopefully revoke and reverse the increases proposed by the Hon. Minister of Agriculture because they are very unpopular on the ground in farming communities across the divide. It does not make economic sense to, at this point in time, increase taxation on a sector that is going through hard times when the Minister recognises that the sector is going through difficult times.

It does not augur well for good relationships when a Minister of the Government was hoping to pass off as a consultation, but, in my judgement, it was informing farmers and to ask them what they are complaining about, that the increase is equivalent to just three beers. I find that very unpleasant and insensitive to our farming folks for that kind of analysis to be done and, in effort to give comfort to farmers, by making that kind of analogy. We revoke, in totality, the notion of equating such a huge increase from \$3,500 to \$15,000, and passing it off lightly, to the equivalent of three beers, whether it is three beers per day or three beers per week. I did not do the Math because I found that to be very unpleasant.

The fact that the Government, even after having made the decision and in the face of many popular demonstrations at MMA/ADA and otherwise, still failed to engage the stakeholders in a consultative process to address the concerns... It is not surprising. It is really, in my mind, unpleasant.

The Hon. Minister is not alone in recognising the difficulties that the agriculture sector, in particular rice, faces. His Excellency President Granger also recognised the difficulties of the sector. In the *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper of 28th October, 2015, there is an article about Mexico being keen on Guyana's rice and it stated that the Prime Minister secured commitment during a meeting with Mexican authorities.

The article stated:

“Only on Sunday, President David Granger assured Berbice rice farmers that their problems have not gone unnoticed and that his Government has already started seeking viable solutions where reducing operational costs and creating new market opportunities are concerned.”

It flows with what the Hon. Minister of Agriculture said in addressing costs of production. That is why it is even more surprising that, recognising our costs of production, the Hon. Minister would seek to impose more costs on the heavily burdened farming communities.

The Government tried to secure a number of markets to, at least, increase the price for our rice exported. We are still waiting. Back in 2015, there were a lot of pronouncements. It was in the *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper of 6th December, 2015 where the Prime Minister told a gathering in Essequibo:

“Essequibo is rice and rice is Essequibo so rice is here to stay.”

2.50 p.m.

Regarding the Mexican deal, which he is personally involved in, the Prime Minister said that Mexico would have been a good play, and that was back in 2015. We hoped that we would have started exporting rice at a high price to Mexico so that any increases in drainage and irrigation and land rent could have been cushioned by the expected windfall from high-priced market in Mexico.

And then recently, another headline screamed, “Guyana to export 150,000 tons of rice to Mexico”. We have not been able to send a single grain so far to Mexico and, if we should base on the numbers, then farmers are looking at a price in the range of \$1,800 to \$1,900 per bag for us to compete with and have access to the Mexican market. So, it was a lot of fluff about nothing and it raised the expectations of our farming communities – our rice farmers in particular – that, notwithstanding what increases are put there, they still had the faith that we will be able to cushion those costs with the increase or better prices for our products.

If our farmers get a good price, they would be able to pay land rent and the increase in land rent; they would be able to pay drainage and irrigation charges and the increases in drainage and irrigation charges. But after the announcement was made and the Rice Producers Association met with the members of the Board of Directors of the MMA/ADA to discuss this matter and to seek a stay in the implementation of this decision, we were told by the Board that farmers within the MMA/ADA area owe more than \$400 million to the MMA/ADA.

And this amount is at the old rate of \$3,500. Our question to the Board was: if farmers were unable to pay at a rate of \$3,500 when they were getting decent prices, how does the Government expect farmers to pay at a rate of \$15,000 per acre when they are getting 30% to 40% less than that which they were accustomed to getting? The average prices for paddy are well-known and I think that they are published in some report. I think that the Rice Development Board would have published some of that information too. Some years it used to be \$4,000 to \$5,500 per bag for paddy and the drainage and irrigation charges in that particular area was at \$3,500.

Now, this season here, farmers are actually getting \$100 less than that which they received last season, which is already about 30% less than what they used to get in early 2014 and 2015. How is it that they would be able to bear the burden of these increases, especially given the reduction, which I had mentioned earlier, in the average cost of our export?

The increases, whilst it is primarily affecting rice farmers, do not stop in the project area, per se, that is mostly cultivated by rice farmers, affected all the areas that fall under the management of the MMA/ADA, which also include cash crop area, which also include livestock area. And some of these increases are really in excess of 600% and 700%.

Again, we call on the Government to recognise that the productive sector, if it is doing well, can solve so many problems and, if it is not doing well, then it needs support. World over, developed and developing countries give support to their agriculture sector. One country in the far East gave subsidy in excess of 400% to rice farmers. All we, in Guyana, are saying is that, recognising some of the difficulties we are faced with as a developing nation, do not tax us more. Do not move our total charges from \$3,500 to \$15,000 per acre at a time when we are not doing so well. And when the productive sectors do not do well, all of us feel the squeeze; the entire country feels the squeeze whereby, if the export goes down, if the prices go down for an exchange, if earning goes down, there would be pressure on our exchange rate. If there is pressure on the exchange rate, then what is purchased as inputs for the sector, without the prices going up by virtue of the exchange rate moving, will have an impact on the production cost for the farmers.

To add to the burden of these draconian increases, we have seen the implementation of value added tax (VAT) on agriculture inputs as of January of this year. Now, cash crop farmers who are accustomed to purchasing their inputs and to protect their crops, whether from insects, pests or diseases, are faced with this additional burden of the costs of all the inputs that they purchase going up by 14% by virtue of the VAT alone, leaving out increases because of the slide in the exchange rate.

These matters contribute overall to a problem that is recognised by the Hon. Minister and a problem that is also recognised by His Excellency the President; one is our competitiveness in dealing with our exports. To put more burdens on our sector does not augur well for our ability to export more.

Equipment and machinery – what can be considered capital assets – also used to enjoy a position of being zero-rated for VAT because one would want to give incentive to one's productive sector. So much more spill off is earned when a productive sector does well. It makes a lot of economic sense to give incentives to these sectors so that the farmers can produce for themselves, the country and for export. And to really burden the farmers with what we feel are unnecessary increases at this point in time is not a well thought out idea.

Up to this morning, I was listening to a farmer speaking to a newspaper outside of the Ministry of Agriculture – there was another protest there this morning – and he was saying that he is well-known and that his name is “Nopsey” and that you could call his name anywhere and at any time. He said that he voted for change because he was promised \$9,000 a bag for paddy. He supported that change because he felt that this would go a long way towards addressing the plight that they are faced with in the agriculture sector. And he is very bitter, like many other farmers, about the turnaround by the Government from a position on the campaign trail of promising double of what farmers were getting and, in some instances, promising triple of what the farmers were getting to moving from a position of not even maintaining the status quo but to pile on additional burden onto the backs of our productive people and onto the backs of our rural communities – our farmers.

This is really a blow that the sector is reeling from right now and even now the weather has come in on them. Although they are being called upon to pay these huge increases in the drainage and

irrigation charges, a lot of them cannot continue with harvesting after the rainfall because their fields are still flooded, to some extent, by rainfall.

Hon. Member Ms. Jennifer Wade gave us some support at Onverwagt, at least at the first demonstration. I had counted on the Colleague across the floor to give us additional support, but I was disappointed when I did not see the Hon. Member coming out to give us further support. A lot of farmers are speaking about what is happening and the Mahaicony-Abary Rice Development Scheme (MARDS), for the areas that fall under this agency, is also calling on farmers and demanding that the farmers have to pay these increases because the MMA/ADA is charging these increases and this is a scheme.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 27 minutes.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Cde. Speaker.

The Mahaicony-Abary Rice Development Scheme or MARDS, as it is commonly called, used to also provide a lot of services to the farmers and one would have expected that, with the change, the trend would have continued or it would have been even better for the farmers. But what happened was that even the small amount of resources – financial and otherwise – that MARDS had, which was supposed to go towards providing support to the farming community, were misused by some members of the Board of Directors.

The first Chairman after the change of Government who, I think, back then, was called a liaison officer attached to the Office of the Prime Minister - not an executive chairman - commandeered the lone vehicle, which was assigned to this Government agency back in February, without the necessary approval, without given the authorisation to drive or to operate, depleted that agency that provided services to the farming community of the use of that single vehicle. And sad to say, some months after, he crashed it into the market fence and then took hard-earned farmers' moneys, which were supposed to be used to provide services to the farmers, out of MARDS – the state agency – to repair the vehicle that was supposed to provide services to the farming community, and he has failed to pay back since then. That caused MARDS to be in a position where it cannot, as it used to, provide adequate services to the farmers. So, even that is depleted. And it did not stop there. Another member of the Board appropriated to himself or herself about

\$6 million of MARDS money that was supposed to be used to provide services by MARDS to the farmers because they are collecting land rent from the farmers'... [*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

These are moneys that are paid by farmers to MARDS to provide services and the moneys that are there, apparently, as we say, *full the eyes* of the members. They took it upon themselves to take it from MARDS and to put MARDS in a position where it is unable to fulfil its mandate towards the farmers who pay the land rent to MARDS.

3.05 p.m.

This is a sad situation and the Government needs to pay attention and to cut out these kinds of activities and to ensure that the behaviour... The Government must send a strong signal to those they appoint to positions of authority not to abuse that kind of authority, but to provide services for the farmers and to utilise the resources of those agencies that are supposed to provide services to the farming community.

Mention was made about the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB). As far as I am aware, the Board is totally funded by the rice industry by virtue of activities in the sector itself. Funds that are within the coffers of the GRDB, I would think, would be utilised to give support to farmers in times of need and distress. I recall clearly that, in the past, whenever farmers were faced with difficulties, the GRDB would respond to the situation, whether it was a flood, drought, infestation by paddy bugs or whatever is the case, and give support. I know a number of activities were carried out where chemicals were purchased by the GRDB and made available to rice farmers across the country to counter epidemic levels of infestation by paddy bugs to ensure that the crop is protected from this pest that has the potential to devastate the economy. When it reaches that state, the GRDB would respond to ensure the crop is protected.

For this season, we have not seen any response like that. Some farmers are reporting 25%, 35% and 40% damaged grains. This could have been avoided if resources from the GRDB had gone towards addressing the plight of the farmers. While there has been a lot of talk about revolving fund and setting up accounts and whatever, one can say that the funds that are with the GRDB, because of the industry, should be utilised for the benefit of the industry because, if we export

more, the GRDB could make more. But I do not know if the Board has any funds left there. I know back in 2015 there was about \$2 billion available. I understand that about \$200 million was given to do some experiment at Wales, which is yet to provide any result for that intervention of utilising rice farmers' money away from the target area to conduct experiment, whereas money should have been used from the Treasury.

After all, we have a huge Budget of \$250 billion and one would expect betterment for all the sectors and not additional burdens. One would have expected that with that size of Budget, the bigger and better, as was the chant then...but, apparently, bigger is not necessarily better, as we are experiencing now. I do not know whether the increased changes in land rent and in drainage and irrigation fees are going to go towards reaching the \$250 billion mark. Farmers are talking about the amount that was sent to Wales but not to help the sugar workers; sugar workers have not benefited from that amount. I would have supported any intervention to help the sugar workers. I do not know who that amount was to help. It seems to be shrouded in secrecy. We are unable to figure out what is going on there.

Diesel fuel that the industry uses so much of, let us say at \$58 per barrel and given the high taxation on diesel fuel currently, the industry, in any given year, is contributing almost \$3 billion in taxes by virtue of purchasing fuel alone. So it is not that the industry is not contributing or doing its share in terms of taxation. We feel that if we are contributing \$3 billion in taxes by utilising diesel fuel, at least, ease up on the charges for drainage and irrigation; let the *status quo* remain although we are getting much less. We will try to *ban the belly* and make things work. But things cannot work if one has to pay \$15,000 per acre when it used to be \$3,500 per acre.

The industry contributes tremendously towards the overall development of our country and we have to respond in kind. The fact that the industry has been breaking records since 2009 shows clearly that, if any sector, especially a productive sector, is given the kinds of incentives that are needed to stimulate growth and development, then that sector would do the country, the people and the Government well - not on top of increased taxation to have increased charges for services that are provided and to have increases on land rent. I cannot really comprehend why. If diesel fuel is less than maintenance operation and maintenance cost, at least utilising equipment would be less by virtue of the fuel being less. Even with that aside, we can probably understand the Government's agitation in moving that up.

The land rent moved from \$1,000 to \$7,000 while nothing was done or is being done to improve the land by the Government. Farmers are improving the quality of their lands by making their own investment and they should be applauded and encouraged for that, not penalised by a draconian increase. If a farmer uses his own resources to develop and appreciate lands which were classified as pastureland, abandoned land or land that does not benefit from any kind of services, it is unconscionable that the Government would move in, without knowingly making any contribution towards increasing the value of the land and without any consultation, to institute on the farmers that increase from \$1,000 to \$7,000.

We need this Government to engage the stakeholders. We need the Ministry of Agriculture, the Cabinet and the other persons in authority to engage the stakeholders when they contemplate making these moves so that there could be consultations. You would tell us the difficulties you are facing and we will, of course, appreciate much better those difficulties and we also will use the opportunity to tell you what the difficulties are that we are facing so that you would have an appreciation of the difficulties we are facing. Having gotten an appreciation from both sides, then, together, we would be able to make a decision. This is not rocket science. It is practised all over the world, except here. It is the way of proper governance – consultation. The Government knows about it. It was one of the mantras that was being preached in early 2015 – consultation; time to recognise the right of all of our people. That is all that we are asking for.

This motion clearly states that the Government should recognise our contribution. The Government should recognise that these increases, unilaterally, are not in the best interest of our farming community. The Government should recognise that we are not doing so well currently. The Government's own statistics would provide it with that kind of information. It is, I think, a very simple matter for us to have an appreciation for the arguments presented and to state it clearly and finish this debate early. We recognise the concerns that you have articulated. We recognise that farmers are getting much less now for their products. We recognise that the decision we took was a wrong one. We recognise the need for consultation. We will reverse and we will revoke this decision. We will start the consultation with you. We will discuss with you some of the difficulties we are faced with and likewise you with us and, after these consultations, together, we would decide on a way forward for an industry, for a sector, that is strategic to our overall development - 33% of employment and 25% of GDP. Those are not small numbers. I

urge the Government to consider this motion in a positive way and to give it the deserved support so that we could move forward. I rest my case.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, as I make my contribution to the debate on this motion, permit me to remind this House of relevant particulars regarding the authority in question and matters thereto that are pertaining.

The Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary Water Control Project was conceived to facilitate the complete agricultural development of an area of about 450,000 acres of land lying behind the Mahaica and Berbice Rivers on the north eastern Atlantic Coast of Guyana. The plans were first outlined in 1952 and the project proposals were first finalise around 1962. The idea was to provide water control for the coastal lands up to a distance of some 30 miles inland by impounding the floodwaters in surface reservoirs or conservancies located in the upper reaches of the rivers and through the construction of appropriate civil engineering infrastructure to provide drainage and irrigation services to the areas nearest the coast.

The project was divided into three phases with each phase covering an area within the two of the rivers, hence Abary/Berbice, Mahaicony/Abary and Mahaica/Mahaicony. In 1977, the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary Agriculture Development Authority was constituted by statute as the executing agency for the project through Act No. 27 of 1977. In the mid-1980s, Phase I Abary/Berbice construction works were completed with the establishment of the Abary conservancy, along with the completion of secondary works to facilitate the growing of 37,524 acres of paddy.

3.20 p.m.

A further 20,000 acres of private lands have since been cultivated with rice, while extensive livestock rearing has been facilitated. The Blairmont Estate, which cultivates some 14,000 acres of sugar cane, is also serviced by the Authority.

While only Phase 1 of the project has been completed, the areas that are to be included in the other phases have already had some extent of prior development and the Authority is responsible for their administration, with particular emphasis on the operation and maintenance of the

drainage and irrigation (D&I) systems. These services support the cultivation of another 30,000 to 35,000 acres of rice in these areas, in addition to open range livestock rearing.

The Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary (MMA) is currently engaged in the construction of new infrastructural works in the Phase 2 - that is Mahaicony/Abary, which will facilitate the development of another 15,000 areas of lands. Overall, the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary-Agriculture Development Association (MMA/ADA), at present, supports nearly half of the national rice production, about 30% to 35% of all livestock, mostly cattle production, and 10% to 15% of national sugar production. More particularly, the Authority is responsible for the operation and maintenance of 784 miles of drainage and irrigation canals; 381 structures, including kokers, sluices, bridges, aqueducts and regulators and four pump stations. A total of 169,878 acres are beneficially occupied for agricultural purposes.

For more than a decade, farmers were required to pay \$2,500 per acre, annually, that is \$208 per month, notwithstanding the increasing cost of materials and supplies in the provision for D&I services by the MMA/ADA. Despite such a low cost for land and drainage and irrigation services provided by the State, some sections of farmers were still not keeping their end of the agreement, by paying their lease rates, as stipulated by the MMA/ADA Act. As such, this has hampered the Authority from executing planned works, outlined in its work programme, with the most important being the completion of MMA Phases 2 and 3.

In this year's budget, the MMA received \$357 million from Central Government. As the Authority, in view of the existing D&I rates and land rent charges, is unable to meet its operating costs. The MMA/ADA, as a statutory agency under the aegis of the Ministry of Agriculture, is required to provide drainage and irrigation services within the MMA/ADA area, as laid out in the MMA/ADA Act. The areas which fall under the MMA's purview, as mentioned, are the Abary/Berbice, Abary/Mahaicony and Mahaica/Mahaicony. The provision of these D&I services are financed from charges levied on the users of the services. No budgetary appropriations are received for D&I services in these blocks. Over the years, the MMA/ADA has faced serious challenges in meeting the expenditure required for fuel, spares for machinery and increases in salaries/wages of the Authority's workers.

By Cabinet's decision in 2007, the Authority assumed responsibility for the Mahaica/Mahaicony

Block with instructions for the financing responsibilities to be transferred from the Regional Democratic Council (RDC) of Region 5. Over the past nine years, extensive infrastructural and other works have been undertaken in the Block to the extent that the cultivated area has doubled. Consequently, the requirement for D&I services has increased and the Region 5 appropriations are inadequate to meet the cost of providing these services.

The new D&I charges for land in the Abary/Berbice area, which receives from the Authority, flood control, primary drainage and irrigation, secondary drainage and irrigation and primary and secondary access services, ranges from a high of \$8,000 per annum, which is \$666 per month, to \$1,000 per annum, which is \$83 per acre per month, based on the location.

Land in the Mahaicony/Abary Block, which receives flood control, dual purpose D&I services and primary and secondary access services, ranges between \$7,000, annually, which is \$583 per month per acre to \$2,500 per annum, which is \$208 per month, based on location.

Land in the Mahaica/Mahaicony area, which receives from the Authority flood control dual purpose D&I and primary and secondary access services, attracts D&I charges of \$5,000 per annum, which \$416 per month.

Surely these charges cannot be considered as onerous. Indeed, some people might consider such monthly charges for one-acre of land, the equivalent of eight full house lots or 16 half lots, as obtains in our Capital City of Georgetown, as ridiculously low.

Let us now consider land rental charges. In 1998, land rental charges were fixed at \$1,000 per acre per annum, which is \$83 per month per acre. Shortly, thereafter, it was argued, at the level of the MMA/ADA Board, that the rental for land for pasturage should be reduced. The Board agreed to reduce the land rental charges for pasture to \$200 per acre, which is \$17 per month. These charges have remained in place for the past 18 years.

The Rice Farmers (Security of Tenure) Act, Cap: 69:02 is intituled:

“An Act to provide better security of tenure for tenant rice farmers; to limit the rent payable for the letting of rice lands; and for matters connected with the matters aforesaid”.

The guidelines for basic rental per acre per annum are set out in the First Schedule of the Act and are expressed in bags - units are in 140 pound bags of paddy - based on approximately five per cent of the quantity of paddy produced in one two-crop year.

Applying the guidelines, as set out in Chapter 69:02 of the Laws of Guyana, to determine the basic rental of rice lands in the MMA area, require that, based on the national average yield of 35 bags per acre per crop, which is 70 bags per annum, 5% of yield which would attract a charge of 3.5 bags of paddy per acre per year. As the value of one bag of paddy ranges between \$2,000 and \$3,000 per bag and conservatively using the lowest rate of \$2,000, a rental of \$7,000 per annum, or \$583 per acre per month, can legally and appropriately be applied.

In view of the fact that the MMA Board had previously determined that the rental for pasturage should be 20% of that for rice, the new rate for pasture land in the MMA area has been determined at \$1,400 per acre per annum, which is \$117 per acre per month.

Again, I humbly submit that by no stretch of the imagination and under no set of circumstances can these charges be considered exorbitant or present a burden on stakeholders.

In summary, the total of D&I and land rental charges per acre in the MMA area range from \$15,000 per annum, which is \$1,250 per acre per month, to \$12,000 per annum, which is \$1,000 per acre per month, for rice lands; and between \$9,400 per annum, which is \$783 per acre per month and \$6,400 per annum, which is \$583 per month, for pasturage.

Permit me to address what this means financially. Figures obtained from the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB) indicate that the average price for paddy in Region 5 in 2016 was \$2,900 per bag, the equivalent of an annual income of \$203,000 per acre. In agriculture, the three main factors of production are land, labour and capital, with land being the most important of these, since without it not one grain of paddy could be produced. With the cost of land rent and D&I charges being less than 10% of average income per acre per annum, the fees could not possibly be burdensome on any farmer. But, perhaps, the main concern regarding the increase in D&I and land rental charges might be due to the lobbying of those who are involved in the illegal practice of the sub-letting of leased lands in the MMA/ADA area.

Clause 4 of the Lease of State Land for Agricultural Purposes, issued under section 3(b) of the

State Lands Act, Cap 62:01, and in accordance with the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary-Agricultural Development Authority Act No 27 of 1977 states:

“The lessee shall not sublet or give possession of the land hereby leased or any part thereof.”

Without the previous written consent of the lessor.

While the Authority has on record only one instance of authorised subletting, incidence of this practice might be quite common in the area at a rental of a minimum of \$8,000 per acre per crop, which is \$16,000 per annum. The increase in the fees to \$15,000 per annum will severely compromise the illegal returns from this practice. It does, however, indicate that *bona fide* farmers are quite content in paying D&I rates and land rental in excess of those instituted.

The MMA/ADA is a public corporation *via* the Public Corporations Act Cap 19:05. Under section 30 of that Act, a corporation of this nature may charge fees for any service rendered. This is done with the approval of the Minister.

The MMA/ADA Act, Cap 70:01 was enacted to establish the MMA/ADA and to ensure the smooth functioning of that organisation. According to the Public Corporations Act, section 12 (1), such organisations have a duty to stimulate, facilitate and undertake the purpose for which they were established.

In order to effectively carry out its functions as a body corporate, sufficient drainage and irrigation and land rent charges must be collected by the MMA/ADA to facilitate further development of the agriculture sector. According to the draft *National Strategy for Agriculture in Guyana 2016-2020, Development and Maintenance of Agricultural Infrastructure*, pg.58, financing is required for the successful completion of Phases 2 and 3 of the MMA/ADA Strategic Plan. This can only become a reality with legitimate increased drainage and irrigation and land rent charges.

Further, the agricultural sector, in the *National Strategy for Agriculture in Guyana 2013-2020* is mandated to change the view that agriculture is for subsistence livelihood, since it seeks to promote agriculture as a wealth generator and entrepreneurial enterprise, producing food and

non-food commodities to meet local and export demands. If this is to become a reality for small farmers, then there needs to be improved drainage and irrigation services, which can only be possible if the operating and maintenance costs for infrastructure are taken into consideration. Therefore, increased drainage and irrigation charges and land rentals are required.

For these reasons, I cannot recommend support for this motion by this honourable House.
[Applause]

Mr. Damon: Before I go into my speech proper, I heard the Minister of Agriculture made mention about the Rice Farmers (Security of Tenure) Act. What I did not hear the Minister state was that there are three types of soil. There is the saline soil, bagasse soil and the clay soil and each one of them carries a different definition.

If the House want, I can tell it that, for saline soil, one bag of paddy per acre per crop; for bagasse soil, two bags of paddy per acre per crop; and for the clay soil, three bags of paddy per acre per crop. Put that in your pipe and smoke it.

3.35 p.m.

I stand here to contribute to the destruction of the MMA farmers and to help to relieve them. Enough is enough on the weary backs of our cultivation farmers. I wonder where we are going. Could you imagine a farmer is called upon to pay \$15,000 per acre per year for cultivation lands? An increase of \$12,000, these very farmers who have to pay almost 200 taxes - from water to electricity and many others, including Value Added Tax (VAT) on private education in private schools.

This is not democracy. This is nothing else but dictating to our farmers against their will. Let us try to understand that times are so difficult for our rice farmers and their families. Though, throughout the length and breadth of Guyana, I wonder how the rice farmers would find moneys to cultivate these rice lands, which is a very difficult task and to now pay \$15,000 to the Ministry of Agriculture that the MMA is managed by. Hon. Minister of Agriculture Minister, where were you when this decision was made?

I am confident by the way our agricultural sector is declining, that Hon. Minister of Agriculture you are building a reputation as being the worst Minister of Agriculture that Guyana has ever had. I call on this Hon. Minister...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I would suggest that you withdraw the statement which you just made and continue. Hon. Member, you would withdraw the direct attack you made on the Minister.

Mr. Damon: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw and I will rephrase. Hon. Agriculture Minister, you are building a reputation that nobody would like to hear. I call on this Hon. Minister of Agriculture to stop destroying agriculture and our rice farmers. Let me repeat, \$15,000 is too much. Please revisit these figures.

Rice is very costly to cultivate. It costs about \$60,000 to cultivate one acre of paddy or rice. If a farmer cannot reap over 35 bags per acre he is doomed to fail. This is because paddy is sold at \$1600 - \$2000 a bag, depending on the various grains.

Hon. Minister of Agriculture, in your own words, sugar is failing and rice is also failing after the Petro-Caribe Agreement came to an end. Could the Hon. Minister of Agriculture say what his mandate is for sugar and rice in Guyana? The Hon. Member has no mandate and for this rice is doomed. I am in deep sympathy with the farmers in the MMA Scheme, also all my Colleagues on this side of this honourable House. We ask that the Hon. Minister goes back to the bargaining table to have this \$15,000 reduced. It is too much. Hon. Minister of Agriculture, rice farmers need subsidies on fertiliser and agricultural equipment, not increased taxes on land rent.

Hon. Minister you are getting it so wrong. Stop putting undeserved pressure on our rice farmers or else there would be no future for our farmers in the MMA Scheme. Where is the consultation with the farmers? Hon. Minister you continue to flunk your responsibility as the Minister of Agriculture. I now call for the increase to be shelved.

The world needs food and food is the mecca of life. One of the best investments by any Government is to produce food in excess and large quantities so that our country can help feed starving nations in the world. We are part of the United Nations (UN) and the United Nations

Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), but in Guyana agriculture is neglected by this 'I do not care' Government.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I rise not only to attempt to answer the question in the motion on the Notice Paper No. 84 (M 68 Opp. 14), published on 2017-01-18, in the name of Mr. Dharamkumar Seeraj, Member of Parliament (MP), but to give a sense of reasoning and clarity to the increase in land rent and other charges to farmers in the MMA/ADA Scheme.

The Hon. Members from the Opposition would have regaled us with a chorus of percentages, much quality, but of little substance, very low on the quality of reasoning, great repetition and a demonstration of 'Big ABC Mathematics'. Everyone understands percentage, but percentage without reasoning and context is backward thinking. And permit me. **[Mr. Damon: Backward thinking?] It is not forward thinking.**

Our Government is just and reasonable with the increase proposed. The two speakers of the Opposition that presented so far, the mover of the motion hardly ever supported his very motion. Member of Parliament, Mr. Damon, simply regaled us with lots of things about taxes and other issues. But Sir, I must admire the Opposition's honesty in not saying to the House that this critical and useful Scheme was the creation of a Government at another time, when the 'good life' was here for us.

I was at the Mahaicony Secondary School, when this project started in 1977. Before I completed my secondary education, this drainage and irrigation masterpiece was the talk of Region 5, one of the major agricultural belts in this our beloved country. Rice swamp seed, as it is called, is no strange thing to me. I grew up in Burma Mahaicony and I understand the challenges and the successes of the rice industry and say, unreservedly, that I support the rice industry and agriculture, in general, for many of the farmers are my friends, schoolmates and family.

Sir, I know of the dust of rice fields and the cold chilly nights of water logged fields. My memory informs me that the MMA Project was intended to be in three phases, and the first would have been completed. I so much so support the rice farmers if they should ask and this Government could deliver the completion, as Minister of Agriculture stated, of all three phases.

Thus, I ask the farmers to understand this small dollar-value increase, which appears to be a large percentage value increase, as reasonable and just at this time.

Hence, I join my Colleagues to remove the factious and irresponsible thinking that the increase is burdensome and unreasonable. Facts and facts alone will erase this and that is what this side of the House is presenting. Sir, the lot for farmers is not always rosy, but this Government understands the challenges and will continue to work with our farmers, as we are grateful for their contribution to the *Grow More Food and Feed Ourselves* mantras. That was the vision in 1976 and this Administration will certainly realise.

This rice belt averages 35 bags per acre, almost 10 bags per acre more than when the Scheme had started. The research I did, suggests that, in 2012, the average cost to produce one bag was over \$2700 per bag. Today, this is somewhere hovering around \$2000. Likewise, the average cost per acre in 2016 was \$72,580 per acre, while in 2012 this was over \$80,000 per acre. We are not suggesting that we collect these savings from the farmers, but suggest that the performance of the D&I would have contributed to the cost and, consequently, the profit and better performance of the Scheme.

We would all want to have the MMA fulfil its mandate, which is a statutory agency under the Ministry of Agriculture, and that is to provide drainage and irrigation services within the MMA area, which is laid out in the MMA Act and is one and the same as the area described as Region 5.

More conveniently, the MMA is a composite of three geographic blocks, Abary/Berbice, Abary/Mahaicony and Mahaica/Mahaicony, each of which is between two rivers.

The intention is that the provision of D&I services in the Abary/Berbice and Abary/Mahaica blocks be financed from charges levied on the users of this service and rightly so. A perusal of the budgetary appropriation shows no provision and, thus over the years, the MMA/ADA has faced serious challenges in meeting the expenditure.

I ask, must we continue to allow this? Despite continued increases in labour and related expenses, the D&I charges have remained static for over a decade. Must this continue? I say no and we on this side of the House say no. We have noted that the Mahaica/Mahaicony blocks

operate differently and, thus, they had infrastructure and other works undertaken over the past nine years. What happened was, by the Cabinet decision in 2007, the MMA assumed responsibility for the Mahaicony/ Mahaica block, with instructions for financing responsibilities to be transferred from the RDC of Region 5. This has resulted in almost a doubling of the cultivated area. The D&I services require an increase. Secondly, the RDC in Region 5 appropriations were inadequate to meet costs. But it should be noted that the users in the Mahaica/Mahaicony Block do not pay for D&I services, while users in the other blocks pay. It is only reasonable that Mahaica/Mahaicony users also pay.

Let us examine the basic land rental charges, as was clearly outlined by Minister Holder. The land rental charges were fixed at \$1000 per acre in 1998, but with dialogue at the Board level, pasture land was reduced to \$2,000 per acre. The rate today remains \$200 per acre for pasture land and \$1,000 per acre for rice land. A better understanding of an acre is needed. One acre is approximately a 950ft by 100ft house lot, which is a pretty large area.

Now, let us move beyond the 'Big ABC Mathematics' and be guided by the Rice Farmers Act, Cap. 69:02 which sets out the schedule for the basic rent per annum. This is based on bags at 140 pounds and approximately five per cent of the quantity of paddy produced in one two-crop year. Five per cent of the average five acre bags per acre will give us 3.5 bags per acre. Taking a price of only \$2,700 per bag, this will give us just under \$10,500 per acre for rice lands. Using the established 20% for pasture, we would get \$2,100 per acre, per annum.

The charges proposed are reasonable and this side of the House unreservedly do not support the motion as read by MP, Mr. Seeraj.

I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Dharamlall: Thank you Mr. Speaker and good afternoon to you and to my Colleagues in the National Assembly.

3.50 p.m.

I would like to join with the MPs on this side of the House in calling for a revocation of the unconscionable land rates that have been proposed and are currently being implemented by the

Ministry of Agriculture, through the MMA/ADA. I think that, in addition to it being disrespectful and unconscionable, it came from a lot of backward thinking.

The Constitution, Article 38(a), states:

“To ensure that Guyana is a democratic State with a healthy economy. The State shall-

- (a) Facilitate the engagement of citizens in activities designed to achieve their sustainable livelihood;
- (b) Progressively remove the barriers that prohibit or limit the realization of the potential for self-sustaining activities in such fields as agriculture, processing, manufacturing and artistic and information-based activities...”

So, I find it strange that, as we are trying to build a democratic state that we are also, at the same time, going against what needs to be done. The Hon. Mr. Seeraj mentioned, in his opening statement, that there was no consultation done with our farmers. I think that the Hon. Minister also, by and large, refused to identify, if any, what type of consultation was done with our farmers, to arrive at these monumental unconscionable backward increases. So, I think too, that what is happening before us is that we are not building a democratic state, but we are forging ahead into an electoral autocratic state, which is totally different from what our Constitution wants.

I find it strange too, with the two speakers before me on the Government’s side who tried to defend these increases, that agriculture is being targeted by this Government for so much destruction. I mean the Government, through the two speakers, spoke in support of increases, but when we take this as a whole and we multiply the \$431 plus per month that the Hon. Minister spoke about as part of the increases, and then when we multiply that by the 200 plus taxes that we have in our country, that is where our problem is. It is about the hardship that people face on a daily basis.

So, for the Government that earns super salaries and super *fat cat* salaries, they could afford it, but poor farmers in this country cannot afford a single dollar more. They cannot afford it and when you lump all of these taxes and increases on farmers, then our problems in this country are progressively getting worse. We increase prices on rice and taxes and what happens? The cost of

production goes up. But the problem that we have, the efficiency, is still where it is. Our efficiency is not being enhanced. The services that are being provided are also not the services that the people are being paid for and which the Government is charging for.

When the cost of production rises what happens? Concomitantly, as we speak, the price of rice is decreasing. Production cost goes up; we cannot compete in our export market. Rice, and in Guyana's case we are a net food exporter, we contribute, of course, to the national food security, to the regional food security and to the food security ex-regionally. So, when we cannot compete in our markets what happens? We cannot get foreign exchange and when we cannot get foreign exchange what happens? We have constraints in our financial sector and in the economy. How is the Government going to be meeting the expenditure of a \$250 billion budget? Apparently, it is increasing every year, so I expect it is going to probably be bigger next year and the following year. What is going to happen?

The only resort this Government has, with agriculture failing, primarily rice, sugar and the forestry sectors, which are the biggest agricultural sectors in our country, earning the most foreign exchange. When those fail, what is going to happen? More taxes on our people. So, my worry is, come 2018, this Government is going to tax people even further and that is our greatest worry. So, it is not just about the \$431 thereabout, which the Hon. Minister spoke about per month, but it is about the effect it has on our daily lives. Can people really afford all of what is taking place?

Then we speak about building rural agriculture and rural families. When we affect agriculture in Region 5, we are going to be dislocating thousands of families and thousands of households. I think that we have about 2,500 plus farmer's households that are involved directly in agriculture in Region 5. We have nearly 48,000 people who are dependent on agriculture in Region 5. When rice fails, the entire region will fail. You know that sugar is planted in Region 5 too. That sugar has failed under this Government. So, irrespective of all of the shenanigans about sugar that this Government is putting forward, it is a failed enterprise that this Government is managing.

The other thing too, when we speak about livestock and non-traditional crops, Region 5 is the biggest cattle rearing region in our country. When we raise land rent from \$399 per acre to nearly 3,600, what do you think is going to happen to our livestock producers in Region 5? So, I do not

understand the logic with which this Government moves itself and with which decisions are taken by this Government.

Mr. Speaker, if you permit me, I think too that these increases are terribly illogical and they are counterproductive to nation building. Like I said, it is going to dislocate rural families, it is going to drive people away from agriculture and this whole notion that farmers feed our nation, is going to be a failed notion under the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government. I also think too that, with such failures in agriculture as we speak, we are going to have an increase in crime; we are going to have massive increases in unemployment; and we are going to have massive levels of poverty once again in our country.

And when that happens, we cannot afford to send our children to school. There were parents out there, when I was coming in here, protesting because they cannot afford the VAT on education to send their children to school. So, when there are farmers, primarily in Region 5, who are going to be affected by all of this, what do you think is going to happen to those thousands of school children? Very soon the two David G. buses would probably not have children to take to school. I think too that this Government needs to relook at the salary increases... sorry the land rates. I actually have their salary increases on my mind, I think they should relook it as well.

I think too that it is important that, as we move forward in trying to build an agricultural state, we also need to look at the types of investments that are being made. The Hon. Minister spoke about 750 plus 84 miles of the D&I, 381 structures and four pump stations, the entire Region 5 infrastructure, especially in the Abary area, that is already dug and managed. When we are going to drive rice farmers and livestock farmers away from the lands; when we are going to be driving the 2,000 plus 500 acres that are cultivated by non-traditional farmers, cultivated with non-traditional crops, what do you think is going to take place in our country?

I genuinely believe that, come in the next few months, we probably would not be able to afford to buy bora in Georgetown, but of course, this Government is too organised. They do not understand what takes place in poor people's lives in the far flung areas. I would like to encourage Members of the Government to go out and visit the rural communities and to speak with people, to understand what their concerns are, so that, as a Parliament... The duty of all of us in this Parliament is to ensure that the rights of the people are protected. We should ensure

that employment is generated and we should ensure that the lives of our children are also fostered.

We cannot continue to sit here just debating something that makes no sense for national development. Agriculture is failing because the Government has no vision for agriculture. So, charging more for agriculture and agriculture is deteriorating is not *rocket science*. It means that the Government is one, mismanaging the sector or two, whatever the Government is doing is not in sync with what is needed, which means that the Government is visionless.

So, again I would like to join with my Colleagues on this side of the House and call for a rescindment of the increases. I would hope that you would use your good chair to ensure that this gets done.

Thank you, very much. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is now four o'clock. We will take the suspension. I will invite Members of the Committee of Selection to meet with me, immediately, after we rise here, to deal with one issue.

Sitting was suspended at 4.02 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 5.00 p.m.

Ms. Wade: I rise to make my contribution to the motion that is before this House today. I am speaking from a regional perspective. I can recall the days when farmers had to depend on rainfall and the pumping of water into the rice lands just to receive one crop yearly. The People's National Congress (PNC) Administration, under the late President, the Hon. Forbes Burnham, then, brought relief to farmers by introducing the MMA Water Control Project to facilitate agricultural development to the landline between Mahaica and the Berbice River on the North-Eastern Atlantic Seacoast of Guyana.

5.12 p.m.

This project was divided into three phases, hence the Abary/Berbice, the Mahaicony/Abary and the Mahaica/Mahaicony areas. In the mid-1980, Phase 1, Abary/Berbice construction works were

completed to facilitate rice farming, livestock rearing, cash crop and sugar cultivation. As such, it was deemed the largest agriculture region in the country.

The previous Government took over a perfect Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary-Agriculture Development Authority (MMA/ADA) system on a platter. Over the years it was in office, it reduced the charges which it had inherited. Consequently, the system failed to maintain itself, thus making the authority face serious challenges, annually, in meeting expenditures to provide various services to farmers.

The low charges remained the same until the previous Government demitted office, despite the high cost for fuel and spares for machinery and increase in salaries for MMA/ADA staff over the years. I believe that the staff of the MMA/ADA are receiving the lowest salaries ever. This action placed the authority in a serious crisis in relation to its position to fulfil its statutory obligation. This is the obligation of providing farmers with the quality service they were accustomed to. The previous Government took the authority to its lowest, because of the very low payments. We are saying that that must not remain the same.

In the MMA/ADA scheme there is an urgent need for plenty of work to be done. Payments of charges from farmers are very poor because the service is not there, so nobody, over the years, wanted to pay for what was being receiving. Thus, the situation has put the Authority in a very difficult financial position, and that is the reason the MMA/ADA is trying to do an expansion in its revenue base.

Presently, the authority is finding it difficult to weed and clean canals and drains, de-silting the over fall channels, repair structures, *kokers*, sluices, bridges and culverts, grade access dams and maintain inlets and outlets. I can go on and on. As such, the farmers are receiving services in the run down areas of which I made mention earlier. Who would want to pay for those kinds of services? Is there anybody in this House who can tell me that? There is a pump station and a sea sluice. The sluice has to be closed during the high tide period. As for the pumps, four of them were normally turned on to drain the farmlands for the residential communities. Let them say to this House what they did with those pumps.

Presently, during the rainy season areas such as Number 28 and Number 30 Villages, among others, are under water. Those are the basin areas in the region. It is because of the deplorable

state in which they left the authority, the farmers are suffering and owe the MMA/ADA, as to what the Hon. Member Mr. Seeraj spoke about. Comrades even protested. During the last period of rainfall in the region, they blocked the roads. Why? It was because of what we inherited. We are now trying to fix the system. Give us our space to fix the system.

At this point, I must say that the MMA/ADA had systems in place to police the various areas. Rangers were appointed so that rice or cattle farmers could have been prevented from abusing the system. I stood on the Opposition side and I spoke about all of these things. Nobody listened. Now that they are in the seat over there, they are now seeing and hearing.

The four-wheel tractors, animals, were prevented from traversing, be it rain or sunshine, in those days. Now, it is lawlessness. Anybody is going up and down and in and out. We have to get money to repair those damages. Further, there are 88 structures along the main canals that regulate the quantity of water to be taken from the main canal into the secondary canal. The Hon. Member Seeraj knows what I am speaking about. The majority of them were destroyed and, because of that, the authority is suffering from huge wastage of irrigation water. As a result, farmers are suffering and we are trying to put the systems in place.

As for the 24 miles of all-weather road, it was the intention of the authority to upgrade and maintain those areas from time to time. It is because of the very low charges that that could not have been done. Twenty-four miles cannot even be maintained, much less to improve more.

How can other areas be developed? That question was asked. I give the farmers south of the main canal my sympathy. They are the ones, Mr. Seeraj, who are suffering. What did the previous Government do for them over the years? Tell this House – nothing. They suffered for 23 years. We are in Government for two years and all of you want us to fix it. Give us time to fix it. We have a lot of mess to clean up. The fact is that farmers are dissatisfied with the services that they are receiving. Some of them are finding it hard to pay. The sad state of affairs is evident in the unacceptable amounts of moneys that are owed to the MMA/ADA.

Hon. Member Seeraj, the Rice Producers Association (RPA) is saying to the farmers in Region 5 that they should not pay and that they should let the Government find the money and fix the problem. If you did not fix it for 23 years, how are we going to fix it in two years? Let the previous Government say to the farmers what it did over the 23 years. It did nothing for farmers

in Region 5. That is the reason the MMA/ADA is in crisis and in the run down state of affairs today. Now they are saying to us what we should do. Shame on you, Comrade - shame!

The MMA/ADA is responsible for the operation and maintenance of drainage and irrigation and the complete agricultural development of Region 5. That is why the authority must not depend on a Government bail out to give farmers a quality of service. The MMA/ADA must do it and we intend to do better.

I want to remind the previous Government of some of the suffering that the farmers went through over the years. There was the repossession of land. Some farmers were even taken to court. Farmers' names were published in the newspapers. They destroyed all of the co-op societies in the region and now they are coming to tell us how we must run this affair. Farmers and villagers are currently divided in the region because of the previous Government. I can go on and on. Those were the days when farmers walked over the canals due to the high vegetation. I know it because I walked over, too, the canals in those days. I spoke about those matters over and over but nobody listened and nobody saw. They were blind and deaf. Now that they are over there, all of a sudden they are seeing and hearing. Why is it that when we are trying to guarantee sustainability of the authority, to bring the MMA/ADA back to its former glory, the Opposition is playing a hard political gimmick ball game for its personal gains?

I say that the GuySuCo is receiving a bail out. The MMA/ADA must not receive a bail out. Give 'David' a chance. I rest my case.

Thank you Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Mustapha: I rise to support the motion as was moved by the Hon. Member on this side of the House. Before I go into my main presentation, I heard almost all of the speakers from the Government side regaled this House on the MMA/ADA scheme, the history of the MMA/ADA scheme, how the MMA/ADA scheme was set up and how all of the problems being experienced within the last two years came about under the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C). They are running this country and they are still blaming the PPP/C. That shows that when someone does not have a vision and a plan they will always blame someone else. As the old saying goes, *a bad workman always quarrels with his tools*. They are playing the blame game.

We just heard the Hon. Member talked about this beautiful MMA/ADA scheme. It was the PPP/C that took this scheme and made Region 5 the largest rice-producing area in this country. When the PPP/C was in Government, farmers never blocked the road and farmers never burnt tyres on the road. Two years they have been in Government and their own supporters have got disgusted with them. They are burning tyres and blocking the road.

I visited a number of areas in Region 5, and not only areas that are considered to be PPP areas. I visited Seafield; I visited Number 30 Village; I visited Trafalgar; and I visited Hopetown. Mr. Speaker, let me tell you this: The farmers in Seafield are crying today. It is because their lands are being taken over forcefully by this Government. The Hon. Member Mr. Nandlall would tell you. He is representing them now in court. That is what this Government is doing and they are talking about agriculture.

I rest my case here to say that this Government is blaming the PPP/C Government for all of its faults.

With regard to this motion, which we are debating today, the increases in land rent and other charges to farmers in the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary-Agriculture Development Authority, what are the operative words? They are “new charges”. The hallmark of this Government is new charges. This begs the question, what else would they put new charges on?

This Government, having broadside this nation with a deluge of new taxes and unconscionable increases in fees and licences by hundreds of per cent, is now singling out one section of our population for new and additional burdens. In another three days from today would be two years since this Government took office. What has it done for agriculture in this country? Every single sector - we heard the Hon. Member Dharamlall speaks about it - agriculture, rice, sugar and forestry are all on the downward spiral in this country. If they were so good in managing an economy...I just saw on the news that 704 Food and Entertainment Complex would be closing its international franchise in Guyana. That is the problem with this country.

My view is that this Government's, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government, decision is being motivated by politics. It views agriculture as a base for the PPP and that is why it is trying to destroy agriculture in our country.

It is not just about increasing stacks of suffering on the backs of the ordinary Guyanese, but it is the authoritative manner in which this Government imposes these increases.

5.27 p.m.

This Government is priding itself in bringing about suffering and financial wounds to the Guyanese people. The farmers learned of these increases through a public announcement. There were no prior consultations as the Hon. Member Comrade Seeraj, mentioned, with the farmers, organisation, or any stakeholders. It was the same with other increases. Do you remember the last budget debate in this National Assembly and we were in the Committee of Supply when one of the Members, on this side of the House, asked a question and then the Guyanese public realised that the tolls for the Demerara Harbour Bridge would increase. This is the way they go about doing things. They impose suffering on Guyanese people.

Mr. Speaker, just how they announce announced the closure of the Wales Estate, let me tell you, they are doing these actions without any repercussion, because they feel if they want to impose anything they do not care about public opinion. That is why, to date, 1,700 workers and their families are on the breadlines at Wales Estate. Thousands of other persons, who are depending directly on the sugar industry, are out of business. What this tells us? It tells us that this is reflective of a dictatorship in the making. This is growing every day for the last two years since the Government took office.

The MMA/ADA farmers are simple hard-working Guyanese who toil every day if it rain or sun, not only to earn a decent living and to provide for their families, but also they provide a service to countless others who depend on them for food production. These increases would not only affect the farmers, many of whom would probably be forced out of the livelihood, because we listen to the complaints of people in West Coast Berbice, in Mahaicony, Mahaica, Abary. People are now coming off the land because the cost of production is so high. As I said, poverty now stark this land under two years of rulership with this Government. Paying more has become a mantra for this Government. Since it took over we have seen an increase in licences, new and higher taxes, increase in the cost of living, value added tax (VAT) on water and electricity, VAT on private education, and I can go on and on. All of those suffering were brought by this Government - this hopeless, visionless Government.

It seems that this Government has an obsession to put serious burden on the Guyanese people. This seems like the only logical explanation. Why almost every week it unilaterally implement measures to suffer people? There is the increase in charges. The farmers of MMA/ADA have to pay just over 600%. They can make all kinds of sarcastic remarks. I remembered I was in this House speaking about the budget debate and the Members on the Government side did not show any respect for the ordinary people. They would be, when you are talking about the ordinary people, that you are mad. This is the kind of language they are using. They do not have any respect for anyone in this country. These are the unconscionable increases designed to punish our farmers at a time when the Government needs to stimulate agriculture production and the economy as a whole.

These high percentage increases is fitting in with Government's obsession with high numbers after giving themselves hefty big increases. What can these farmers now do when they are forced to pay \$11,500 increase per acre for land rent and drainage and irrigation (D&I) charges? The cost of production, we heard from speaker after speaker, from this side of the House, is already high. Not even if you add a cent to it, the burden would come more, the principle would come more. You cannot save \$241 a month more. It is more money. You are putting additional burden on the poor and ordinary working people of this country. We must not forget that not so long ago when they were in Government, prior to 1992, that they killed agriculture, especially the rice industry. We brought it back to life and they are now taking it down again. They are blaming the PPP/C Government.

These are the people who have to work for us, the ordinary farmers. They do not have the state taking care of their drivers and vehicles, taking their children to school. They do not have the state to pay their electricity and water bills. They do not have the state to pay their internet and telephone bills. They have to pay it themselves and while they are trying to earn an honest day living this Government is putting tremendous burden on these ordinary hard-working people.

I want to say, no matter how small a country is, no matter how poor a country is, no matter how small an economy is, everywhere you go, as long the productive sector, is facing crisis the Government tries to get subsidies and incentives so that it can build back itself and the economy. Unlike this Government with no vision, it is adding an additional burden on the farmers, so that they can come out of production. They are talking. Every day you hear people lamenting the fact

that the economy is going down. Businesses are not going on. Businessmen are laying off their staff. Is this the “good life” that they promised the Guyanese people?

I want to say that I join with my colleague on this side of the House to say that the fees are too high for the farmers in the MMA/ADA scheme. As such, if the Government has interest in agriculture, if it wants agriculture to be the backbone of Guyana economy, then it will reduce the fees, implement subsidies and give incentives to the farmers.

I thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Minister of Citizenship [Mr. Felix]: Permit me please, Sir, to make two comments on some assertion made by the previous speaker. One of his early comments was about who created the MMA/ADA scheme. Let me set the record straight. Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, now deceased, originated that scheme. He did not do so because he had supporters in there. He did so out of an interest in making the agricultural lands available to all the residents of West Berbice. That was the intention. It was not to play politics with an important aspect of this economy.

From his second point about the persons in Number 42 Village and Number 43 Village West Berbice... I do not know when he went there, but between 2014 and 2015 I was summoned, while we were in Opposition, by the residents of Number 42 Village to the Community Centre where I met about 30 persons, all of whom were complaining about seizure of land by MMA/ADA. In this computer I have a report which was submitted by a lawyer and resulted in a matter going to court. Those two assertions were completely unfounded, inaccurate and should be treated as such.

Mr. Mustapha: Point of Order, Standing Order 40 (a), I just want to correct the Hon. Member that I never said the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) created the MMA/ADA scheme. You could check the transcript. I said that I heard the Government side talked about the creation of the scheme and the PPP develop the scheme to be one of the schemes that produces the largest amount of rice. That is what I said.

Mr. Felix: Mr. Speaker, the statement in the first Whereas clause can give no cause for alarm but inherent in that clause are all the reasons to justify the modest and considerate increases in

drainage and irrigation and land rent charges proposed by the board of the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary/Agricultural Development Authority.

In the second Whereas clause, there is a false and misleading statement that Government has unilaterally imposed increases in land and other charges to farmers. Nothing can be further from the truth. This APNU/AFC Government treats the MMA/ADA according to the relevant legislation contained in section 3 of the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary /Agricultural Development Authority Act, Chapter 70:01 which states: “The MMA/ ADA shall be a body corporate.” This means that the MMA/ADA has attained the character of an independent legal entity separate from the people who own, control and manage it. In fact, the MMA/ADA is managed by a board with Dr. Sealey as its Chairman and armed with that facility to act independently. The board can set charges it considers necessary to ensure the viability and sustainability of the scheme.

In the third Whereas clause is mischievous. The mover of this motion had to be so ashamed not to produce the figures, including the old and new charges. The old figures are ridiculously low and to produce a figure of 600% representing the increase is intended to serve a devious political purpose, but, I would describe these increases later.

The fourth and fifth Whereas Clauses have no worth other than to excite and incite rice farmers in Region 5. The increases are intended to enable MMA/ADA to maintain the infrastructure that rice farmers need to sow and reap their crops, and to ensure the viability of the entity.

The Be It Resolved clause, therefore, is a non-starter as it would cripple the MMA/ADA and deny it much needed financial resources to pursue its mandate.

The MMA/ADA has been created during the regime, as I said before, of Forbes Burnham People’s National Congress (PNC) Government by Act No. 27/1977 which came into force in in 1978 for the purpose of providing drainage and irrigation to lands in Region 5, Mahaica/Berbice. According to the description given in the first schedule of the MMA Act Chapter 70:01, we have already been told of the three blocks of land which comprise the scheme, that is, Abary/Berbice, Abary/Mahaicony and Mahaicony/Mahaica which comprise the MMA/ADA. The scheme came into being in 1988 but the Mahaicony/Mahaica was not included though it was identified for development.

The MMA/ADA is a system of canals, drains, aqueducts, *kokers* and dams in order to facilitate rice and cash crop farming and cattle rearing. The MMA/ADA was created and given functions in the MMA/ADA Act between Chapter 70:01, sections 4, paragraph (a) to (0). Some of these functions include *inter alia*:

- (i) to prepare plans for, approve and undertake responsibility for construction of drainage and irrigation systems or related works;
- (ii) to accelerate and promote agricultural development in the area;
- (iii) to prepare and approve plans and schemes, relating to land use in the area, including the location of new canals; and
- (iv) to act as the principal agency in implementing approved plans for drainage and irrigation schemes.

5.42 p.m.

These functions do not exhaust the various areas of work which the legislation has assigned to the authority, but the authority has to receive revenue from reliable sources to execute its mandate. Therefore farmers, who had lands in the agricultural area and were benefiting from the drainage and irrigation facilities, which were constructed, were required to pay for the operation, management and maintenance of the structures, which include drains and canals, dams, *kokers*, pumps and bridges. Section 28 of the MMA Act gives the authority the power to fix charges each year for drainage and irrigation services provided by it for the proprietors of land in the area. This rate fixing task was performed by the Technical staff who calculated the charges. Between 1995 and 1998 farmers were required to pay \$3,550 per acre per year. In 1999, the charges were reduced in half. The question is: Who must bear the cost of maintenance of canals, drains, dams, vehicles and equipment, *kokers*, bridges and aqueducts?

We must be reminded that the MMA/ADA was made a body corporate by section 3 of Chapter 70:01 and the work of the MMA/ADA must be done by members of the body corporate. Therefore in the second Whereas clause of this motion accuses the Government of “unilaterally imposed increases in land rent and other charges”, but that was a decision of the MMA/ADA Board. In 1998 agricultural land rental charges were fixed at \$1,000 per acre per annum. Shortly

thereafter, it was argued at the MMA/ADA Board that the rental of land for pasturage should be reduced. The board agreed to reduce the land rental charges for pasture to \$200 per acre where it remained until now.

The rental charges for rice lands have remained at \$1, 000 per acre per annum for the past 18 years. This single Act reduced the revenue collected and available for the maintenance of structures which the MMA/ADA was responsible for. The resultant effect was reduced maintenance of dams, canals and bridges. For almost 20 years, rates were not increased. Farmers were required to pay reduced rates per acre annually, despite the increasing cost of materials and supplies required to provide drainage and irrigation services by the MMA/ADA, thus leaving the authority hamstrung to provide the services required of it in the MMA /ADA area.

There are approximately 748 miles of drainage and irrigation canals, 381 structures, inclusive of *kokers*, culverts, bridges, dams and canals and four pump structures. Apart from the regular maintenance of these, there was vandalism of two critical drainage pumps in the Trafalgar area. The MMA/ADA was unable to have these pumps fixed due to lack of available funds. Central Government was required to provide financial aid to offset the expenses to curtail severe flooding in the Union, Tempe and Trafalgar villages.

Rice farmers in Region 5, most of which is covered by the MMA/ADA, have enjoyed increased yields over the period 2012 to 2016 and experienced the third highest yields in the country of 35.3 bags per acre. The yields, in terms of bags per acre, according to the figures from officials from MMA/ADA, are 2012 - 28.9 bags, 2013 - 31.2 bags, 2014 - 32.4 bags, 2015 - 35.4, 2016 - 35.3 bags at an average of 32.4 bags. This illustration clearly shows that the yield per bag of rice progressively improved between 2012 and 2016 from 28.9 bags per acre in 2012 to 35.3 bags per acre in 2016 at an average of 32.4 bags. These improved yields have been accompanied by reduced cost of production in Region 5.

In 2012, the average cost per acre was \$80,245.5, 2013. It was reduced to \$71,879; in 2014, it was \$69,784 per acres; in 2015, it was \$70,824 and then came down in 2016 to \$67,687. In term of bags per acres, in 2012 the cost to produce a bag of rice per acre was \$2,776, in 2013 - \$2,303, 2014 - \$2,153, 2015 - \$2,000 and in 2016 - \$1,917. The cost of production of rice reduced from \$80, 245.5 bags per acre in 2012 to \$67,687.5 in 2016, at an average cost per a bag of \$72,085.

Similarly, the cost of producing one bag of rice reduced from \$2,769 in 2012 to \$1, 917 in 2016. What this means that the efficient operation of the MMA/ADA is essential to improve its productivity of rice within the authority's agricultural area.

I am in sympathy with persons who take risk, such as rice farmers, and there are always high in low points in earnings. This is so all over the world, and in the case of the rice farmer in Guyana is no exception.

The MMA/ADA is not only required to manage the infrastructure within the Berbice/Abary and Abary/Mahaicony blocks, but also the Mahaica/Mahaicony block. By Cabinet decision in 2007, MMA/ADA assumed responsibility for the Mahaica/Mahaicony block, but without the rate pay and responsibility of those who were benefiting from the services. Therefore let me say that the MMA/ADA was intended to be self-sufficient and it has to finance its infrastructural work within its boundary without the payment of rates by the farmers. Let me give you an example of infrastructural work done, and for which contractors had to be paid, rehabilitation Perth/Baiabu Canal, rehabilitation of six drainage canals in that area and constructed heavy-duty bridge over Manuel Canal. In a joint effort with the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA), it dug a seven-mile long Kulliserabo canal in 21 days, to bring fresh water to rice farms from the upper reaches of the Mahaica Creek. These capital intensive projects require massive sums of money. The authority is experiencing severe financial stress on its finances caused by an unjust reduction in rates, failure to increase those rates over time and the imposition of the Mahaica/Mahaicony block upon the authority without the ability to receive rates.

The negative actions could contribute to the authority being unable to maintain the infrastructural facilities within its boundaries. I anticipate that without the proposed increases, the justification, which the Opposition speakers have not recognised, would eventually lead to a call on the state to bail out MMA/ADA. This must be avoided at all cost.

I cannot support this motion but join the Hon. Minister of Agriculture in supporting the proposed increases.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Nandlall: The privilege is mine to lend my humble voice to the cries of the rice farmers of this country, calling upon this Government to reverse the increases imposed by the MMA/ADA. Your Honour, this motion was not hatched at Freedom House or at the Leader of the Opposition's office. I have listened to my friend, the Hon. Member Jennifer Wade, for whom I have deep respect for as a farmer and I extend to her my empathy because she found herself in quite an invidious position knowing full well the plight of the rice farmers, herself, facing serious obstacles, but she had to sing a political song today.

We have been asked, as representatives of the rice farmers, from both sides of the political divide. The Leader of the Opposition, visited Region 5, and visited areas villages such as Seafield, Number 40 Village, Hopetown and Belladrum. My distinguished colleagues, of that side of the honourable House, know full well where the votes from those villages went at the last election. I say that to put this motion into perspective and let us stop the politicking.

We are here canvassing the concerns of the rice farmers. They were here and they were barricaded away from coming closer to the precinct of this Parliament. On the last session of this Parliament a motion was moved by a Member of the then Opposition, Mr. Desmond Trotman, for the removal of barricades from in front of this Parliament, unanimously supported by the Government when it was in the Opposition. Today the barricades have multiplied five and six-fold, so much so that for the first time in years Guyanese citizens, who wish to protest in front of the Parliament, so that the Government of the day could hear their cry directly when they sit in this honourable House, are now prevented from so doing.

5.57 p.m.

Today the rice farmers were put beyond the barricade. Today the people protesting against VAT on education were put beyond the barricade. Those who protested the ban on used tyres were put beyond the barricade. There must be a reason why so many different groups of people who represent so many different interest groups are protesting. They are anxious to have their voices heard by the Government of the day. They are going to the Ministry of the Presidency and they are getting no response. They are going to the Ministries and they are getting no response. When they try to get their voices heard in the Parliament or by the Parliament, they are barricaded. That is the reality of the situation facing the people of this country.

When myself, the Hon. Member Seeraj and the Hon. Member Mustapha stand and speak to this motion, we have no private, pecuniary or vested interest in this motion. We are simply conveying the concerns, the sentiments, the protestations, the anguish and the suffering of the rice farmers of our country.

If the Government wishes to treat it in a flippant manner, to dismiss it summarily, that is a matter for the Government. The rice farmers are viewing what is going on. At some point in time, the rice farmers would speak.

The Hon. Minister Felix and someone else made the issue as to who started the MMA/ADA a contentious one. The original piece of land (750,000 hectares) for the MMA/ADA was identified and demarcated by Premier Cheddi Jagan. That is an undisputed fact. It was surveyed by a British surveyor, Mr. Hutchinson. The MMA/ADA is a product, a baby, born out of the cradle and bosom of the People's Progressive Party (PPP).

It is true that the Forbes Burnham Government brought it into being as a corporate entity. If Minister Felix does his research, he would see that Dr. Jagan, in this House, extended critical support to the People's National Congress (PNC) to get International Development Bank (IDB) funding to start the MMA/ADA. No one party could claim ownership of the MMA/ADA. I just wanted to put that into perspective.

This motion cannot be debated in isolation. The rice industry does not exist in a vacuum. The rice farmers are not living on an island. Region 5 is not somewhere in space. It is in the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. Therefore, to understand the plight of the rice farmers, to understand why this motion is here, we have to examine the surrounding circumstances. We have to take into account the regime of taxation which has been imposed on the backs of the farmers. We have to take into account VAT on education, on water and on light. We have to take into account VAT, for the first time, being imposed on agricultural equipment. We have to take into account, for the first time, that rice farmers cannot get market for their paddy in over a decade. You have to take into account the fact that when we put forward a regime right in this House to assist the rice farmers, it was rejected by this Government; it was a regime that would have seen the removal of rents from State lands for an interim period; a regime that would have seen the removal of taxes on gasoline and diesel for a period; a regime that would have seen the

removal of VAT on heavy-duty equipment. Instead, we have had the reverse in every request that we have made on behalf of the rice farmers. It was not only rejected. Had it been rejected, we would have lived with that. It was reversed. It was maybe to spite the farmers by saying, “If you want no VAT, we will put VAT. You want removal of taxes from electricity; we would add more taxes. You want a removal of rates of MMA/ADA; we are imposing an increase on your backs. That is the insensitive posture of this Government. That is the reality that the rice farmers face.

We cannot quarrel with statistics and history. We could come here and twist words. The truth of the matter is: in 1991, as a country, we produced, 90,000 tons of rice. In 2014, we produced 690,000 tons. That is the reality, no matter what you say. That would never change. When you check who was in government during that period, it was the PPP. Maybe it is a coincidence, but it is the reality. Since we left government, rice production in this country has declined by 30%. Sixty per cent of the rice farmers who were on the land in 2014, 40% of them are no longer on the land. Wakenaam was producing thousands of tons and now Wakenaam is done. Rice is finished with in Wakenaam. That is the reality of today’s rice industry.

We heard about the taking away of rice lands. The fact that this increase is being imposed is not the only challenge that the rice farmers are facing. I have a notification, a public advertisement, published in the *Kaieteur News* newspaper of Friday, 18th March, 2016 and it lists 24 leases issued by MMA/ADA under the caption: Cancellation of State Land Leases Seafield and No. 40 Villages, West Coast Berbice.

“Notice is hereby given that His Excellency, the President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana has cancelled all State land leases as described in the Schedules.”

When we talk about cancellation of leases, these are the facts. In 2016, 25 leases were cancelled at one time. It is not only about the reverse in the fees.

The coalition Government promised the people of this country a consultative democracy. When you go through its Manifesto, several pages are dedicated to that - very ideal concepts.

The Hon. Member, Ms. Jennifer Wade, outlined that the MMA/ADA has problems and that it needs to raise funds and that the current rate or rates are not viable and cannot sustain the level of

husbandry, irrigation and quality control on the land that is necessary. Why not consult with the farmers? Why not sit and work out an arrangement with the farmers? Why is there the unilateral increase? Why determine what the farmers could afford without hearing from them?

The Hon. Minister went into Hope Town for a meeting and wanted to leave the meeting early. I was in that area. The comrade farmers from Hope Town blocked the road. They told him that when the PPP was in Government, when Dr. Ramsammy or Mr. Robert Persaud comes to Hope Town, they stay there very late. They said that they voted for the PNC. They went to Hope Town and they wanted to leave the meeting early. That was their approach. The farmers were accustomed to meeting with the Ministers. [Ms. Ally: Drinking.] Do not bother with drinking, Ms. Ally. You are making fun of the plight of the rice farmers. Minister Ally is a land lady too. Many of these farmers are sub-tenants. They cannot even afford to pay the current regime of rental more so now this rate regime of increases would obviously have to be borne by them. And to what end?

If the rice industry was in such a state that there was ready market for the rice at a price that allowed the rice farmers to make a reasonable and decent profit, the impact would not have been as devastating as it is. That is all that they are saying. If the Government is bent on an increase, then work with the farmers, engage in consultation and work out a regime of increases that the farmers would be able to pay. Do not kill them; do not kill the industry. That is our plea here today. If the Government is bent on going ahead with the increase or an increase, we beseech the Government, we appeal to the Government, to go back to the farmers and work out, through a medium of consultation, a rate of increase that the farmers would be able to sustain their operations and their livelihood.

On Saturday, I was in Region 5 at a ceremony in Blairmont to celebrate Arrival Day. There was a little girl on the stage singing a song that is about 50 years old but made popular by an Indian playback singer: *Oh manager, oh manager, rice a cut and price na pay atal.*

Fifty years after, that song is relevant. They promised the farmers \$9,000 a bag. I said in a previous presentation that a rice farmer became so excited on the Essequibo Coast that he dropped his pants in one of the protests. I believe that he was charged by the police for that lewd

exhibition.
charged.

[An Hon. Member: *Inaudible*] ... next charges].

I am already

The rice farmers were misled. They were told that new markets would be found; they were told that new species of rice would be discovered; they were told that improved scientific methodology would be used to increase production of bags per acre; they were told about the increased price for paddy and that more lands would be made available. All of these things were promised to them. Look how they have ended up. Not a single new acre is under cultivation but the price has been increased by 600%.

These farmers have loans to pay. They have mortgaged their homes to commercial banks. They have mortgaged their equipment to the Institute of Private Enterprise Development (IPED).

6.12 p.m.

This is their livelihood. They know no other trade; they know no other industry; they know no other economic activity to which they can turn. And it is from that perspective that they have asked us to implore the Government to consider a reversal of these fees. The MMA/ADA will not be closed down.

On this side of the House, we will support any measure that the Government brings to this House to get increased financing for the rice farmers – any measure that they bring; any form of financing that they want from international agencies, we will join them in their application. But we are saying, “Do not destroy the industry.”

The rice industry is in a precarious position as the sugar industry is. Whether they are making a profit or not, together, they contribute to nearly 25% of the gross domestic product (GDP) of this country. We are speaking about an industry - we are not speaking about profitability - and a Government has a duty to assist an industry that is so significant in the economic makeup of the country. Over 100,000 people depend upon this industry – directly or indirectly. It contributes to about 15%, by itself, to GDP. We like to follow the United States of America (USA). The USA subsidises its farmers to the extent of about 40%; we are not asking for that. We cannot afford those largesse and we understand that. But, during this difficult period, we can be able to cushion

the rice industry, nurse it, hold its hand and walk it through this difficult period, rather than take a hammer and pound it as it lies in a sick bed. That is all we are saying.

This is where a Government with a vision and that has genuine concern for the people of this country... As I said, the rice industry in Region 5, in particular, our largest rice producing region, presents a very unique opportunity in Guyana. And I repeat “unique opportunity”. You do not see it very often in a country that is as divided along ethnic lines as ours, but the rice industry in Berbice, in Region 5, embraces both of the major racial groups in our country which find it so difficult to operate in harmony and in unison in so many different fronts and in so many different activities. But go to the protests of the rice farmers in front of the MMA/ADA and you will see all of our people there – Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese - protesting this increase. And they voted for the Government. We won Region 5 but a significant number of seats at the Regional Democratic Council (RDC) are controlled by the Opposition and we recognised that. And that is why we are saying that we should not have this great difficulty in persuading. I could understand sugar because sugar is a little more skewed in one direction, but rice, in Region 5, in particular, has that unique balance and the calls of the rice farmers are ignored.

There is nothing objectionable about this motion. In fact, there is nothing political about this motion. I agree with the Hon. Member, Ms. Jennifer Wade, that a lot of improvements have to be made in the MMA/ADA scheme. I agree that many more canals have to be cleaned, but why are you going to clean them when you are killing the rice farmers? Who will use the canals? Are they the cows and the goats? It is being cleaned for the purpose of rice production, but how can they produce in these circumstances when they cannot afford to pay the rates? Why are you developing the place if they cannot afford to pay the rates? It makes no sense improving conditions at the MMA/ADA if there will be no rice being planted. And the farmers have clearly said to us that some of them may be able to go back to the land but there would be a significant decline. My Hon. Friend Ms. Manickchand’s father is a rice farmer. He has to pay \$1.5 million and he has not planted a single paddy – not a single seed paddy as yet – but they have already sent him a letter of demand for \$1.5 million. Where will he get that money from? *[Interruption]* We can heckle but that is the reality of the rice farmer.

I appeal again to the Government: this motion has nothing to do with politics and there is no need to grandstand on this motion. There is no need to politic on this motion. This is a motion

about the rice industry. It is in crisis. I think that the Government recognises that; that much I believe they recognise. How, by using any method of logic, for an industry that is in crisis, the Government, the State, is increasing fees. The State is supposed to be giving it a stimulus package, as President Obama would have done to Caterpillar. Give it a lifeline, as the distinguished Bishop is advising me. This Government is doing the opposite.

In conclusion, I appeal to this Government for and on behalf of the rice farmers, not because of me, not because of the PPP because we are simply the conduit; we are simply the voice of the rice farmers; we stand in their shoes; that is all we are doing. And we humbly, respectfully and emphatically ask this Government to please reverse the MMA/ADA proposed increase.

Thank you very much, Sir. [*Applause*]

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Williams]: If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker, it is indeed lamentable that, after 23 years, and just as it was said earlier tonight, about two years into our watch, we have this statement from the Hon. Member on that side of this House: “The rice farmers have to mortgage their property; they have to beg; they have to steal.”

That does not speak well of their tenure for the last 23 years. **[Mr. Nandlall: I did not say that.]** That is what you said. I have it written down that they have to mortgage their properties and all of these things.

[Mr. Nandlall: I did not say “steal” [*inaudible*] dignity.]

Well, I withdraw the word “steal”. [*Interruption*] **[Ms. Manickchand: Beg and steal. The rice farmers do not beg for anything.]**

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I will remind you that your remarks should be directed to the Chair. If you are going to express a difference and you want to rise on a point of order, then that should be addressed to the Chair. The private parlies, for the moment, can be overlooked but they must not be repeated. It would be helpful to the Speaker if they are not. Please proceed.

Mr. Williams: I am guided, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, let me reiterate...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Ms. Manickchand, do you wish to speak?

Ms. Manickchand: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: You have the floor. Do you rise on a point of order?

Ms. Manickchand: Thank you, Sir. Your Honour, I rise on a point of order, Standing Order 40 (a). The Hon. Member said something that disparaged a large group of persons who are not here to defend themselves. He referred to them as beggars and stealers and, on their behalf, I ask him to withdraw that comment. [Ms. Ally: No.] The Hansard is there, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. Please proceed.

Mr. Williams: Much obliged, Mr. Speaker.

As I was saying, the lamentation is after 23 years of tenure under the Members of the other side. It is contending that, after two years under our watch, the rice farmers now have to mortgage, beg, borrow and steal. I am not attributing that to any specific person over there. It is a manner of speaking. And so it does not speak well for the watch of the Members on the other side.

Now, there was the Venezuelan arrangement...

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, I rose earlier on a point of order and Your Honour has not ruled. And the Member has repeated it and I repeat my offence on behalf of the farmers of this country.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, let us be specific. You rise on a point of order; what is the point of order?

Ms. Manickchand: The same one I mentioned earlier but I would be happy to repeat it, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, what is the Standing Order that you are rising on?

Ms. Manickchand: Your Honour, I repeat, I rise under Standing Order 40 (a) on the same point of order that I raised with Your Honour – five minutes ago – and that is that the Hon. Member on the floor referred to rice farmers as beggars and stealers and tried to attribute that to comments made from Members of this side of the House.

The great thing about the way that this Parliament is constructed and the developments that we have made as a House over the years is that we have Hansard that we can refer to immediately, Sir. I am saying that the Hansard will show clearly...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, are you...

Ms. Manickchand: I am asking that the Hon. Member withdraws those statements.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I thank you. Mr. Williams, you would be guided because I will not have to refer to anyone by...

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Hon. Member not to misdescribe what I said. I would ask that the Hon. Member withdraws that. [*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Williams, you will continue your statement.

Mr. Williams: Much obliged, Sir.

And so we are saying that the performance of the Members on the other side over the 23 years of their tenure was dismal. And let us deal with some of the other contentions that have been made tonight.

Let us talk about the GRDB. The Hon. Member, Mr. Seeraj, said that there are linkages but I am talking about leakages because money that should have gone to the rice farmers has gone other places, and that must be recompensed. So, how could the rice farmers benefit when money that is due to them is spent and is leaked away from them? There are many things that they are going to jump up about tonight before I finish sitting down.

They also speak about closures of sugar estates. Who started this business of closing sugar estates? We had a situation when the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) should have had expert management, but instead had members from a building in Robb Street, unqualified to manage the sugar industry that we have.

6.27 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, we are speaking on the motion. Would that be correct?

Mr. Williams: Yes, please. I am guided, Mr. Speaker. But we have to clear the record. We did not close the Diamond Sugar Estate. We did not close the Enmore Sugar Estate. We did not close

the Leonora Sugar Estate. So what is this? The fact of the matter is that we were given a basket to fetch water over the last two years. We have a situation where we have to try to do our best to correct what happened over the past 23 years so that we could move forward with the Guyanese people.

When one talks about taking over the farmers lands, the question is, who? Let me say this: we keep thanking God for the last electoral victory. But not only us; more particularly, the farmers of West Coast of Berbice, the Seafield Farmers. Just before the General Elections, they had the situation where they were in a co-op from 1970; the co-op preceded the MMA/ADA. They discovered that the then management of the MMA/ADA began taking away their lands without let or hindrance and many were the lamentations. How did that happen? If one failed to pay any Drainage and Irrigation (D&I) charges, one's land was taken away. Everyone knew that the parlous state of the MMA/ADA was because the last Administration paid little attention to drainage and irrigation of that Scheme.

If one could not drain the land, how could one plant rice on the land? If one could not plant rice on the land, how could one pay charges and D&I fees and rent? It was a cauldron that was created. There were farmers who were not favoured, who were taxed for not paying the fees. There was the situation where some farmers who were not paying at all were able to keep their lands. It was a good thing that the Elections of 2015 intervened. Many persons lost their lands when purported leases were given to total strangers to the villages. A set of people were imposed on the people of Seafield to take over their lands.

The complaints were many. The registration of the Co-op was cancelled under some contention that there was no audit and not enough members. The attempt was to hand over the lands of the members of the Seafield Cooperative Land Society to the new interlopers. It was one of our very first acts on becoming a Government of this land to restore justice to those farmers. That is why the persons were there for only a matter of months. *God does not sleep*. They did not have a chance to settle in on the ill-gotten gains. We cancelled those leases and restored the land to their proper owners. Is that not justice?

This matter is a simple one. We had to put out billions of dollars not only into sugar, but also into rice. Where are we going to get the money to continue doing all of this? We already inherited a

basket case which is the sugar industry and the MMA/ADA scheme was quickly moving into that realm of disquietude. What were we to do? Were we to let it go into the ground? It is because we know the antecedents that we would not let it be destroyed. It reminds me of the biblical story of Solomon and the two women claiming the baby. Tonight, somebody is claiming it is somebody else's Scheme, but we know whose Scheme it is so we cannot let the Scheme fail. As Solomon said, let me part the baby and give it to you.

The real mother said, "No. Do not part it. Give it to the other woman." Is it not the same thing here? We are saying, "No. We are not going to destroy the scheme, even if we have to increase the fees a little then relook at it later when it comes back on even keel. That is all that it is. We never had any intention of oppressing the people of this country. We were never oppressors. Our remit was always to take care of the ordinary people of this country - the masses. That has always been our remit and we would not change it now. Hon. Members, I am saying that we should get together and work to try and salvage the MMA/ADA.

My remit is to show justification that what the MMA/ADA has done to increase the land charges and rent a bit is something that has been authorised by law. We do not do anything outside of the law. The MMA/ADA, as my Friend and Hon. Member, Mr. Felix, indicated earlier, is a corporate body established under an Act, *et cetera*. Any increase of rates for services provided by the Authority must be governed by legislation. Might I respectfully refer you, Mr. Speaker, and the Hon. Members, to sections 25 to 32 of the Mahaica-Mahaicony-Abary Agricultural Development Authority Act, Chapter 70:01, which makes provision for financial procedures of the Authority?

The Act provides that State lands within the area held under a lease licence or permission, or in the possession or occupation of any person shall be liable and subject to charges for drainage and irrigation services as well as rent charges. These provisions are in keeping with those in the Public Corporations Act, Chapter 19:05, which authorises a public corporation to charge fees for any service rendered by it. Therefore, the MMA/ADA has been authorised to charge fees for its drainage and irrigation services provided to the area for proprietors and lessees. In addition, section 28 of the MMA/ADA Act also authorises the Authority to fix different charges for drainage and irrigation services in different farming patterns.

In fixing these charges, the Act specifies that the Authority must act in accordance with procedures to recover rates under the Municipal and District Councils Act, Chapter 28:01. Similarly, section 30 (2) of the Public Corporations Act authorises the Minister to make regulations regarding the procedures relating to the levy and collection of such fees. As such, even though the Act contemplated that an increase in rates might be necessary, there is an established procedure to ensure there is not an arbitrary increase in rates and land rental fees. We are contending that the increases were not arbitrary. The legislation therefore acts as a method of monitoring and regulating.

This has been said before. Similarly, the computation for the increase is not capricious. The Act has identified the factors the Authority is required to consider when increasing the rates. If one listens carefully, one would find that these include the operational costs, the profitability and any other relevant factors such as interest, depreciation and certain charges associated with capital costs. The Authority is also authorised to consider any other relevant factors. It is legally understood that this will be done to arrive at a reasonable and feasible amount. So the fees were not arbitrarily increased. The legislation was applied and the reasonable increase was arrived at in order to keep the MMA/ADA just above water. It is not to sustain it indefinitely. It is an attempt to ensure that it does not sink.

The governing legislation of the Authority contemplated by this Act should be able to function effectively by managing its accounts and recovering its charges, where necessary. We also have related legislation that could impact the MMA/ADA, including the Rice Farmers Security of Tenure Act. The important thing is that these charges are not debilitating on the rice farmers. The ills of rice farmers cannot be fixed because of these recent increases. It would be fallacious to contend that. We must look at the factors that go to the pith of this problem that is now confronting the rice farmers. What happened to the Venezuelan deal? What happened to the funds from it? If that fund was managed effectively and efficiently, we would have inherited a fund that we could have utilised to help the rice farmers to maintain their equilibrium. Further, when the relevant organs in the rice industry have been entrusted with billions of dollars to support the farmers and that money does not reach the farmers, that would be a fundamental cause for the parlous state of the rice farmers. We have seen and read about the state of the funds. There are situations where GRDB advances billions of dollars to do the work for the rice

farmers and there is no accountability. These types of actions would cause great problems for the rice farmers. You cannot blame us. We have not been in charge of the GRDB for the last 23 years. We are putting in transparency and accountability measures for the GRDB. We can assure the rice farmers that their due will come to them sooner rather than later. [Mr. Seeraj: Charade.] This is not a charade. You come and talk, pitying the rice farmers when you had it in your arms to make their lives sublime. We cannot be allowed to be distracted by such contentions.

6.42 p.m.

As I said, since we have the legal basis upon which we can act and have acted, I say, without any hesitation, that I will give my overriding and overwhelming support to this motion and urge its passage through this honourable House. [Interruption]

I tend to do this to them all of the time. Now that I have gotten the attention of the Hon. Members on the other side and now that the Hon. Mr. Nandlall is back in his seat, I want them to be here so that they would hear clearly what we are saying. Having argued the case with the increase in the land charges and rent, I cannot, but support the increases for land charges and rents by the MMA/ADA.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: I must say that I was taken by surprise. I did not expect that this debate would have ended so soon, but it might as well be because there was a lot of talk and little substance from the mover and supporters of the motion.

I believe that the case has been made out and made out beyond any doubt that this motion has no merit and that the increases in the rates chargeable by proprietors and lessees of the MMA are justifiable, reasonable, rational and necessary.

I want to say that a responsible Government cannot allow what has happened to GuySuCo, under the watch of the previous Government, to visit the MMA. Prudent management would require that certain lawful measures be taken to ensure that the MMA does not become a drag on the Treasury and does not become like GuySuCo, where, during the last 24 months, this Government subsidised the industry that had been bankrupted by the former Government to the tune of \$32

billion. Too much is at stake in the lives of both sugar workers and rice farmers, and the cattle rearers and cash crop producers, to allow the MMA to go down without a policy that would ensure that farmers receive the services to which they are entitled.

The argument that was raised that this increase came out of the blues and that it was meant to be punitive on rice farmers is totally without merit. I want to refer to a situation that had existed where the increases had been, in fact, planned for in an earlier period, in 2007, under the hand of the then Minister of Agriculture. It was anticipated that, because services, which were hitherto funded by the State, the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) and the RDC of Region 5, had been transferred to the MMA. It was intended that, as the services came on stream, the payments from the users of the system would be introduced to ensure sustainability. That was under the hand of then Minister and it is dated 15th November, 2007. It was a memorandum which was presented to the Cabinet. The Cabinet's decision that was made at that time endorsed the responsibility for drainage and irrigation works and services in the agricultural areas between the Mahaica and Mahaicony Rivers of Region 5, being transferred to and assumed by the MMA/ADA with suitable financing by Central Government. The responsibility for residential drainage and irrigation services in the Mahaica/Mahaicony area continued to be held by the relevant NDCs with support from the RDC.

It was out of that decision that it was found that the support was inadequate and that the RDC and the NDC had not been carrying its share of the responsibility. When areas like Trafalgar and Tempi on the West Coast started to be affected by floods, it was felt necessary that the MMA should provide additional infrastructure. At one time there was a sabotage of the two pumps at Trafalgar and the communities had been subjected to flooding. It was felt that it was time that the MMA should assume responsibility for the infrastructure and that there should be an increase in the rates chargeable to users of blocks in the MMA area.

I want to situate this debate in that antecedent to show that an increase in the charges had not been sudden or arbitrary and that there was already a plan afoot to have this done because the MMA could not have sustained the services that were required by the farmers in the MMA area. There was a fear and I would refer to correspondence that would show that the MMA had been suffering, even then, from a severe case of default in payments by users of the land in the Scheme. So that when the Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall, referred to the repossession of lands, the

MMA had been faced with a situation that it came close to being a bankrupted entity. In order for them to recover from the users of the land, it resorted to repossession. My Learned Friend, Mr. Nandlall, quoted from some documents showing how there had been repossession. Here is the MMA/ADA's repossession and reallocation of State lands list. There are 58 separate instances of repossession. Not only repossession, but there was also reallocation of people's land because it was felt that those who had possession of the lands were not paying their rates for water usage and for the land itself. When the Hon. Attorney General, Mr. Basil Williams, referred to the injustice that was done because the repossession was very selective... As an attorney then, I had mentioned it before, I was approached by African farmers from co-operatives in Region 5, and I would say it clearly because I represented that matter. Their co-op land at C Field was withdrawn and...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister you will resume your seat. Hon. Members, there are constant interruptions. But I would say to certain Hon. Members and to those two Hon. Members must know who they are, so I will not now name them, but it really is a test of the Speaker's forbearance. If those two Members should continue in the manner in which they have been conducting themselves, the Speaker would be hard put not to react. Please proceed.

Mr. Nagamootoo: May I say this: As Members of this National Assembly, we are here to present an argument and the arguments have to be based on facts, the arguments have to be rational and the arguments must be cogent and not manufactured for the sake of an argument. An allegation had been made that this Administration had seized people's lands or repossessed lands. It was a paper that I have also. If you are talking facts, then it must be balanced facts and not contrived to make an allegation that, in fact, is no allegation that is founded in truth. The truth is that the MMA had been facing a financial crisis because the rates were either too low and could not maintain the facilities that were necessary for thriving agricultural activities in the MMA/ADA area that it had to go after those who owed moneys. If there was a fair case that the land had to be repossessed there could be no argument. There was also vindictiveness to take land away. At the C Field Co-op, 300 acres at the rear of No. 42 were withdrawn; 244 at No. 42 Co-op; and 245 at No. 40. This was done not under this Administration.

Bishop Edghill: On a Point of Order. Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 48, I think, repeatedly, you have said in this House that if Hon. Members would quote from documents, then they must be

available, publicly, to all Members of this House. The Hon. Prime Minister is quoting from a document and I am at a loss, I do not know which document it is and it is not available before us.

6.57 p.m.

So I would be guided by your ruling on this matter, Sir. [An Hon. Member from the Government: What about Mr. Nandlall?] He quoted from the newspapers and he showed everybody the newspapers, but we do not know what the Hon. Prime Minister is quoting from. I wish to be guided because I am at a loss.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I thank you. It would be good if you would remember to speak to me and not answer the Hon. Members on the floor. Hon. Prime Minister, you ought not to quote verbatim from a document, unless it is available to the rest of the House.

Mr. Nagamootoo: I am going to share the document. It is *MMA/ADA Repossession and Reallocation of State Lands in Region 5*. I will circulate the document shortly after, to make it available to the National Assembly, for all Members. That was done in 2014, as I recall it. This Administration took over in 2015. Therefore, this cannot be placed at the feet of this Administration.

Seventy acres of land at the rear of Trafalgar were withdrawn and repossessed by the MMA/ADA from Mr. Basil Bazillo and another Basil Bazillo - 94.5 acres, Benjamin Halley, Raymond. D. Bacchus and so the list goes on. When one looks at the list, it goes on from 2007, 2008, 2011, 2013, 2014 and the list stops there. Hundreds of acres of land had been taken back because it was alleged that the people had not paid their drainage and irrigation rates and their fees for rental.

The Hon. Attorney General has already stated that the authorisation for increases in rates have been done lawfully. This is because one has to examine whether it was done, as I said, arbitrarily under Cap. 69:11, the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary-Agricultural Development Authority Act under section 28:01, it states:

“(1) The Authority, with the approval of the Minister, shall in respect of each year fix charges for drainage and irrigation services provided by it for proprietors in the area.”

The law, under which the MMA/ADA operates and which establishes the MMA/ADA, provides for review of rates and for increases where appropriate. Also, we have what was originally referred to in the House, the law that gives the guidance when one Member was sailing, done under the Rice Farmers (Security of Tenure) Act, Cap. 69:02. In the First Schedule, it was referred to, but what was not referred to was that the First Schedule was amended in 1996. I knew that Government of 1996. I was part of that Government in 1996. I was a Minister in that Government in 1996. It was the People's Progressive Party (PPP) Government that provided a formula for how rents should be charged for lands. It was a guideline/formula by which the lands would be charged and for the clay soil, it did have clay soil, bagasse soil, saline soil - not sailing. It had a formula that the Minister of Agriculture explained to this House to a very acceptable level. The formula would have meant that the lands for which fees were fixed in the past, when there were 14 bags per acre, a certain fee would be charged. If the acreage increased to 35 bags per acre, then the fees would go up in accordance with the guidelines. So here again, the fees were not fixed arbitrarily. There was a rational basis, a legal guidance, on which it had been done.

The Members on the other side tried to argue that the fees were too high. [Mr. Neendkumar: All too high.] Yes. They said that the fees were way too high. They said that the fees should be revoked. I recall, at one time, when there was access to potable water throughout Guyana, no one paid for potable water at that time. I remember when the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) had decided that there should be cost recovery, everyone who had use of water for drinking purposes had to pay for water and it was not this Government. I was a part of that Government. I was at the Rosignol Stelling, when a farmer from Bath Settlement approached me and called me by a name that people refer to as an uncle, he had said: "*Wa ayo do to abee now, ayo kill abee*". I was a part of the Government then, when a user tax was placed on drinking water. Therefore, one has to look at the service that is provided and the cost of the service and decide whether it would be economical to provide the service if there was no cost recovery.

When I was also on that side, with the PPP, I was an Advisor in a project that was called the Haags Bosch Solid Waste Management Project. In that project, a plan was devised to receive US\$20 million to provide a service that would have had solid waste disposal. At that time, the

'Garden City' was described as the 'Garbage City'. There was stench and piles of garbage thrown all over, including in the cemeteries. We had decided that there should be a cost recovery to make sure that every person, whose garbage is picked up or collected, would pay two dollars \$2 per household. It is the same way Government policies evolve, in terms of not manufacturing it overnight. It evolves out of particular specific situations, where a service is provided and it is decided that there should be a cost attached to the service. That is why, unto this day, people pay a tipping cost for dumping waste at the garbage sites.

Sir, they said that this rate was high. But when the Minister of Agriculture explained that it would not be the formula that was applied because it was a formula that was guided under law, a formula that, undoubtedly, those who had control of agriculture previously had hinted that the cost recovery programme must be effective. They had warned that either the rates be increased or lands be repossessed because they could not deal with both the low charges for D&I and the low rental of the land and, at the same time, not collecting from people who were users of the land.

It was even worse that it was found by the MMA, under Mr. Gajraj, that many of the people, who owned lands and were in possession of licences and leases under the MMA Project, were in fact absentee holders. I have had calls from farmers at the MMA, who would plead with me that they were prepared to pay the increase that was fixed, on the condition that they be allowed to have the lease transferred to them because they have to pay the external lessees and that they have to pay for rental of the land that they were sub-leasing, at the same time - they now had to pay higher rates.

Therefore, the issue was the bad management then of the MMA not to be able to inventorise properly. The MMA law itself, had spoken to the issue of land to the tiller. It was a good socialist policy and socialist advocacy, both by Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham about people who actually plant the land should be allowed to own the land or to lease the land. But it was discovered, under the former Administration that many people had gone aboard and they allowed others to use their land, plant their land or they sub-leased the land, and so it had become a burden on the persons to pay a rent for the land and at the same time to pay the increased drainage and irrigation taxes. So we have to look at that system very carefully.

I also want to say that those who had said that the MMA could have avoided the increases that were announced, they must take cognisance of the fact that, like the GuySuCo, this year and this year alone, the MMA had to be given \$357 million as a subvention by Central Government to allow it to exist as an agency that was created under law to supervise and manage this large and very productive area of our country for which we depend on our staple.

I want to say that this motion was badly conceived. It was intended to capitalise opportunistically on a situation that would bring about dissatisfaction and disaffection among a section of the Guyanese people. It was also used and beaten as an ethnic drum, to send fears to a section of the Guyanese people that they were being targeted for oppression and they were being targeted for destruction. Hence, the presentation by the Hon. Former Attorney General, in which I am totally disappointed, that he should try to drag into the debate the spectre of ethnicity and the spectre of people who were dispossessed. He talked about people being targeted.

7.12 p.m.

Today, they use the debate not only for that and not only for the mobilisation of people to do a protest, but they try to have an omnibus protest to throw tyre together with rice and to throw rice together with sugar, and to throw sugar together with tuition fees. When they could not attract a decent protest, they did what every failed politician do; they put the blame on this side. “We ain’t get the crowd today because you put barriers.” I think your own politics have become the barrier to rational people staging uprising and staging protests and rebellions, as they have been warning that the farmers are going to act.

When the rice farmers acted not so long ago on the Essequibo Coast, demanding that their Government should protect them against rapacious millers, who were not paying them the prices for their paddy on time and were paying them low prices, what did our Friends on the other side do? They threw tear gas at them. The leader of the rice farmers was stripped naked for protesting against his Government because he wanted better prices. Then they said that the man took his clothes off himself. They tear gassed the children. That is the kind of irrationality that you do not bring to an august Chamber, such as this House. You accuse this side of being oppressive to rice farmers, when you yourselves do not have what is often described as clean hands. You cannot come to this court and accuse us of a mischief of which I know for sure the other side was guilty

when they were in Office. Today, farmers enjoy a rice market like no other time of 35 countries. They have access to markets, but they do not have access to high prices or at least the prices that they deserve and should have.

[**An Hon. Member from the Opposition:** What happened with Mexico?] The Mexican Market is available to Guyana. Perhaps, those who were there before and were busy putting their *fingers into the cookie jar* did not try to reach their hands to other markets. [Mr. **Neendkumar:** Call their name] You will hear the names soon. Do not worry. At least, an attempt has been made to make an honest representation for our rice farmers. I am proud that I had gone to Mexico with my honourable and honest Friend, Minister Raphael Trotman. We literally pleaded that the farmers of Guyana depend on markets and any quota we have, big or small, would be a good quota in the face of the Venezuelan withdrawal of purchase of our rice, which had placed our farmers in a bad position and in the face of the Petro Caribe Funds having been *run down* and snatched for purposes that had nothing to do with rice and rice farmers. So, I am told that Mexico will be buying rice from Guyana at a price that is comparable to the World Price. There are negotiations currently entrained, but the price for paddy is, not what maybe at this point in time, advantageous to our rice farmers.

Here again, it has been dragged as a red herring in the debate - \$9,000. But at not one moment, since this Eleventh Parliament has started, a single Member of the Opposition has named someone on this side who had promised rice farmers \$9,000 nor could they have ever given a source of their information. If they have the courage to stand up to name me the source, stand and put it in the record and prove it that that source is credible. They invented an argument to fool the rice farmers by saying that we had promised \$9,000 per bag. No such promise had ever been made by anyone on this side of the House; no such promise had been made in the Manifesto of the Coalition during the elections. It is a mischief to take advantage of the privileges of this House to repeat an allegation that cannot be founded in truth or in fact, an allegation that is totally concocted and invented. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

We want the rice farmers of this country to know that they are being used as political fodder in a kind of concocted war that would use them for the advantage of ambitious politicians who are licking their wounds, now that they have been thrown out of Office.

Sir, I want to say that the mover of the motion should in fact have withdrawn this motion because it was not brought to this House with the intention to advance the cause of the farmers of the MMA. When Minister Holder had said that the cost for rental has been brought to a status where one could buy a beer per month for an acre of land, for example for pasturage, it was not meant as an insult to the farmers or of over simplification. It was meant to show, in a very graphic way, that one could not rent an acre of land for pasturage and ask to pay US\$1 per month. That is what it meant, that one is asked to pay US\$1 per month per acre of pasturage land. Therefore, we believe that it is justifiable because it is not overkill; it is not intended that you are taking this to make a profit. The money that goes into the MMA is the money that is being paid to provide services for the farmers.

Mr. Seeraj: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order under Standing Order 41(6). The Hon. Prime Minister just said to this House that the intention of the mover of the motion was not to forward the cause of the rice farmers. I am referring you, Sir, to Standing Order 41(6) where it states clearly here:

“No Member shall impute improper motive to any Member of the Assembly.”

I brought a motion Sir...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, it is a reasonable assumption that improper motive was imputed to the Member. I would advise that you withdraw that or rephrase the question and proceed.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Mr. Speaker, it is not my intention to impute an improper motive to the mover of the motion. I am talking about the impact and effect of a motion of this nature, which is not to advance the cause of the farmers. And that is a situation, a contention, whether this motion is advancing the cause of the farmers or whether it was brought to be able to place the farmers in a mode of agitation to protest, as I mentioned before. But if Your Honour rules that it imputes or that it tends to impute, I withdraw the remark.

Sir, today, was a lively discourse and we have to take in totality the presentations that have been made and the fact that these rates at MMA, and the case was made out, that they had not been increased since 18 years ago and the D&I rates remain the same in 20 years. We all know that the cost of services have gone up and the cost for fuel also to operate hymacs and bulldozers, which were necessary to clear large expanses of land to avoid places like, as I said earlier, Trafalgar, Tempe and Union from flooding, that these require additional funding for the MMA.

Therefore, when we come here to discuss this motion, it is not intended that we should say that farmers are rich and could afford to pay any amount. All they were being asked was to pay an amount that was rational and affordable. I sympathise and this side of the House sympathises with those farmers who called to say that they are subletting and were under pressure to pay for the landlords living overseas and then have to pay these rates. We sympathise with them and we hope that we can have a process where we could revert, one day, to land for all those who till the land and that there should be more land made available. The MMA should be a model for other schemes like Tapakuma and Black Bush Polder, where there are large tracts of land under cultivation. All Guyanese who have an interest in agriculture, not only in rice farming, but also in cattle rearing, fruits and vegetables and cash crops, that they would be able to have land that they could plant and cultivate without having to sublet from others who took the land and are not in the country or for some other reasons and are not planting the land. There are cases that I know of, but I would not quote here, of people being given large expanses of land and they have not been able to cultivate the land, neither have they been able to pay the rentals for the land.

So there are many reasons why we have come to this situation, where the rates that were agreed to and approved by the Minister, reflected a reality that one would have to pay a little more to have better services. I agree and you would agree that our farmers, particularly rice farmers, they do not only need markets with better prices or they do not only need millers who could pay them more and to ease the disparity between rice prices paid for paddy in Berbice and paddy and rice paid for in Essequibo, but to be able to have some arrangement where the paddy and rice supplied to millers could attract prices that would be in keeping with the cost of production and with the investment made by rice farmers.

7.27 p.m.

We all want our rice farmers to enjoy better conditions and for the rice industry, in particular, to prosper. The only way we can do that is if schemes, such as the MMA/ADA, become viable and receive enough funds so that they can provide better services so that our farmers can prosper.

In saying these and in closing this debate, I wish to reiterate that we cannot support this motion at all. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, you will observe that we are well past the 7 o'clock hour. The final speaker on this motion remains to make his statement. If Members are in agreement with this approach, we will complete debate on this motion through the last speaker and then have the break. Members are in agreement with that, we would proceed in that way. The speaker on the motion is the Hon. Member Dharamkumar Seeraj.

Mr. Seeraj (replying): Thank you very much Cde. Speaker. Through you, Sir, let me express my appreciation to all Members of the House for allowing us to skip the break, as they say, to complete this motion before us.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I do not think that the Hon. Members agreed to skip the break. They agreed to delay the break.

Mr. Seeraj: I stand corrected, Sir.

In tabling the motion, I made reference to the acknowledgement by senior Members of the Government that the industry and the agriculture sector, as a whole, have not been doing so well. The numbers are there; they speak for themselves. I quoted from the *Guyana Chronicle* what Minister Holder said. I quoted what His Excellency acknowledged was a difficulty in the agriculture sector. I quoted also what the Hon. Minister of Finance said in his budget speech. It is in that context that we sought to bring the motion to address a situation in a sector that is not doing so well. Budget 2017 also recognised some of the difficulties of this particular sector. On page 6, the Hon. Minister of Finance said, in relation to agriculture, forestry and fishing:

“Mr. Speaker, this sector is expected to contract significantly in the second half of 2016...”

At paragraph 3.3 on page 6, he stated:

“Due to continued uncertainty in the rice industry, output is expected to reach 600,000 metric tonnes in 2016, representing a decline of 12.8 percent...”

In terms of the livestock sector, the Minister went on to say:

“The livestock sub-sector is expected to contract by 5.1 percent in 2016.”

He stated further:

“The forestry sub-sector is expected to contract significantly by 33.3 percent”

Bringing this motion to the National Assembly is in recognition of our economy not doing well and it is in recognition that a huge sector that provides, again quoting the Hon. Minister of Finance, “employment for 33 per cent of our people and contributing 25 per cent to Gross Domestic Product (GDP)”. It is a significant sector that contributes to the well-being of our economy.

Quite frankly, I am very much disappointed with the responses that we have received from the Government benches. I think they lost the focus of the motion and went in to a lot of politicking, when in to a lot of history, some of which obviously was not correct and had to be corrected by Mr. Nandlall, particularly in relation to the MMA/ADA, its establishment and all of that.

I note, too, the comments which were made by the Hon. Member Ms. Jennifer Wade, who spoke about the glorious period of the PNC with the MMA/ADA. By 1992, only 19% of the MMA/ADA lands were under cultivation, so it could not have been that glorious. Since we had to import rice by 1989, what was so glorious about that period? I did not go there, but it is in reference to what was said about our motion that I made some notes. This motion is not about that. It is not about who did what. It is about a current situation where farmers are faced with low prices; there is a decline in the industry; we are exporting more and getting less and VAT has been placed on agriculture. Farmers are feeling the squeeze. All sorts of things came into the equation.

Regarding the Seafield matter, I think it was 66 farmers from 23 families who had got the lands from the Seafield Co-operative Society. I think the Hon. Member Minister Holder was written on 2nd June, 2015. That letter clearly outlined what process and procedures were adhered to. Hon.

Member Jennifer Wade played an important part as a member of the board in arriving at the recommendations to ensure that 66 farmers, representing 23 families, all from Seafield, got the lands, which was felt by the panel doing the interviews that they rightly deserved.

All of these things were mentioned. I thought, in my wrapping up, that I should say that the focus really is on what we can do, collectively, for our farmers, besides burdening them with VAT, new charge and draconian increases, knowing full well that the Government recognises the difficulties that we are all faced with. Instead, we were regaled with a set of things that are not relevant. We did not dispute the legality of the increases. A lot of contributions centred on that and it was not about that. It was about a Government giving support to a sector that is critical to our overall development. In this particular case, it is the people of Region 5. I would not leave it only to Region 5. Region 4 is also coming under that kind of situation where farmers need this kind of development.

I heard quotes from the Rice Farmers Security of Tenure Act. It would appear as if this Government wants to stop governing and become landlords. A government has a responsibility to create the enabling environment for people to produce and do well so that the economy could do well. We cannot reduce our Government to being a landlord, applying the same measurement as private farmers. The Government has to set policies in place to give support to its critical sectors. We have to compete and we are competing against nations that are giving support to their farmers and not taxing them and increasing services.

In an article titled *Agricultural Subsidies*, written by Chris Edwards on 7th October, 2016, it was quoted that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) spends US\$25 billion or more a year on subsidies for farm businesses. This is what we have to compete with. That is why we cannot have access to the Mexico market and we will not get access to the Mexico market as long as the United States continues to put rice and paddy into the Mexico market. It is a fallacy to say that we can have access to Mexico when we are dealing with the kind of support that our competitors are getting. Our Government is seeking to put these draconian increases on to the backs of our farmers when they have to compete in which others farmers are getting all of the support. The same article states, “As a result, subsidies that were expected to cost \$47 billion over the seven years of the 1996 law ended up costing \$121 billion.”

That is the kind of support that farmers got. We have to take this in the context of us competing in a global environment and we have to match the competition. As a Government, it is incumbent upon them - it is our responsibility - to give support to the productive sectors to allow them to be competitive. That is what it is all about.

There are eight types of farm subsidies that farmers in the United States enjoy. We seem to be bent on putting, on the backs of our farmers, eight types of penalties, fees, charges and increases when we have to compete with this. They have insurance; they have agriculture risk coverage; they have price loss coverage; they have conservation programmes; they have marketing loans; they have disaster aid; they have market and export promotion; they have research and other support. All these are support that farmers in a country in the developed world are receiving. That is what we have to compete with. Here, the Government is seeking to penalise farmers who are using their own resources to develop pasture lands, lands that are not serviced by any kind of infrastructure. They do not even have flood control. When we raised it in this National Assembly, it is pointed in the direction that we want to score political points. There is nothing in this motion that is supposed to be political or controversial. It is addressing the livelihood of our farmers.

The Library of Economics and Liberty, in an article titled, *Agricultural Subsidy Program* by Daniel A. Summer, states that New Deal and the Agricultural Adjustment Act 1933 provides that there would be a dizzying array of schemes to support and subsidise farmers.

According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development figures, there are subsidies ranging from 22% to 55% for farmers in other countries. Rice, it is said, gets 85% support in some countries. I quoted from Japan and Korea. It is in this context that we in Guyana have to recognise the difficulties that our farmers are faced with. Indeed, all of our producers and other sectors, manufacturing, industries, once we go on the international market, we have to compete and we have to study what the competition is getting and we have to provide that framework for our people to be competitive.

I used to argue, years ago, that, should subsidies be removed from the rice farmers of the United States of America, our producers can put rice on the US market cheaper than their cost of production. That is why, while speakers mentioned that increases were not done over nearly two

decades, over 18 years, there was a reason for that. That reason, I humbly believe, was to enable our farmers. We saw the result of that enabling environment. Our production report speaks volumes about that. When the enabling environment is provided to the farmers...It is not like the glorious period of the PNC, prior to 1992, when the figures are so dismal. I am speaking about genuine development in an enabling environment where we saw production record after record being broken by our farmers.

Against this background, we, on this side of the House, would be very happy if we can return to that trend of increasing production and productivity so that our farmers, so that country and so that economy can do better. I sincerely think this is one way that we can achieve that. We can go back to the trajectory of increased production and productivity, year after year, by giving support to our farmers.

I am going to make a last plea, Sir, through you, to the Members of the Government side. Let us suspend this decision to impose these draconian increases on our farmers. Let us have some sort of consultation with the stakeholders. Let us listen to their plight. All is not well there. Comparison was made with people living in urban areas, how much is paid for house lot as against an acre of land. I do not believe, Sir, that people remotely have an idea of the conditions that people are living in. Saturday night I went to a 'wake' house in a rice-growing community. I had to park 300 rods away and walk in ankle-deep mud to reach to that home. Those people are being compared to a situation out here, in Georgetown, where you can come out of your car, walk where you can come out of your car, walk with your high heels, up your stairs and into your home.

7.42 p.m.

We are comparing those people to this situation. We have to consider conditions that people are living in, the conditions that they are working under. When they go out in the fields, they are under the sun, under the rain and the hardship that they are faced with.

Sir, in two years they have managed to reversed all the progress that we have made. I am not talking about any two years. Our appeal here is that in the year 2017 this Government is moving to increase drainage and irrigation charges and land rent from \$3,500 to \$15, 000. Our contention is that the time is not right. It should be revoked; it should be suspended. Let us start the

consultation. I asked once again that the Government side consider giving support to this motion so that our rice industry and our agriculture sector can benefit from at least some sort of Government support.

Thank you Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Motion not carried.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member for his statement. I will invite the Members of the Special Select Committee on Civil Aviation to meet with me briefly as we agreed to select the Chairperson of that Committee. Just as a reminder the names of the Hon. Members are the Hon. Mr. Carl B. Greenidge, Hon. Mr. David A. Patterson, Hon. Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, Hon. Ms. Annette N. Ferguson, Hon. Member Mr. Michael Carrington, Hon. Member Mr. Clement J. Rohee, Hon. Member Ms. Gail Teixeira, Hon. Member Bishop Juan Edghill and Hon. Member Mr. Joseph Hamilton.

Sitting suspended at 7.45 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 9.01 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Before we commence our work, I must tell you that this is probably the longest half of an hour you have ever experienced as Members of Parliament. Some discussions of an intense nature were taking place and that did in fact occasion our late start. The results of those discussions, you would agree, in due course, would be entirely beneficial to us all in the progress of our work.

The second and equally pleasurable matter I would wish to bring to your attention is the presence among us of the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the National Toshias Council. I acknowledge the presence of Mr. Joel Fredericks and Mr. Lenox Shuman among us. You are welcome Sirs, and I hope you find the matters about which we will discuss interesting.

Mr. Nagamootoo: With your leave, Mr. Speaker, before we embark on the next matter on the Order Paper, I would like to crave your indulgence to inform this National Assembly, through you, that there has been consultation and discussion between the Government side and the Opposition. It was the consensus that we will debate the motion on the Order Paper. Each side

will have one speaker each, that this honourable House will adjourn at the schedule time of adjournment at 10 p.m. The debate on the motion, which would commence shortly, would resume at a later date, that is, on June 16th.

It was during the discussion that it was pointed out that the sitting on June 16th would coincide with the observance of Enmore Martyrs' Day, but I would have moved, at the scheduled time, an adjournment of the House to June 15th so that the discussion ensued saw a compromise to have a back to back session of the National Assembly for two days, which are the 15th and the 16th. The 16th being the date arrived at after consideration that we wanted this motion to be resumed on that day. I believe Your Honour that this decision, which is arrived at, and I am sure my colleagues on the other side will concur, is in the best interest of national unity and social cohesion.

REVOCATION OF THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY SURROUNDING THE CLAIMS OF AMERINDIAN LAND TITLING, THE INDIVIDUAL, JOINT OR COMMUNAL OWNERSHIP OF LANDS ACQUIRED BY FREED AFRICANS AND ANY OTHER LAND TITLING IN GUYANA

WHEREAS on the 10th March, 2017, His Excellency, President David Granger, established a Commission of Inquiry under the Commissions of Inquiry Act, Chap 19:03 of Laws of Guyana for the following purpose:

“to examine and make recommendations to resolve all issues and uncertainties surrounding the claims of Amerindian land titling, the individual, joint or communal ownership of lands acquired by freed Africans and any matters relating to land titling in Guyana”;

AND WHEREAS the Commissioners have already been appointed to this Commission and this Commission is mandated to render the final report, findings and recommendations to His Excellency, the President, on or before the 1st day of November, 2017, or any later date as may be determined by His Excellency;

AND WHEREAS the Terms of Reference of the Commission of Inquiry were published in the Official Gazette on March 11, 2017;

AND WHEREAS the mandate of the Commission could undermine the legitimacy of Amerindian land rights and lead to the dispossession of Amerindian land titles and future land titling;

AND WHEREAS Guyana has established under the Amerindian Act 2006, a legal framework which addresses Amerindian land rights and Amerindian communal land titling;

AND WHEREAS under the Amerindian Act of 2006, many Amerindian communities have been able to acquire communal titles;

AND WHEREAS the establishment of the aforementioned Commission appears to put Guyana on a collision course with its international rights and obligations;

BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly calls upon the Government to invite His Excellency the President to consider revoking the aforementioned Commission of Inquiry in the best interest of national unity and social cohesion. [*Ms. Campbell-Sukhai*]

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: The motion standing in my name “The revocation of the commission of inquiry surrounding the claims of Amerindian land titling, the individual, joint or communal ownership of lands acquired by freed Africans and any other land titling in Guyana”, for the record, I wish to record that the title of the original motion submitted is now much more expansive and the motion, in its original form, was hugely deguttled.

The motion, however, before us has seven Whereas clauses and one Be It Resolved clause, a vast difference from the origination motion which contained 14 Whereas clauses and two Be It Resolved clauses. I am hopeful, however, that the deleted details will now form part of the issuing debate.

Forgive me, I too at this time wish to acknowledge the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the National Toshias Council. Further, lest the name of the motion, as is, is taken out of context, I wish to put on record that my motion has no intention to be in any way against or obtrusive for addressing land matters of any sorts related to the individual, joint, or communal ownership of land acquired by freed Africans. However, on the other side that the motion before this House is

based on the premise that Amerindian land titling and claims should have no place in the current established commission of inquiry on lands. [Hon. Members: Wow.] I heard the “wow”, but I wish to allay the fears of the “wow”, because what the first Whereas clause points to is the established commission. It also detailed the purpose in that commission. For the record of the House, I wish to read it. It states:

“to examine and make recommendations to resolve all issues and uncertainties surrounding the claims of Amerindian land titling, the individual, joint or communal ownership of lands acquired by freed Africans and any matters relating to land titling in Guyana”;

The commission has actually been sprung upon the Indigenous people of this country. With all due respect to the executive order of the establishment of this commission I feel dissatisfied and disappointed that in the establishment the executive sought no audience, or a dialog, or by themselves with the Indigenous people, or their representative, or by the Ministry of Indigenous People’s Affairs, or with the National Toshias Council on this matter. I wish to posit that the establishment of this commission, I believe, is ill-advised. Therefore I presume that the executive needs to examine whether officials of the executive or high ranking officials of the Government have actually done their homework.

I feel a bit worried that at the level of the executive there appears to be a perception which does not speak to being well informed on the matter of Amerindian land claims or Amerindian titling. What is bothering me is the fact that there are two Ministers responsible for the Ministry of Indigenous People’s Affairs.

9.12 p.m.

However, more and more, I believe, that the Ministers responsible for the Ministry Indigenous People’s Affairs were either not up to the task or their silence on providing completeness to advise the executive on a matter such as this, either tells me a number of things, Hon. Ministers. What I could discern, if you would allow me to speculate, is that either they have not done their homework or either their silence reflect the selling of their souls for, I have no idea what. My expectation is that the Ministers and their team ought to have put enough effort into providing a high-level of representation on behalf of Indigenous people and more so that keen interest with

respect to what is happening. I say this because currently we in Guyana are ranked very high as it relates to addressing Indigenous people's affairs, their rights and we have supposed - I say we - to a very high-level their evolving development.

We have in this country a modern piece of legislation refers to as the Amerindian Act of 2006. In this Act it makes our Indigenous peoples very proud because this Act, which I hold in my hands tonight, is the product - I hear my Comrade over there referring to years - of prolonged discussions, consultations, informed consent, agreed to by the Indigenous peoples, their leaders, representatives of Indigenous peoples, public spirited citizens, Members of Parliament on both sides of this House and finally the concurrence and the approval of the National Assembly with respect to this modern piece of legislation.

With respect to the motion, the motion's in its second Whereas clause speaks to the fact that having established the commission, appointments were made to the commission by His Excellency the President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. What has happened? While His Excellency has the prerogative to establish any commission - I do not give him wrong for establishing commissions - the mandate, the terms of reference of this commission, is what is troubling and is of utter most concern to indigenous, their representatives and their leader. If the terms of reference are not troubling to the Government side, I wish to posit that the terms of reference seek to be focused on Indigenous land claims. Why did I say that? If one reads the terms of reference, there are ten points in the terms of reference, five of which target Indigenous peoples' land. For me, this seems to be a bit out of sort. This is so because what I find in addition to not consulting indigenous leaders, the indigenous communities or anyone representing indigenous people. I find that all five of the terms of reference are not eligible under the commission. For example, one of the terms of reference speaks to inquiry into the Amerindian land titling.

Can it be explained to this House what is the demanding factor to examine Amerindian land titling? That is the first one. What is this pull factor? Is this House being told that under the terms of reference that the commission will reopen land titling that emanated out of the 1969 Amerindian Lands Commission Report where 63 such titles which found their way into legislation, and that is the Amerindian (Amendment) of 1976, almost a decade after those recommendations were made? Is the commission of inquiry going to reopen those Amerindian

lands titling where 63 titles were vested into communities? This House needs to know that. Is the commissioner of the commission of inquiry will be reopening the close to 30 land titles issue under the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government? Is that what is going to happen?

Today, there are close to 103 Amerindian titled lands. Will they reopen those titles and examined whether it was fairly dispensed with, so that the lands will be granted to Amerindian? If that is so, then, what do you think that this commission of inquiry will result in? The commission of inquiry will result in chaos, tensions, areas of disconnect among the population, and, of course, it will hamper the growing work or the aspiring work of my Amerindian brother on the other side, social cohesion. I would wish tonight that this House be advised as to what level of reopening of land titling will occur. Tonight is a significant and historical night because every time an indigenous issue is placed before the House or a discussion significant enough to have impactful results on Indigenous peoples it always appears as though we do not have time for it. I am very pleased tonight we were able to start this debate.

I want to move to the second aspect of the terms of reference of this established commission which was done without consultation. "To enquire into the criteria for establishing Amerindian and ancestral lands", this is bothersome. In the Amerindian Act No. 6 of 2006, the criteria and the eligibility of how lands are titled to indigenous population or the indigenous nation of Guyana is already here. If I would have been permitted, I would have read it for the benefit of the House. If I am permitted, I will proceed to do so, however, I believe that everyone in this House should by now have a copy and should have been aware that this terms of reference, which is instructed to the commissioners to enquire into the criteria for establishing Amerindian lands, is again, ill informed.

The next terms of reference point, which I want to deal with, is point five on the terms of reference, "Develop and publish a description of all Amerindian ancestral lands." This is not a difficult task to and I do not see the necessity of placing such a task on individuals who I believe have better things to expend their time on, because there is a Ministry of Indigenous People's Affairs, which could be asked to compile such a list. There is the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission (GLSC). Both parties could be advised to work collaboratively to put together a list if there is no such list. Let us say there is no such list.

Tonight I could probably stand here and do it for this House. I can share with this House the Amerindian (Amendment) Act of 1976 where 63 of the villages are detailed or legislated in this Act that forms part of the laws of Guyana with a full description of the area with respect to those that were issued under the People's Progressive Party/ Civic administration, which, I believe, the intent is to diminish. Those records can be provided by GLSC because it is the custodians of land information. It has the maps and plans. It has a copy of the grant and it could provide that. Why does this Government want to place such a simple task into a commission that I believed is highly comprised?

9.27 p.m.

What has happened is that the campaign rhetoric of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) coalition Government has been eroded because there is adequate information on these matters. I could recall that, when there was the handing over, the transition team was provided with the details. I am assured that all the files and information still reside within the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs.

Even if files disappear because some people do not want to look into files and they order that the files be put in boxes and stored away, I believe that the Executive should ask that they go into those boxes and update themselves with respect to the application for lands. If that does not happen, we have the Amerindian Land Titling (ALT) Project. In that Project resides another bundle or package of files of information which details application for land claims made by villages. It details the areas in villages which were applied for. It details the schedule of how the Ministry would roll out the investigation and the consultation with the various stakeholders and their representatives. The source of funding is also known.

All I could say about this terms of reference is that the campaign rhetoric about the People's Progressive Party/Civic taking away lands from the Indigenous peoples is dead. Now that you are there in the driving seat, you have the information. Now you want to ensure that no credit is given to the PPP/C for advancing land titling, for giving expansive areas of land which the Indigenous peoples own.

The Indigenous peoples are now more informed of the antics of the Government. And the fear that is already emanating from the bottom, both at the hinterland and elsewhere, with respect to

the Government opening all those claims is that they would be dispossessed. I do not only think it is a fear; I believe that the intent is to dispossess.

That is not only my fear, but it is the fear of the executive and the National Toshias Council (NTC). Today, Indigenous peoples are much more informed; they are much more empowered and are much more capable; their capacity to think for themselves is now advanced and they could see through any of the antics of the current Government.

Indeed, we have acquired freedom in the last two decades. We are no longer ashamed of being Amerindians. We are very proud of the capacities that we have developed under the People's Progressive Party/Civic. Therefore, all the lumping of Indigenous land claims only tells us one thing, and that is that the current Government is ill-informed on the matter.

Number six of the terms of reference speaks about reviewing the current and established practices relating to Amerindian, ancestral and other lands in Guyana. It affects the Indigenous land titling process.

I may not be able to explain in details what this means in the Amerindian Act 2006 but I leave some of it for other speakers who would speak after when we resume on this motion. In this Act, it is clear what the process is. This honourable House should be told by the Government the reasons why it wishes to re-examine the current established practices. Does it mean that you have no faith in the Indigenous peoples who crafted the process or are you back-peddling on the approval of the process when we all sat in the Special Select Committee to deal with it?

The honourable big wigs of the time agreed to this process. If the Indigenous peoples have not requested a review of this, then why is it being pushed down their throats? Why is repressive behaviour expressed by the Government against the Indigenous peoples? The freedom that we have acquired does not tolerate, today, such repressiveness. Do not believe that Indigenous peoples cannot detect and identify repressiveness. Do not believe that our silence, sometimes, means that we lack knowledge. I could tell that the Indigenous peoples of Guyana are so empowered that we know where it pinches; we know our contribution to this country; we know of the challenges that we face; we know of the disadvantage that lurks every time we turn around. We, like any other Guyanese, are aware of all of the perils of this world. The leaders of the Indigenous peoples, including myself, will be loud in our objections on matters that threaten

our survival and the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry (CoI) on lands which seems to entrench the processes of titling of lands to my fellow brothers and sisters in the Indigenous villages. We would support. The Peoples Progressive Party would throw its support behind the NTC on this matter.

If you read the statement of the NTC which was widely circulated by the Media houses, including Facebook and online news, they have clearly signalled to the Government that they would not cooperate with you on this matter of the CoI.

Let us remember the 2015 campaign slogan that was placed in the hinterland in bold green and yellow letters which said: “It is time to respect Amerindians”. There were two faces on it and I would not mention who they are. There were two gentlemen on both sides. Is this the way we are demonstrating respect? Is this the way we are embracing the Amerindian population of this country? Is it by establishing a commission that seeks to raise tension among the ranks of Indigenous peoples? I disagree and disapprove.

The People’s Progressive Party strongly supports the dissolution of this established Commission with the specific terms of reference mandated to the Commissioners as it relates to Indigenous land claims and titling.

Number 8 of the terms of reference speaks about ensuring all land uses and practices under Communal tenure conform to the principles of sustainable land management. Again, this is disappointing. Why does the current Government seem to want to - I want to use a word but I know it may be unparliamentary - diminish the work of Indigenous peoples of this country. This legislation, which is branded as an Indigenous product, speaks to the fact that the Amerindians are the sole protector or the custodian of their lands. This is small so I would read it.

Section 58 (2) of the Amerindian Act 2006:

“No protected area may be established over the whole or any part of Village lands without the consent of the Village general meeting.”

When we speak of sustainable use and when we use terms about the environment, I believe that, in recognition of the Amerindians as custodians of their areas, they are the example of using land, forest products and natural resources in a sustainable way. In fact, internationally, it is

recognised that the Indigenous peoples are the custodians of the forest and, in some cases, almost all tracks of lands which they traverse and use for their benefit and survival.

In fact, the Hon. Vice-President and Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, Mr. Sydney Allicock has always popularly used this term, like a mantra, "The Indigenous peoples are the custodians of the forests." [An Hon. Member: He is the boss.] He may be the boss but he may lose his pages.

The Hon. Minister, now responsible for Indigenous peoples' affairs, has allowed his peers to overstep the boundaries with respect to these matters before us.

9.42 p.m.

The terms of reference, as I said, is like a recipe for chaos and tension. And it also speaks to Guyana having established, under the Amerindian Act 2006, a legal framework which addresses Amerindian land rights and Amerindian communal titling. I have said so much on this - the sixth WHEREAS clause. Under the Amerindian Act of 2006, many Amerindian communities have been able to acquire communal titles. I have already presented the fact that an expansive number of communities have received land titling under the PPP/C Government, in addition to those which were vested as a recommendation emanating out of the Amerindian Lands Commission of 1967.

"And whereas the establishment of the aforementioned Commission appears to put Guyana on a collision course with its international rights and obligation;"

Again, this matter of Guyana being a member of the United Nations (UN), a signatory to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), it is worrisome because I understand that an Hon. Minister from the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs attended the 16th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) in New York. I perused the statement made by the Hon. Minister Garrido-Lowe. There was not a single mention of the progress Guyana has made on land. This sends a signal. It means that the slothfulness of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs in ensuring that the Amerindian Land Titling Project and its staff deliver on project targets...this House needs to know what the status of that Project is. Is it that that Project is now thrown out the window? Is it

now that the Minister who attended the UNPFII Conference is left out of the loop, so in her presentation she had no recourse but to leave a huge gap in her presentation that did not speak to one of the most significant areas that affect Indigenous peoples' lives? Or is it that the Hon. Minister disagreed with what had occurred and refused to include any such thing in her presentation?

Another matter is that even at the UNPFII Conference, at such an internationally acclaimed conference for Indigenous peoples, the major elected leaders of Indigenous peoples' of Guyana were absent. Is it that the Government is afraid that if it had taken a team of Indigenous leaders to that Conference that they would have exposed the fact that here it is that a signatory to UNDRIP is now negatively affecting its survival? Land for Amerindians is life. Land for Amerindians is the foundation of their survival and development, and it is probably a slap in the face of Indigenous peoples that the Government which professed such respect for them prior to the 2015 elections has now thrown them aside. This House needs an explanation. There is a precedent that Indigenous leaders of this country should be supported at all levels, even at the international level where the voices of Indigenous peoples are put together to assist and exchange with each other solutions that will allow further development to take place as it relates to their livelihood, communities, and their space. It is worrisome. And it is within this vein that I wish to address the BE IT RESOLVED clause.

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly calls upon the Government to invite His Excellency the President to consider revoking the aforementioned Commission of Inquiry in the best interest of national unity and social cohesion.”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 43 minutes.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am about to conclude. I would like to speak longer but, if I have overstepped my time...

Mr. Speaker: The rules allow you a possible 45 minutes. I will allow you a few extra minutes to conclude.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On the BE IT RESOLVED clause, I wish to place on record that there is enough legal mechanism to address Amerindian land titling, issues surrounding claims of Amerindian lands or claims submitted by Amerindians, and I also wish to submit that there is no significant land issue, which is not being addressed, which would allow for such inclusion of Amerindian claims and land titling to be part and parcel of this established Commission.

Things do change. However, there is a process when change takes place. Is non-consultation now the new form of good governance when international charters support that governments, where Indigenous Peoples are located, increase dialogue with the Indigenous population and ensure that the rights of the Indigenous population are addressed and are respected?

Therefore, while I call for the revocation of this established Commission of Inquiry on Lands, I want to leave two things: any Government, whether the current Government or future government, should take a leaf out of the books of the PPP/C whereby we have introduced a culture of inclusiveness, consultative approach, and participatory approach to governance. And it is under the period of the PPP/C Government that we were able to “free-up” some of the “hang-ups” which this nation had about the Indigenous peoples or Amerindians. I feel very proud today that the opportunity has been provided to the entire Indigenous population of this country to be able to represent themselves, to be independent in thinking and to participate with a lot of dedication to their upliftment and development. And in so doing, I posit that the established Commission of Inquiry is revoked.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO.10 (1)

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, in the light of the fact that we are now commencing the second speaker, and I strongly believe that we will go beyond 10.00 p.m., I would wish a motion to enable us to continue until the Hon. Sydney Allicock completes his statement.

Mr. Nagamootoo: As advised, Your Honour, I move that the House continues sitting until the conclusion of the speech by Vice-President Sydney Allicock.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

Vice-President and Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs [Mr. Allicock]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I recognise the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman of the NTC being here tonight. I would like to also say to this august House that I would like to try to bring something that is more meaningful for the development of this beautiful country of ours.

It is with a sense of pride that I join in the debating of this motion titled, Revocation of the Commission of Inquiry Surrounding the Claims of Amerindian Land Titling, the Individual, Joint or Communal Ownership of Lands Acquired by Freed Africans and Any Other Land Titling in Guyana, moved by the Hon. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai.

We are, indeed, in interesting times.

9.57 p.m.

Today, we are debating a motion which, among other things, seeks to discuss the non-existent and, therefore, in reality, challenges nothing. It is passing strange, therefore, that four days before this motion came up for debate in this honourable House, two leading members of the National Toshias Council, on a frolic of their own, sought to debate the same non-existing situations while presenting the same untenable arguments as the People's Progressive Party has presented here today.

Ms. Manickchand: A point of order, please, Mr. Speaker. Your Honour, I believe we have a tradition in this House, guided by a rule that...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, if you have a point of order, please state the Standing Order on which you stand and make the point after that.

Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Speaker, I was going to rely on Your Honour to guide me about the Standing Order.

Mr. Speaker: Then you, perhaps, rose before you ought to. You need to guide yourself on that.

Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Speaker, I am standing under Standing Order No. 40 (a). The Hon. Vice-President derogatorily referred to persons who cannot defend themselves in this House. We do not do that in this House.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. Please proceed.

Mr. Allicock: Mr. Speaker, I know that my Hon. Friends across the aisle are unhappy with being where they are but I wish to assure them that the rest of Guyana has a different perspective on this matter. This motion helps to cement their place in the Opposition beyond 2020.

WHEREAS clause 4 repeats a falsehood which has made its rounds in Guyana's hinterland. This misinformation, used either unintentionally or deliberately, has caused unease, and the unease is among our Indigenous peoples of Guyana and even the people of the hinterland. I believe that we, the Hon. Members of this august Assembly, owe it to ourselves, our consciences and the people of Guyana to speak the truth and speak it always - be truthful; be helpful.

Having read the terms of reference of the Commission of Inquiry and finding absolutely no shred of evidence of even a veiled suggestion regarding dispossession of Amerindian land titles, I am moved to challenge the mover of this motion and the Hon. Leader of the Opposition to either prove this assertion today in this House or apologise to the Indigenous peoples of this land and withdraw the motion forthwith.

WHEREAS clauses 5 and 6 seem to suggest that 2006 marked the beginning of all things relative to Amerindian land titling. Nothing is further from the truth. Even before Independence, the first Indigenous Guyanese legislator embarked upon a journey with a mission to ensure that Indigenous peoples' rights to land were secured. Mr. Stephen Campbell travelled to London to meet with the British Crown with a view to ensuring that post-independent Guyana did not lose sight of this critical issue.

Following the British Guiana Independence Conference of 1965, on 20th May, 1966, the Amerindian Lands Commission Act, Chapter 59:03 of the Laws of Guyana, came into being. Its effective date was 26th May, 1966. That, in several ways, was and remains a very important date in Guyana's history. In a few days, Guyana will again be celebrating another Independence

anniversary on 26th May, 2017. In August, 1967, the Minister of Local Government, the Hon. Randolph Emanuel Cheeks, appointed five Commissioners in accordance with this Act.

Following the Elections in 1968, on Friday, 28th February, 1969, Prime Minister Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham attended and addressed the first ever Conference of Amerindian Leaders in Guyana. Ms. Mary Williams, who led the Village Captains, as they were then called, is still alive and well in the village of Mainstay/Wayaka and can tell of the details. At that Conference, which ended on Monday, 3rd March, 1969, Prime Minister Burnham spoke to the question of land and his Government's policy with respect to land titles for Amerindian villages.

In August, 1969, two years following its Constitution, the Amerindian Lands Commission presented its Report. Following the presentation of this landmark Report on 21st April, 1976, a full 41 years ago, the 1951 Amerindian Act was amended by the Amerindian (Amendment) Act of 1976. Its preamble stated that it was an Act to amend the Amerindian Act for the purpose of giving effect to the vesting of lands settled by Amerindian citizens of Guyana in accordance with the recommendations of the Amerindian Lands Commission.

This amendment included a schedule of 63 villages and two districts which were accorded legal instruments of ownership to their lands. Mr. Burnham was, at that time, both Prime Minister and Minister with responsibility for Amerindian Affairs. By a subsequent Order in 1991, under the hand of the Hon. Robert H O Corbin, Deputy Prime Minister, another 10 villages and two districts were accorded similar status. This brought the number of villages and districts which legally became owners of their lands to a total of 77. In the PPP/C's 23 years in office, it managed to add a further 28 villages to that list, taking it to 105. There is much crowing about the addition of 28 villages but seldom is there even a slight mention of the 77 villages.

It is important that the children of Guyana be made aware of their history, lest they fall prey to the suggestion that, in Guyana, all things began in October, 1992. The Opposition likes to say that the PNC is back in government under another name. Would the PNC, under any another name, want to destroy its own legacy of ensuring that Indigenous peoples' rights to their lands are guaranteed? The truth is plain to see. Indigenous peoples' rights to their lands and actual ownership of lands preceded the Amerindian Act of 2016. In fact, the NTC stoutly represented at several fora that the Amerindian Act of 2006 failed to adequately address the Indigenous land

question and the question of rights. The NTC Vice-Chairman even broke rank with his colleagues of the Executive, demanding that the Amerindian Land Titling Project be halted until the Act is amended. Politics being as dynamic as it is, the self-same gentleman is on record, a few days ago, saying the same things contained in WHEREAS clause 5 – an about face to no mean order. It reminds the Bible-aware persons of the infamous story about the 30 pieces of silver.

All that I have said here ought to be motivation to the mover of this motion to honourably withdraw this motion and, perhaps, even retreat into political retirement to save face. The Hon. Leader of the Opposition – he is not here and I am sorry to be talking *behind his back* - and others may not have possessed these facts before now, owing to a mixture of lack of real interest and proper advice, but could be forgiven. The former Minister of Amerindian Affairs cannot, however, escape blame for attempting to mislead this House into believing that the COI could: one, undermine the legitimacy of Amerindian land rights; two, lead to the dispossession of Amerindian land titles; and three, put Guyana on a collision course with its international rights and obligations. This is a case that cannot be proven.

I, therefore, join with my Colleagues of the Government benches in rejecting this motion. It is divisive, seeks to promote disunity among the citizens of Guyana and lacks substance. It is not grounded in reality.

His Excellency the President has the authority, under section 2 of the Commission of Inquiry and Chapter 19:03 of the Laws of Guyana, to issue a commission appointing commissioners, as he did in this case in the public interest. His Excellency also did so in several other instances and the outcome of those Commissions of Inquiry seemed to have created unease among some circles. This one appears to have caused a similar disquiet.

The conversation on land is a national one. While I understand fully that the Opposition will, for good reason, be uncomfortable with the outcome of the work of the Commission, we must move forward with the work of the country.

What can the Opposition be so afraid of? Is it that it believes that the truth about worthless pieces of paper purported to be land titles, having been given to the people of Kangaruma and Tassarone and then taken back, will be told to the CoI? Or is it afraid that stories about the

mishandling of applications for lands and the arbitrary slashing of areas applied for will be told? Or is it a case where the Opposition is afraid that the forced submission of the Indigenous peoples, through political pressure by select operatives in villages aligned with the People's Progressive Party, will be made public?

10.12 p.m.

I say let the work of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry on Lands be proceeded with, let the truth be told and let the public be the judge. Let us allow His Excellency President Granger to benefit from the findings and recommendations of the Commission, as Guyana seeks to address the question of lands, which is a national issue and which requires the full participation of all concerned parties, with a view to a resolution of the matters which will come before the Commission.

We are all Guyanese. We each have a stake in our Guyana. We are equal before man and God. Guyana belongs to all of us and we must, together, build a nation which is united and strong. We must not fail in our efforts to shape our country's destiny together. Our children and their children's future depend on us and our works.

The old saying is: *A drowning man will clutch at a straw, especially if they are from the bar.*

Let us look beyond the doom and gloom. We have so much to celebrate. We have this beautiful land of ours that each and every ethnic group has a space to live happily. We have a land of many waters; we have a land of six peoples. We have to move away from the era of Christopher Columbus; we have to be part of the process of development of this wonderful country. The future is bright, land will be given, the results will be for each and every one of us, the happiness that Guyanese need.

What we have to move off from is the continued division that we see and the continued fear that is being driven into our people. This Coalition Government is trying to unite this nation. We are bringing people together and that is what we want. For 23 years our people were divided and have not been seeing eye-to-eye. If both sides of the House are serious, then we must do all that is in our power to ensure that everyone is properly housed and settled in this beautiful land of ours. There is enough space for each and every one of us. Stop driving fear into our people.

I would like to, again, call on the mover of this motion to withdraw it, immediately, so that the work can be done to the benefit of each and every one.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: The time is now 10.15 p.m. I would now invite the Hon. Prime Minister to move the adjournment motion.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Mr. Speaker, I move that this House be adjourned to 15th June at 2 p.m.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, there is a caveat and that is, could the Hon. Prime Minister just add, for the record, that the National Assembly would also meet on 16th June, 2017, to continue the debate on this motion. Mr. Speaker, I know that you have announced it, but I would like to hear it from the horse's mouth - the Hon. Prime Minister and First Vice- President.

Mr. Nagamootoo: I have no problem whatsoever, Sir. I have spoken before, but if my Hon. friend wishes to be reinforced and to be comforted, we shall meet on 16th June, 2017, after I would have properly moved the adjournment on 15th June, 2017.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Ms. Teixeira, I believe that we are all comfortable with what we just heard.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Members, the House stands adjourned to the 15th June, 2017 at 2 p.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 10.18 p.m.