

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

77TH Sitting

Thursday, 7TH December, 2017

Assembly convened at 10.08 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Conduct of Members during Sittings of the National Assembly

Mr. Speaker: Before we commence today, I would like to request Hon. Members to avoid interrupting the speaker when the speaker is on the floor. I would request all speakers to avoid casting aspersions and making comments which are provocative and would, therefore, evoke a response from the person to whom the particular comments are directed. I would ask Hon. Members to avoid making personal remarks and, certainly, I would remind Hon. Members that the manner in which a Point of Order should be taken is by one person and not the whole National Assembly. If there is a matter which appears to call to bring forth a need for the Speaker to be notified about it, then one Member would get up and would make the Point of Order to the Speaker and then would resume his or her seat. There would be no explanation, no remonstrations but simply the Point of Order – what is breached and then one would sit. The Speaker would treat with it. I thank you.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

MOTION

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2018

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

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

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2018 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 2017-11-27.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2018, of a total sum of two hundred and forty three billion, three hundred and seventy five million, two hundred and eighty eight thousand dollars (\$243,375,288,000), excluding twenty three billion, seven hundred and eighteen million, four hundred and eighty three thousand dollars (\$23,718,483,000) which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in the undermentioned schedule, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to further provision in respect of finance.” *[Minister of Finance]*

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Ms. Manickchand: Thank you, kindly, Mr. Speaker. I rise this morning to make my contribution to this Budget debate. Sadly, this debate for the Government, it appears, has been and is a robotic act, a routine thing that needs to be done, a box that needs to be checked so we checked it and, in common parlance, a *deh deh* budget. It is bare in addressing the issues that the Budget itself identifies, the challenges that we have as a country.

Unfortunately, over the last four days, what should have been an important, high-level discussion by everybody in this House about how we are going to move our dearly beloved Guyana and her people forward past these challenges, instead of seeing that level of debate, we saw a calibre where a senior Minister of the Government took time on taxpayers' dollars to go and cut grass and put it into a Ziplock bag and grinned and brought it into this House and make that a part of her presentation. Such was the calibre that we have seen from the Government benches. That, for me, is disappointing and dangerous and, more importantly, the bare budget and the checkbox budget really manifested itself in presentation after presentation being just as robotic and laying out a programme and a plan in an environment that has been defined by the Government as being different from when the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) was in government.

The Minister of Finance, who presented the Budget, said that we are in hard economic times. The economy has not performed. It has dipped; it has slipped and it is poorly performing. Every Member on this side of the House has said that and everybody in the country is saying that. People do not like to hear that. Let us believe everything that the Minister said in this Budget regarding the performance of the economy. The Minister said that we are doing poorly. The Minister said that the economy has not performed the way it was projected to perform. The Minister said that the economy is slipping. I agree that he is truthful and should be given credit for that if not for anything else. In fact, the words that were used over the last year by the Private Sector Commission (PSC), the private sector bodies and individuals in this country to determine this, to define the economic state of the country, have one thing in common – dipped, slipped, sliding, declining, limped. These are all words used to describe the economy. A Google search would show that.

The Minister made this disclosure truthfully in this House and then he ran away with his Minister within the Ministry of Finance from the criticisms and suggestions that would come his way. I do not even see senior members of the Ministry in this House and this reinforces my point that this is a checkbox budget - "We have to go because we have to present a budget; let us go; let us read something and then let us carry on with our trips and our business." He is not even here to hear our suggestions and, perhaps, answer some of the criticisms. That is the arrogance that we are seeing too. I do not know if the *Hansard* would record anywhere under the leadership of the PPP/C - we never had so many Ministers in a Ministry - where the Minister presented a budget

and then escaped to a different country. In this case, we have two Ministers in the same Ministry. This tells us again that there is no interest in what would happen in this process. It is just a process that must happen in a year and it happened. They could check that particular box.

So convinced is the Minister of the fact that he is telling the truth that the economy is doing badly that he sheepishly inserts, at the end of the speech, that he promised us plenty things but cannot get them this term; that he cannot deliver them this term.

Perhaps it is best for us to go back to a very basic thing: what are national budgets for? What do they do and what are their purposes? They are essentially a financial statement from the government to the people of a country saying that this is how much was earned last year; this is what we spent it on; this is what we project to earn this year and this is what we would spend it on. Capable governments would usually make their plans and policies with a larger ideological and philosophical position.

This particular A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government has failed, to date, to tell us, in as many words, almost three years down the line, what its ideology and philosophy for Guyana is.

The PPP/C was clear. When it was elected to office in 1992, it said that it had inherited a bankrupt country, a country which does not respect people's basic human rights, a country which does not recognise women as being equal, and it listed a whole set of things. The country had a 61% poverty rate. This means, out of every 100 persons, 62 of them were poor, as a result of which our Government was a pro-poor, development-oriented government. It looked to reduce poverty, develop the country, to give the country international image that the Hon. Minister, Mr. Greenidge, spoke of last night in one of the better presentations. He brought our minds repeatedly to the issue of image. I am not sure if he meant hair and makeup in the National Assembly. He raised the issue of image. He said that, for decades, we have been able to improve our image.

The PPP/C, as the then Government, then went about crafting policies and plans in every Ministry and toiled year after year to take the country from one position of decrepit, unrecognisable and unworthy to a higher position. Some of the things that it did are known to the population. We moved from not having a Ministry of Housing to having 100,000 families own

their own homes, have capital... We moved from what Father Morrison described in his book, *Justice*, being at the bottom of the ladder in the Caribbean regarding education to topping the Caribbean at the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) for nine consecutive years. That is what we did in the plan to reduce poverty and develop Guyana.

We moved from only half of the old-age population receiving a pension to every person over 65 years old, whether you had a party card or not, whether you are Black, Indian, Portuguese or Amerindian, being able to access pensions and then being able to access subsidies on electricity and water rates. We continued to do that. This year, we have the pension books. They are in green and yellow. This is the big focus of the country in a budget where the senior Minister of Finance told us that we are in hard economic times and that their focus is to make everything green and yellow.

We moved from a place where the State said that governments do not fund legal aid to where the PPP/C showed how we could have legal aid in every region of this country funded by the people of Guyana for the people of Guyana. That was our plan. That was how we developed the country and that was how we reduced poverty. We had lost too. It was in our time that Guyana lost preferential market for sugar but 2,000 persons were not without a job at that time.

10.23 a.m.

We moved from a place where you had to leave Georgetown at four o'clock in the morning and reach to New Amsterdam until 10 o'clock, with a boat, to a place where the Members coming from Berbice to get to this National Assembly for 10.00 a.m. could leave home at 8.00 a.m. and drive over a bridge. Such was the development you saw when there was a plan – a philosophy – that we want to reduce poverty by half, and we did not do this in the easiest of times. I hear all the whining and the complaining about there is not any money and if you all did not do this, then we could have done that. We did this in hard times. They were naturally hard times. We did this when the farmers had to go through El Niño and La Niña periods – new words that had become known in the global lexicon. We did this when there was a '*mo fire, slow fire*' phenomenon when Regent Street, in the blink of an eye, a whole block got burnt down. And we had to divert moneys to building that back even as we built our country. We did this while other countries were spitting on Guyana and Guyanese. There were Guyana benches in almost every single

Caribbean country in this region, where all who are in this House went to Law School during a certain period. As late as 2000, people in Trinidad were asking us if we have television and cars in Guyana. That was how badly our image was destroyed by the rigged elections and the poverty that we saw going on. Those are just one or two that were mentioned there.

With all of these programmes that the PPP did and toiled after, year after year, what happened? We saw poverty reduced by half. The World Bank, an international financial institution, said, in a 1991 study, that 62% of our people were living in poverty and 35% were living in desperate poverty. That means that, out of every 100 people, 62 are poor. In 2008, that same World Bank did another study on us and said that Guyana had cut poverty in half. So, those programmes, in this philosophical approach, that we want to reduce poverty, worked. And we could be talking about numbers and percentages, here. What it meant was that the people in Guyana, whether living in Georgetown, Region 9, Mahaicony or Charity, whether you are black, white or yellow, male or female, all got a better standard of living in some way or the other. And that is what the numbers mean; it is that the people of Guyana were doing better and Guyana as a whole was doing better, so much so that we have citizens of this country who were recognised by the world as being Champion of the Earth; citizens of this country who are recognised by the world as being capable to be judges and international persons sitting at ambassadorial levels. That is what we have now or that was what we had.

It is important that the Government tells us what its philosophy is. We can guess. We are people and everybody is wondering. We heard about a green State and that is a very topical issue that sponsors a lot of trips. I suppose that it is something lucrative for the Ministers of the Government to hang on to. And we could guess that the Government is probably thinking about a green State; everything is painted green. The fence of the Ministry of Presidency is in this chameleon green. The people who go in there must feel like they are entering the belly of a chameleon. And that is not a good thing. You want to trust the people you are going to speak to; a chameleon switches – flip flops on positions. Why do you want people to feel like that? State House, the people's House, is being painted green. The pension book that was just presented is green and yellow. It sounds like a small issue and it sounds like something that we can trivialise. But it is really taking us back to that position of party paramountcy that is described so clearly in historical pieces written on our nation. Party paramountcy has done nothing for the development

of Guyana and for the development of her people. I believe that it is only people who have no plan, who have no vision, who could be described by many as vacuous, who have to occupy us with these distracting issues of painting a country green and forcing the staff at the Ministry of the Presidency to wear green. We could guess that that is probably one of the Government's plans.

We can also guess that there has been some coming together of the minds over there to determine that there have been plans and programmes of the PPP/C that we better keep running or we are going to get into trouble. And so they are very flatteringly copying them wholesale, coming here and are boasting about some of them that are going on. They are actually PPP/C programmes. I will come to why it is a problem for them to wholesale copy those programmes.

To begin with, the Government does not have a plan and the Budget did not present one for us.

Secondly, the Government seems incapable of properly projecting what the income of this country is ever going to be. Twice last year, the Government projected something and had to readjust those numbers downwards. It exaggerated the numbers: we will do so well in terms of growth, and it had to come back and sheepishly say that it made a mistake. I want to invite the Government, the Ministers and the Cabinet Members who are here, to consider why it is they might not have seen the expected income that they wanted. I am asking directly of the Ministers for them to ponder if, perhaps, the fact that they declared the country to be bankrupt at the beginning has seen no investments coming here and, therefore, no growth - not the growth they expected. Who comes to invest in a bankrupt country? I want to ask them if heavily armed policemen raiding the houses of businessmen at 5.00 a.m. with their children and families in those houses has anything to with them not seeing the projected income that they expected, and, incidentally, finding absolutely nothing incriminating in those houses. I want to ask them if frivolously charging political opponents, arresting and charging them – Dr. Luncheon, as though he is a flight risk – has anything to do with people believing that this is an unstable political place where an investment is not going to see growth.

I want to ask them if unilaterally appointing a Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM), which has been criticised by every single civil society and rights loving group, and too many individuals to mention in this country, locally and internationally, has anything to do

with the fact that our income is not as the Minister has projected because people do not believe that we have a politically stable environment in which they can invest. Is that one of the reasons? Is the practical shutting down of the construction industries one of the reasons they have not been able to see the income that they projected? Is the Ministers' laziness in implementing the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP)... We heard here in this House about how advertisements are going out in December, 2017 for programmes they came and asked us to approve in November, 2016. It is one year later. [Mr. Ramjattan: So what?] The Hon. Minister, Mr. Ramjattan, said, "So what?" It is a complete failure to understand what the Government spending means to our economy and the turnover of money. Does that have anything to do with our inability to earn the way we earn?

Mr. Speaker, I want to warmly welcome the Hon. Minister of Finance back to this House after his hiatus for the last five days.

Finally, because I know my time is running out, I want to ask the Government or particularly ask the Alliance For Change (AFC) in that Government if it feels, in anyway, responsible for our income not being what we projected. After all, it was the AFC who told people that it would be the third force. It would be the balancing force. It would pull back the People's National Congress (PNC) from its excesses and the AFC has been exposed to be people who have no force, let alone a third force. They are fully in bed with the PNC. The Guyanese people trust them no more, and, therefore, do not feel like they can come here and spend money or stay here – those who have remained here – and invest money because it will not grow because this party has failed them in being what it promised it would be.

We have a number of reasons why the country seems to be doing badly and I have asked questions and you can answer. If you do not think it is your laziness in spending, if you do not think it is the AFC being untrustworthy, tell me that. But we have all of these problems and I think, when we add them up, the Government and this Budget can be summed thus: they are incompetent and untrustworthy. The APNU/AFC Government is politically spiteful and happy with dumping years of democratic practice that has brought stability to this country. It is not business friendly and is without the ability to plan and/or implement for a better Guyana. There is no plan, so the Minister of Finance comes here and says to us - and he is here again – "We are in trouble; this country is performing poorly, our economy is doing badly." And you would think

that, if the Minister comes and tells us that, that he would bring with him prescriptions that we are doing badly in this area and here is how we are going to fix it; we are doing badly in this area and here is how we will fix it. We have seen the Minister come here and woe that we are doing so badly, tell us these horror stories, and then the highlights of his Budget are the building of six duplexes and two abattoirs and some meeting Minister Greenidge is going to chair somewhere in the world. So, this is cause for serious worry.

In fact, instead of seeing a stimulus plan stating that this is how we are going to stimulate this economy... PPP, work with us; help us vote for these things so that we can stimulate this economy that you say is dying; that you say is stagnant; that you say that cannot move; here PPP, work with us. [*Interruption*] **[Mr. Nandlall:** Mr. Speaker, I cannot hear!]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Nandlall... Hon. Ms. Manickchand, take your seat. Mr. Nandlall, there is a method by which the Speaker's attention is attracted. You will employ that method and that method alone. Thank you.

Mr. Nandlall: What is that method, Sir?

Mr. Speaker: Please resume your seat, Mr. Nandlall.

Mr. Nandlall: Are you refusing...

Mr. Speaker: No outbursts in the Chamber...

10.38 a.m.

Mr. Nandlall: Sir, are you not hearing outbursts from the other side?

Ms. Manickchand: Thank you very much, Sir. I think that was about three minutes. I would ask the timekeeper to give me back my time. Where is the stimulus, sir? How are you going to stimulate this economy that you say is stagnant and is doing badly?

In the mid-2000s, this country joined the rest of the world when we saw an economic downturn, crisis across the world, entire countries crashing, peoples' businesses folding, homes being seized. Guyana did not only hold her own, but she grew in that period. She grew because of prudent management, sensible policies and stimulus in the economy such as: giving the waiver

on the water rates to pensions; saying, “Parents, we know you are having some hard times because your relatives overseas are no longer sending money for you so we are going to give you uniform assistance.” That is how we cushioned the impact for our people.

Conversely, we were told by the Minister, an Hon. Gentleman, not only because of his seat but because of his knowledge - I trust him; I believe him - that this country is slipping; it is sliding; the economy is doing poorly. And he has been unable to tell us what the plan is. Usually, we know. We know when countries are doing badly, the most vulnerable suffer more: women, children, and people in the Hinterland regions. What is the plan for them? Coming and telling us about a \$10 million grant, as beautiful as it maybe, is half of the Prime Minister’s car. That cannot stimulate the Amerindian community. Instead, what we have seen is the opposite. Instead of telling us how you are going to help these various communities in the economic downturn, you tell 2,000 persons that, come 1st January, you would not have an income. Two thousand persons, 2,000 families, 10,000 people are going to be affected.

We are talking about these numbers. I just want us to, if we can, close our eyes for a minute and stop and imagine what happens if you were to wake up tomorrow, anybody in here, without a job and in a wheelchair. We are not only knocking them off; we are failing to give them anything they could do with themselves, so we are crippling them. We are failing to give them anything they could do to make an earning for their families. It is like if you are walking out of this Parliament and a car *lick you upside down* and changes your life automatically in a moment. The Government is that car licking these people upside down; 10,000 persons, directly, children and women, *daddies*, taking them away and not giving them the skills or any kind of wherewithal to go and make a living. These are not skilled, educated people who could just get up from one desk job and go to another, assuming those others exist for 2,000 persons. These persons have special skills. You have not retrained them.

Then to go all the way to Kenya and talk about people before profit... We do need to go to Kenya to hear about people before profit. Let your action speak right here in Guyana. Put the people of the Sugar Estates first; put them before your profits. What is the problem? Are they not people or is it because they are not your people? Is that the real issue we are dealing with here?

[**Ms. Ally:** Why are you insinuating?]

I am not insinuating anything. I want to be very

clear. I am asking the Government if it feels comfortable knocking off these 2,000 persons

because it does not believe they are the Government's. There is no insinuation there. That is a clear question. Answer it.

In this economic decline, where the Minister tells us, in his Budget speech that the country's economy is performing poorly, doing badly, this is the same time that the Minister decides he is going to withdraw the water rate subsidy and electricity subsidy from pensioners, old people, our vulnerable population, and place a tax on those two necessary commodities.

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

Ms. Manickchand: Is that with my three minutes?

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

Ms. Manickchand: Is that inclusive of my three minutes, Sir?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, it includes all the time that you are entitled to.

Ms. Manickchand: Thank you very much. You are very kind. Instead of coming with a stimulus package, education... You say that education will take us out of poverty; it is the only route that we could use as nation, as a people, all those fancy quotes. You came and you said that. In the same year that you tell us the nation is doing badly and the economy is doing badly and parents are suffering outside, you say to them, "You are going to have to pay VAT on your children's education, goods and services. "You told us that. Instead of giving us a stimulus, you are taking away and adding to these people's burdens.

I am asking, how much did we earn last year, because this is the Budget, in the taxing of education, goods and services and how much of that will be applied to the benefit of the children this year? Could I ask, specifically, Mr. Minister of Finance, that the taxes earned from taxing education, goods and services be applied directly to the children of the sugar workers who are going to be fired next year? Could I ask how much it was, and, two, that it be applied directly to those people you are responsible for firing? Or is it this money that we used to buy the five cars that cost \$100 million for the Ministry of the Presidency? Is that where we used the money?

I know I only have a little bit of time remaining, but, to come here and boast about read, love and play, this is a PPP/C programme - crafted, thought of, funded by the PPP/C. **[Ms.**

Charles-Broomes: That is why you are in the Opposition.] This triumphant “That’s why you are in the Opposition” is not going to take this country anywhere. Boasting about 77% trained teachers is not going to help us because ‘read, love and play’ was crafted at a time when 85% of our nursery population was enrolled in a nursery school, the highest in the Commonwealth Caribbean and their parents were employed. You cannot come into the Government, fire 2,000 persons directly related to the children who are intended to benefit from this ‘read, love and play’ campaign –those are the Amerindian young men and women from the Hinterland - do not listen to their Toshias Council, do not fund their Toshias Council and expect to see the same kind of results in these programmes.

We are saying very clearly in this House that there needs to be more done for the people who are suffering from the economic decline, defined and articulated by the Minister of Finance. We say that you could begin by telling us, in this House, how you are going to deal with the sugar workers and their children. You could begin by telling us, in this House, that you are going to give the \$10,000 cash grant back to the children so that their parents could be assisted in this economy that you said is hard. Ten thousand dollars was given to 187,000 children, amounting to \$1.6 billion in this country. Your bus and boat programme is not even serving 2,000. It is a great programme but it is not even serving 2,000 persons. When you see a headline that Government benchers have to defend taking away \$10,000, you know we are in trouble. *[Interruption]* I am assuming that Your Honour understands that I could speak in noise and that is why there is no interruption, calling for some quite in the House while I am speaking, the way Your Honour usually does when anyone over there is speaking.

I am going to yield to Hon. Member Mr. Harmon, someone I...

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

Minister of State [Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon]: Mr. Speaker, good morning. I stand to give my unequivocal support to the Budget presented here in the National Assembly by the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordon, and his team. Just in the event that time runs out on me, I ask that we give this Budget our full support and passage on the Floor of this National Assembly.

Among other things, this Budget inspires confidence, unlike what my Friends on the other side are saying. What, more importantly, it does is that it clarifies the vision of the APNU/AFC Administration for the development of this country.

Let me return to this matter of vision. But, let me, first of all, commend my Hon. Friend, Dr. Frank Anthony, on the other side, who spoke the day before yesterday and said that this was a tired budget. I recall that, in 2014, sitting exactly in that place where Dr. Anthony is sitting, I described Dr. Ashni Singh's Budget as "tired" and that he should take a rest. Of course, Dr. Singh preserved and reserved his worst tirade on attacking me for describing his Budget in those terms. I am sure that I cannot attack Dr. Anthony in that way, but I would ask that the *Hansard* records accurately the similarity of the words that I used and the words that Dr. Anthony has used here.

The Opposition says that our Budget has no vision. But, when you do not have any eyes to see, you cannot understand the vision. While the vision is unfolding before their very eyes, my dear Friends cannot see it. It is like if you go to build a house, you have a plot of land and the architect comes with his drawings, his designs and he says that this is what the house would look like; this is the land.

10.53 a.m.

You cannot visualise what it is going to be like, so you say, "All that I am seeing here is bush." The bush is cleared but you still do not see a house; the concrete has started to be poured and you still do not see a house; the structures are up and you still do not see a house; the house is finished - a duplex is finished and then you see half of a house. It is not our fault that the other side do not see the vision. The vision is right there. It is unfolding before your very eyes, but still you cannot see it.

This budget, I will posit, has brought smiles to the faces of the bulk of the Guyanese people. In this budget, while some of my Friends speak about their love for the sugar workers, we have taken that into consideration. In the amounts of moneys that are allocated for the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), there is a huge chunk of money in there for severance. The workers must know that too. While you keep complaining that, "Oh, we do not do this for workers and

we do not do that for workers”, a chunk is in there for them. You did not even pay their National Insurance Scheme (NIS) contributions.

I am asking that we look at the several presentations made by the Ministers and Members of Parliament (MPs) on this side of the House, and you will see the vision. Minister Hughes gave the vision on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) development. What clearer message do you want than that? Minister Bulkan gave the vision on local democracy. What clearer vision than that do you want? Minister Norton gave the vision on social cohesion - youth, sport and culture. What clearer vision than that do you want? Minister Lawrence gave the vision on public health and on what we are going to do. What clearer that that do you want? Minister Holder gave the vision on agriculture. What else do you want? Minister Gaskin gave the vision on business and where we are going. What else do you want? Minister Valerie Patterson-Yearwood gave the vision on housing. What else do you want? She said to you, the housing stock that we have and the number of house lots that were issued in the past and could not have been occupied. She has said to you that we were going to be providing, not just house lots, but we will be providing communities. We will be building communities for the people of this country. What other than that do you want?

All the other Members, on this side of the House, have clarified, in a major way, what the vision is. We have actually gone into granular details to clarify this vision and still, the Members on the other side cannot see it. What I am saying is that the people of this country are listening, they are seeing and they are judging, and so they will judge them about their lack of vision and the blindness that is taking place on that other side of the House.

In my presentation here today, I wish to argue that the green agenda that has been promoted by this Government is the enduring and sustainable trajectory that will ensure the long term economic, social and cultural development of Guyana. Time permitted, I will also argue that the Government’s approach to disaster preparedness is one which endears itself to a national buy-in by all Guyanese.

The green agenda, which the Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira, spoke about, and I will admit that Mdm. Teixeira is a very persuasive and compelling speaker, and makes a compelling argument. She has posited that the People’s Progressive Party (PPP), by its Low Carbon Development

Strategy (LCDS) policy, brought US\$250 million to Guyana and has questioned what we did with it. I do not dispute that. I will deal with that and I will deal with the Norway Agreement in the context of a Green State Development Agenda, which we have embraced.

When we took Office in 2015, we recognised that the Low Carbon Development Strategy, as a development model, was seriously limited. In fact, it provided a foundation upon which we recognise that we can build a more enduring, resilient and self-sustaining economy to develop our country. We did not throw away the LCDS. We recognise that what was needed was a more embracing and all-embracing approach, and, hence, the approach of the Green State Agenda.

On Sunday and Monday of this week, we had two distinguished visitors who came to Guyana. We had the President of Conservation International and two Board Members of that entity, one of them being Mr. Robert Walton, the Chairman of Walmart. As you know, Walmart has a major chain of stores in the United States of America (USA). Those two gentlemen came here and they spent four days in Guyana. On Sunday evening, Mr. Peter Seligmann, who is the President of Conservation International, with branches all over this world, actually said to me, and he had been to over 122 countries in this world, Mr. Seligmann said this,

“Of all the countries in the world that I have visited, Guyana is a wonderful place”.

He said that Guyana is a global leader in the fight against climate change. He said that Guyana is a remarkable place. My Colleagues on the other side of this House, the party that I met on Monday morning, Mr. Walton is the Chairman of a group of companies that employs over two million persons, almost twice the population of Guyana. What he was saying is that he admires the courage of this Government. He admires the fact that, in the face on an impending boom for oil, this Government has embraced a Green State Strategy. He said, “I admire that in this country and I believe that in any other part of the world on this earth...” which is what he said, “Guyana is the place to be”. That is what they said. So what is it... *[Interruption][Inaudible]* I said that I was there at the meeting, read the newspaper.

What I am saying is that, if all of these people can see that, if these world leaders can see that, if a Chairman, a President of such an organisation, who has been all around the world, can see that, what is wrong with us? Where is the vision? Why can we not recognise that the world is seeing us as a place to be, as the place for the future, and we are in this House fighting? What is really

happening to us? I am asking that we pay careful attention to what it is that we are doing and the images that we are sending out there to the world. This is not the place to behave in a certain way.

When I listen to the presentations by my Friends on the other side, I am seeing what we used to call *scatter shots*. The Hon. Member, who just spoke, spoke about everything on the face of this earth except the budget. Every single thing except the budget, so I do not know what it is that they are seeing.

I did in fact say earlier that I intended to address this question of the Agreement with the Kingdom of Norway because I believe that it is an important element in our Green State Development Strategy. That strategy of course has been written about already. We have had significant help from the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) and from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in drafting and crafting that strategy. I believe that the help which we have received has put us in a better place.

Under the LCDS, the former President, Mr. Jagdeo, had someone come to sit with him for weeks and months to guide him along the way and I think that that was a good thing, but we now have a broader strategy. A strategy which includes not just a few forays into the hinterland, but a strategy which includes the persons who are living on the coast that are affected by Global Warming, and are affect by the rising of sea levels. These are the people that are 80% of this country - the farmers who are living on the coast. This strategy is not just about emission or low carbon emission and forays into hinterland. It involves everyone. It involves the connection between the hinterland and the coast. It involves the ICT development that will take place in these communities. It involves the transportation arrangements which will be made. It involves our embracing of the solar energy. It involves our embracing of wind. It involves our embracing of all of these elements.

When we look at the Norway Agreement and my Friend, the Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira, who basically said that they do not know what we are doing about it, I can say to you that our agreement with the Kingdom of Norway is alive and well. Only this morning, in fact this week, the Government had sent a letter to the Kingdom of Norway requiring that we meet to discuss certain elements of the agreement. Only this morning, we had an acknowledgement that stated

“Yes this was going to happen”. Only this morning, we got confirmation that Norway was going to release funding for some of our major projects that are in this area. While some people talk about us not embracing this and all the problems with that... [Mr. Jordon: It is just talks.] It is just talks.

When the agreement was signed in 2009, the agreement was that there would be US\$250 million that would be paid to us. By the time we got into Office, the sum had gone down to US\$215 million, A - because of penalties that were attached because of the non-performance of the previous Administration and B - because of the exchange rates.

11.08 a.m.

There was \$15 million that we lost because of that and another \$20 million that we lost because of the exchange rate. I cannot pin that one the other side. So, rather than \$250,000, as my Friend was talking about, all we were dealing with was US\$215 million. [Ms. Teixeira: What did you do with it though?] My Friend is asking what we did with it. There are so many things we have done with it. There are so many things which we have done with that; so many projects that you could not get done that are now done and paid for.

The major stumbling block, which we have in relation to that agreement, is the question of the \$80 million, which was allocated for hydro development. What has happened there is that, for that \$80 million, the previous Administration identified a particular project for it. We recognise, right here in this House, while we were in the Opposition, that that project had some serious issues. The entire project was never brought this House. In fact, two elements, which were brought there, one had to do with the debt ceiling and the other one was the offset to cater for some rare species of fish that the people found. That was what it was, nothing else came here. When the People Progressive Party (PPP/C), on its own, shut down the project, it attempted to put the blame on us saying that it was because we did not agree with it. That is what happened. It never came here.

After we came into Office, we engaged the Norwegians on the matter and we had agreed that there was going to be consultation on it. We agreed that a company by the name of Nor Consultant would do a study of what the situation is. The company did the study and the company reported on the study. In fact, what the company said in its report was that there were

major technical issues which had to be addressed; which even if we had proceeded to the point of trying to get it completed, it could have never been done. *[Interruption]*

The company spoke about the shaft which was put down there; it was too narrow or too small. It spoke about the flow of water, which was wrong. The company spoke about these things and they said too that the company that was dealing with that matter would have never been approved - the Chinese company. They said all of that, so what were you giving to us, *basket to fetch water?* That is what it said. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

It is a question of vision on the other side. No vision.

The report stated that the most advance project that they saw was the Amelia Falls Hydropower Project and we agreed with that. It is because we had already invested millions of United States (US) dollars in the infrastructure, almost US\$40 million in the road, the pontoon and all of these things. This was not the PPP/C's money. This was the money that belongs to the people of this country.

While we agree that something needs to be done, we feel now that it is appropriate for us to try to address certain matters under the agreement. When we spoke to the Norwegians they said further now, that what they would like to have are the elements of our Green State Development Strategy, they would like to see that and they would like to see, also, our energy road map. We produced those documents Madam Teixeira; we did produce those documents. We have a... *[Inaudible]* Green State Development Strategy and we are working now on the plan. These are the two elements that they had asked for clarification on. We did give clarification. The Green State Development Strategy was laid with the Norwegians and our energy road map.

The concern which the Norwegians had with our energy road map was the inclusion of natural gas. What we agreed to was that we were going to have 100% renewables by 2025. In that, they made an objection to the inclusion of natural gas in that energy road map in the mix. Our contention was that natural gas is cheap gas. It is clean gas. The emissions are at least 50% to 60% less than fossil fuel. **[Ms. Teixeira: But it is not renewable.]** We do not disagree. It is not a renewal resource, but it is a national resource and it is available. What we

said is that we need to move this country forward. We need to ensure that we could provide a certain quality of electricity, of power, to move the industries in this country. What we are saying is that this is a temporary step. It is a transitional arrangement. It is transitional and we will, at the same time, investigate other elements of the hydroelectricity.

The Minister of Finance, in his budget speech, identified some of those projects that we are going to look at. I do not know what the Opposition is talking about “That you have no vision.” and that it was not seeing this and not seeing that. It is right there before your very eyes. It is all there.

We have said to the Kingdom of Norway that we would like to meet at a Ministerial level and to finalise the little issues that we have going forward. I am confident that, in the environment in which we find ourselves, where our President has gone to Kenya to speak at a major United Nations (UN) environment forum, as the guest speaker. That what people are talking about what His Excellency said, the fear on the other side is that he would get some award higher than the *Kingdom of the Champion of Dirt*. That is the fear.

The Green State Development Strategy is a strategy that is a work in progress. Already, we are going to the school children to tell them about this thing. We have gone to the nursery schools; we have gone to the primary schools; and we have gone to secondary schools. We have created videos and all sorts of learning aids for them. They are understanding what it is all about. It is not like the LCDS where there are six or eight people going into the hinterland every month and collecting money for it. It is not like that. This is what has been going on. We have three secondary schools that would be going to Jamaica to deal with this whole thing about resilience and so on.

[Ms. Teixeira: Where is it?]

Ask the children of this country. The

children of this country, when you go home, they are the ones that would educate you about what the Green State Development Strategy is. We have to get things in the young people’s minds, so that they could understand what it is. That green is not just about a colour or a preference. It is about a way of life.

Our education and awareness activities take into consideration not just one set of people that live in the hinterland, but all the people of Guyana. This is because we are all affected by climate change. We are all affected by natural disasters. These are matters that are out there and I am

suggesting that if my dear friends on the other side, even if you were to go down to the level of your children and understand what is happening, that you would have a better understanding of what the Green State Development Strategy is all about.

Let me speak a little now about our preparedness for disasters and our preparation for resilience.

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

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: The hurricanes of 2017, Irma, Maria and Harvey have all wreaked havoc in the Caribbean. Locally, we have had our own issues in Regions 7, 8, 9 and 10. We have responded and we have responded in a very positive way. The Civil Defence Commission (CDC), under the guidance of the Minister of State, has activated several mechanisms. The first had to do with the National Disaster Preparedness Platform, which is a combination of civil society, the discipline forces and the State. That platform has been able to outline a procedure for dealing with things.

Additionally, we have established a National Emergency Operation Centre in the event that there is an emergency which take place somewhere. More importantly, at the level of the communities, we have activated volunteers who would actually be dealing with as first responders. We have trained over 9,000 of these volunteers all across this country and more are being trained. When we talk about civil defence, I want to give this assurance to this House that we are not just dealing with something that happens after the event, but we are dealing with what is taking place before it and the preparation which needs to take place.

I want to say that Guyana is in a good place where our preparation for emergencies is concerned. We have a good structure in place and, in a physical sense, in the budget, moneys have been allocated for public infrastructure - for infrastructure along the coast. I believe that several billion dollars of funds had been allocated for the physical infrastructure, [Dr. Anthony: Now is not response time.] You rest yourself. Two billion four hundred million has been budgeted for the improvement of our sea fences. Specifically there will be the construction and rehabilitation of the sea defence all along the coast in Ruimzeight, Wallers Delight, De Willem and Uitvlugt in Region 3, Grove Lookout, Pomeroon, Cottage and Uitvlugt.

11.23 a.m.

These sea defence structures will further protect our low lying communities from flooding. Moreover, nine fixed and five mobile pumps will be procured in 2018 to augment the existing inventory of 60 pumps. There can be no doubt of this Government's commitment to building resilience to disaster risks for all Guyanese. This is demonstrated by the 2018 budgetary allocations of \$274,333,000, which excludes foreign funded projects. We have worked and will continue to strive to ensure that we are better prepared and able to deal with the increased risks expected from climate change. Disastrous management is therefore our business and we intend to do all that we can to create a better and safer Guyana.

With those remarks, I commend this budget to this honourable House and ask that we pass it and, at the same time, to give my Hon. Friend, Minister Mr. Jordan, all the kudos for an excellent budget. I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Lumumba: Good morning Mr. Speaker. Good morning Minister, welcome back. I understand that Donald Trump flew you in just to hear me. Congratulations. Good morning Members on the other side. In particular, good morning Minister Harmon. **[Lt. Col.**

(Ret'd) Harmon: Good morning Sir.] Thank you.

I am indeed disappointed because I can recall that the People's National Congress (PNC) of the old days, under the late President Mr. Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, had a philosophy. He had an ideological position, feed, clothe and house the poor of the nation and the working class in particular. His Ministers of Finance, whether it was Mr. Hope, Mr. Haslyn Parris or the Hon. Mr Carl Greenidge, when they delivered a budget, the budget presentation would synchronise with the ideas of Mr. Burnham. Those ideas were not very far from that of Dr. Jagan, the only difference is, Mr. Burnham knew how to steal elections. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gravel.]

Mr. Lumumba: Of course...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General did you rise on a Point of Order?

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Williams]: On a Point of Order, under Standing Order 40 (a).

Mr. Speaker: I thank you Hon. Member.

Mr. Williams: I ask that the Hon. Member withdraw the imputation of crime by the former President of this land.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please take your seat. I thank the Hon. Minister, Hon. Member. Mr. Lumumba, I do not know whether you were here this morning when I asked Members to avoid inflammatory remarks when making their statements. That comment was Out of Order and I would ask you to withdraw it.

Mr. Lumumba: Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am asking you to withdraw that comment. I am sure that whatever you want to say, you are not challenged by the English language and you could say it differently. You will withdraw that.

Mr. Lumumba: Hon, Mr. Speaker, I will withdraw the sentence, but I am on record, based on history, that history was recorded from the United Nations, that the Hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Moses Nagamootoo, has accused the PNC of rigging elections. What am I saying that is wrong? I am not saying anything that is wrong.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I do not see anyone rising about that.

Mr. Lumumba: I am saying that based on history. I am withdrawing Mr. Burnham's name and saying that, historical facts have stated and those historical fact are also based on what the Hon. Prime Minister has said in the past, that the PNC has rigged elections.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, do you wish to proceed with your statements?

Mr. Lumumba: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Then do that. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Lumumba: I rise today, on behalf of the People's Progressive Party/Civic, to put forward my views and pronouncements on the 2018 Budget of Guyana, which was presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan.

I must begin by stating that this budget represents a good book keeping exercise. This budget lacks vision and any visible tool to reduce poverty. It lacks any equation that points toward economic growth and it lacks hope. Indeed, I am very disappointed.

The people of an underdeveloped country, like Guyana, expects a budget that would establish economic growth, and a budget that projects more than one hundred homes to be built for the poor. The seniors of Guyana who want to cook a Christmas meal for their grandchildren must feel disappointed that this Government believes that their worth is only worth \$500. This is a mean Government.

Minister Ms. Amna Ally, a grandmother's pepper pot will cause \$6000 for her family - *metem* \$3000. How can a Government that promised so much give US\$2.50 to our seniors for Christmas? What will they prepare their Christmas meals with? The Minister and this Government seem to believe that the only role of the elderly in Linden, Den Amstel, Buxton, Lethem, Rose Hall and Campbellville is to vote for the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU). That is the only role, according to them.

This Government is callous. There is no emphasis on jobs for the unemployed, no emphasis on the funding of projects to emphasise the village economics. [Ms. Lawrence: It is that time you had slapped Mr. Rohee.] It was a mistake. [Interruption]

President Granger speaks a lot about village economics, but there is no attempt in this budget or no formula that will lead to a substantial decrease in the mortgage rates of those who have land and access to mortgages. This budget does not show how the sugar-based communities, such as Enmore, Rose Hall, Black Bush, Blairmont and Wales will survive. There is a linkage between the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) and the drainage and irrigation schemes of these villages. With the close down of the sugar industry, we must figure out, and the Minister of Finance should put in his budget and determine, who will deal with the drainage and irrigation issues that will now wreak havoc in those communities.

This budget represents doomsday and the wake-up call for the poor and working class who fell for the 2015 *three-card trick* of APNU/AFC. The Minister stated that, between 2015 and 2016, the economy grew at an average of 3%. When the PPP/C left Government, the economy was growing at a rate of 4% to 5%.

The Minister boasted that, between 2015 and 2017, the minimum wage had increased by over 50%, but he failed to pronounce that when the PPP came into power in 1992, the public servants' minimum wage was at inhumane amount of \$3002 and when we left Government in 2015, it was \$37,000. The PPP/C enacted a national minimum wage of \$33,000 to \$37,000 in 2013. The Minister believes in sweeping the past under the carpet but let us not forget the following sugar production decline from 220,995 tons in 1987 to 129,000 tons in 1990; rice production was 131,000 tons in 1987 but dropped to \$94,000 tons in 1990; and bauxite dropped from 1,486,000 tons in 1987 to 1,321,000 tons in 1990. I release these facts to show that, under the PNC, there has been a steadfast decline of all the productive sectors in the past. If one looks at the economy and the growth figures, one can see that this Government is going down that same path again. The records will show that rice, sugar, gold and bauxite increased in production under the PPP/C.

The Minister wants to beat his chest and talk about the reduction of Value-Added Tax (VAT) on education. I am not trying to cause a riff in the rank of the Government, but I would like to congratulate Minister Roopnaraine for standing up to the tax hungry APNU/AFC in his decision to stand with thousands of Guyanese who knew that VAT on education is immoral. I congratulate you, Minister Roopnaraine.

The Guyanese public recognises that the reduction of VAT has not helped their individual pockets. While the reduction of VAT was a good deed, the increase of taxes has taken away every single item that would have helped the poor in the reduction of VAT.

It is also very important to remember that the PPP/C showed its appreciation for the Joint Services by granting them a one month's bonus. This Government has shown its disdain for the hardworking Joint Services by not offering them a bonus and they have refused to increase the Income Tax Threshold by anything substantial.

Minister Jordan proudly speaks about the Public Procurement Commission (PPC), an entity that has been made toothless and an entity that has failed to live up to its expectations because of the lack of support from the Government and its unclear mandate. The Minister, in his desire to speak about accomplishments, talks about the establishment of the Local Government Commission, which has been established two years late and was only implemented because of constant complaints by the PPP/C and some level of international intervention. Minister Jordan

proudly speaks of the Public Procurement Commission and, to date, there has been no relevant decision made by that entity.

The Minister's pronouncements have been empty. There are no credible, statistical or empirical evidences as it relates to employment. Unemployment in Buxton is probably at 40%, Linden 50%, Bartica 30% and the average village 35%. Because of this Government's policies, over 12,000 citizens of the sugar belt will be on the breadline by 2018. When we combine 40% employment in the villages, 60% in Linden and 12,000 laid off from the sugar belt, all we can see is disaster for our country. The Minister has an obligation to outline and to identify the location of these phantom jobs he speaks off. He needs to show us and to identify where these proof of skill development entities exist. He needs to prove and to show us that his claims of investments in massive infrastructure is not a bogus theory, especially since the spending of most Ministries for 2017 has not reached 50%.

My good friend, Mr. Raphael Trotman, has an obligation to explain why 42% of his budget has not yet been utilised. This speaks of gross incompetence. The Minister is pulling things out of the air. Where are the young entrepreneurs he speaks off?

11.38 p.m.

Could we find them in Den Amstel, Victoria, or Linden, perhaps in Dartmouth, Lethem, Campbellville, or are they in south Georgetown or are they in the sugar belt? This Government has been in power for two years, where is the "good life"?

The Minister has an obligation to publish the success stories and identify these young entrepreneurs. The Government can fool the people sometimes, but it cannot fool them all the time.

Let us now turn to mining. When we speak of mining in Guyana, we speak of its impact on the African villages such as Mahaica, Golden Grove, Buxton, Den Amstel, Agricola and the communities in Region 10, in particular Linden and Wismar, and the direct impact on communities in Bartica and the hinterland areas. Reduced mining means more unemployment among the working class and a weaker economy within certain communities, in particular African based villages. The Government and the Minister, in particular, cannot provide an eight-

line pronouncement on these industries and move on. However, the slow production in gold and the reduction of bauxite is a direct result of poor management, anti-mining taxes, inadequate concessions and slow responses from the requisite agencies, in essence, reduction in mining activities has resulted in weaker village economy. My grandfather, who was a gold miner in the old days, bought a land in Buxton from the gold industry. **[Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Do you know the people at Buxton?]** Not really.

The fact that the chief executive of this country has been unwilling to meet the executives of the Guyana Gold and Diamond Miners Association (GGDMA) which can be interpreted as lack of concern and appreciation of the gold industry itself, and in particular the investors and workers. It also should remind the residents of the villages and communities that their survival is not important to A Partnership for National Unity (APNU), the only thing important to APNU is their votes. Like sugar bauxite and rice in the old days, gold represents the backbone of this country and if this industry is adequately supported unemployment in African villages will be reduced substantially.

Gold prices are rising and there is a relationship between output and access to equipment such as hymacs, bulldozers and bobcats. Better gold prices will have an impact on the industry in Guyana if the harsh tariffs are dropped. In essence, it does not matter how high the gold prices go up, if there is not enough incentives the miners would not go into the interior to exploit their resources, so we would have no beneficial impact on the communities. In today's mining shovels, spades and pick axes cannot work. It was for those reasons that the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) removed the tariff from mining equipment which resulted in lowering the operation cost and offer incentives for those involved in the industry and the end result was an increased production and a better life in our villages.

The Minister needs to be more scientific. He has implied that thousands of ounces of gold are being smuggled out of the country each month. He makes this argument as a way to deflect the lack of a dramatic increase in gold production and he blames smuggling. A small miner does not have that capacity, sophistication or linkage to smuggle gold to any other country. The Minister does not have any evidence to prove that there is widespread smuggling of gold. What we do know is that the 20% tax, combined with the taxes on mining equipment, has served as a disincentive to increase mining in Guyana and we must not forget that getting more allocations

of gold bearing land from the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) is like pulling teeth. Even the syndicate, which is the brainchild of Minister Broomes, can speak on this issue, so let us not blame smuggling. It is bad policy and the lack of financial creativity.

The APNU in particular, particular the People's National Congress (PNC) Members, like to say that Region 10 is their birthright, but yet after two years in power there are no tangible goodies for the people of Linden and Wismar. There is nothing for the people of Linden and Wismar. The APNU/Alliance For Change (AFC) promised Region 10 an expanded bauxite industry, but the Government still has not built a new aluminium plant or kick start any new bauxite operation. As a matter of fact, the only achievement of the Government in Linden and Wismar is 50% unemployment. As other African based communities, we cannot find any Government programme that is geared towards reducing poverty in those neighbourhoods. Even though this is a criticism, I think it is a wake-up call for the Government that it cannot continue to tell people "vote for us" and they are going to have a better life. Up to now there is no tangible evidence that it cares.

The Government speaks of oil and gas, but is silent on how this new industry will impact on potential aluminium and alumina industry in Linden and Wismar. There are no Government programmes that are geared towards reducing poverty in these neighbourhoods.

Should I accuse the APNU/AFC Government of reverse racism? It is because it has turned its backs on African based communities, in the same way as it has turned its back on the Indian based sugar belt and the Indigenous communities. The people of Region 10 must feel insulted by the Minister's pronouncement that bauxite production is projected to decline by approximately one and a half million tons for 2017. He is blaming the decline of the bauxite industry on inclement weather and mechanical problems. The Minister's position represents voodooism. To further strengthen my point, the bauxite industry is mismanaged, in addition to the lack of serious interest in revitalising the industry. It is obvious that the Minister and his advisers know nothing about the industry and his comment is an afterthought.

Region 10 has always been plagued with heavy rainfalls and tough weather conditions. Tough weather condition has always plagued bauxite powers such as Australia and Guinea and none of them have reduced production. The people of Linden and Kwakwani must not accept the

excuses. They must continue to remind the Government of the all-weather road that was promised during the election. The all-weather road was promised from Linden and Kwakwani and they must remind them constantly of this.

Let us just touch on the green state development. We cannot touch this subject without referring to oil, gas, renewable energy and hydro. This Government believes that a green economy is synonymous with green paint and its objective is to paint the buildings and roads green and pass legislation that would determine that citizens have to wear green clothes and behave as if we are in North Korea or Mars. The key tenet of a green economy is a clean air and clean energy and this can only be accomplished by means of clean energy which can only be accomplished by hydropower, renewable energy and clean gas. Other than green paint all over the place, the Government has gone silent when it comes to the wind farm. This Government has refused to acknowledge that the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project was the best immediate approach to clean and sustainable energy. I am glad to hear that Minister Harmon has said that it has not been taken completely off the board. The Government is now whispering in the dark about a 50 megawatt power plant. Where is the feasibility study for this project? Are we going to commit ourselves to \$600 to \$800 million without a feasibility study? This is an example of how this Government intends to waste our revenue.

I do not want anyone to get me wrong to believe that this side of the House does not support renewable energy and a gas power plant. The Minister of Finance is clearly at sea when it comes to the appropriate steps which must be taken. We cannot just decide it is a 50-megawatt plant. We must first know how much gas is available? The cost of the pipeline and the construction cost of the power plant? It seems that the 50 megawatt gas plant is projected to cost more than the 160-megawatt Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. Again, this is voodoo economics. Where is the comprehensive plan on clean energy, renewable energy and use of the Norway funds? Minister Harmon tried his best to explain that there is a project, there is a paper and there is a plan. We would like to see that plan at some point in time.

I save my harshest criticism of this budget for last. Guyana is on the verge of becoming a potential player in the field of oil and gas. Guyana will be producing gas in the year 2020, yet the Minister of Finance in his budget has a toothpick approach to a lumber yard issue. By the year 2027 Guyana will have access to billions of US dollars, yet in 2018 there will be no viable plan

as to how this revenue will be spent and how it is projected to enhance the economic development of the working class and the poor. There is no plan as to how these funds will be directed to put new blood in villages, the sugar belt or Guyana as a whole.

All the pronouncements that have been made in Guyana oil and gas are about the business sector. Pronouncements are made about wharf owners; pronouncements are made about who want to rent houses to the expatriates; pronouncements are made about whose cargo ship will carry cargo to the oil rigs. Every pronouncement is about the rich getting richer. There are no pronouncements about empowering of villages, nothing about empowering communities in the sugar belt and there are certainly no pronouncements on how oil and gas will empower Linden and South Georgetown.

In closing, I must leave the Hon. Minister with an opportunity to respond to the followings that I think are very important.

- (i) When will the Government establish the Sovereign Wealth Fund and when will it come to Parliament? Next year will be 2018 and oil will begin to flow from 2020.
- (ii) When will the Government commence a massive training programme for young people from African based villages, the sugar belt, Linden, Wismar, South Georgetown and Campbellville which will satisfy the needs that will develop because of a robust oil and gas industry?

It is important that we learn from the experience of Nigeria that we cannot wait too long. Do not assume that the young people of our country are going to sit idly and allow people to get rich and richer and the Government is not focusing on this.

- (iii) When will the University of Guyana (UG) be adequately funded, so that the GGMC department and can meet the challenges of a powerful oil industry?
- (iv) When will the Government put procurement and employment policies in place to ensure that Guyanese are the true beneficiaries of the oil industry and not all the visitors of the Marriot hotel?

- (v) When will the Government sit with the Opposition and plan the future of this country and stop making 2020 Elections their only priority?

The Hon. Member Mr. Winston Jordan, my brother, this budget offers no hope for the poor and working class, and so I have no choice to but to oppose it unless major amendments are made.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we are ten minutes before the time fixed for our suspension. I have the impression that lunch maybe available. If I am accurate about that, and I would have confirmation in a few minutes, then we could rise now and return ten minutes to one o' clock. In the meantime, Hon. Members, I would like to let you know that the Business Sub-committee of the Committee of Supply will meet this afternoon at five o' clock when we have that suspension. Perhaps, Members might want to refresh themselves at the suspension and then prepare to go to my chamber for us to deal with this matter at five o'clock this afternoon. In a few minutes, I would receive word whether our lunch is here. It is here and so we will take suspension now and we will return at ten minutes to one o'clock.

Sitting suspended at 11.53 a.m.

Sitting resumed at 12.58 p.m.

12.58 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before we begin our stated business for this afternoon, it is my pleasure to let you know that we have 40 visitors and two teachers from the Camille's Institute for Business and Science Studies. They are visiting us and I bid you welcome and I hope that you will find our proceedings interesting. [*Applause*]

Minister within the Ministry of Public Infrastructure [Ms. Ferguson]: Just before I go into my actual presentation, let me just acknowledge the young faces in our midst here this afternoon.

I rise to join my honourable colleagues on this side of the House to give my support to Budget 2018. Allow me to proffer congratulations to the Hon. Minister of Finance and his hard-working team for a well put together budget. This budget has the right mix of policy and programmes to take this nation forward under the theme, "*The Journey to the Good Life Continues.*"

Budget 2018 builds on the foundation that has already been laid in three previous budgets presented by this APNU/AFC Government. This budget is one that is practical and presents workable strategies to transform and develop Guyana. It is only if your vision is clouded or you are playing partisan politics that you will not see nor understand the merits of Budget 2018.

Throughout the debate, the Hon. Members of the Opposition have tried to discredit Budget 2018, but their arguments lacked substance and they have failed to show that the measures proposed in the budget will not benefit the economy. It is yet another pitiful attempt by the Opposition to disrupt and distract Guyanese on their journey to the “good life”.

Over the last three days, I sat here listening to the speakers on the opposite side. I kept hearing the word “sugar” in their presentation. When you listen to the PPP/C Members and their choir, you get the feeling that they have all the solutions in the world to transform the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo). They present themselves as these knights in shining white armours, unblemished and full of wisdom, but yet it was under the PPP/C watch that sugar started to decline and the glory of the sweetness started to fade.

Further to the aforementioned, I took the liberty of reviewing budgets under the PPP/C Government. The Budget 2004 which introduced the Skeldon modernisation project was presented on 29th March, 2004 under the theme, *Investing for Sustained Economic Growth and Enhanced Social Development*. Right in this honourable House, permit me, Sir, to quote what the then Minister of Finance said on page 23 of his speech:

“Mr. Speaker, the management of Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) will continue to implement the strategic plan, which is geared to increase the company's competitiveness, profitability and long-term viability. The plan envisages GuySuCo increasing production to around 450,000 tonnes of sugar and lowering costs from the current average of US17 cents to about US9 cents per pound by 2007.”

Three years after, in the PPP/C, 2007 Budget, the Minister of Finance reported that the sugar production target of 315,000 tons was not achieved. Simple calculation will show that the PPP/C was a long way from reaching its 450,000 tons target.

The very last budget of the PPP/C Government in 2013 on pages 16 and 17 respectively, gave us the gloomy, dismal and depressing state of GuySuCo.

“...the sugar industry has been beset by issues associated with managerial capacity, unpredictable weather and labour supply constraints, to name but a few. Consequently, annual production levels have been less than acceptable.

As GUYSUCO continues to grapple with the challenges of returning to its production potential and profitability, it has to recognise and confront its managerial, industrial, technical, marketing and financial realities.”

Sir, it was the PPP/C, who in its own budget acknowledged that GuySuCo had serious problems and was far from its productive potential. I beg the question, what have they done to arrest the perennial problems? After giving us an ailing GuySuCo, it is shameful today that the PPP/C should show up here and lecture to us in this House, and tell us, how and what must be done for GuySuCo after having ample time to fix it and they have f-a-i-l-e-d. They have failed GuySuCo miserably. The demise of GuySuCo is a PPP engineered problem and it has nothing to do with this APNU/AFC Government. Every Guyanese knows that GuySuCo underperformed and was on life support under the PPP/C administration and so, today, I admonish them to stop this Judas politics, betraying and misleading the Guyanese, on whose fault it is with GuySuCo. They fabricated glorious numbers concerning the Skeldon Sugar Factory and what it will do. I believe they bought those numbers from a candy store.

I am sure the Hon. Member Mr. Vickram Bharrat, who is absent this afternoon, will agree with me that the productive capacity and profitability of Skeldon Sugar Factory was a fairy tale story of the PPP/C administration because the Skeldon Sugar Factory is yet to deliver on the production cost and output, promised by the PPP/C. They left office and it never happened.

Lecturing to us about our Government crowding out private investment and how our development model is backward, you have invested billions in GuySuCo and not a cent has been returned on its investment. To crown it off, you have saddled the people of this country with the burden of a loan for the Skeldon Sugar Factory that will end sometime in 2033. Therefore we are paying a loan for GuySuCo that we are supporting GuySuCo through annual bail outs. The

PPP/C has got a big fat ‘f’, on the state of affairs of GuySuCo and that is why the people put the APNU/AFC Government in power to get it right, because clearly the PPP/C got it wrong.

As I turn my attention to Budget 2018, let it be known that the Green State Development Strategy (GSDS) is one that is modern; it is transformative. It is also futuristic and ahead of many and we are indeed ahead of many of our Caribbean partners and other countries around the world. This strategy deserves high commendation. We should be proud, as a small state, that we are on the right path. Let “the journey to the good life continues.”

I am indeed disappointed that the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, who is not here with us this afternoon, once awarded the Champion of the Earth Award and parades himself as an environmental leader, finds it difficult to come to grips with the Green State Development Strategy. The Hon. Member has travelled around the world, and at times faster than Santa Claus does, preaching about climate change and its impact on small states. Yet today, when given the opportunity to turn his words into action, the Hon. Member is choosing partisan politics over country. He has left his fellow Opposition colleagues in the House to make noise about everything, and at times, they serenade us with fairy tales because they had no substance to talk about.

Budget 2018, is a budget for all Guyanese to be proud of. Our Government delivers to the working class both in the public and private sectors. In Budget 2017, this Government cut the PPP/C imposed value added tax (VAT) from 16% to 14% and we adjusted the tax threshold, all in an effort to allow Guyanese to have more disposable income.

Yesterday, we heard that we are not a caring Government but I need to ask the rhetorical question: Are we not a caring Government? In Budget 2018, private sector employees will benefit from tax-free vacation allowance. A benefit only enjoyed by the public sector employees. This means, many Guyanese working in the private sector will enjoy more disposable income from this new tax measure. This is the “good life” we speak about, and as the theme so reflects, *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*. Are we not a caring Government?

Many parents sending their schoolchildren to private educational institutions will no longer be required to pay VAT on educational services. This will result in savings of approximately \$342

million to the parents and again, Sir, this represents additional disposable income that parents will have to spend. Sir, I ask the question again, are we not a caring Government?

I commend the Minister of Finance for proposing to grant an amnesty to all delinquent taxpayers, corporate and individual, who are outstanding in the filing and payment of their true and correct taxes and payment. This measure can only testify to the Government's willingness to work with Guyanese across the landscape to regularise their conduct as businesses and citizens of this beautiful land.

1.13 p.m.

The word of God clearly states, in the book Matthew 22:1, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's". Over the last couple of days, many people have met me and they have said: "We like what the Government is doing with the amnesty on tax return filing. It is a good thing for the country". This amnesty will result in more disposable income for both corporates and individuals who will take up the Government on its offer and therefore will not have to pay interest on their late filing. All Guyanese will benefit across the political divide. This is the "good life".

The Members of the Opposition said that the budget has nothing about wealth creation but rather wealth distribution. The Hon. Member Vickram Bharrat called it the "Robin Hood" budget. The Hon. Member Cornel Damon, in his presentation, said that old men must have their rest. This explains why the wealth creation component of Budget 2018 has eluded Members of the Opposition. They were sleeping and to them, I say these words, "sleep on beloved, sleep on".

Page 47 of Budget 2018 describes, in black and white, that our Government is in negotiation with a multilateral donor to secure a US\$15 million loan to upgrade the Lethem airstrip into a regional hub and international aerodrome in order to receive flights originating from Brazil and other Latin American neighbours. This will enhance Guyana's connectivity with the rest of the world and complement the tourism sector, thus creating jobs for many Guyanese. In this regard, a sum of \$20 million has been allocated in Budget 2018 for a pre-feasibility study for the establishment of the regional air transport hub at Lethem.

A recent study, done in 2017, by Oxford Economics, shows that the economic impact of the aviation sector in Guyana is substantial, representing 3.2% of Guyana's total gross domestic

product (GDP) in 2015 and created approximately 12,000 Guyanese jobs. This, Sir, accounts for nearly one in twenty jobs in Guyana. Just imagine the wealth creation that will be generated from the development of Lethem airstrip into an international airport. It is significant, and the people of Lethem will be proud and happy to know that their Government is thinking about them and is putting Guyana first.

The PPP/C is living in denial and the Members are trying to distract the people of Guyana, including Lethem, from their journey to the “good life”. The development of the Lethem aerodrome will transform the aviation sector and the tourism landscape of Guyana and the region. This will be complemented by the modernisation and rehabilitation of airstrips across the country to connect our people and enhance commerce and trade between the coastal and hinterland regions of Guyana.

During 2017, the Government, through the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, launched the Community Organised for the Restoration of the Environment project, commonly called the CORE project, with an allocation of GYD\$200 million. This initiative of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure has the prime purpose of assisting communities with environmental upgrades, drainage, sanitation, road works and improving the general aesthetics of villages. This project has provided in excess of 200 jobs for many young people across the regions of Guyana. In the Budget 2018, the sum of \$150 million has been allocated to the project. This will see the reformation and the re-launching of other groups across the region.

We heard, during the debate from the other side of the House, about the need for street lights. Let it be known that my honourable friend Mr. Damon resides in Dartmouth and under this APNU/AFC Government, Dartmouth, for the first time in the history of Guyana, is now seeing the light of day.

His Excellency President David Granger, who stood in this very House on 2nd November, 2017, stated:

“The country's transportation network of aerodromes, bridges, roads, stelling and wharves has been improved”.

On this note, I will present brief reviews on the Demerara Harbour Bridge (DHB), The Guyana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA), the Transport and Harbours Department (T&HD), the

Hinterland Electrification Company Incorporated (HECI) and the Aerodromes Unit, all embodied within the Ministry of Public Infrastructure. My colleague, Hon. Minister David Patterson, will address the other agencies within the Ministry.

I now turn my attention to the T&HD. This department continues to provide scheduled water transport services for the people across Guyana. Despite its archaic and aging vessels, the ferry service remains a vital means of transport for the riverine communities and provides its services at very affordable cost to commuters. During 2017, in excess of \$200 million were expended to affect rehabilitative works on the following vessels the *M.V. Malali*, Sandaka, the *M.V. Lady Northcote* and including the *M.V. Kimbia*. In addition to the rehabilitation, I would like to report that an additional \$169 million was expended to rebuild and reinstall two new generators in the *M.V. Kimbia*. After prolonged delay, the *M.V. Barima* which was out of commission for some time, but I wish to report to this honourable House that after spending in excess of GYD\$240 million, this vessel is back in operation and is providing services to the residents in Region 1.

In 2018, a sum of GYD\$500 million has been allocated to and will see the rehabilitation of the following vessels: the *M.V. Makouria*, the *M.V. Kanawan* and the *M.V. Sabanto*. These works will indeed improve the facilities and quality of services offered to the travelling public.

Stellings, indeed, formed an important infrastructure as part of the water transport system. To this end, I wish to report to this honourable House that the sum of GYD\$261 million has been allocated in the Budget 2018 to effect rehabilitative works on the following stellings: the Supenaam Stelling, the continuation of Phase II of the Bartica Stelling and that of the Leguan Stelling. The Canawaima Ferry Service which is located at our eastern border, Region 6, which provides a vital link between Guyana and Suriname that facilitates the movement of people, trade, goods and commerce. In 2018, the following projects will be undertaken: replacement of a pontoon, construction of trestles and reservoirs for firefighting, construction of a facility for housing of our staff and our crew members and the installation of perimeter lights at the terminal and continued upgrade of its aesthetics.

In 2018, as part of the process for transforming the services of the T&HD, an assessment study for the modernisation of riverine transport in Guyana, which commenced in 2017, will be completed. The sum of GYD\$18 million has been set aside for this study to be done. Also during the Budget 2017, as I promised in my last budget presentation, the resuscitation of the Transport

and Harbours Advisory Council was done. It is a shame that this body had disbanded under the PPP/C administration for over two decades.

I now turn my attention to the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority. This sector is rising and this year was yet another historic year for Guyana. It marks the year that Guyana received the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Council President Certificate for significant progress made in resolving safety oversight deficiencies and improving the effective implementation of ICAO standards and recommended practices. This is a proud achievement for all Guyanese and due commendation must be given to APNU/AFC Government. Let me remind the House that under the PPP/C administration, Guyana's level of compliance was a paltry 44%. Under the APNU/AFC Government, it is now 64%. I am proud to say that Guyana is now the closest it has ever, over the last decade, to achieving category one status from the United States (US) Federal Aviation Administration.

In 2015, the GCAA underwent major capacity and institutional strengthening. The agency now boasts equivalence with the rest of the developed world with a computerised licensing system for pilots and aviation personnel, with a state-of-the art Air Traffic Controllers Simulator training facility to test and prepare Air Traffic Controllers for the real work environment. There is an increased fleet of vehicles for inspectors to conduct their work in order to do surveillance and have inspection oversight of the industry. In addition, there are trained and qualified inspectors to provide safety and security oversight of the civil aviation system. A VHF Repeaters and Automatic Dependence Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) system was installed at the following sites: Kaieteur, Kamarang, Annai and Port Kaituma. This system will allow the GCAA to track, in real time, aircraft movement within the upper and lower airspace of Guyana — quite an achievement to bring Guyana on par with the rest of the developed world.

In 2017, for the first time in the history of Guyana, the Air Traffic Controller Training School at Timehri was certified by the GCAA as being compliant with regulations. This deserves our commendation and will ensure the training of Air Traffic Controllers is done to a high standard. This will give confidence to our aviators, those men and women of honour who are in the tower.

1.28 p.m.

To accomplish these achievements, in excess of \$600 million was invested through this Government since 2015.

The Guyana Civil Aviation Authority will continue to strengthen its safety and security oversight. A draft Civil Aviation Bill is under review by a Parliamentary Special Select Committee. We are now examining it Clause by Clause, as recommended, and it is envisaged that this would be completed within the first quarter of 2018.

In an effort to guide the continuing transformation and modernisation of the aviation sector, work on the development of a national aviation master plan has commenced and will advance in 2018. The overall purpose of the proposed project is to improve the quality of the aviation oversight in Guyana and to develop a master plan for the structured development of civil aviation development over the next two decades in Guyana. A sum of \$90.3 million from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has been allocated in Budget 2018 for this project.

I now turn my attention to Hinterland airstrips. Nine airstrips or nine aerodromes were done during 2017. These are: Kurupung, Baramita, Kopinang, Ekereku Bottom, Annai, Kaikan, Kato, Eteringbang and Paramakatoi.

In 2018, two aerodromes are slated for rehabilitation at a cost of \$140 million. These are: Bemichi and Kamana. Both aerodromes are in a deplorable state. These aerodromes are critical for the transportation network of these villages and their environs. Consequently...

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

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Consequently, the rehabilitation would improve livelihood and produce immense social and economic benefits to the people in those areas.

Hinterland Electrification: The sum of \$88.9 million was allocated in this year's Budget. We heard about the Green State Development Strategy that we have. I wish to report to this honourable House that, for 2018, the sum of \$25 million has been allocated to the Lethem Power Company to effect the following projects: continuous power extension to the Secondary School in Moco Moco Village; network power extension to residents residing along the road to the Rodeo ground; and network upgrade for St. Ignatius Village. Hinterland electrification will also

continue in 2018 for the installation of the 400 KWPV Solar Farm in Mabaruma. For 2018, the sum of \$45.5 million has been budgeted for the completion of this project by February, 2018.

A sum of \$20 million is also provided in Budget 2018. This sum would be utilised for correcting and replacing defective distributions in Port Kaituma, Region 1.

I turn my attention quickly to the Demerara Harbour Bridge. The Demerara Harbour Bridge continues to be a vital link for commuters, linking mainly two Administrative Regions - Regions 3 and 4. During the year 2017, rehabilitative and maintenance works continued to the almost four decade old bridge to ensure unhindered services are provided. In Budget 2018, the sum of \$5 million has been allocated for the procurement of wire ropes to assist with the continuation of maintenance of the Bridge.

The investment in the new bridge would no doubt create new jobs and enhance the livelihood of our people. This Government is committed to wealth creation and the betterment of our people, contrary to what the Opposition said. We are resolute in giving Guyanese the good life.

In concluding, I, once again, renew my support for Budget 2018 and I call upon my Opposition Friends to put aside political partisanship and rethink their approach to Budget 2018 so the journey to the good life can continue for all Guyanese. I thank you. May God richly bless us all.
[Applause]

Mr. Charlie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *Miyaramang* and *kaimen* to you and to all Hon. Members in this House.

I listened attentively to the Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Public Infrastructure where she alluded to \$200 million which was allotted to the Community Organised for the Restoration of the Environment (CORE) Programme. But, at this time, I am disappointed because the Minister failed to address the non-payment of the CORE workers in Region 9, having not been paid for three months. Is this the good life?

I listened very carefully to the Hon. Minister of Finance's Budget 2018 presentation. I am constrained to conclude in my native language, the *Wapishan*, where one word could sum it all up – *yackard*. This Budget is *yackard*. When translated, it means baseless and senseless. The

2018 national Budget lacks an innovative vision. This Budget is disdainful to the Guyanese people, except for a privileged few.

I, like other Indigenous Amerindians, anticipated a budget of fireworks. Instead, it was damp squib. It is a very disastrous budget that lacks vision and any comprehensive programme to promote economic growth, job creation, wealth creation, transformative infrastructure, enhancing the wellbeing of our people, fighting crimes, protecting our people, fair governance and, most importantly, it has completely failed to continue the PPP/C's dynamic legacy that created the developmental paradigm that was well on its way to transforming Guyana into a modern world.

Since the May, 2015 Elections, the lives of our Amerindian peoples have drastically changed from the good life they once lived under the PPP/C to a life of unbearable hardship as a direct result of deliberate acts of neglect and seemingly open hatred of our first peoples by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government and its supporters.

While in Opposition, the coalition parties preached the glorious theory of national unity and granting an elevated life for Amerindians. I used the word "theory" because, since the coalition parties became the Government, they have acted in ways towards the Amerindians that severely retarded our social, infrastructural and economic growth. Moreover, the gains, lives and lifestyles we had under the PPP/C Administration had quickly been eroded, seemingly by deliberate acts that are being perpetuated against our people, individually and severally.

The first order of business of this Government when it took office was to fire the 1,972 Amerindians under the pretext of lies and nebulous excuses to the effect that the project was not helping the Amerindians. Who best knows what is good for us but us. The PPP/C Administration had always given us the latitude to make decisions concerning our welfare. This Government did not consult with us before taking this unilateral decision of depriving our people of much needed jobs that provided income to take care of our families. Today, we are seeing the callous behaviour repeated in the sugar industry and elsewhere across the country.

The 2018 national Budget has failed the country and the people because it is sheer fluff and bluff with no viable strategy for a sustainable, expanded, modern and diversified economy, nor with

any concepts of breaching new frontiers of promulgation of economic growth, job creation, programmes and youth development. This Government has consistently failed to provide adequate healthcare and specialised services and has completely abandoned the Speciality Hospital that would have provided life-saving tertiary healthcare at affordable prices.

This Budget, as with every Budget during the tenure of this Government, has promised much but failed to ensure the social, emotional and mental wellbeing of its citizens, particularly the most vulnerable groups – women, children, disabled, especially youths, and elderly. Only a miserly \$500 was given as pension increase – shame.

This Government has failed to support the development of the Amerindian peoples' quality of life. Instead, the decline has been rapid countrywide, especially in Hinterland communities. They made lofty claims in this noble House but we are the ones who are experiencing the negative impacts of their prejudicial, incompetent and seemingly vindictive approach to governance.

In essence, this Government has failed to stimulate growth and build a diversified green economy. Their version of green economy is highly visible across this country. They repainted State properties countrywide and failed to provide the real needs of the people; hence, Budget 2018, like all their previous Budgets, has failed to deliver on Government's promise of providing a good life. All we saw was the Minister of Finance on the journey to the good life on billboards erected across the country.

I now turn my attention to my geographic region, Region 9. I bring to your attention an issue of four capital projects that were approved in 2016 by this august House for the enhancement of the delivery of education in Region 9, all of which yet remain incomplete, despite final payments have been awarded to an APNU contractor. The projects were rolled over from 2016 to 2017. These projects are for the construction of Tabatinga Nursery School in the Municipality of Lethem, Bashaidrun Nursery School in the Deep South Rupununi, Paipang Nursery School in South Pakaraimas and Teachers' five-apartment Living Quarters in Sand Creek, South Central Rupununi. It is pellucid and public knowledge that the awarded contractor had received final payments for the said projects, pending 10% retention. Yet, all capital projects remain at a standstill and incomplete.

The opening of the new Nursery School and Teacher's Quarters, respectively, in the new school academic year, September, 2017 was highly anticipated by parents, teachers and pupils. The collective disappointment is indescribable. Where is the Minister of Education? You and your Government had promised transparency and accountability in public spending. What is happening here, Hon. Minister of Education?

Of major note and immense concern is the fact that the First Vice-President and the Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs visited Sand Creek Village but chose to turn a blind eye on the incomplete and stalled Teachers' five-apartment construction. The people of Region 9 have seen and noted that the APNU/AFC Ministers frequently visit, lecture and make pronouncements without addressing needs and concerns or finding solutions to existing problems of the villagers. Instead, they chose to make glorious remarks in self-praise of the good life the people now enjoy. But, at the level of the Hinterland communities in Guyana, it is a different reality.

The PPP/C Administration had achieved a United Nations Millennium Developmental Goal in primary education and had succeeded in bringing equitable opportunities for Hinterland students as well as for Coastland students. Today, the Government is boasting of the results achieved under the PPP/C Government's initiative, even as it is neglecting the educational sector, particularly in Hinterland communities, except for an occasional patchwork.

1.43 p.m.

Among a plethora of problems now in the Hinterland educational system is the lack of adequate...and, additionally, there is great neglect in our educational facilities and services in the Hinterland communities. Recently, parents were told, at Aishalton Secondary School, of the shortage of school furniture. The school sought the support of the parents for the supply of furniture for their child or children who are attending that institution. Visits are regularly made by Government Ministers over there who turn a blind eye, despite the urgency of the need for the Hinterland children to be comfortably accommodated in schools to perform at their ultimate capacity.

We, on this side of the House, have seen a great decline in spending on education for our Amerindian peoples. Having taken away the nation's children's \$10,000 school cash grant and uniform vouchers to a fraudulent Hinterland School Feeding Programme, our communities are

also finding difficulties in the storage of educational materials. The fragmented and untimely manner in which school uniforms are distributed under this APNU/AFC Government, in the hinterland regions, is another concern of hinterland parents, this being an ‘I do not care’ approach by the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs.

Currently, there is dire need for expediting the payment of salaries and stipends for teachers and students, respectively, since Government funding is used to effect payment. Teachers were not paid November, 2017 salary, and students have not been paid stipends since September, 2017 to date. This is according to teachers and students of Bina Hill Institute in the North Rupununi of Region 9, who had called earlier today. Did they call you, Hon. Minister Sydney Allicock? No. They did not because they lost that confidence in you.

The Hon. Minister of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs had pointed, in his 2017 Budget Speech, that the Hinterland is clearly important to his Government. As such, Issano, Buck Hall, Karasabai, Monkey Mountain, Aishalton, and Chinowieng in Regions 7, 8 and 9 will benefit from major road improvements. What has happened here, Hon. Minister? The National Assembly is not a place for exaggeration. It is a place where you put the people’s interest first. But all we heard were promises and idle boasts without being responsible and caring leaders from that Government over there.

Since this Government took office, the Amerindian communities have been deprived of basic infrastructural development. Hinterland road networks were always properly maintained under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), and I worked there. Now, some roadways are being lost to bad weather conditions, with no timely remedy to the point of them becoming history in this country. Take a look at the roads in the Municipality of Lethem and the roads in the Tabatinga Housing Scheme in Region 9. They were budgeted for and not a single road work was done, to date.

The Hon. Minister of Public Infrastructure told this august House, in 2017, that, in the month of August, road works will commence. Mr. Minister, we are in the month of December. What is happening to the asphalt roads in Lethem and the road from Karasabai to Monkey Mountain? No wonder why the residents of Lethem are now living in a dust bin; it is because of the

negligence of that Government over there. This is the life and hardship that we have to endure under this Government.

The thousands of teachers, city cleaners, nurses, law enforcement officers and agriculture workers cannot get a decent raise of pay, a promise made by that Government while in Opposition. All the facilitating mechanisms for the productive sector are relentlessly being eroded to the point where many entrepreneurs are giving up in this country. They are struggling to keep their businesses afloat under all the inhibiting constraints imposed upon them with each of the Coalition's Budgets, which are counterproductive to expansion and growth of businesses, especially in our hinterland regions.

The Hon. Minister Valerie Garrido-Lowe failed to report on the Hinterland Entrepreneurial Youth Scheme (HEYS) for 2016 and 2017, respectively. The Minister failed to report to the House the transparency and accountability of the Programme, which is deemed, to date, as a *white elephant* in our hinterland regions, with no supervision by the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs. No wonder why the HEYS Programme now adds to the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Cohesion. The Hon. Minister boasted of the Tomato Project in Region 8, but failed to relay to this House that the tomatoes were bought from the farmers at \$20 per pound. Yet, the Hon. Minister preaches about the 'Good Life' for the Indigenous Amerindians in Region 8.

The community of Paruima, in Region 7, is in the process of construction of a school, but this has brought depression to the community since all building materials for the school is being imported from the Coast, nothing for my Amerindian brothers and sisters of that village.

To date, the Indigenous Amerindians of Guyana have seen two Ministers of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs and a slew of technical advisors, and, yet, no completing and continuation of Land Titling, and Land Demarcation Projects. Instead, we saw the Government setting up a Land Commission of Inquiry (CoI), to determine who the rightful owners of traditional, Indigenous lands are, the lands which our Amerindian peoples can trace both their historical and genetic history. Is this a caring act of this Government towards our Amerindian peoples?

Today, under advisement from an advisor to the Government, whose opportunistic theory propagates the fallacy that one race group was here 400 years prior to the Amerindians, ignoring both historical and scientific facts, Government has again acted...

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

Mr. Charlie: Thank you.

The Indigenous Amerindians are grossly disappointed with the budgetary allocation allotted to the National Toshias Council (NTC). It is pellucid that the NTC's allocation represents no increase from what was allotted in 2017, even though the NTC is a legitimate body enshrined in the Constitution of Guyana.

Under this Coalition Government, we have witnessed withholding of vital Government aid to Amerindian communities. We have seen cases where aid that was meant for our Amerindian peoples have been converted to personal use of APNU and party members. With all the concerns I have raised here today, which are just the tip of an iceberg, it is evident to any impartial observer that the Government is displaying great animosity to Amerindians. Is this your Government's way of punishing our Amerindian peoples because the majority has always been strong supporters of the PPP/C? Your Government needs to be reminded that this is an act of genocide towards our Amerindian peoples, which is a crime against humanity, punishable by the International Court of Justice, the world Court, a court to which Guyana is a signature partner.

A few months ago, aid that was meant for Amerindians was given to APNU supporters, even though the Amerindians were special Government guests. If giving the aid to APNU supporters was not bad enough, our people were subjected to very hurtful and disrespectful insults and ill treatment by Government supporters. The budgetary allocation for Amerindian communities is so small that it is an indication of Government's lack of commitment and care for Guyana's real first peoples. Where is the money going if no adequate amount is being spent on our Amerindian peoples? Even in the entire country, we are not seeing any boost in the country's economic growth. One can only conclude that your Government is misappropriating taxpayers' money and it is all over the public domain.

Therefore, in conclusion, in a view of the inability and the callus unwillingness to address the needs and concerns of the Guyanese people, in general, and the Amerindian people, in particular, I respectfully submit that I cannot, in good conscience and faith, support the Government's Budget of 2018. Take it back to the drawing board and fix this *yackard* budget.

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

Minister of Social Protection [Ms. Ally]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members of this National Assembly, permit me to applaud the Minister of Finance, Winston Jordan, for a well-crafted Budget under the theme, *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*. Indeed, we are seeing and picking the fruits on this journey, and, with time, under the Coalition Government, Guyana will rise to the peak where all will enjoy the "Good Life".

I could not have agreed more with the Hon. Minister of Finance when he said, in his Budget Presentation:

"We were in a hurry to rebuild a country that was marred and scarred by poor and corrupted governance under the PPP/C."

Our task is enormous, but we are proud of what we have achieved and the path we are traversing to reach the "Good Life".

The Ministry of Social Protection has formulated programmes and policies to create an enabling welfare State, one which helps people to help themselves. Let me say that we will continue to work to give the unemployed youth the skills to find a decent job. We will give the single mother the support she needs to go out and work or start a small business. We will provide vulnerable persons, such as our children, the elderly, the homeless and the victims of violence and trafficking, with the right care and protection needed to better their lives.

With the multitudinous achievements of this Ministry, I have absolutely no hesitation in saying that the Coalition Government stands at the centre of many of these advances. These achievements did not come by chance. Our actions continue and we will continue to be informed by the pledge we made to the people by the goal that the Coalition Government has pursued

since 2015, the objective of securing a better life for our journey to the good life has only now begun.

The Ministry of Social Protection has four programmes and I take pride in presenting what we have done and what we will do. Under the First Lady's Capacity Building Initiative, over 900 persons, mainly female single parents, and female young adults, have been trained in areas of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Care for the Elderly, First Aid, Child Care, Early Childhood Development, Self Reliance and Success in Business. Following on, we have done training of trainers' workshops in order to extend the reach of the programme.

Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED): A total of \$100 million was allocated in 2017. To date, we have established 20 projects in various regions and these projects vary from pig rearing, poultry rearing, manufacturing, shade house cultivation, among others.

1.58 p.m.

We could boast that, over 253 households, totalling 1,170 persons are beneficiaries. In 2018, the Ministry will expand the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurship Development (SLED) Programme because we believe that it will support community-based, income-generation activities as well as employment. [Mr. G. Persaud: SLED was there all the time; it is nothing new.]

Mr. Speaker, I hear a voice in the wilderness. But I also want to advise Hon. Member Ganga Persaud that this is the Ministry that, when you do not take care of your children, we look after them.

In 2017, the Ministry continued its implementation of the Women Of Worth (WOW) Programme. Forty loans were issued. It is not only WOW, but also the People of Worth Entrepreneurial Resources (POWER) Programme. For this Programme, 17 loans were issued for varying efforts. These are Programmes geared to improve the lives of our people. It also brings us closer to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 2, 5 and 10, which speak to ending all forms of poverty.

Under the Programme, Social Services, the Ministry addresses a variety of issues, some being very challenging. Addressing the issue of trafficking in persons has been a task which the Coalition Government took seriously. We have made great strides in countering trafficking in

persons. Because of our political will, our programmes, our networking, something which the Opposition never had, we have resulted in Guyana moving from Tier 2 to Tier 1.

This Coalition Government, under the Ministry of Social Protection, will continue to fight to eradicate this inhumane phenomenon from the Guyanese society. We are proud to be lifted in the international ranking. Our network and partnerships with the Ministerial Task Force, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Jamaica Trafficking in Persons, and the Embassy of the United States of America have all contributed to this huge success story.

In 2018, the Ministry will develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the treatment of human trafficking victims. There is no doubt that this Government will do everything possible to eradicate this disease. I trust that the Hon. Member, Dr. Vindhya Persaud, will wake up from her slumber and smell the coffee. What you did not do in 23 years, we have done it in two and a half years.

We will never neglect our senior citizens. We will provide an improved life for our elderly and, at page 76 in the Budget speech, we have seen the various concessions. Since this Government came to power... **[Mr. Dharamlall: Who did your lipstick?]** You are not my kind. We have increased old age pension by 49%. You hear a lot of mumblings about a small increase, but, let me just take time off to give you some facts. In 2010, pensioners were receiving peanuts, a mere \$6,600 as pension; in 2011- \$7,500; in 2012 - \$10,000; in 2013 – \$12,500; and in 2014 - \$13,125. However, when this Coalition Government came into office, senior citizens' pension was significantly increased to \$17,000. Yes, for 2018, it will go to \$19,500. I hope Hon. Members, Mr. Neendkumar, Ms. Burton-Persaud and Mr. Hamilton, could put to rest their misrepresentation of pension for the elderly. I congratulate my Colleague, Hon. Ms. Hughes, for pointing out the \$90 in 2003 and the \$92 in 2004 that the PPP gave in its tenure. But, let me not forget that, in 2007, it was \$175 increase. In 2009, it was \$300 increase. In 2010, it was \$300 increase. *What a tangled web the PPP/C weaved.*

More than that, pensioners are relieved from paying departure tax, driver's licence fees, passport fees, among other things. We did not only lift the bar on pension, we looked at improving the welfare of residents in residential care facilities; hence, we have established a Visiting Committee to evaluate, report and monitor all facilities. The objective is to achieve enhanced

standards of elderly residential facilities throughout Guyana. Over 40% of these facilities have been visited and assessed. Yes, for two and a half years. It is not 23 years.

In 2018, a national policy on ageing will be developed, the overarching goal being to promote and support the social, economic and cultural re-integration of older persons into mainstream society and to enable our senior citizens population, as far as practicable, to participate in the national development process. **[Mr. Nandlall: That is a self-serving policy.]** For you.

The Ministry will establish an elderly welfare section within the Probation and Social Services Department, in 2018, to monitor the daily operations of elderly residential care facilities, in collaboration with the Visiting Committee, and investigate reports of elderly abuse.

I trust that the Hon. Member, Ms. Veerasammy, is reminded - is reminded I repeat - of the Ministry's capabilities and also its achievements.

Gender and Social Inclusion Policy: We see gender as an inclusionary issue. Hence, we are in the process of formulating a national gender and social inclusion policy which will aim to mainstream gender issues into all sectors in order to eliminate all negative economic, social and cultural practices that impede equality and equity. The policy will also strengthen links between Government, non-governmental organisations and the private sector in mainstreaming of gender in the respective sectors. It will also develop, maintain and provide gender sensitive information and gender disaggregated data for use in planning and project implementation at all levels and in all sectors. We have already commenced consultations and, by the end of December, 2017, the draft policy will be completed. Only this morning, I received a call and it was reported that this policy is now finished.

Patient Care at Geriatric Facilities: **[Mr. Dharamlall: Is that for the rubber stamp?]**

We are going to take care of you, Mr. Dharamlall, in one of these facilities. Do not worry; I have you at heart. Training of Patient Care Assistants (PCA) has been rigorously intensified. The institutions that benefitted are the Palms Geriatric Home, the Hugo Chavez Centre for Rehabilitation and Reintegration and the Night Shelter. Thanks to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation for its input on this. This training now provides our PCAs to be more equipped to be of service to our elderly. So, very well, sir; you could choose which one you would want to go to.

Like I said, daily, we look at the improvement of the lives of our elderly. In 2018, the Palms Geriatric Home, which is one of 20 care facilities in Guyana, will benefit from a wheelchair accessible bus which will aid those residents who are wheelchair bound. The infirmary at the Palms Geriatric Home is almost completed. Within a few days in this year, 2017, this facility will be completed. This Government is really a caring Government. And I say that we are all in this.

Sexual and Domestic Violence: Domestic and sexual violence, Mr. Dharamlall, is a cause for concern at this Ministry; hence, a national action plan is developed. Very important is training for frontline categories of workers. Social workers have undergone training so that they could be *au fait* with the Sexual Offences Act, the Domestic Violence Act and gender-based violence. We have the capacity to deal with this scourge that plagues our nation.

In addition, model guidelines have been developed in keeping with international best practices to manage cases. I must say that it is an opportune moment and groundbreaking, indeed, when, only last month, November, Guyana became the first country in the Caribbean to establish a specialised court for sexual offences.

2.13 p.m.

This court is outfitted with modern features for an enabling environment to deal with these issues. [An Hon. Member: *[Inaudible]*] Priya Manickchand? She had 23 years to put it. I said, now it is being established.

Yesterday, I listened to the Hon. Member, Dr. Vindhya Persaud, and my sympathy goes out to her. Sympathy because she spoke without knowledge. I trust that the Hon. Member is situated in a much better place now. [Ms. Teixeira: She? Why do you not say Hon. Member?] I have said so, I said Hon. Member.

In 2018, The Ministry will establish a Victim Support Unit (VSU) to service the Sexual Offences Court. The VSU will assist victims in identifying their needs and advocating their rights throughout the justice pre-trial, trial and post-trial processes.

The Ministry will establish its latest Domestic Violence Centre prior to the end of 2017 in Region 6. We are not forgetting you Hon. Member, Gail Teixeira, you can have a space in that centre.

Let me say that the Ministry of Social Protection will continue on a vigorous programme in 2018 to eradicate this type of violence. Hence, we will continue with training programmes, sensitisation activities, protocols for the collection of evidence, among others, to eliminate this distasteful act.

Child Care - our children are Guyana's most treasured and important resources. Many of them are deprived of having a good life. Sir, under the Child Care Protection Agency (CCPA), this Ministry is geared to provide the opportunities for a safe, stable and nurturing environment, which is free from abuse and neglect.

[**An Hon. Member of the Opposition:** Another brainchild.]

All you all had was brainchild. Sir, towards this end, we have implemented a series of initiatives such as the launching of the National Multimedia Child Abuse awareness Campaign, where daily ads and information sessions are illustrated on the television stations. The print and non-print media are also used to promote this campaign.

In 2017, we commenced a programme to reach parents who should help with providing a safe and nurturing family environment for their children. So far, we have reached hundreds of parents. This will continue in 2018, but with more involvement of community groups and religious organisations.

Day care centres in and around Guyana are an integral part of a child's development. Day care facilities have therefore become an integral part of children's lives. To date, 260 child care facilities have been registered, but only 80 have been licenced. We look forward to the remaining facilities to reach the desired standards and to be equipped so that we can have our children grown in an environment most positive and natural for their growth, well-being and protection.

In 2018, the Ministry will vigorously work to implement its programmes that will continue the journey to the good life for the people of Guyana. Our projections for 2018 will see the construction of a new drop-in- centre, which will replace the previous one that was destroyed by fire in 2016. This new accommodation will be a processing centre for children and families in difficult circumstances. This will be a place to temporarily house up to 80 children and to

accommodate up to four families for a few days, while the risk assessments and care plans are being completed.

Youth Development - there has been a lot to talk about youth employment. Sir, as a reminder, let me refer you to page 64, at paragraph 4.153, where the Minister outlined a \$1.7 billion investment in youth programmes.

My Colleagues on the other side lack the capacity to assimilate what is the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) programme; what is the Youth Entrepreneurial Skills' Training (YEST); what is the Youth Innovation Project of Guyana (YIPOG); and what is the Hinterland Employment and Youth Scheme (HEYS). I will *chalk it up* to the short sightedness or to no vision by the Opposition. Let me say that all those programmes are intended to invest in youth development. Guyana continues to move on under the coalition Government, and for a long time it will be under the coalition Government.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, the Ministry will continue the implementation of activities under the various programmes that comprise the Ministry's wide-ranging portfolio, policy development and administration, social services labour administration and child care protection to improve the lives of the people of this great nation of ours.

This coalition Government has a vision. It is taking the country down the road of progress and development. I say to all, "Get on board", work with the Government and be prepared to enjoy the good life.

Mr. Speaker, with no hesitation, I wish to commend this 2018 Budget to this honourable House. I thank you. *[Applause]*

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge the work of the Ministry of Finance in preparing the 2018 Budget. The 2018 Budget offers no significant opportunity to bridge the gap between the hinterland and the coast. The hinterland residents and mostly the Amerindian population are expected to be no better off in 2018 than they are today. Why so? Well, the budget has offered nothing new. What we are getting are the pipeline projects, which were in progress under the PPP/C Government in 2015. I am not enlightened at all by any flagship project, nationally or regionally.

The budget speaks to “Infrastructure for integration”, pointing out "the need to invest in Infrastructure for job creation". It further alluded that the plan is to eliminate the infrastructure deficit, including linking our heavily populated coastland to our rich, arable and pristine hinterland communities. This continues to guide investment in the sector. The statement sounds great, but will anything actually materialise in 2018? That is left to be seen.

In Regions 1, 7 and 8, what are the flagship projects to create jobs and to close the gaps? Prove me wrong, these three hinterland regions will see no major investment other than the municipality road construction, which is in progress, in Mahdia and Mabaruma.

The inability of the Ministry of Public infrastructure to maintain the Linden to Lethem Road for the past two years, among other interior roads serving various communities, serving investors, both small and medium scale miners and the travelling public. I recall a question put to the Hon. Minister in July of this year, in this honourable House, on what he intended to do to fix the deplorable roads in the interior. The Minister was at pains to convincingly respond to the issue. Instead, after muttering many excuses, he laid the blame on the truckers for the destruction of the interior roads. Arising out of the query, laid in this House on interior roads, the responsible authority was forced to speed up the spending which was allocated in the budget. Twenty-five million dollars were hurriedly spent to try to bring some relief to the travelling public.

Amazingly, the Government would like the population to feel that the infrastructural project for Region 9 is their visionary invention. However, the public’s memory is still fresh and remembers that, two years going on three, the Government has made no attempt to move on the Linden and Lethem Road Projects nor the Kurupukari Bridge. Two pipeline projects which were started under the PPP/C, even though they committed to do so in the two previous budgets. Commuters, residents, businessmen and vehicle owners all experienced difficulties in traversing the various interior roads. Cost of living ratchet up as goods and services, trucked from Georgetown to Lethem, attracted higher prices upon arrival in the Rupununi. Is this the good life? Is this the start of a good life?

The long hours to reach destinations, breakages and down time resulted in higher costs for vehicle maintenance. Of course, commuters, residents and the population of Region 9 had to dig deep into their pockets to pay the higher costs. Is this a representation of a good life?

2.28 p.m.

The residents of the Rupununi will now be further disappointed as no relief is in sight for a better road in 2018. The budget offers and I quote:

“In the coming year, we will be launching the feasibility studies and detailed designs for the first phase of the Linden-Lethem road ...”

It is jobs for consultants and not for the ordinary unemployed men, women and youths of the hinterland, who currently face high levels of unemployment. So much for jobs creation for the unemployed youths in the hinterland, from infrastructure projects, flagship projects, as we are told in the budget.

Residents and commuters will see another rough year for road travels. Will this attract tourism? Is this bridging the gap between the coast and hinterland? I think not. The good life is yet to reach the hinterland.

Turning my attention to flagship projects for Region 8. Yesterday, we were treated to a list of what was done and what will be done for the region by an Hon. Member of Government side. On the list were the current ongoing road projects in the municipalities of Mahdia. That is the only significant road project recorded in the region or for Region 8, and yes, that project is fully supported by me. It is long overdue; it is going on to three years. It is high time that those roads are actually completed.

However, the Hon. Member failed to inform us that, since 2015, the budget provided little or no allocation for road maintenance for Sub-Region One, the North Pakaraimas, the location where the least investment for roads maintenance and construction are allocated. With the floods during May to June of this year, the roads condition became even worse.

The households in Region 8, Sub-Region One and two, depend heavily on the mini-contracts to supplement their income as the single economic opportunity in that sub-region. For two years, Sub-Region One did not enjoy any mini-projects. Instead, the 2017 allocation for road maintenance was awarded to a coastal contractor who failed miserably to deliver on the road maintenance project which he was awarded. The remaining sums from the contracted project sum were then turned to the indigenous village councils for rescue. While I believe that I am

always in approval for fairness and reasonableness to prevail when it comes to the vulnerable and to Amerindians, who have the least opportunity still in this country, I want to give credit to the village council and to the people of Paramakatoi and Bamboo Creek who have stepped in for a smaller sum to do the road between Paramakatoi and Bamboo Creek. We speak about supporting Amerindian development and that is a classic example of the level of support which this Government place on their table as it relates to indigenous employment, indigenous opportunity and indigenous support for development.

The single stretch of road linking the 16 communities in the North Pakaraima, in two and a half years, it is only that single stretch of road that receives any level of support. This brings me to the point of how the limited funds budgeted for the hinterland regions are not bringing value and benefits to the residents of the hinterland, coupled with alarming and increasing concerns about the low rate of implementation by the sectorial ministries, which are allocated moneys to support infrastructure projects and other projects in the hinterland.

Turning now to the Hinterland Sustainable Housing Project (HSHP), this project is an initiative inherited. What is sad is that for two and a half years there was a slothful implementation of the second phase of this project. It is well and good for His Excellency, the President, in his wisdom to report to this House, in a presentation delivered to this House on 2nd November, 2017 and I quote:

“We are expanding the Hinterland Housing Programme. Houses have been constructed at Sebai, Whitewater, Kwatamang and Massara.”

This is a fact, but it was an achievement which was already completed under the PPP/Civic. The Whitewater and Aranaputa Villages completed their leg of the initiative in 2014. The then PPP/Civic Government had the honour to enjoin with the residents at the opening ceremony with the former President, President Ramotar, who officiated at the event in November 2014. With respect to the Aranaputa Village, the opening ceremony was on 8th November, 2014.

Was His Excellency, the President, advised correctly about the HSHP Project? Was he advised that the project is being delivered on a slow train; that Sebai, Massara and Apoteri, identified in 2014 with consultation, needs assessment and model designs, that the community began construction? Yet, one year later, after taking government, the Government re-launched the

Sebai Project. These are the incorrect data and information that seem to be pervasive coming from the Government side.

The Ministry of Finance should seriously examine and monitor the rate of implementation for such projects, which aim to bring greater benefits to Amerindians. Delayed benefits to the people of this nation are not going to bring the enjoyment of a good life anytime soon. The Hinterland Housing Initiative is a good project and I am happy that the Government is continuing this project. However, I am left to assume that there is either an attempt to recycle project information or that incorrect information was passed to the Hon. Members who fail to validate the information and has therefore repeated and shared incorrect information in this honourable House. I recommend that, as Cabinet Members on the other side, they take the time to validate whatever information is placed before them.

Today, the Hinterland Sustainable Housing Project has had to request an extension from 2016 to 2019. Is this accelerating the gap between the coast and the hinterland? Is this achieving efficiency? Why were these projects put on pause? Why are these projects delayed? Again, I repeat that, when you delay benefits and implementation to the nation, it is the poor, the vulnerable and those who are in need that suffer the most.

The health situation - another major issue that the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs should look into or has failed to represent is the severe shortage of drugs in the Amerindian villages and communities which continues even as we speak. What is wrong with the Ministry of Indigenous People's Affairs partnering with the Ministry of Public Health or the regional health departments of the hinterland regions, to ensure that the efficient delivery of drugs and medical supplies reaches the hinterland villages health facilities? Children, women and adults are living out there in the hinterland. They need to be treated equally. They need our full representation.

Hinterland health care is not on track. The shortage of drugs and medical supplies remain at an all-time low, while the municipalities of Bartica, Mabaruma, including the proposed township of Mahdia, have had improved supplies, but not adequate supplies, the more than 215 villages and communities are still struggling to cope with little or no drugs on their shelves.

In the words of the Kurukabaru leader, who had expressed to me, while I visiting his village two weeks ago, his complaint expressed the fear of residents falling seriously ill as there were no

drugs. The same is true for Bamboo Creek, Kato, Kamana, Tuseneng, Taruka, Waipa, and Kaibarupai. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

The village leaders, on behalf of the health personnel, reported that the first time they experienced a medical outreach within the last two years was during the floods of May to June of this year. The leaders requested me to remind the Government that it has failed to deliver on its promise to send drugs to the majority of health centres in that region, a promise made by Ministers and health personnel during their visits during the floods.

The single village which took matters into its own hands because it had the resources to do so was Itabac village. The residents were able to get to Mahdia and to make representation for their supplies. Last September they receive supplies for the first time after the floods. As of 17th November, 2017, there were still no drugs or medical supplies for the various health centres in Region 8.

Shadowing hinterland and Amerindian development, this is a scenario that describes what obtains in other hinterland regions, Regions 1, 7, 8 and somewhat in 9.

I urge the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs to not sit idly and do nothing about the complaints because they are aware of it. Enquire about the problems the system might be experiencing, engage at the ministerial level, identify the bottlenecks in the system and assist in resolving the issue on behalf of the hinterland residents and the Amerindian villagers. The villagers are depending on the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs to take the lead in representing their cause. You may not be in charge, Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, of execution or programmes, but you can contribute to the solution.

2.43 p.m.

I call on the Minister of Public Health, to ensure that the Bacille Calmette Guerin (BCG) vaccines are available in every hinterland health facility. In the same manner that you have conducted medical outreaches to administer the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, in the same manner, I beg of you to please provide BCG and Poliomyelitis to the facilities in storage.

Across the hinterland regions, they do not have such vaccines. The Government needs to continue... *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, could you please...

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

The Government needs to continue to invest in solar refrigerators. The cost for these items must never be too much when it comes to the hinterland if we intend to close the gap. Batteries for the solar systems need to be acquired for almost all of the health centres that may have the solar refrigerators. This will simply aid with the storage of vaccines and benefit to the young children when they are born.

Speaking of investment in the Community Development Council (CDC) and the Climate Resilient Programme, which was just delivered to this House by Hon. Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon. I am reminded about the floods of May to June, which affected villages in Regions 7, 8 and 9. I wish to recognise the effort of the CDC and the friendly Guyanese population for the donations, which went a far way in the flood relief efforts, but the expected support for the recovery was not forthcoming. On a recent trip to Region 8, the villagers related about a Minister from the Ministry of the Presidency who landed in an helicopter at Itabac. That Hon. Minister met with the villagers and made some promises to supply beds, mattresses, zinc, rice, flour, oil and canned foods. I am not referring to Minister Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, it was a male Minister. The promised items never arrived. However, what did arrived was Manapak, a mixture of rice and soya. The residents asked me to report to the National Assembly, during this debate, their dissatisfaction with the unfulfilled commitments and that they have the Manapak in storage, as most of the residents are unaccustomed to the item and dislike the strange odour of the item when cooked. The villagers wish to return the Manapak to the Government, as they have found it difficult to consume.

The villagers are upset with the Government's response to the post-flood recovery period and the position taken by the Minister of Local Government that the Government will take no responsibility to assist in the recovery phase of the affected villagers. The Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, made no effort to provide leadership, nor did it represent the post-flood recovery needs of the affected villagers. In fact, it has not even made a visit or a second visit to see how these communities have been coping with their recovery.

Villages in Region 8 are experiencing a shortage of cassava, the main staple. Most of the cassava crops are not yet matured, so there is limited farine and cassava bread for households to use or to sell. There are no paid jobs in those villages, so the level of cash availability does not allow the villagers to extend to neighbouring Brazil to acquire any basic items. What is the position of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs on the post-flood recovery phase? It has no position. I am convinced that the Ministry has made no submission of any kind for mitigation or adaptation initiatives to be funded under the Green State Development Strategy (GSDS) to assist communities, to mitigate against such devastation of floods or droughts, in regions prone to flooding and droughts. The Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs knows too well where these villages are located and in which hinterland regions.

The Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs' posture of lack of concern is further compounded with lack of vision to chart a direction or to develop proposals to support the lofty plans which the coalition Government so frequently talks about. That is, recognising that the hinterland lacks major support systems to access services and that they are always willing, on the other side, to close the gap.

The Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs does not feature in the budget on these matters. They do not feature. I am yet to understand what it is that the Amerindian population, areas, villages and districts will benefit and what projects are flagship projects under the Green State Development Strategy (GSDS).

I now turn my attention to the HEYS Project: A lot has been said about this project by the Hon. Mr. Charlie, but I wish to reaffirm a few things. The HEYS Project is yet another failed initiative and is experiencing a low rate of implementation. I was encouraged when the Minister of Social Cohesion said that, among all the youth programmes, HEYS will be evaluated to see if it matches the requirements of the policy being pursued for youths.

I would suggest that Minister of Cohesion, extend his evaluation to inquire into the output of the HEYS Project. I would encourage that a forensic examination be conducted on whether the execution and implementation were on target; whether the objectives are being met; and whether there are more than 1500 businesses established in the Amerindian villages, following the phases of the HEYS Project in various communities. Village youths and their parents are disturbed, as

the HEYS Project did not result in any permanent jobs or in any large number of micro-businesses. If the responsible Minister invites the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) to do registration of businesses created by the HEYS Project, the Government will be surprised to discover that the information shared about this project is just about a fraction that is almost invisible.

The Minister, in her 2016 Budget's speech acknowledged the situation as it relates to the HEYS Project. However, nothing was done in 2017 to arrest the situation.

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

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: The payment of stipend was a total fiasco last year, December 2016. Management Development Officers (MDOs) were sent into the fields to distribute stipends in the final week of December 2016 because the established HEYS Unit was unable to perform. They failed to properly prepare pay sheets, then on another occasion, the pay sheets were displaced by a leading officer of the Ministry. Even though the payment was downloaded on the Regional Democratic Council's (RDC) administration, there are still some outstanding payments for during the phase of the fiasco. My time is short, but I will now move to the other issues.

Last August, while attending the opening of the National Toshi Council's (NTC's) meeting at the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE), the featured address was done by His Excellency. His delivered presentation was reported in the *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper of 22nd of August, 2017. It stated that his Government was committed to the development of the country's Indigenous people. I suspect that, while it is agreeable for the Government to continue the Presidential grants, eco-tourism and support for water and land transportation, these are all the foundational projects developed by the PPP/Civic to render support to Amerindian development. What are unacceptable are the level of non-performance and the lack of wherewithal to implement just over \$1 billion of investment for the Amerindian villages in 12 months because they get very early budgets.

If one looks at the figures from 2015, 2016, 2017 and the projected 2018 figures, they are sliding down. Shame! There are two Ministers with many new units to assist in the implementation and execution of assistance and support to Indigenous people.

Reported in the same article, His Excellency told the packed to capacity audience, in the CPCE's auditorium, that the NTC is of paramount importance and should not be treated as a talk shop, but as a workshop that will ensure continued development. These are lofty statements and are politically correct. However, the statement did not translate into the level of support required.

The proposed budget does not adequately cover expenditure for executing the functions of the NTC. In fact, for the last two years, the NTC has been grappling with no increases to their expenditures or the proposed expenditures for the years. In the same breath, the NTC, with a wide range of responsibilities, whose budget has been constricted for the last three years, is expected to adequately be able to provide leadership across the 215 villages and communities, to conduct outreaches and to consult with districts, councils and villages. The NTC's position this year on the budgetary sum allocated for funding their operational activities is \$16 million in the 2018 Budget. They have lambasted the cut of their budget's proposal, referring to Government as being more concerned with Ministers' comfort rather than with supporting and addressing Amerindian issues. How can the Government build a cohesive nation when it has not right the wrongs in this country against Indigenous people? It continues to not do anything to correct the statement made in the House by the Hon. Minister Mr. Keith Scott. The NTC's leadership and members, at the last NTC meeting, requested of the Minister to apologise to them and they were disappointed. I will tell you that Indigenous people are very humble, so they did not fight on this matter. This is because if someone refuses to apologise, then let them be.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up. I thank the Hon. Member for her statement the next speaker is the Hon. Ms. Nicolette Henry.

2.58 p.m.

Minister of Education [Ms. Henry]: A special good afternoon to all our students present here today. Let me say, it is with pride and humility that I stand this afternoon as a proud Member of this Government to verbalise my fervent support for Budget 2018. Let me begin, of course, by thanking the Minister of Finance and his team for working diligently to present a well thought out fiscal plan for this country for the year 2018.

My presentation will focus on the achievements in the education sector for this year, as well as the measures and plans contained in the Budget 2018 which are intended to create the

transformative shift that will place Guyana firmly on the path to development while ensuring our education system continues to progress in tandem.

Before I delve in to education specific matters there are a few generalised statements that I would like to touch on, related to the Budget 2018.

My first point is that this budget, as the three previous ones laid by this Government, continues on the path of investing in the development of our country human resources as *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*. As you are aware, and I posited last year, this administration has been promoting education as the bedrock of development. Rightly so, as it is, education has provided us in this House, and those before us, and those who would come after us, with the knowledge and skills required to drive this country's growth and development. We, on this side of the House, are also convinced that investment in education, knowledge, information and human capital development are pre-requisites to a "good life", prosperity and well-being of all our citizens. It is for that reason that we will provide substantial allocations in this Budget 2018 for education, health, social platforms and infrastructure.

For the purpose of emphasis, and certainly to edify the Hon. Member Alister Charlie, let me place on record that, contrary to what he said in his *yakard* presentation, the education sector allocation was increased and education received 15.7% of the total budget for 2018 which is the largest budgetary allocation to date for education.

The second point that I would like to make is how this Government has stupefied on several levels the real meaning of social inclusion and participatory democracy. Here I have to say to the people of this country that your Government will continue to listen to you and make the necessary adjustments, as we journey collectively towards the "good life". A case in point being the removal of VAT on all educational services, coupled with the reformation and innovation of the education sector.

I may now turn my attention to Guyana's journey to first class education, which is the thrust of my presentation. In 2017, we invested significant sums at the nursery, primary and secondary levels. Apart from routine activities, some of the initiatives we rolled out included emergency intervention for mathematics at the primary level with a strong focus on content and methodology, expansion of the music programme where we trained in excess of 300 teachers in

the areas of dance, music, visual arts and physical education, with a view to creating more rounded students.

In 2017, we also saw increased students' performance in test scores and at the national and regional examinations which would not only break the cycle of poverty for many of these students, but would also guarantee a better life and a brighter future for them, their families and this country.

In 2018, the Government will continue in this direction, so moneys have been allocated in the Budget 2018 for curriculum review, the interactive radio instruction programme will be reviewed, leadership training for senior teachers, development of a handbook for teaching methods and strategies for primary teachers and the development of standards for primary mathematics from Grades One to Six. These interventions will build on the progress already made to better equip our students holistically, to allow them to succeed in the twenty-first century where all of the opportunities and inevitable challenges lie before us.

We are indeed living in interesting times and for the past three days I have been subjected to several instances of alternative facts coming from the other side. I believe, however, that examination of the performance of the education sector must begin with analysis of how our students have fared overtime. Let me share some data with the House and I would begin with 2012 to give an idea of the trend and direction in which we are moving.

In the year 2012, at the Grade Six level in mathematics, 11% of our students scored 50% and above, in English - 21%, in social studies - 33% and in science - 30%. In 2013, 31% scored more than 50% in mathematics, 20% in English, 36% in social studies and 18% in science. In 2014, 25% of our students were able to score more than 50% in mathematics, 23% in English, 37% in social studies and 23% in science. The data can speak for itself. I believe that it should please this House to know that 2017 has been a decisive year for the education sector in this country. For the first time, in more than two decades, more than 47% of our students were able to secure passes more than 50% in mathematics at the Grade Six level with similar increases in other subject areas. This, my friend, is the embodiment of the concept of the journey to a good life. Recognising how politics work and the complexities of our society, it is not surprising that the syndrome of when it is good it is the people, or it is a brainchild, or pipeline project, and when it

is bad it is the Government. Either way, progress is good and it could only lead to the development of this country.

To this end, in 2017, this APNU/AFC Government took a conscience decision to increase, from 110 to 202, the number of schools approved for community based School Feeding Programme in the hinterland. I would like the Hon. Member Charlie to listen this. While this may not seem like much, depending on where one sits in this House, I can tell you, to the ordinary people, especially the additional 30,000 students who are now benefiting for the first time from school feeding, this is a big deal. Also, because of this initiative, we are creating jobs within several communities, as this requires hiring hundreds of women from within these communities. Apart from job creation, I think it is very clear, from all the literature, that the construct of a “good life” speaks to a journey, not a destination and this journey began in 2015 for thousands of citizen throughout this country. We have also implemented a breakfast programme with similar impact on the coastland, in addition to the juice and biscuit initiative that existed.

In 2018, this Government will continue along this path and scale up this initiative as we understand the benefits of school feeding programmes and we understand that they are far-reaching and they are also evidence based. According to the United Nations, there is evidence to show that school feeding programmes enhance enrolment in school and better educational outcomes. I wish to add that increased educational achievement will improve students’ potential future, productivity and earnings. All of which are important to a “good life”. We are still to see the documented evidence of how the \$10,000 “We Care” cash voucher brainchild is a model or perhaps an international best practice and, more importantly, how it is linked to enhancing enrolment in school, or better yet improve educational outcomes. I would leave that there.

Speaking of evidence based interventions, however, in 2017, the Ministry of Education launched its first smart classroom. We also hosted a series of stakeholders’ engagement and awarded millions of dollars in Presidential Grants to several schools as part of the National Endowment for Science and Technology called (NEST). [Ms. Manickchand: Here you go. You do not know when...phagwali.] I am not a *Kshatriya*, so I may not know when there is Diwali or Phagwah but I do know what it takes to improve the education sector. This NEST initiative focuses on three gaps namely equipping selected schools with science equipment and

consumables generating enthusiasm and participation in science, technology and education among students and re-orienting science for sustainability.

As a responsible Government, we have to make the difficult strategic decisions and we will continue to find innovative solutions to close the gaps and reduce the disparities in education. For us, on this side of the House, every child matters and it is for that reason that we have, among other things, commissioned buses, boats and bicycles in some of our most disadvantaged communities such as the Pomeroun, Barakara, River View, Bartica and Maraikobai where our children were at greatest risk of being left behind. The President's Five 'Bs' initiative is a model for transforming the education landscape. From May 2015 to date, I heard someone asked for the number, we have provided 26 buses, nine boats and thousands of bicycles which are transporting our children across this beautiful country. After all these years, some are still asking the question, where is the "good life"? From what I have heard during the past three days of debates, the term "good life" means different things to different people, especially in the context of where you are sitting in this honourable House.

I want to move beyond that and speak about the child in Barakara who is saving \$5,000 thousand dollars a week in transportation cost by travelling daily to and from school in a 'David G' boat and who is benefiting also from breakfast at a cost of approximately \$1,000 a day, cumulatively more than \$40,000 a month.

3.13 p.m.

Call it what you may, it is a measure. It is measures such as these that mitigate against perpetual intergenerational cycles of disadvantage. As a sector, we are seriously addressing the structural determinants of inequality which includes poverty, deficient policies and inefficient delivery of systems that prevent our children from realising their full potential.

In 2018, for the first time, in over a decade, we will reintroduce training of our teachers in Region 8. I listened to a former Minister of Education, on the other side of the House this morning, who said that 77% of trained teachers would not help us. I have to say that the literature is replete with evidence of the benefits of having trained teachers in classrooms. This measure will not only help us but would also ensure that all of our regions, throughout the length and breadth of Guyana, will have more trained teachers, a point raised by a Member on your side,

yesterday. Of course, the increase of 80% of the teachers remote area incentive is only part of the package, of a comprehensive plan to bridge the gap between the hinterland and the coastland communities. It takes vision to provide affordable access to education in far-flung communities.

I have to say, while we may not have got everything right, we have always put the people first. I realise, perhaps more than many others, that transforming the education system will not be easy and that we are likely to encounter a lot of challenges along the way, and so we have to fix things. We have to make them more appropriate and we have to ensure that they reach acceptable standards, such as the fixing of Kato Secondary School. Let me say to the people of this country, whether you live in Lethem or Linden, Babu John or Cove and John, transforming the education system is a necessary journey that we will all have to take as “One People, One Nation and One Destiny.”

For the first time, in over a decade, we have conducted a condition survey of all our schools across this country and we will use this data for maintenance and infrastructural works to be undertaken by the Ministry of Education.

In keeping with international best practices for a high performing education system, the Ministry of Education is prioritising special education needs in 2018. As numerous children in this country, needlessly, endure the horror of academic underperformance due to a lack of appropriate cognitive social and emotional support care and treatment options. The evidence is saying to us that these conditions are treatable and, perhaps, preventable with early diagnosis and treatment. In 2018, the newly constructed Special Education Diagnosis and Assimilation Centre, at Turkeyen, will be outfitted with appropriate equipment and furnishing. For much too long, because of the absence of a specific diagnostic and assimilation facility, many of our children were left to develop into full blown conditions at a tremendous personal cost and society loss in later years.

Another strategic and operational shift required to achieve the vision of the first class education in Guyana is the expansion and strengthening of the technical and vocational education. Let me the first to admit, that the targets set by the Ministry of Education in 2018 are ambitious, but entirely achievable. There is allocation of resources in 2018 for the construction of the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) hubs at Bina Hill, Mahdia, Lethem and Mabaruma

to bridge the gap between hinterland and coastland, while enhancing hinterland access to post-secondary education opportunities.

Speaking of post-secondary opportunities, the modernisation of the University of Guyana continues to be a priority in 2018. I have to say here that we came into Government at a time when even the University of Guyana's most ardent supporters would have admitted that the university was in danger of stagnation. To bring a sense of pride and augustness to this institution, we have, among other things, accomplished, in 2017, the regional accreditation of the medical school. I give a round of applause for that. I worked personally as a technical officer years ago. We will continue to work assiduously to ensure that there is alignment along the entire education value chain as we prepare for petroleum education, biodiversity and the green state pursuit.

As I seek to wind up my presentation, it was the great Mahatma Gandhi who said, "The future depends on what you do today." Today, on behalf of the Government of Guyana, I wish to place on record my heartfelt gratitude to the thousands of men and women who worked immensely, contributing towards the improvement of our education system. To my staff and the team at the Ministry of Education, I want to publicly thank you. **[Hon. Member (Opposition):** Why

are you crying?] I am not crying. I want to publicly thank you, first of all, for believing in the vision and, more importantly, for the great work you do every day. I know I ask a lot of you, but I also know that you are ordinary people who are capable of doing extraordinary things.

Please permit me to quote one of the world's greatest political icon of this twenty-first century. It will be the great Nelson Mandela.

"What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made in the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead."

Indeed, we have done so much in education with the sole purpose of making a difference in the lives of others in this country. I look forward to an even more rewarding year in 2018, and I have every confidence that we will persevere and deliver as we continue the journey of laying a solid foundation for the "good life" of all our students who are the future of this country.

I will conclude by saying the only impossible journey is the one that never began. I am therefore optimistic about the present and the future of education in Guyana as “the journey to the good life continues.” On a very personal note, it is indeed a privilege to play meaningful part in moulding God’s greatest creation, the human being.

It, therefore, gives me great pleasure to commend to this honourable House Budget 2018 under the theme, *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we would pause for a brief moment to allow our visitors, the students who have been paying attention to our debate, to depart. Those who would wish to do so and their teachers this is a good time and we thank you for coming to visit us. [*Applause*] We thank you for your visit once more.

Teachers and students left the chamber.

Mr. Rohee: Mr. Speaker, I beg of you...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, if you do not wish to speak that is quite all right.

Mr. Rohee: What I was about to say Mr. Speaker, is according to the Bible, “...there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” What we have witnessed this afternoon, in terms of the weeping and the gnashing of teeth, is obviously a manifestation of what is to come by 2020. There will be more weeping and gnashing of teeth. Mr. Speaker, you know that there is the saying “the more you live the more you learn”, and that it is never too late to learn.

We heard the Hon. Member from Region 9 mentioned something this afternoon which I believe will resonate throughout the length and breadth of the country and will last for a very long time in the annals of the history and the records of this Parliament. I refer to the *yakard* budget.

Soon after the distinguished, not so far extinguished, Minister of Finance had completed reading his budget, all around the city where billboards were mounted, the billboards started to come down.

3.28 p.m.

I consider that act to be symptomatic of what our country is currently experiencing, *vis-à-vis* the economic and social policies of APNU/AFC administration. Just before the presentation of the budget... [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please resume your seat. Hon. Members, it seems that members feel they must speak when someone else is on the floor. Members, I believe, can do it without interrupting the speaker or this Speaker's hearing of the statement. I think we can do that. If we cannot keep quiet then at least we can do that, although I must observe that there were some speakers where members found it very easy to remain quiet. Let us proceed. Mr. Rohee, please go ahead.

Mr. Rohee: Thank you Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, not too long before the Minister of Finance made his budget presentation, or his speech presenting the budget in this hallowed chamber, the Hon. Prime Minister, in one of his articles deemed "My turn" in the *Guyana Chronicle*, wrote about the little things that matter. As I read that article, it struck me that the Hon. Prime Minister actually missed the bus. He did not see the big picture and dealt with a number of matters which meant little or nothing to the ordinary man or woman in the streets of this country. As I listened subsequently to the Minister of Finance, he was careful enough to not go down the road which the Hon. Prime Minister went down. He refrained from going in that direction, because he knew the 'trip' wires that would have been found along the way, had he gone down the road with the Hon. Prime Minister with his little things, which in fact was basically nothing, whatsoever. There is nothing whatsoever, not only in the Prime Minister's article, but there is nothing whatsoever also in the budget presentation for the grassroots man and woman. Much was said to that effect on this side of the House and on that side of the House. There is a saying "practice is the criterion of truth" and in practical life in our country is that the truth is what is out there. There is punishment all round us and people are experiencing very difficult times.

The Hon. Minister of Finance said that in 2018 global growth is projected to rise marginally to 3.7%. This delphic forecast is fraught with great dangers, if not trepidations, because the pace with which the world disorder is proceeding, you may very well find a situation that this projection would eventually not be accomplished. It is said that politics is a concentrated form of economics. If that is indeed the case, the projection that was made by the Hon. Minister of

Finance would encounter great difficulties given the political and economic developments that are occurring at a global level. There are problems all over the world and the growth, of the global economy is threatened by the problems that are affecting the world at different levels and therefore, the global outlook is extremely troubling. These projections that I wish to submit will be difficult, if not hard, to come by, given the exigencies of the global situation in which we are currently living.

Further, in the Hon. Minister of Finance's presentation, one would find a huge number of clichés and catch phrases, but I will only mention one or two. He mentioned, for example, that the budget is aimed at expiring confidence; that we are shaping a new destiny; that this budget requires strong leadership and that they are changing in the narrative. It is this narrative that is to be changed. Of course, we heard the old thread worn clichés such as diversification of the economy, inclusiveness in governance, and others. There is absolutely nothing in this budget that will lift families out of poverty. In fact, it will drive families even further into poverty as we go along. Notwithstanding what my good friend, Hon. Member Amna Ally, said, to the effect, that they are building a welfare state in this country. A welfare state for themselves is far removed from what is a virtual welfare state, for example, in the Nordic countries. If you want to talk about welfare states, examine what is happening in the Nordic countries and then measure what you are doing against what they are doing, what you are allocating to the people of this country versus what they are allocating, and then we would be able to qualify as a welfare state. The sound bites sound very attractive but, in essence, they are meaningless and for the ordinary man and woman in the streets, they do not mean a thing.

We heard that they are making steady progress, but where is the steady progress? We look around us and the only sign of steady progress that we can see is the progress that was made under the PPP/C administration. Those are the signs. We heard some references that the future of Guyana looks bright, a quotation by the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB). We are told a statement to the effect that the future looks bright for Guyana, but what the Hon. Minister did not tell us was that the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) Group Country Strategy made reference to this statement that "there is lack of strategic planning and vision of the highest level of this country". He did not mention that. Incidentally, since we are speaking about vision, this is

what the IDB is saying - “lack of vision at the highest level.” That is the IDB, not the PPP/C. If you want to question that, then go to the IDB, go to Ms. Makonnen and question her.

We heard about impressive achievements, but instead of impressive achievements, we are hearing, and we know, about achievements... This is what the IDB was quoted saying - that was from the *Kaieteur News*, your loving newspaper - “the Government continues to live in a bubble created by its own self.” It appears that they are suffering from an optical illusion. They believe they are making progress when, in fact, it is illusory. It does not exist. It is a utopia and they are living in their own bubble and are believing their own propaganda. It is amazing. It is kind of a surreal world that they live in - surrealistic.

The Hon. Minister of Finance, in his speech, spoke about placing great emphasis on the safety of citizens. Really - placing great emphasis on the security of citizens. Soon after the Christmas police plan was launched in Berbice by the ‘B’ Division, four days after, at a supermarket of a gentleman called Bobby, bandits went into the supermarket and carried out a robbery almost endangering the physical life of the individual. It was the PPP/C that launched the Citizen Security Programme, Phase 1 and Phase 2, which the Ministry of Public Security inherited, embellished and we heard “tweaked” - their favourite word “tweaked” - when in fact it was never really tweaked. The Government and the country is running on the foundation for citizen security that was laid by the PPP/C.

We expected the budget to reflect, to a large extent, the social and economic challenges facing the country and the people. It is a pity that they did not listen to the Zimbabwean experience where the new president rose to power and the mantra is about jobs. Where are the jobs? No investments are coming into the country, foreign or local. It is by virtue of investment that jobs are generated. It is because of the Government’s attitude towards investments which is scaring them away. How can jobs be generated? As a fact, further compounding the situation is the state of affairs in the sugar industry. I heard the Hon. Member Mr. Harmon mentioned that the greening of the country is a way of life. Well, I want to tell Minister Harmon, in his absence, that sugar is a way of life.

We see no focus in this budget. There is a total lack of focus in the budget that was presented before us, pinning their hopes on heavy taxations, living like leaches, like barnacles off of the blood of taxpayers. This is what is happening. They are sucking the blood.

3.43 p.m.

I do not want to use the word ‘vampire’, Mr. Speaker. I prefer to be a little more elegant by talking about barnacles and leaches. But this is precisely what is happening. It has taken the elite out of poverty. It is the elite that has been taken out of poverty with the fantastic and humongous salary increases. That is what has happened. In terms of the ordinary man and woman, they are deeper and deeper in poverty.

In the course of Minister Harmon’s address, he spoke about being rather brief in his presentation less he runs out of time. I want to say that running out of time is not only relative to Minister Harmon, it is relative to the APNU/AFC. They are running out of time. Their clock is ticking. Their clock started ticking from May, 2015. [Ms. Charles-Broomes: Your clock stopped.] Girl, my clock cannot stop. You try it and you would see. You try my clock and you would see.

We are sitting on a time bomb. This is a time bomb that has to do with the frustration, with the disgust and with the alienation of people. This is what would explode sooner rather than later.

We heard a hue and cry about vision. The Hon. Minister, Mr. Harmon, spent almost his entire presentation speaking about vision. It has hurt them a lot when our Members over here told them that they were visionless. I want to say this: there is something called ‘real politics’. When you were on this side, you accused us of being visionless. Now you are over there, you take that for being visionless. You are equally visionless. Live with that. If you are talking about visionless...

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, direct your remarks to the Speaker.

Mr. Rohee: Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: It pays to do that.

Mr. Rohee: Let me withdraw the word on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the Speaker has not requested you to withdraw any word.

Mr. Rohee: I did not say the Speaker; I said that the Leader of the Opposition gave me some useful advice and, as he is Leader of the Opposition, I am prone to his advice.

Mr. Speaker, let me continue. All is fair in love and politics. You have to live with your visionless policies in the same way that you had accused us of being visionless. The problem now and the difference, however, is that, when you go out there, you see a reality. You see tangible evidence of the vision of the People's Progressive Party/Civic.

The Hon. Minister, Mr. Harmon, also spoke to us and, in fact, briefed us. We were very happy for the briefing about the visit... **[Hon. Members (Opposition):** Powder man.]

Man, y'all don't throw me off. I am trying to work with you, Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Minister, Mr. Harmon, briefed us on a visit by a representative from Walmart. What was the name of the gentleman who visited? **[Hon. Members:** Walton.]

Mr. Walton. What is interesting is that Walmart is in trouble just the same way like the APNU/AFC is. They came to exchange notes. Walmart changed its name from Wal-Mart to Walmart. The PNC changed its name from PNC to APNU. Walmart is now in serious trouble.

Up to now, the Government has not told us what the *quid pro quo* is. What has it given in exchange for what Walmart brought? We do not know. We come back to the question of transparency and accountability. This appears to be another big secret which they are keeping close to their chest.

Let me deal with Mr. Greenidge, our distinguished Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs avoided a number of issues which are very important to this country. For example, when he spoke, he never told us what were the Government's policies and what is its vision with respect to Brexit (British Exit – withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union). This country's economy is tied up, to a large extent, with the African, Caribbean Pacific/European Union (ACP/EU) relationship.

The Hon. Minister never told us about the hot bells of tension that is around the world and what is the policy of the Government when dealing with those matters. **[An. Hon. Member:**

Budget] Budget? You better listen and learn.

We were told that this Government and the Government of Venezuela are in talks. We do not have a difficulty with talks. The Leader of the Opposition was the one who initiated talks with respect to Suriname. We won the case. We hope that this would be the same situation in this matter. The fact of the matter is that there must be full disclosure to Parliamentarians who represent people. If we do not want to do it in open house, then we have to be able to do it in another way.

I now come to the Minister of Public Security. He seems anxious to hear what I want to talk to him about. I perused the contributions made by the Hon. Minister, Mr. Ramjattan, on the 2016 Budget and I perused his 2017 presentation as well. It is amazing. The good Member of Parliament had very little to say about his sector. He lamented that there was not enough policemen. He said that they want 150 policemen to deal with domestic violence. Have you accomplished that, Hon. Minister? Where are the 150 policemen that would deal with domestic violence that you trained?

We were told that they have to find a venue for a Command Centre and they wanted a big piece of land to set up the Command Centre. That is how he put it. He said that they wanted a brand new building. This has not been done so far.

We were also told that they would be conducting a major study on alternative incarceration. Where is the major study? There is nothing as yet. We were also told that there is a lot of violence in the communities. They virtually disbanded the Community Policing Groups (CPG). The Hon. Minister said to the press and in his 2016 Budget speech that the CPG should not worry about the vehicles that were taken away from them; that they would be getting them back by 2016. The Guyana Police Force just got a huge gift from the Chinese Government. I want to see if the Hon. Minister would be giving back the vehicles to the Community Policing Groups. It is a fraud. Excuse my language, Mr. Speaker. This one is called fraudulent conversion – where you take away from the Community Policing Groups and give to the Guyana Police Force and not returning the properties that were budgeted for to the Community Policing Groups.

The Hon. Minister said, in his speeches before, that they would be bringing the Juvenile Justice Bill which would be coming soon. It is not here as yet. Two years ago, it was coming.

The Smart City Project: Where is the Smart City Project? This is another talk. Everything is coming. What is it? Is it 'coming'? I have no difficulty with that because that is good. But if it is 'coming', I have a difficulty with that.

They spoke about a brand new police station at Parfaite Harmonie. Where is the brand new station at Parfaite Harmonie? Two years ago, a new police station was supposed to be in Parfaite Harmonie. They cannot get it as yet. People are complaining. These are the kinds of empty promises that we are hearing all the time. By the way, we were promised openly in the House that the distinguished Minister, soon to be extinguished, is going to present a protocol for the Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU). Where is the protocol for SOCU? The Member said that it would be made public. Nothing is there yet.

Let me move quickly to drugs. The Hon. Minister, Mr. Harmon, in a public speech, said that the time has long gone in this country for trafficking in narcotics; that those days are over. There is no longer trafficking in narcotics in Guyana.

In May, 2016, 12 pounds of cocaine; in August, two pounds of cocaine; in November, three pounds of cocaine; in September, a Cessna aircraft was found illegally in Guyana. All the cocaine passed through the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA).

In 2017, there was the same pattern. In January, we started the year with three pounds of cocaine. In February, we had four pounds of cocaine. In March, we had 11 pounds of cocaine. In April, we had six pounds of cocaine. In May, we had 24 pounds of cocaine. In June, we had 10 pounds of cocaine in Ogle and it goes on. By the way, there was a huge find of cocaine the other day. We have not heard what happened with the investigation up to now. I want to suspect that somebody cut a deal. How did the cocaine suddenly disappear? There is no talking about it. How come you are not blowing your trumpets about this discovery? How come you are not taking people to Court? They used to accuse the PPP/C Administration of running an economy on drugs. What are they doing?

The other day, a submarine was found in the North/West area. They tried hard to kerfuffle the public by selling a story or planting a story in the press that it had nothing to do with drugs but that it had to do with fishing. We have been around for 23 years. We did not waste time. We

know exactly what is going on. If you believe that you started this thing before us, you should think again. By the way, our Administration was never a lazy administration.

I listened yesterday to the Hon. Minister, Mr. Felix. I was amazed. If you look at the Hon. Minister's speech in 2016 and 2017, they are the same old thing. All he did was change up a few things here and there. He talked about laziness...

3.58 p.m.

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

Mr. Rohee: He talked about laziness and, by the way, the Ministry or the Department headed by Hon. Member Mr. Felix has responsibilities for some very important areas, but he omitted to mention how many naturalisations they did, how much citizenship they did, and how many visas were issued to foreigners; he did that before. But somehow or the other, for some strange reason, he did not do it this year. And do you know that that is highly suspect? Anytime information is left out that was given before and was not given this time – *where there is smoke, there is fire...* And so, when Hon. Ms. Teixeira raised this question about... By the way, somebody mentioned that they had given 500 birth certificates and we are checking it out. Mr. Allen mentioned that 500 birth certificates were issued in the Barima area. We do not know how many more were issued in other areas. **[Hon. Member:** You are not supposed to know.] We

are not supposed to. Really? Did you hear that, Mr. Speaker? We are not supposed to know that.

These are issues that we are concerned about. One of the major issues that have confounded this nation is the confusion, the monkey wrench that is thrown into the Guyana Police Force (GPF) and they are talking about reforms. They are virtually destroying that organisation. They are destroying good police officers in that organisation. The Hon. Minister said, in the public, that one senior rank, the *de facto* Deputy Commissioner Law Enforcement (DCLE)...that it is a normal thing to post people from one place to the next. **[Mr. Williams:** Is that abnormal?]

Of course, it is abnormal, especially when you are coming from that position. A man who is in charge of the entire Criminal Investigation Department (CID), a man who is in charge of so many assets under his control, a man who is in charge of so many District Development Offices (DDOs) across the country, and you are coming and telling an administration that has been around that nothing is wrong with that. I want to say that we are hearing all kind of confusing

signals – special leave, vacation leave, Christmas leave and, yet, they cannot tell us what it is exactly the kind of leave have these people gone on. But apparently, they themselves are not clear about it.

I wanted to say something about firearms because, in all the talks they used to tell us about firearms coming through the borders, it has not stopped, and it is not only coming; it is not stopping in the divisions that are near to the borders, it is coming right into the ‘A’ Division. You said that you would stop it but you have not stopped anything.

Finally, on the question of the prisons, up to now, we have not had this debate on the motion submitted by the PPP/C’s Members of Parliament (MPs) on what happened at the Georgetown Prison. But I want to say that, when one reads that report, that report has exonerated the Hon. Minister from any fault whatsoever. It has wrongly exonerated him and let me tell you why. It is the Hon. Minister who comes to this House and asks, at the Committee of Supply, for salaries and wages to be paid to ranks of the Guyana Prison Service. It is the Hon. Minister who comes here during the Committee of Supply to ask for capital moneys to be approved. So, I am saying, in the same way he comes here and asks for approvals of these things, in the same way he must be accountable for what transpired in the prison.

Again, I want to conclude by saying that I would advise the Hon. Members to go and pray in the Garden of Gethsemane in preparation for the mountain of what is called Calvary – Mount Calvary. Let them go and pray in the Garden of Gethsemane to mount the...

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

Mr. Rohee: Thank you. [*Applause*]

Vice-President and Minister of Public Security [Mr. Ramjattan]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Before revealing that which the honourable last speaker mentioned that I ought to mention, I wish to make certain preliminary remarks about certain things that were said here and that had largely to do with the general politics. It is always a good thing to be preambular in relation to those matters. One of which has to do with what was said by Hon. Member Ms. Priya Manickchand, condemning the Alliance For Change (AFC) as a partner in this Coalition

Government. I want to say that the Hon. Member failed to realise that our country took a turn for the better in 2015 because of certain decisions made by the AFC.

First of all, to start unity talks with the APNU... Also to ensure that we brought a motion of no confidence against a Government that was a minority, and, today, we are here doing that which every visionary will do, moving this country to a better life. Your invidious remarks concerning us becoming a little chewed up are not true. In infrastructural matters, there is a Member called Mr. David Patterson who is ensuring that the infrastructural works, the bridges and a whole lot of things in this country are moving forward. And in relation to natural resources and in relation to telecommunications, our Prime Minister is here with the constitutional reform which would appear that you do not want to support. We are doing that which is...and, of course, Ms. Valarie Garrido-Lowe. We are doing with our Coalition partner that which would make this country be on the cusp of great things to come. And I think, because of the fact that greater things will come, especially with an oil sector, you just cannot take it. Wait, did Mr. Jagdeo cut and run already? **[Hon. Members: Yes.]** Oh my God. And so, I wish to make that point. It is a very important point.

This party, it must be appreciated, as with the Coalition Government, must make hard decisions in relation to the sugar industry. And so, it is important that, indeed, when you do the analysis, as the Commission of Inquiry had done and completed, when you did the consultation with the National Association of Agricultural, Commercial and Industrial Employees (NAACIE) and the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers' Union (GAWU), and you heard what they had to say, and when you have heard all the facts, like a good judge, you have to make the decision as to where it will go from there and we have made the decision. However, we are going to ensure that everything that could lighten the transition, knowing very well that we cannot pour money – \$32 billion has already been poured into that industry... And it is important that all of them will be better for it in the long term. It is a terminal illness in relation to sugar today. It is not with the price that it used to have internationally. So many workers are abandoning the cane and it is important to understand that it is not being profitable. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

And so, it is important to understand that we are going to make that decision and we have so made it. *[Interruption]*

If you win the elections in 2020, you must bring back the sugar. And do you want to bet me that you will never bring it back? You had 23 years and you did not. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, please resume your seat. Hon. Members, this is what passes for a debate. Persons who do not wish to hear a speaker, shout the speaker down and persons who do that are very cognisant that this is the bastion of democracy and so remind everyone. How do we reconcile those two? How do we do it? Persons we do not wish to hear, we shout them down, and those who we want to hear, we remain silent. How do we do this? And this is what we call a debate. There are many other words to describe it but I do not know, if this is a useful debate, if I may say so, if this is how we will conduct it. Hon. Member, please proceed.

Mr. Ramjattan: Thank you very much, Sir.

In relation to the matters concerning my Ministry and the difficulties that were mentioned last year, I want to tell, through you, Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member that was asking the questions as to what had been done in relation to all that was setup as work last year... Before I go to the statistics, I need to indicate that at least one major achievement which could not have been done by, somehow, the PPP's Administration has been the 9/11. Is that not a major achievement? But you did not mention it?

[An Hon. Member: But who started it?]

Who started

it? Oh gosh. I want to say that the directed focus efforts of the Ministry, and the Ministry here involves every aspect about it, including the Citizen Security Strengthening Programme (CSSP), providing economic insertion activity for youth at-risk, providing infrastructural works to the various sectors of the Ministry, and also, in another way, enhancing the capacities of all these various sectors...

[Mr. Hamilton: How many youths were trained this year?]

Four

hundred and twenty-eight youths were trained this year, and, out of those, they were from 20 communities. They had opportunities in relation to a number of technical training, and, right now, 62 of those 428 took loans and they have gotten the loans and have started their jobs.

I want to say that, in 2018, in relation to the services of consultants for job readiness, we are going to train another 420 and that will continue until the year 2020. In 2017, this year, we are preparing, for 2018, a number of at-risk youths to do work with families to strengthen their resilience and the use of solving problems and conflicts and all of that. These are going to come and these are an additional to that 420 from Regions 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10 with skills to better resolve conflicts and promote positive parenting practices through a number of campaigns, workshops and family oriented activities; we have scheduled 21 such.

In 2018, too, the CSSP, with the Ministry's efforts, will also be doing literacy training, mentorship and cycle support for the families of these at-risk youths.

4.13 p.m.

It is important to understand that this is but yet another programme that is in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and certain other programmes to ensure our young people get jobs, get training and prepare themselves away from the allure of criminality.

I want to say this: we have also set up the platform that is going to help in all these programmes by facilitating a minimum of this 21 workshops, but also 19 community officers being appointed and already starting the work to deal with these youths to prevent violence cultivation, to prevent them from getting involved in bullying and also anger management, and, in a way, to give them improved self-esteem. I must say that this is very important because it is seeing a lot of improvements in those communities that they have started. Example: the 420 that they dealt with, a number of them from New Amsterdam and Canje on a pilot project and we have noticed an increase improvement in the quality of the kids and that, when replicated in and around the country in the 20 other communities, as was known, Kildonan, Kilcoy Chesney, Port Mourant, Rosignol, Wismar, Annandale, Angus Avenue, Agricola, Charlestown, West Ruimveldt Kingston, to name a few.

There is going to be at least an improvement with these at-risk youths in these areas that were selected. But more than that, we also have 10 rapid impact projects next year that have been provided for through the Ministry and citizen security. This rapid impact project or small community-based project is designed with the intention to provide a place for community members, particularly youth, to enjoy in meaningful activities. What we are going to do there is

to ensure that they have a social hall where they could use computers, play their dominoes or so on, a recreational centre, or enhance the community ground so they could play their cricket, football and so on.

There is a component, too, to what is called the CSSP, along with the Ministry's effort, that will foster the strengthening of the Guyana Police Force's crime prevention and investigation capacity for homicides, burglaries and robberies at the national level. We have done a number of these strengthening already; contracts in the sum of over \$380 million, last year, were awarded and we had over 12 stations being developed, rehabilitated, which would provide...and if I may say this, they would have a domestic violence room; they are so designed; they would have an information technology room and they would also have a greater enquiries area that is going to be placed. Of these 12 stations, four have been almost completed. Eight are in the process of being completed; they would be rolled over into 2018. But, in addition for 2018, we are going to have six more. And the six police stations to be rehabilitated there would be the Whim, Springlands, Parika, Baramita, Mahdia and Albion. It is important to understand, Hon. Member Mr. Rohee, that lots have been set up, have been started and will be completed this year, and lots more are to be completed next year.

These things, indeed, had to be tweaked by this Administration because, when I had seen yours, of course, it was okay, but we had our priorities as a Government and we wanted to do it. Yes, indeed, the programme started under the PPP/C in 2014, I think. But, the trouble is that it had to be tweaked so that we could get what it is that we saw as priority.

As part of the institutional strengthening of the GPF, we also have seen the support of five Civilian Policy Analysts for the GPF. They are presently dealing with policy issues and are currently working in the police Strategic Management Department. They are playing integral roles in those positions to monitor, to plan for and to create a vision that would be even more improved or a greater for evidence-based approaches in their work.

We also have seen the enhancing of the GPF's performance capacity, which will require a human resource management plan and the establishment of a performance assessment framework. This is very important for what I saw initially and the leadership of the GPF saw but could not do anything about. That was, how do you make assessment performance? We are now setting up

that framework and, in this regard, will be funding a diagnostic of police performance capacity in 2018. This assessment is expected to assist the GPF in assessing baseline conditions, identifying weaknesses and strengths and so many other things that human resource management plans would have. That is necessary because you have excellent cops and then you have some that are real bad and we call them rogue, and so we have to make sure that we deal with them.

The CSSP is also going to give support to the Police Complaints Authority. It has been doing that; five investigators have started their work there and, in 2018, we will continue that.

[**Mr. Rohee:** When did you appoint *[inaudible]*] I have done a recommendation to Mr. Harmon and we will soon talk about it. It is a presidential appointment and I will do the recommending, unless, of course, you would have Mr. Nandlall saying that Mr. Ramjattan is unconstitutional if I do the...

In any event, that has been an ongoing piece of work that I have been doing. It is important also for a policy analyst and a data analyst to be appointed for what is called the crime observatory at my Ministry. Both of them have been appointed to the extent now where they have been dealing with the data collection, but, I want to make mention of a recent programme that we launched at the Guyana Marriott Hotel Georgetown in which it is a cariSECURE programme of a number of countries in the Caribbean enhancing what is called evidence-based policymaking. The data in some of the countries, especially Guyana, was not there because it was not properly collected. There was the remnant of an Integrated Computer Information System (ICIS) that could have collected the reports from all the police stations but we had huge problems with that. It had started under the PPP/C. But, the cariSECURE programme is now going to strengthen it so that each police station in this country is going to have an IT section in the police station whereby all the reports of everyone are going to be placed into a main computer server. [**Mr. Rohee:**

It was there.] Well, I do not know if it were there. It was not working because you did not have the data entry clerks, the computers are falling apart, with all the difficulties you have. This cariSECURE programme is going to enhance that to make sure that it works, but not only work to collect the data; it is also going to be for purposes of ensuring that you have analysis of the data. And then, in the GPF's Strategic Management Unit, you are also going to have people who are going to make polices as a result of that data. That is important too.

I want to indicate that we have a lot more surveys to do and, as was mentioned by, I think, Dr. Persaud, expansion of crime and violence data. We have had some surveys done already: the household survey on licit and illicit drugs, the school survey on licit and illicit drugs and it is proven that Guyanese young kids, even going to school – the first form and the second form - start drinking heavily and we are known to be the binge drinkers in students in the Caribbean. We are also now going to do an expansion of the crime and violence data in 2018 – a survey of women, health and life expectancy in relation to all those who had suffered and become victims of domestic violence, how it affects them and what should the recommendations be. It is going to be an estimated cost of US\$280,000 for that survey. **[Ms. Teixeira: More studies?]** That is being asked for by the Members of the other side.

Strengthen police and community relations: we, in the Ministry, are doing just that. The training of a number of police officers in community policing, engagement and cooperation with them have started and, when it is being said as if we have not done anything with Community Policing Group (CPG), which is not true. When I came into the Administration, the priority was to ensure that your policemen get better vehicles and a number of the vehicles were with the CPG. I thought that it was good leadership to give the police the vehicles rather than the CPG. I have done that and it has helped. We are going to ensure that the CPGs get back some vehicles that were given to the police. But, if you feel that the CGPs should have it and the police would not have, then that is your position. Our position is that the police ought to have it and they have had it. They now have a huge number from the People's Republic of China, as you know about, and, of course, we are going to get back some for the CPG. **[Mr. Rohee: Let us hope so]**

I am wondering what his interest is in the CPG, because I noticed a lot of those Progressive Youth Organisation (PYO) boys used to be in the CPG - PPP/C people. **[Ms. Manickchand: What is wrong with that? He wants them to get the vehicles so that they could do their political work, party work like the CSOs.]**

In the Guyana forensic science laboratory in 2017, I must tell you this, too, that the laboratory benefited from the support and the expertise of international consultant funded by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), as the laboratory strived towards the achievement of International Organization for Standardization (ISO) certification and accreditation.

In 2018, the citizen security is going to invest close to US\$1 million to upgrade the laboratory infrastructure and to equip the laboratory to conduct Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) testing. I want to say that we have had a number of difficulties with that forensic laboratory because, when it was designed in 2012, it had huge problems. Initially, it was only for trace evidence testing, chemistry testing, toxicology and serology but there was a talk that it would be for DNA testing. But it was not made structurally and ventilation wise and also security wise for DNA testing. That is why I had to plead with the IDB officials to tweak that, yes, indeed, we will need US\$1 million more for that purpose to make it into DNA testing ready. That is why we are getting the money now in 2018.

I want to make mention of the Ministry's work in relation to crime prevention strategies and offender recidivism. Of course, we have had a number of interventions in this regard and we have also done some surveys. One of them has been completed from the University of Guyana and the University of Argentina, called *Universidad Nacional Tres de Febrero*. I hope I have pronounced that correctly. This survey has to do with what happens during the prison incarceration and how it affects these offenders and how they are to be treated in prison and even after prison. This was done by Dr. Scott, Dr. Thomas and Dr. Henry. It is completed and came out, I understand, recently.

4.28 p.m.

Last week or some time it was, and it is being refined by the Citizen Security Strengthening Programme (CSSP) officials to the extent of prioritising the recommendations that came. The expert conducted, also, an assessment on the adequacy of the prison's physical infrastructure and capacities. That was another survey that was done as part of the CSSP.

Professor Ernesto Owaisi's report is out.

[An Hon. Member from the Opposition:

[Inaudible]

You will get it, I will share it with you. The CSSP also had a consultant to examine models and good practices in the field of alternatives to pre-trial detention that are harmonious with criminal justice processes in Guyana, and which can contribute to a reduction in prison overcrowding and the prevention of further criminalisation of youths. That was completed by Senior Counsel Mr. Peter Pursglove from Trinidad and Tobago. That report has been handed in also, is being looked at and is going to be sent to Mdm. Gail Teixeira, at her request.

In 2018, there will be other implementation of programmes and the rehabilitation of the Guyana Prison Service. Moreover than that, we have major infrastructural works at the Mazaruni Prison that will be going on to take care of the two fires, the one that had happened in 2016 and the other one that happened in this year. It is almost \$1.5 billion as the start for the works at the Mazaruni Prison and another \$400 million for the rehabilitation of the Camp Street Prison. It is important to understand that we are modernising our prison infrastructure. These things were 120 years old. There are bad people like Royden Williams who would scratch a match and kill *Wickam* and can do all of that – we are going to get it flattened. We are doing the things necessary to ensure that, indeed, we have a modern prison. We are going to ensure that that be fast tracked for next year, and we have the designs and all of that. **[An Hon. Member**

from the Opposition: Neglect.] It is not neglect. It is neglect on your part - 120 years old. What did you do? You did the wall at the Lusignan Prison so that I could have put them there, and they flattened it. That was good. Thank you very much for that.

In relation to some statistics... **[An Hon. Member of the Opposition: Who dug the hole that they got out from.]** They dug it, not me. In any event, I am pleading with you to understand that, indeed, we want, as best as possible, and I am certain that you over there also want as best as possible, the infrastructure that will go along with the Police Force and the Prison Service. First of all, in relation to the statistics here, I have gotten the statistics. There were statistics that had been compiled by the Police Force in 2014. There is a big hue and cry as if the crimes are not going downwards and I want to make it quite clear.

For all of the Divisions, A-G, in 2014, there were 3393 serious crimes committed. In 2015, there were 3712, and in 2016, there were 3034. Up to this point, this morning, there were 2717. When you see the graph, it is going very much downwards. When you do not want to believe what we are doing, with all the police training that we are giving them - they are going to the academies in America, the training and the workshops in Panama, and all over the place. We are getting the experts to come here and we are getting the training schools to teach them and crime scene management, and even so many other different things. We have seen a decline, but they do not want to hear about that. They did not even want to believe that there is a decline in piracy, but they have to appreciate that, when we came into Government, almost every other week, there was piracy. **[Ms. Teixeira: Piracy?]** Yes, there was piracy in Corentyne and all

over the place. Yes. All the cases of robberies under arms for those four years are here and they have been reduced, so do not bother with you. I will share it with Mr. Rohee. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

We have also done a lot of work in relation to trafficking in crime, trafficking in narcotics and transnational crimes. Yes, that is why we have gotten three planes now. What makes you think that we did it? Yes, and we have two boats that are submersible and one that is semi-submersible. We have also done major interdictions that the Americans are very proud of us, very proud of us and the capacity. When we see wrong things being done, we also correct them immediately for purposes of ensuring that, indeed...*[Interruption]* We also suffer scrutiny, internationally, unlike what had happened under the previous Administration. They waited a long time for the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) to come into the country. They did not want international scrutiny, but we are literally with them, in an alliance, in a coalition with the DEA to ensure that we get the work done.

Only yesterday, I was talking to the International Board of Narcotics. They came in and they did not want it, but they asked so many questions of us in connection with what we were doing and all of that. When they saw the five-year strategy that we had and the master plan that we launched a couple months ago, earlier this year, they were pretty impressed. We are doing a lot of things and that is why we will continue with that. We are continuing, also, enhancing the coordination of our drug fight through what is called the National Anti-Narcotics Agency (NANA), which will be the umbrella organisation over which the Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit (CANU), the Narcotics Branch of the Police Force and the GRA will be integrating their efforts so that, whenever the drugs are coming from the border areas and through the airplane, even if it manages to reach the wharf, the container scanners at the wharfs are going to ensure that they get caught before they go. Even if they do not get caught, the information is going to be shared with our international partners in Scotland, Jamaica or wherever it is going for purposes...

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

Mr. Ramjattan: Thank you very much Sir. A lot was also said about what we are doing about suicide and so forth. I want to say that, indeed, that is a problem, a social problem, but we are doing our best with the hotline that we have and the coordinated efforts with the Ministry of

Public Health and so forth, to ensure that it is reduced. If you were to do the statistics, in 2013, when we did not have sugar problems like this now, there were 129 suicides. This is because the argument was made as if it was the sugar and the problems that were killing the people. No, we had 129 suicides. In 2014, we had 97; in 2015, 92, in 2016, 89 and 2017 up to now 86. It is still high. It is not something that we should be proud of, but the scale is coming down because of the work that the task force is doing with the Police and we are talking to them. That community programme that we have with the officers is also helping. So people must not say that we are not doing anything. If you do not want to see, well there is nothing that I can do about that, but we are doing as much as possible in relation to that. I want to make it quite clear because it does seem as it...

[**Mr. Rohee:** You never answer anything that I have asked.]

I think that I have provided as much answers to the Hon. Former Minister.

In relation to the Crime Chief, the Crime Chief is under the Commissioner of Police. He was on leave and he came back. If the Commissioner that is acting would like him to go to the Division, he will be instructed. You are not going to, in anyway... [*Interruption*] I do not interfere. [**Mr. Rohee:** Who wrote the letter?] What letter? I do not know what he is talking about, but that is how... [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you are on the floor and so you address the Speaker.

Mr. Ramjattan: Yes. I want to make it quite clear that he is a Senior Superintendent that was doing a fantastic job there. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Are these things appropriate for questioning?

Mr. Ramjattan: There is a time when it is indeed important for the Commissioner that is presently there, if he asks him. Let me make it quite clear. When I came into Office, there was a Crime Chief called Leslie James. Mr. Leslie James was there. Mr. Seelall Persaud, the Commissioner then, had decided that, for his operational aspect, he would like to remove him and bring Mr. Blanhum there. I said "Well fine, do it." And he did it. If Mr. Ramnarine now would like to move Blanhum from there, what is the big deal? You see, that is your problem and so what. [*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

In any event, we are not going to interfere with the leadership of the Police Force. We are not going to interfere like how the interference used to be in previous times. We are going to do it very professional.

Finally, that is why we are doing it through the British Security Sector Reform. They did not want the £4.5 million. They did not want the expert advice from the British. Just like the DEA, they wanted them out so that they could have done their thing. We are now doing it in accordance with international best practices. People who know the work and are here, their report will come out in January, and I am certain that most will be implemented. Do not tell us that we are interfering and in any event... *[Interruption]* You can say what you want.

It is very much a budget that must be supported because all that is here, in this budget, is but a continuation of 2015 and that is a journey. A journey that will take us to the good life, and by phases, we are going to get there.

Thank you very much. This budget should be commended to this House for its approval.
[Applause]

Bishop Edghill: This afternoon, I rise to make my contribution on Budget 2018. I must indicate that there seems to be a misunderstanding of what is a vision. This is because what we would have heard here all week, so far, are various Members of the Government and Members of Parliament (MPs), standing up and reading out their work programmes that were prepared by some technical officer and they are calling that a vision. A vision is not where you are. A vision is where you are going. This document has not articulated or it has not captivated the imagination of the Guyanese people to assure them that we are going somewhere. As a matter of fact, if you are admiring yourself you are marking time. That is what the A Partnership for National Unity and Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government is doing. This budget is a disappointment. It is uninspiring; it lacks imagination; it is an absurdity; it is ludicrous. It is preposterous; it is hilarious and I could continue.

Mr. Speaker, before I go into my presentation, properly, I have a message to deliver to Mr. Ramjattan, through you Sir. **[Mr. Ramjattan: Is it from Jesus?]** Yes, it is from Jesus. The message is a message that went to a church called 'Sardis'. I want to say that to Mr. Ramjattan who wanted the nation to know just now that the AFC is alive. Hear what the message

stated: “You have a name that you are alive, but in fact, you are dead.” You have a reputation, but in reality you do not exist. So, you can continue to pontificate to the people.

The reason why Budget 2018 cannot be supported by me and my Colleagues on this side of the House is because, number one - it has failed on three very important counts. Let us examine these simple things.

4.43 p.m.

Does it provide opportunities for job creation? No. As a matter of fact, while we are debating Budget 2018, jobs are being lost. Not even sustaining what existed, much less creating new jobs. Gone! So, it has failed where job creation is concerned.

Secondly, does this budget enhance the welfare and well-being of our people and bring them out of poverty? The answer to that is a big ‘no’. Our people are worse off today. If I am to be a faithful representative of the people of Guyana and bring to this National Assembly some of the messages that people have given me on the streets and in the various places, where I would have met them, I would not be able to use the language that is being used out there to describe this Administration and this Government. It is because some of the words that are used, I have never used them in my life. But I would tell you one: A common theme that I have heard across *people sucking salt*. This budget is encouraging that kind of behaviour.

Does this budget encourage growth of the economy and sustainable growth? The answer is no. This document that the Hon. Minister read to us for three hours and 10 minutes, did not name one foreign direct investor that is coming to this country, not one. It has not named one local investment of some magnitude that will happen in this country in 2018. You could check it, Sir, not one. Where is the growth coming from? The dream world of so many jobs that we heard in a report card from the Minister of Business, illusionary. Rather, what we are seeing in the country are high levels of mismanagement, underperformance, incompetence, Executive interference, noncompliance with the *Constitution* and Laws of our country. That is what we are seeing in this country.

Budget 2018 has failed to address the pillars of sustainable development, which are innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship. It has failed to address these pillars. More Government revenues do not mean that all are better off. It could also mean the opposite. There could be more money,

but it does not mean that more people are better off. We have \$267 billion, but are our people better off? Finding oil and prosperity is not one and the same. We have just learned from His Excellency, the President, in his speech in Kenya, “Look after people not just profits”. Well, I will deal with that a little later.

An examination of the allocations will cause one to conclude that evidence-based decision-making is woefully lacking. Rather, we see in here actions that are guided by pure partisan politics. Let us have two examples: GuySuCo – a lot was being said about GuySuCo this week, but I want to bring three things to bear.

One - The decisions to close estates and to send people home, like we are seeing, have been done without an economic impact assessment. If there is no economic impact assessment, you cannot say it is an economic decision.

Two – it has been done without any social impact assessment, so one is left to conclude that everything that is happening with GuySuCo is not evidence-based. It is a political decision and that is what makes the environment toxic as it is right now because of those political decisions, lacking any evidence or research.

I was part of the Opposition delegation that attended the Old Year’s Day, 2016 meeting, which the Hon. Vice-President, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, chaired. The Hon. Irfaan Ali had led our delegation. When we asked for a social impact assessment and an economic impact assessment, do you know what we were told? *We nah ga time fa da*. Well, what happened in close doors is now being manifested in the public because *we nah ga time* to deal with evidence-based decision-making. We are just doing what we have to do. It is a pure political decision.

The next case in point, that we lack evidence-based decision-making, has to do with the US\$66 million loan for the upgrade of the Sheriff/Mandela Road; works in Canal Polder No. 1 and Canal Polder No. 2; the upgrade of the road from the four lane highway, from Diamond to Timehri; the East Bank Demerara Road; and to conduct a number of studies. Mr. Speaker, do you know what had happened? That loan was reformulated. Thirty million from that loan is being used to put into the Sophia area. What is the evidence and the driving factor that has led to such a decision?

Farm to market roads, thousands of commuters that would be affected, upgrading our access to the airport, all of that have been abandoned at the altar of political expediency. This must be condemned in this House today. The infantile analysis of the Hon. Member...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please, rephrased that.

Bishop Edghill: Is infantile an offensive word, Sir?

Mr. Speaker: Infantile is a word which I would not permit the use of here.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Speaker, I rephrase. This lack of proper analysis that was done by the Hon. Member, Mr. John Adams, saying that the President's Five Gs Programme is more effective than the \$10,000 per child cash grant.

Let us examine this for what it is worth. How many students are being transported by buses, bicycles and boats? In the Georgetown area, where there are in excess of 30,000 school children, where three buses could only carry 30 children per trip, Mr. Speaker, do you know what we did? Every child - nursery, primary and secondary - received the cash grants, without discrimination, throughout the length and breadth of Guyana. That is what the PPP/C did. If it is true that it is better, I am making a recommendation here this afternoon. I am asking the Government to get an independent firm to conduct a parent satisfaction survey and publish the results. I am also suggesting that, if we believe that the pensioners are satisfied with the \$500 pension increase, let us conduct an independent pensioner satisfaction survey and publish the results.

I want to proceed by presenting some facts. The number one fact, that cannot be disputed, every productive sector has declined since the APNU/AFC assumed Office. Fact number two, Guyana has not lived up to its growth potential, the economy has underperformed. Fact number three, in the phase of underperformance, not even what could have been done was done.

I will deal only with the Ministry of Public Infrastructure. I could deal with everybody else, but I will only deal with the Ministry of Public Infrastructure. Waterfront development came to this National Assembly as if it was a new big initiative, "We are going to have broad walks along here". Last year I lifted up these same estimates and showed this House what was in the budget for this waterfront development - \$50 million. I said that would have created two jobs. I stand here this afternoon and I am almost driven to tears, not even the two jobs were created. It is

because nothing, not even a dollar, was spent on the waterfront development. Underperformance!

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am experiencing some discomfort. I was thinking that the amplification was too great. I do not know if you could assist, if you were able to lower your voice.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Speaker, I speak in a particular way.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, if you cannot lower your voice, then I would ask for amplification to be adjusted.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Speaker, the underperformance of the APNU/AFC Government continues. In the budget, last year, in this same big book that I lifted up last year, a new ferry would have gone to the North West, we heard all about that. Eight-five million dollars was budgeted. Do you know how much was spent? Zero – nothing. Underperformance!

As it relates to the Linden/Mabura Road and the Kurupukari Bridge, these are big laudable projects, “We are doing the road from Linden to Lethem and we are doing the Kurupukari Bridge across the Essequibo. Nice. In the budget, \$50 million was budgeted and I had said that two jobs would have been created last year. Not even those two people got the work because nothing was spent, zero. That is the record of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure. Congratulations on your success.

As it relates to renewal initiatives, we are talking about green growth, green this and green that. The Inter-Development Bank (IDB) has money for funding renewal energy initiatives, which was budgeted for last year - \$145 million. Do you know how much was spent? Twenty-five million. Oh my, shame, shame, shame. The Guyana/Brazil Road link, listen, these things sound nice, big projects, ‘Guyana/ Brazil Road link and deep water harbour’. Budgeted was \$42 million. Do you know much was spent? Thirty-two million. Do you know what has happened now? In this year’s budget, zero; the project is dead.

Listen, Sir, the East Bank Demerara/East Coast Demerara Corridor link, which was money that was secured by the People Progressive Party (PPP/C) from the Government of India to take away all the traffic coming through Georgetown, where the East Coast Demerara could be linked to the

East Bank Demerara. Last year, in the budget, \$81 million was for studies. I said two jobs, not even the two jobs were created. Do you know how much was spent? Zero. Come on, what are we talking about?

Fact number four – the budgets of 2015, 2016, 2017 and now 2018 seem to be creating colonies in Guyana. **[An Hon. Member from the Opposition: Why you say so?]** I am glad you asked why I said so. Let me tell you why I said so. Development in Guyana has to be equitable and it has to be across the board. We said that we cannot find the money for sugar, but listen to the reality. We are giving to Linden and Region 10, \$2.36 billion in subsidies for electricity. I have asked for the 2012 National Population and Housing Census to make sure that I do not have to have a Motion of Privilege because, whenever I use numbers in this House, people have problems. There are 10,000 households in Region 10. Do you know what that works out to? Two hundred and fifty-three thousand, six hundred dollars per household per year or a subsidy of \$21,133 monthly for electricity.

4.58 p.m.

We in this National Assembly, when we approve Budget 2018, are doling out to every household in Region 10, \$21,133 monthly for electricity.

Let us come to the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo). When you go to the sugar belt, Hon. Prime Minister, there are 70,000 households. Do you know what is in the budget for GuySuCo? There is \$6.3 billion. We need clarification because we do not even know if this money is coming from the Consolidated Fund because the figure is similar to the figure paid by the Central Planning and Housing Authority (CHPA) to GuySuCo already for lands at Ogle and at Goedverwagting. We have the information, so we do not even know if it is a subsidy, but a payment was already made. The figures are too similar; the Minister of Finance must clarify them - \$6.3 billion. If we do the Math, 70,000 households into \$6.3 billion will give us a subsidy of \$90,000 for the entire year or \$7, 500 per month. Do you know what that means? We are doing three times more for Linden, than we are doing for sugar. Let us get some equitable development in Guyana.

Let us come to Georgetown. The Minister said in the Budget Speech that Georgetown would be getting \$200 million and the rest of the Local Authority Areas (LAA) would get \$1 billion. There

are 71 Local Authority Areas, so if Georgetown is taken out, there will have 70 remaining. We have to divide the \$1 billion by the 70 Local Authority Areas. Do you know what that means? Georgetown is getting 14 times more. Let us get some equitable distribution and stop the colonies we are creating in Guyana. We must stop the colonies.

Fact number five - the Procurement Act seems to be the greatest obstacle to this Government. They wish that the Procurement Act of 2003 never existed. [Mr. Nandlall: And the Constitution.] They do not like Law and Order. We are committed to Law and Order. Follow the rules. Prime Minister, while you are talking about constitutional reforms, we demand constitutional compliance. If you cannot obey what exist, then not even the best laws that come, you will obey. It is the culture of preaches that we are talking about. Every day the Procurement Act is being destroyed.

Number six - there is an excessive over-reliance on the Force Account Unit and I have to take a minute talk about this. When one uses the Force Account Unit, there is no external supervision and quality assurance is compromised. It provides an avenue for Ministerial interference, Executive direction, and it provides an environment for corruption. I would hope that the Minister would tell us about the East Bank Berbice Road that the Force Account Unit is doing. He does not want to give it out to contractors; it is for the Force Account Unit. We approved over \$1 billion here, I was in New Amsterdam last week and the people were complaining because the road is not done. Tell us where the money went.

We got to go beyond the numbers. Let us look a little beyond the numbers because we have this nice display of fancy numbers in the House, a budget that is bigger and people are driven to tears. It is \$267 billion and all the money that is spent on education and so on. Let us go to the numbers, the numbers speak for themselves and I am going directly. I did not write this book, it was written by the Minister of Finance and the Ministry of Finance. It is not a problem with money; it is a problem with priorities. That is the problem with this Government, priorities. One hundred and forty-eight million has been added to the pension roll; \$103 million has been added on to National Events, more parades and salutes. The Minister of Public Security needs to answer to the nation. It is not the Police and soldiers. Security services, guards, \$722 million more added on. More money is being spent on security guards than on pensioners. For dietary foods, finger foods, Vodka and Grey Goose, there is \$448 million. Those are the priorities of our

spending. I want Minister Harmon to hear this. What is worse is that, for the Ministry of the Presidency, there is an addition of \$3.693 billion, and 168 more persons will be employed at the Ministry of the Presidency alone, in 2018. I asked the Guyanese people, all those young people graduating from the University of Guyana, did you see the vacancy where you could apply and get one of those fat paying jobs at the Ministry of the Presidency? No.

Fact Number eight - The Strategic Plan for the year, there is no strategic plan for the remedying of the blackout situation. Everybody in Guyana knows that we have to solve our energy problem. There is no plan for blackouts. Here is what we are talking about, a wind farm. Last year we were told about the wind farm. Where is the power purchase agreement? Why was there no public procurement? How are we to know that we are getting the best deal? Do you know what we had? The then AFC General Secretary was negotiating with an AFC financier, who had built the AFC's headquarters. That is what we were getting.

We are talking about natural gas. I heard the Minister this morning. Number one, natural gas is not renewable. It is not 100% clean. The Government of Guyana has made a commitment to 100% renewable by 2025. It is not pursuing hydropower, it is pursuing natural gas. The Norwegian consultant had said, whether you like it or not, the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project is the best project and if we do it, we will save US\$3 billion in 20 years. That is the fact of the Norwegian report. I would hope that the Minister would tell the people, whose foods are spoiling in their refrigerators because of the blackouts; would tell the little girl who has the hair dressing salon and has to send away customers because she cannot work for the whole day, when there is a blackout. I hope the Minister will tell the businessmen who have to invest in redundant power, viable capital of \$10 to \$15 million have to be spent to buy a generator to supply redundant electricity because of this blackout situation. It is costing them. No amount of bluffing or gaffing will help the country. Where is the journey to the good life?

Fact number seven - there are some things we have to understand. If we are going to have the good life, there are some things that we need to address. We have to address the issues of good governance. People do not want to hear how much we repair zinc, patch a hole or fix a road. If a man carries home a bag of tennis roll and tells his children, "Look I bring a bag of tennis roll - we have a good life". His children will laugh at him. That is what this Government has done. Here is what it said, "We are going to repair a ferry; we are going to do a road; we are going to

repair a bridge; and the zinc on the garage that is leaking we will move it". That is what you are expected to do, but that is not vision and that is not taking the country forward. "We are going to pay teachers, policemen and buy exercise books" - that is routine. What we need to hear is something that captures the imagination of the people and let them know that Guyana is going somewhere, but you are incapable of doing that because you lack it yourself. If you do not know where you are going, you cannot carry people there.

We have to deal with issues of transparency and accountability. How do we get information in Guyana, Sir? The Opposition has to say something and when the Opposition says something, we hear Ministers coming out and deny it. When they are finish denying it and we bring the empirical guidance, they go into damage control mode and offer fancy explanations. Where is the transparency? Where is the accountability? We have to ensure the Rule of Law and good governance.

We want a Police Force that is professional and not politically directed. We want a sound legal framework and respect for human rights. We want the impartial enforcement of laws and when Guyanese have that, we will have a good life. Without that, we do not have a good life. We need to ensure that the culture of democracy survives. The authoritarian and dictatorial tendencies of this Administration must come to an end. We must have freedom of the press and expression. The illegal and oppressive Broadcasting Act must be immediately repealed. We must guarantee the independence of constitutional agencies. Stop cutting the budgets of constitutional agencies.

I have with me a document that came from the Finance Secretary. It is a budget circular that went out to all budget agencies, including heads of constitutional agencies. Listen to how this Government is directing the heads of constitutional agencies.

"The socio-economic and macro-fiscal objectives and priorities of Government are detailed in the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition's Manifesto."

It is a Government's document. Do you know what they are actually telling Permanent Secretaries, Regional Executive Officers (REOs) and the heads of budget agencies? To pick up the political manifesto of the APNU/AFC and to plan their programmes around that and it was signed by Dr. Hector Butts, Ph.D. This is the document that was sent out. This was the kind of

interference. Who did it go to? It went to all the budget agencies and constitutional bodies. Are you telling the Auditor General, the Judicial Service Commission (JSC) and the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) to read the party's manifesto and make their programmes around it? That is nonsense, shame on you. It is time for good governance in this country.

If the people of Guyana will have a good life, we have to observe acceptable standards of Separation of Powers. Stop the bullying of the judiciary. Parliamentary democracy must live.

While we are talking about parliamentary democracy, I have the last Order Paper here that was circulated last night. There are 13 Committee Reports that have been languishing on the Order Paper for debate.

5.13 p.m.

Do you know including what? The Anti-Money Laundering Authority. An imagination and fixation of the APNU and AFC when they wanted to jeopardised the PPP/C they created this ten-man body. The Attorney General was sitting on the Opposition benches and participated in this. Do you know what he is saying now? Hear what he is saying now, "We do not need it no more". You put it into law and it is on the Order Paper. The Ethnic Relations Commission is on the Order Paper. Why do we not get it going? Two sittings of Private Member's Business for the entire year and even when motions are submitted, they are amended, altered and sometimes they are not treated with. This must come to an end. Parliamentary Democracy must live in Guyana and then the people will have a "good life". The censorship of the Opposition must come to an end. Opposition days must be held.

If the people of Guyana will have a "good life" and we are journeying to the "good life" then we need to have integrity in public office. Set up the Integrity Commission and file your Integrity Commission returns. All the people, who will be evaluating the projects contained in the estimates of the budget, all the moneys for the capital projects, the Public Sector Investment Programmes (PSIP) and the current projects, the evaluators are supposed to be filing with the Integrity Commission. How are we to know that there is no corruption going on there where people are getting pay off, and the rest of it? How are people going to have a "good life" when they do not have that level of comfort?

What is worst is that every major project in this country has been marred by corruption and allegations of corruption under the APNU/AFC. I do not need to rehearse the new Demerara Harbour Bridge fiasco. It is because there is a man who got the contract that did not even apply. How could somebody who did not apply get the work? How did the man know the work exist? The man had shown no interest because he did not apply and he got the contract. Do you know something, Mr. Speaker? We are even hearing... We have to go the regular way because there is going to be the denial and then we are going to bring the evidence that the money that was paid to the consultant was not the exact money because a huge sum of money towards that project came from the Demerara Harbour Bridge Corporation itself. We have the evidence.

I will use my last five minutes to bring messages from the people because, as you may know, Mr. Speaker, when this budget was read we in the parliamentary Opposition did what we always do. We consulted with the people so that when we come here we will represent their views. Hear what the people in New Amsterdam said and I am sure Mr. Ramjattan is willing to listen. Hear what they said, "Bishop Edghill" - and they are listening - "when you go to the Parliament tell the APNU/AFC that we voted for them, but we lost confidence in them." It is the message from New Amsterdam. It was the same day when the 400 persons from Rose Hall got their letters they came and met me in New Amsterdam. [Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: ... You are a bully.] Your intelligence is not working well, Mr. Harmon. Listen to what the people of Georgetown said, "We voted for them, but thank you for representing us". The people of Georgetown who voted for you are looking to the Opposition to represent them because they have lost faith in you. Listen to the message from Linden, even though they brought in their 15 to break up the Linden meeting and it went on to completion. Thanks to the support of Mr. Jermaine Figueira, who arrived and departed simultaneously with those who came. What a coincidence. Listen to what Linden said, "The APNU is looking after friends and family, not even AFC supporters". This is what the people in Linden said. Listen Mr. Harmon, because you were in Bartica recently, hear what the people of Bartica said, "We do not want more billboards; we do not walkways and we do not want parks." They said that it takes an hour and five minutes on a speed boat to Parika when someone is sick and it takes an hour and a half from the hospital to the airport when there is need to take a flight. "Fix the road". That is what the people of Bartica said. You are not even looking after the people who voted for them. They have asked me to convey their concerns to you, and I so humbly do.

Where is this journey to the “good life”? The private sector needs to see something that will make it wants to compete and make them more competitive. Before time run out of me, let me say that the miners in Bartica told me... because they did not understand it clear. The 2% flat tax that we use to put on gold sales, if it is over a \$1,000, it is 2.5%, a 25% increase. If it is more than \$1,500, it is 3%, a 50% increase and if it is more than that, it is a 3.5%, a 75% increase. Hardship to the people, that is in the book.

Our young people need the “good life.” They want to have access to the global village...

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

Bishop Edghill: Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now take the suspension. If Members, are so minded, we could consider the report from the Business Sub-committee. We can consider the document which you have from the Business Sub-committee of the Committee of Supply before you go to have refreshments, or if you so wish, you can have your refreshments now and then we will assemble at a quarter to six o’ clock. Is it that we should meet before?

Ms. Ally: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: If that is agreeable then we would meet before. It is just a reminder that the Members are Hon. Amna Ally, Hon. Carl Greenidge, who is not here, Hon. Dr. Rupert Roopnarine, Hon. Valerie Garrido-Lowe and Hon. Member John Adams, the Hon. Member Mohammed Irfaan Ali, Hon. Member Bishop Juan Edghill, Hon. Member Mr. Dharamkumar Seeraj and Hon. Member Mr. Colin Croal. Those are the Members of the Sub-committee and we will meet in my chamber immediately after we rise. Just for the clarity of everyone, we would return at twenty minutes past six o’ clock.

Sitting suspended at 5.22 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 6.37 p.m.

Minister of Public Infrastructure [Mr. Patterson]: Mr. Speaker, colleague Ministers, Hon. Members on this side of the House, Hon. Members of the Opposition, I now rise to offer my congratulations to my colleague, Hon. Winston DaCosta Jordan, Minister of Finance and his

dedicated and hard-working team for an excellent job, in once again presenting an early budget, Budget 2018 in November, before the close of the 2017 financial year.

The economic fortune and future of Guyana will be predicted on the ability to improve, modernise and expand country's infrastructure. This requires timely planning and implementation of our projects with a key to achieving our developmental goals which will enable us to continue on the journey to a "good life".

The Government of Guyana has committed to the continued development of the country's infrastructure in the construction, rehabilitation of roads and bridges both on the coastal plain and in the hinterland regions, in order to foster growth and economic development. The rehabilitation of the hinterland roads in particular would ensure easy accessibility to the locations of the extractive industries in Regions 1,7,8,9 and 10 and would facilitate the movement of people and goods to and from these locations. This is in accordance with our promise made in our joint APNU/AFC manifesto of 2015.

This Government is also fully committed to the continuous development of the energy sector, and making our energy as clean and sustainable. There is tremendous focus on solar, hydropower and other renewable and alternative resources as well as energy-efficient technologies. This commitment is seen through the Green State Development Strategy. Construction of Guyana's first ever solar farm in Mabaruma started in 2017 and will become operational in the first quarter of 2018. Feasibility studies for the establishment of solar farms in Port Kaituma and Bartica have commenced. Government buildings, including Ministries, schools, health centres have been outfitted with solar photovoltaic panels to reduce Government's dependency on the national grid.

Amongst some of the major projects for 2018, is the new Demerara River crossing, the Sheriff Street to Mandela Avenue road corridor, East Coast Demerara highway, feasibility studies and detailed designs for the first phase of the Linden to Mabura road, feasibility studies and final detailed design for the bridge at Kurupukari, continued rehabilitation of miscellaneous urban and hinterland roads and sea defence, the completion of the airport expansion project and the installation of 5.4 megawatts of power in Anna Regina and 5.5 megawatts in Bartica. Thus, the work we have started in 2015 will continue with this budget theme, *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*.

I will now add to what the Hon. Minister has so succinctly stated while reviewing the performance of my Ministry in 2017 and to provide a projection for 2018.

6.42 p.m.

However, before I do that, Mr. Speaker, permit me to correct some misstatements from some Members on the other side of this honourable House during their presentation. I see the Hon. Member Mr. Odinga Lumumba is here. He asked two questions, which I think was in all right. He queried about who will be looking at the drainage, now that GuySuCo is experiencing some difficulties. I am pleased to inform him that this would be transferred to the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA) from 2018.

Hon Member Pauline Sukhai, I have to congratulate her because during her presentation she sounded more like the substantive shadow Minister of Infrastructure. She actually visited some projects I would assume, rather than sitting at the back pew of a church and writing her budget presentation. I would like to confirm with the Hon. Member that we are doing work of over \$1 billion in Region 8, in both sub districts.

The Hon. Member Mr. Alister Charlie, I want to inform you that no member of CORE has worked three month and not being paid. You came here and you made a statement which was *waka*. You mislead the House. No member has worked for three months and not being paid. That was *waka*.

The Hon. Member and apparently substantive shadow Minister of Infrastructure made several sweeping statements, including one which I think needed to be corrected. He gave the impression that the reformulation of the loan for Sheriff Street and Mandela Avenue road work whereby \$31 million was allocated to civil works - which I think was quite deliberately to say - that the remaining amounts of moneys would be going Sophia, and Sophia only. That, of course, was misleading, and I obviously would like to correct it. Sir, the reformulated loan would be going towards Sophia. It is \$30 million, no more than US\$5 million. It would also be going towards La Parfaite Harmonie, Grove, Bell West, Eccles to Diamond. Works such as roads, drains, streetlights and the upgrading of recreational facilities would be done. The impression he would like to give also is that we were only working in constituencies that were favourable by the Government. That is not true. Some of these places are not.

He also made a very sweeping statement that he was wondering if the moneys...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I hope that you could find another word to express your views.

Mr. Patterson: My apologies, Sir. The Hon. Member Mr. Edghill also made a very sweeping statement about GuySuCo and the money which is available to the company.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, did I hear you say the word “sweeping”?

Mr. Patterson: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Well, please sweep on, Hon. Minister.

Mr. Patterson: The Hon. Member made a wide-ranging statement that he wanted to enquire if the money, which is available to GuySuCo in this budget, is the entire amount. He made the insinuation that the \$2 billion, which was paid by the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA), would be deducted from that sum. I would like to confirm that the \$6.3 billion in the Budget 2018 is also for GuySuCo.

Finally, he asked for several surveys of several different things, but I would like to remind the Hon. Member that we did a house to house survey in 2015 and he knows the results.

Sir, in order to address Budget 2018, I start at where we are in 2017. In the current account, my Ministry has voted \$7.29 billion. We have expended, to date, 87.5% of that and the balance will also be expended in the remaining time of the year. We also had capital provisions of \$35 billion, we have already expended \$67 billion and the others will be expended during the rest of the year. To date, the Ministry has expended 78% overall. For other Member’s information, in Budget 2018 we have a total allocation of \$32 billion and under the current provision we have \$7.879 billion and under the capital provision we have \$24.186 billion, giving us a grand total of \$32 billion which represents 12% of our national budget of \$267.1 billion.

Sir, under the Guyana Energy Agency (GEA), which is the designated agency to lead transitioning efforts towards greater renewable energy and by having every Government building converted to using alternative solar energy within five years, and this has been making steady progress. The renewable energy project for 2017 in keeping with this charge, resulted in an award of contracts for the installation of the photovoltaic (PV) systems on rooftops of 70

Government buildings and the 400 kilowatt PV farm in Mabaruma, giving a total of 1.36 megawatts of PV power supply for 2017. Among this complement of Government buildings, 38 are schools and training centres across Guyana, including, and extending, from Skeldon Line Path Secondary School, the University of Guyana Berbice Campus, Charity Secondary School, Buxton Secondary School, Cyril Potter College of Education and Kurukuru Training Centre, to name a few. Along with the plant 400 kilowatts PV farm being installed by the HECI, the combined installed solar PV will be an unprecedented 3.52 megawatts which will produce an estimated 4.71 kilowatts of energy annually and resulted in over \$260 million in annual savings and an avoided carbon dioxide emission of 2,650 tons.

Other notable initiatives, which have aimed to promote a culture of safety through energy efficiency, include the GEA's supervision, construction and installation of five solar power bed sheds in various high trafficked locations, the installation of 100 energy efficient street lights at the Timehri to Soesdyke village and the installation of 20 solar powered street lights at Agatash and Bartica. The GEA has also revised the design, updated the feasibility study and prepared tender ready documents for the 300-kilowatt Kato Hydropower Project, by connecting the villages of Kato and Paramakatoi, inclusive of two existing schools to the proposed hydropower plant. More than 2,700 residents and hundreds of students are expected to benefit from the proposed electricity supply. The GEA has also lent support to HECI in advancing the rehabilitation of the Mocomoco Hydropower Plant which in turn shall supply electricity to the thousands of residents in Lethem, including the Hon. Member Mr. Charlie, and surrounding villages. There has also been an advancement of procurement and tendering and financing of the 20-kilowatt hydropower plant at Hosororo, Region 1.

The projections for GEA for 2018: The year 2017 has seen continuous information of various renewable energy and energy efficient programmes and 2018 is no different, as it is projected that GEA would be installing approximately 610 kilowatts of peak grid connected and energy storage photovoltaic systems in 40 Government's buildings across all ten regions of Guyana. We are replacing approximately 10,610 inefficient lights with energy saving lamps and 14,486 manually operated switches with energy saving occupancy sensors in government buildings.

Budget 2018 has a provision of \$500 million for renewable energy projects. Some projects slated for the photovoltaic panels in 2018 are for schools. Leading it would be the Saint Stanislaus

College. I would like to have an omission for my alumni which was supposed to be last year, but it is first on the agenda for this year. The Mackenzie High School will be fitted with one as well as the Port Kaituma Secondary School dormitory. We will be putting panels on all the town halls, including Linden, Anna Regina, Corriverton, Rose Hall and Bartica and when installed we will also be powering up Orealla Community Radio Centre and Aishalton Community Radio Centre. In keeping with a promise, in 2018 we will be installing the light-emitting diode (LED) lights in areas as requested, particularly Leguan, Bartica, La Parfaite Harmonie, areas in South Georgetown, Yarrowkabra and obviously all other areas. We will be installing 10,610 new LED lights in 2018.

The Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL): Sir, under the Power Utility Upgrade Programme, the main efforts of this programme during 2017 were centred on the implementation of three major projects under critical activities of the programme and these were as follows: execution of physical works which commenced on 2nd May, 2017 regarding a contract signed for Lot A, rehabilitation of 328 kilometres of the low and medium voltage distribution centre, the total contract sum was \$22.3 million and second complement the implementation of a management strengthening programme for GPL for \$7.5 million. Key areas of focus are loss reduction, technical operations and commercial operations. Finally, a contract is being executed by an independent firm to validate and supervise rehabilitation works in the distribution network in the tune of \$2.2 million. Budget 2018 has a provision of \$2 billion for the continuation of this project.

During 2017, GPL progressed in its efforts to deliver on its mandate in the challenging areas of generation, distribution and customer service. In the area of generation, there was a capital investment of \$4.26 billion to upgrade the generation facilities at Canefield, East Berbice, which was 5.5 megawatts, Anna Regina, as mentioned before, 5.4 megawatts and Bartica 3.3 megawatts, with an allocation of \$3.3 billion for 2017 towards generation in these locations. Expenditure to date has been \$2.17 billion. The company is currently implementing measures to mitigate generation unavailability in Bartica and on the Essequibo Coast, during and before, the Christmas season by increasing available generation capacity.

On the distribution side, frequency conversion Anna Regina, \$7.6 million was allocated and invested in the frequency conversion, 50 to 60 hertz and to replenish the transformer inventory.

To that end, 179 transformers were installed to facilitate this conversion on the Essequibo Coast. For customer service, between January and September of 2017, GPL recorded an increased customer base of 2,217 customers accordingly, while \$229 million was allocated for the replenishment of the meter inventory.

6.57 p.m.

In revisiting the demand for new services and replacement of the inaccurate meters, the company invested an additional \$370 million to establish a replenished inventory which will meet the current demands for 2017 and the partial projected demands in 2018.

I would like to highlight that during November and December of 2017 generation at the respective four power plant locations, Kingston, Kingston II, Garden of Eden and Vreed-en-Hoop, was being done at 89% of the total installed capacity due to ongoing maintenance and overhauls to improve reliability in power supply. However, by 16th December, 2017 all major overhaul maintenance for the power plants shall be completed and the power plants are expected to be fully operational and available during the Christmas season.

For 2018, as mentioned, we have procured some generation sets which will be installed between now and the third quarter of 2018 in Anna Regina, Bartica and Canefield. For renewable energy, a total of 9 megawatts of independent power, generating solar power, is intended to be installed by the fourth quarter of 2018.

The distribution and infrastructure development programme, Phase II, is projected at \$3.4 billion and this programme has commenced and execution includes 2018, with four substations, Wales, Williamsburg, Kurukuru and Hydronie, plus expansion to existing substations, a new 69 kilovolt transmission structure and an estimated 60 kilometres of transmission lines with a second transmission line between Sophia and Kingston and open conductor upgrades to cover conductors. This will be done to address the frequent trips that we would have experienced at the early part of this year. Further, other important activities to be covered under this programme include, but are not limited to, the execution of network plan maintenance and loss reduction programme to realise a further 2% reduction in total losses. Budget 2018, as mentioned, has a \$2 billion...

Under the natural gas development, as queried by the Hon. Member Mr. Odinga Lumumba, having regard to the aforementioned projects to diversify our energy mix and strengthen the power generation sector, during 2017, Government has been actively engaged in discussions regarding the commercial use of natural gas from off shore resources as a transitional fuel for Guyana's economy, which will involve the landing of a pipeline to bring gas on shore as well as the construction of a new power generating facility and the design and mapping of an industrial park in close proximity to this power generating facility. Two sites, one in Region 4 and one in Region 6, are the leading candidates. A final decision will be made during the first quarter of 2018. The Government envisages this proposed initiative as a means to complement the use of renewable energy and strengthen security of supply. It is currently in discussion for studies with the IDB and the World Bank in accessing the use of this clean energy source, not only for downstream power generation, but also to support and to enable investments in associated industries comprising a nearby industrial park in the short and medium term. To cater for this timeline, GPL has invited expressions of interest, in the interim, for the development and installation of a 50-megawatt capacity natural gas fired plant.

Hon. Member Odinga Lumumba queried about the quantity of gas available. It is 300 to 500 million cubic feet per day, which is enough to power a 200-megawatt generator plus a liquefied petroleum gas plant, which will provide more than four times the annual requirements of Guyana. As to project cost, I can say for sure that it is far less in total than even the latest estimates, or the earliest estimates, of the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project and it will be delivering to the GPL at a cost cheaper than the Amaila Falls would have ever done. That is why we are proceeding with that project.

Sir, I now turn to the Work Services Group. The Work Service Group has direct responsibility for the rehabilitation and construction of all foreign and nationally funded infrastructure projects under the Ministry. Under foreign funded projects, there is the Highway Improvement Project, East Bank Demerara. As it is known, that is the four-lane highway project. All works were completed safely with the exception of thermoplastic markings for the four-lane highway improvement project. That was funded by the IDB. The Road Improvement and Rehabilitation Programme under the IDB, reiterating commitment to safety, this project provides the first set of pedestrian overhead crosses in Guyana at Houston, Eccles, Peters Hall, Providence and

Diamond. This project is almost 85% completed with final works to be concluded by April of 2018. The final works, as you would know, would be the installation and operationalisation of two lifts per overpass.

Road Network Upgrade and Expansion Project, Sheriff Street to Mandela Avenue, I am pleased to announce that, at long last, the project is coming on stream, after several years of delay, since 2013. The construction work will commence in the first quarter of 2018 and last for 24 months for 7.1 kilometre length of road. Budget 2018 has provisions of \$2 billion for the commencement and continuation of this project.

In addition to these projects, the IDB has lent support to the execution of a Sustainable Urban Transport Study for Georgetown, which I am pleased to report is 100% completed and the final report will be made public shortly. Additionally, the Government has secured a concessional role with the People's Republic of China in the sum of US\$50.175 million for the East Coast Demerara Road Expansion Project. To date, this project is 10 % completed and the Budget 2018 has budgeted \$2.8 billion in 2018.

Under the Caribbean Development Bank's (CDB) Third Sea and River Defence Resilience Project, the flood production infrastructure work project has commenced from Crane, West Coast Demerara, to Timehri for the contract sum of US\$5 million. The contract for an additional six sites in Regions 2, 3, 4 and 6 will be awarded by the first quarter of 2018. The contract has been awarded and will be signed for the works commenced shortly at Johanna Cecelia, Zorg in Region 2, Success, Endeavour, Blenheim in Region 3. Budget 2018 has provisions of \$1, 80,000,000 for the continuation of this project.

For the United Kingdom Caribbean Infrastructure Programme (UKCIF), these projects are in the design and final feasibility stages. These were requirements of the donors, even though the Government of Guyana had indicated to them that there were several feasibility studies prior, but that was their requirement. That is why we have not commenced construction as yet. The work will continue in 2018. Budget 2018 has the provisions of \$384 million for the continuation of this project, the design for the bridge at Kurupukari, the extension from Linden to Mabura as well as works on the Stabroek wharf and Vreed-en-Hoop stelling and the Georgetown waterfront areas.

Work on the airport expansion project continued in 2017. The final completion and commission of this facility will take place in 2018 with the new arrival hall being set to be completed within the first quarter of 2018. The rehabilitated departure terminal is aimed for completion shortly after. Notably, the extension of the runway to the north-east will be completed by December, 2017 while the completion of the south-west runway extension will be completed by December, 2018. I have to say a bit that one area in the south-east runway experiences some slippage and for safety reasons, we have asked to contractor to come from the foundation all the way up on that particular section, just to ensure that we receive a good project. The overall completion to date is 77% on that project and the departure terminal is 50%. The new arrival building is 70% and the north-east runway is 95% while the south-west runway is 60% completed. Budget 2018 has a provision of \$5 billion for the completion of that project.

Under the sea defence project, Budget 2018 has a provision of \$1.3 billion for the completion of the construction and rehabilitation of sea defences.

Under infrastructure development, works executed in 2017, Sir, as you would know, include the construction of pedestrian sidewalks in Woolford Avenue, LED lights in sections of the Essequibo Coast and works at the Stabroek Market. Additionally, installation works of the LED lights are ongoing along the East Coast of Demerara, Corentyne and the Essequibo Coast at the cost of US\$33 million. Budget 2018 has \$113 million for continued infrastructural works.

Under public and main access roads, the Victoria access road, along with sections of the EBD public road, will be completed for the sum of \$110 million. In 2018, there is a provision of \$130 million and some of the main access roads that are slated for are the University of Guyana access road, Hunter Street, Burnham Drive in Linden and the Essequibo Coast public road.

Under miscellaneous and urban roads, Budget 2018 has the provision of \$1.294 billion. Some of the areas targeted in Budget 2018 in Region 3 include the main access road for Bell West and upgrades to sections of the Wakenaam public road. There is also the Goedverwagting road network and sections of Branch Road, Mahaicony. Under urban roads, Budget 2018 has \$800 million for continuing works. In Budget 2018, there will be Phase II upgrades to all new towns, Mabaruma, Bartica and Lethem, Anna Regina, road to the school. In Region 4, Duncan Street

and Dennis Street will be upgraded. In Linden we will be doing the road at Victory Valley and the road to the hospital.

In the hinterland roads for 2018, we have a budget allocation of \$1.5 billion for the rehabilitation of roads in Regions 1,7,8,9 and 10.

7.12 p.m.

We have, based on consultations with the Guyana Gold Miners Association (GGMA) as well as the Guyana Manufacturers Association Ltd (GMA), some of the roads that would be done are the Bartica/Potaro Road, the Mahdia/Delem Bridge Road, the Lethem/Aishalton Corridor and Monkey Mountain to Kato Road.

Under our Special Projects Unit, Budget 2018 has a provision of \$1.576 billion for the continuation of the maintenance projects by the Special Projects Unit. Areas slated in 2018 are Angoy's Avenue, Parfaite Harmonie and Diamond Housing Scheme. In 2018, there is \$130 million for bridges. The primary bridge would be Moruka which was long promised by the Administration as well as Puruni Bridge which was requested by the Guyana Gold and Diamond Miners' Association. I have here Crown Dam and Cumming's Lodge, as requested by Members of the Opposition.

The new bridge crossing for Demerara River: On 22nd November, 2017, 11 expressions of interests were received for the construction of a new Demerara River crossing, through the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB). To date, an evaluation team has been identified to review the submissions. The Ministry is considering assistance from the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) to provide support regarding the expertise in public/private partnership funding.

After the evaluation process, the Ministry would be in possession of a short list of contractors for the Engineering, Procurement Construction (EPC) and Build-Own-Operate-Transfer (BOOT) contracts.

In conclusion, I would like to say to the Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill, not only do I commend this Budget but I would like him to travel around this country. Last Sunday, I was in Mabaruma and this was the statement from a Councillor from the Opposition side, who said: "Mr. Minister,

do not worry with what people are saying. Continue the work that you are doing because Mabaruma has never seen so much progress in such a short space of time.”

With that, Sir, I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The opportunity is now mine to offer my remarks on Budget 2018 of the Hon. Minister of Finance. I want to take this opportunity to welcome the Minister of Finance. Apparently, he was away for a few days. I see, in the Public Gallery, several Lawyers from the Attorney General’s Chambers. I thank them for coming out to hear me speak. I hope I satisfy their expectations.

During the campaign of the 2015 General Elections, the Guyanese population was promised a good life for all. Budget 2016 bore that very title. In fact, every Budget presented by the Hon. Minister bears that title. Every Budget that comes here has some adjectives added to the title “good life” that pushes the good life further away year after year.

This year’s Budget theme, for example, is *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*. The question is, how many of us would survive this journey? That is the question on the minds of a lot of people. The great Martin Luther King, the human rights icon, when he promised to take the people to the promise land, he told them:

“I may not get there with you.”

The sentiments of the Guyanese people, as they reflect upon the title of this Budget, *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*, is that they are wondering if they would get there with the Minister because every year this life is drifting further away.

The Public Sector workers were promised 20% increase in wages and salaries. Today, they are getting less than 5%. No bonuses, to which they were accustomed to under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), are paid any longer. The Guyana Teachers’ Union, quite recently, had to threaten a countrywide strike before the Government began to negotiate with them.

Sugar workers were promised 25% increase in wages and salaries. Today, they face starvation as the sugar estates are being closed one by one. The annual production incentives have obviously

become something of the past. Even those who were dismissed by the hundreds from the Wales Estate, although they obtained a Court Order from the High Court to pay them severance, have not been paid. Hence, nearly two years now, those workers are still to receive their severance pay.

The rice farmers were promised \$9,000 per bag for paddy. Today, they could barely get \$3,000 per bag. No new markets have been found for rice to replace the lucrative Venezuelan deal that this Government so disastrously handled, causing it to be terminated. Instead, the rice farmers now face several hundred per cent increase in land rents, drainage fees, charges, *et cetera*, at the Mahaica-Mahaicony-Abary/Agricultural Development Authority (MMA/ADA).

In the face of these gloomy realities, the Minister of Finance has the audacity to tell us, in the introductory paragraph of Budget 2018:

“We had to restore hope, inspire confidence and shape a new destiny for our people and our country.”

Let us examine this destiny that the Minister is shaping for our people. I will not use my own words. I would use headlines from the daily newspapers of this country: *Kaieteur News* newspaper dated 16th April, 2017 - “Economic situation forces businesses to retrench countrywide”; *Kaieteur News* newspaper dated 30th April, 2017 - “Economic slowdown threatening businesses’ existence. Unemployment rate rises”; *Stabroek News* newspaper dated 10th May, 2017 - “704 group closing two fast food franchises – economy’s decline blamed”; *Stabroek News* newspaper dated 23rd June, 2017 - “Caribbean Container, Inc announces 36-month closure of recycling plants”; *Stabroek News* newspaper dated 29th June, 2017 - “Non-performing loans remain high - IMF”; *Stabroek News* newspaper dated 18th August, 2017 - “Manufacturing sector at a standstill”; *Stabroek News* newspaper dated 23rd August, 2017 - “GBTI half year profit of \$603 million down from \$96 million last year”; *Stabroek News* newspaper dated 25th August, 2017 - “Cevon’s lays off dozens of workers”; *Guyana Times* newspaper dated 12th July, 2017 - “Economic slowdown hits Region 9.”; *Stabroek News* newspaper dated 6th December, 2017 - “Over 2,000 Skeldon workers laid off”; *Guyana Times* newspaper dated 7th December, 2017 – “1500 Enmore sugar workers booted” and *Stabroek News* newspaper dated 7th December, 2017 – “Skeldon reeling after GuySuCo dismissals”.

While the sugar workers are put on the breadline, our President is feeding baby elephants at Nairobi zoo and our First Vice-President and Prime Minister is physically being pampered and powdered in the National Assembly while the sugar workers are on the breadline. This is the good life.

Against those depressing realities, one must question the accuracy of the name of the Budget's theme. Is it really *The Journey to the Good Life Continues* or should it have been 'the road to perdition continues'?

Indeed, it is now a fact of public notoriety that there is a good life in Guyana but only for those in Government. As the rest of the nation battles for survival, the Ministers enjoy a 50% increase in salary and increase in *per diem* allowances for overseas travel. They could now travel with their spouses at taxpayers' expenses. While the ordinary Guyanese cannot get anti-biotic at the Public Hospitals, the Ministers are jetting off to Ireland where they are receiving medical attention. One ticket to that destination is \$1 million and that is before the first anti-biotic is administered.

The Minister of Finance owes this country an explanation as to how we have reached to such dismal economic debts. It is a fact that public notoriety, supported by data, that he inherited a vibrant and robust economy which was growing at a rate of 4.5 % per annum, the fastest growing economy in the region. How is it that, in two and a half short years, we have reached to this level of economic stagnation and backwardness?

In addition, this Government has inherited, fortuitously, a windfall of revenue. According to the Government, when the PPP/C was in government, \$300 billion per year was stolen from the Treasury due to corruption. In two and a half years, they ought to have saved \$750 billion. Where has that money gone? Mr. Speaker, you will stop me if I ask them if they stole it too. I cannot ask them that question. Where has the \$750 billion gone? That amount of money could have kept the sugar industry alive and could have paid every public sector employee a 50% increase in salary.

It is also known that one of Guyana's largest imports is fuel. When we left office, fuel was trading on the world market at about US\$120 per barrel. When they took office in 2015, it dropped to about US\$29 per barrel. Now it is being stabilised at US\$57 per barrel. They are saving billions of dollars annually from fuel purchases alone. Where has all this money gone?

They have scrapped the \$10,000 Cash Grant Programme for children in public schools. They have removed subsidies from pensioners - light bill and water bill - raking in several billions annually. Where has all this money gone?

The Government imposed over 200 new tax measures and increase in public licences fees which would have netted another several billions of dollars in revenue annually. Where has all this money gone? I could offer two reasons. First, the cost of government has gone up tenfold. We heard about the dietary bill. Bishop Edghill spoke of the dietary bill and the entertainment bill which went up by \$486 million from some \$3 billion. This is one expenditure. That is why our workers cannot get an increase in salary.

7.27 p.m.

The other reason for this non-accountability of this money is because procurement fraud and corruption in Government are at its highest than they have ever been in the history of this country.

The Hon. Minister of Finance, in his presentation, spoke about constitutional reform. He informs us that constitutional reform will take place in 2018. We, in the People's Progressive Party (PPP), always welcome constitutional reform. However, we do not see it as a one-off event. Our Constitution, as our basic document, is organic and alive. It must always be under review. So, constitutional reform must be an ongoing process. Under our Government, over a 23-year period, over 200 changes were made to the 1980 Constitution. So, we recognise the importance of constitutional reform. However, we regard constitutional compliance of equal, if not greater, importance than constitutional reform. What sense does it make to move to constitutional reform when you do not comply with the Constitution in its current form? Not a week passes in this country and this Government or some one of its functionaries, including at the highest, does not violate the Constitution with impunity. Repeated challenges have to be filed in the Court, seeking judicial rectification and remedy.

We have heads of departments of Constitutional Service Commissions hounded out of office and Ministers writing letters giving directions on behalf of the President to Service Commissions. Only recently, the Chief Justice was forced to pronounce on the unconstitutionality of this very issue. Recently, we witnessed another vulgar violation of the Constitution by the Minister of

Public Security, who wrote the Commissioner of Police and, essentially, suspended him from office, in clear violation of Article 225 of the Constitution, which sets out a procedure of how such an officer can be suspended or removed from office. The Constitution and that regime of security of Kenya were thrown out the window by my learned and distinguished Friend, himself a lawyer. These violations of the Constitution occur with seamless ease.

Recently, we read in the press the President explaining that it was necessary for him to give directions to the Police Service Commission to halt promotion. This utterance came even after the Chief Justice pronounced those directions to be unconstitutional, and this speaks volumes. Statements like these, including that is the Chief Justice's opinion, demonstrate and illustrate the lack of respect for the Constitution itself and the offices which it creates.

Today, we heard from Bishop Edghill, where he pointed to a document coming and emanating from an officer within the Ministry of Finance, giving directions to the financial head of constitutional agencies, telling them that, in crafting their budgets, they must have regard to the Manifesto of the APNU/AFC. Can you believe that the Chief Justice and Chancellor George of the Judiciary are being directed to go and read the APNU/AFC Manifesto in order to plan the work of the Judiciary? We have an ideological problem; we have a mental problem. It is something embedded in their head. They cannot get it out. It comes naturally to them. So, before we embark on constitutional reform, we must have respect for constitutionalism.

In a text titled, *Election Management: A Compendium of Commonwealth Good Practice*, published by the Commonwealth Secretariat, the learned authors said this on page 5:

“Constitutionalism, which is the foundation upon which a democracy is built, is the idea that – once elected – a government should be legally limited in its powers, and that its authority in continuing to exercise these powers depends on observing such limitations. The litmus test of constitutionalism is curbing the unfettered (or endlessly extended) exercise of government power and ensuring respect for of law.”

Under the caption “Constitutional Change” - listen to this Mr. Prime Minister - this is what the Commonwealth Secretariat is advising:

“Ill-considered constitutional change, especially when driven by short-term or selfish political interests, can destabilise the democratic process. Writing or amending the constitution, therefore, should only take place on the basis of a clear national consensus, following wide consultation...Such safeguards are there to protect a country from succumbing to arbitrary or undemocratic rule.”

Here the Minister is announcing that we are going into constitutional reform but we do not have an idea whatsoever what we are reforming the Constitution to achieve. No. We do not. I am sure if I ask the Minister, he does not know what he wants to change in the Constitution. Not even a White Paper has been presented in this Parliament to shed some light, at least, on the broad objectives.

This National Assembly, two years ago, approved some \$20 million upon the request of the Prime Minister to be spent on a Committee, handpicked by the Government, to do a report on constitutional reform. Such a report was done and handed to the Prime Minister who seized the opportunity to photograph himself in the press. No one has seen or heard from that report since. This handpicked Committee did not even see it fit to consult with the PPP – the party that got nearly 50% of votes at the last election. This report was not even given to the Parliamentary Standing Committee for Constitutional Reform. So, there is no clear national consensus, at all, on this issue of constitutional reform. We are proceeding along this path, blindly, as a nation, to constitutional reform.

I now turn to the Justice Sector. At page 22 of his Budget Speech, the Minister states, and I want you to pay careful attention to the language:

“...we continue to reform and modernise the justice system, in order to reduce the backlog and delays, increase efficiency, and make sure that justice is available to all.”

Inherent in this statement lies the problem. Here it is you have a Minister of Finance, seamlessly thinking that he can give programmatic directions to the Judiciary. He is saying that he will ensure that the backlogs are dealt with, not that he will make what he meant to say. What the Hon. Minister should say is that the Executive will make resources available for the Judiciary to pursue these objectives. Therein lies the problem. It is an ideological, philosophical deficit that

we are seeing, portrayed and illustrated over and over again. It is not open for the Minister of Finance to give directions to the Judiciary and that is exactly what he did. Now, I understand the thinking because that circular went out and I now understand. So, the courts have a lot of work to do in overruling these positions. But is the Executive providing the resources to the Judiciary? Let us see what the facts are.

Just two weeks ago, in this very House, we saw the Minister of Finance cutting the Judiciary's Budget by nearly 50%. The Judiciary requested \$2.7 billion and this was slashed by the Minister of Finance to \$1.8 billion, a reduction of \$879 million. In terms of its capital budget, the Judiciary requested \$927 million and this was reduced to \$310 million, a cut by almost one-third. For its current budget, the Judiciary requested \$1.8 billion but was only granted \$1.5 billion, a cut of \$262 million.

As a result of these cuts, let us examine what will happen. As a result of these cuts, a new magistrate's court, which was expected to have been built at Golden Grove or Diamond, on the East Bank of Demerara, would not be built. This magistrate's court was expected to ease the congestion of cases at Providence Magistrate's Court which is the only court hearing cases along the entire East Bank Demerara. The Court of Appeal building at Kingston, Georgetown, was budgeted for an extension at a cost of \$92 million to accommodate new courtrooms, a library and a secretariat for the Judicial Service Commission to accommodate an increase in complement of Court of Appeal judges as well. A new magistrate's court building was supposed to be constructed at Kamarang, Region 7. The old court building collapsed and the court is being held in a nursery school after classes are completed for the day. That court would have cost \$179 million. This year, massive revetment works were supposed to be done in the compound of the Berbice High Court in New Amsterdam, and as well as the raising of the floor of that building was scheduled to be done. Also two living quarters to house magistrates presiding in the Berbice region were supposed to be constructed in the compound of the High Court. Currently, premises are being rented for these magistrates. With these massive cuts, almost all of these projects would not even start.

From the current budget of the Judiciary, furniture and furnishings were to be procured for several courts throughout the country. This may no longer be possible, having regard to the Minister's reduction.

None of these projects can be described as wasteful or luxurious. They all constitute basic needs of the Judiciary. So, how can the Minister speak of a modernised justice system? How can he speak about the reduction of backlogs? How can he speak about increased efficiency in the Judiciary when he has slashed its budgetary allocations by such gigantic proportions?

The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) is even worse off. The DPP requested \$223,882,000 and that was cut to \$174,290,000, a cut of nearly \$50 million. The capital budget was a mere \$20 million and that was cut to \$14 million. The capital budget of the DPP was supposed to fund extensions to the DPP's main office, to purchase case management software, an uninterruptible power supply (UPS) system, two servers and a Microsoft computer programme; none of these can be described as wastage or items of luxury. Yet, \$20 million was considered too exorbitant for the Office of the DPP. But we pay \$100 million to special prosecutors. We paid \$25 million for a Land Cruiser for the Prime Minister, \$20 million in airfares for the Prime Minister to attend funerals and to receive awards for being Tamil, in Tamil Nadu, India. That is our priority.

The Minister also spoke about the establishment of a specialised court for sexual offences but was not magnanimous enough to concede that this was a PPP project and it was a brainchild of former Minister Priya Manickchand. The Minister also spoke about piloting a legal aid programme and describes it as a new legal aid programme, conveying the impression that this is the first time that Guyana will benefit from a legal aid programme. Someone either misled the Minister or omitted to inform him that Guyana has had a legal aid programme for about 25 years. It was originally confined to Georgetown but, from 2006 to 2011, it was expanded to Regions 2, 3, 5, 6 and 10. Under this Government, it is reverting to Georgetown under a limited budgetary allocation.

Guyana is not Georgetown. Under our Government, the plan was to extend it to every single Region in this country. Today, the Minister has announced that it will be confined to Georgetown, so we are regressing; we are not progressing.

This year, again, the Minister is telling us that a Law Reform Commission will be established. Two years ago, we passed a Bill in this House for the establishment of such a Commission. Two

years ago, we approved \$40 million in this House for the establishment of this Commission. To date, this mystery Commission remains elusive.

7.42 p.m.

But no one should be surprised, since it is the Attorney General who is tasked with this responsibility. Next year, we may be hearing that we will have a law reform commission again as well.

Similarly, in the second week of January, 2017, the nation was told that we will have a local law school up and running by 2018. There was much public fanfare in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Attorney General and two Universities of unknown quantity. Well, we are three weeks away from 2018 and we are as far away from a local law school as we have ever been. But that is the track record of our Attorney General.

Permit me, Mr. Speaker, to speak a little more about his track record. On 18th August, 2015, during the Budget debate of that year, our learned and most distinguished Attorney General told us:

“We will revisit and review paper committals, which were intended,... to speed up preliminary inquiries in Magistrates Courts but are rarely resorted to by our magistrates.”

It is common knowledge that there was neither a revisit nor a review of paper committals, as promised. In that very speech he says:

“The APNU/AFC Government will implement measures to reduce and eliminate the backlog of cases in the civil courts and improve the capacity and skills of Judges in areas of case management...”

Again, we are unaware of any measures done in this direction. He continues again:

“Our Government will seek to create a pool of legislative and treaty draft persons for the State Offices, including this Parliament Office,...”

Mr. Speaker, you could verify. Do you have a treaty drafts person here, Sir? Could you confirm what Mr. Williams said in the public? No; you do not have. That is another broken promise. He then said this:

“Our Government will... explore and increase access to alternative dispute resolutions and restorative justice and community justice services and to access legal information.”

Again, none of this exists. Nothing was done in this area. He told us:

“The need for commissions of inquiries and inquests into the deaths of hundreds of Guyanese men during the years of the killing fields...”

Well, two and a half years after, we have had no such commission of inquiry. In terms of the inquests, the Attorney General brought to this House, amendments to the Coroners Act. In a long speech, he told us that the President promised the nation that he will hold inquest into the deaths of thousands of Guyanese. The amendments which were brought were intended for more coroners to be appointed. Those amendments were passed nearly two years ago. To date, not a single coroner was appointed under those amendments.

In that very speech, he says:

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

Mr. Nandlall: He says this:

“...around the 5th December, 2014, a team of legal officers was constituted to address all deficiencies within the newly revised laws, with a view to correcting them. The team is headed by Justice Abdullah Zuru, a Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC) Law Revision consultant...”

What the Attorney General refused to say was that, on the 5th December, 2014, I was the Attorney General. I assembled the team, and all he had to do was to get the team to complete the work – a six-month project. Two and a half years later, Mr. Zuru is dead and the project is dead.

He also told us in that year that there is an office for the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) in Berbice, that a building is already renovated and there are official quarters there and there are

living quarters there. We built that before we left Government. All he had to do was to staff it. Two and an half years later, it remains empty.

Then he told us the following year that he was giving us a strong and very impressive programme. He told us that it was funded from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) project – a new justice improvement programme. He gave us some timeline on activities. He stated:

“Setting up a Law Revision Office and undertaking a revision of our laws to update them to 2015; US \$182,260 (one hundred and eighty two thousand two hundred and sixty United States dollars).”

Nothing has been done.

“Setting up a Permanent Law Reform Commission with a Secretariat for the purpose of continuously examining our laws... US \$504,150 (five hundred and four thousand one hundred and fifty United States dollars).”

This was earmarked for this. There is no commission now. Where is the money?

“Training for Judges, Magistrates and Prosecutors, including righting of decisions, sentencing, *et cetera* – US \$504,150.”

Let us give him the benefit of the doubt on this one.

Number four states:

“Disposal of backlog of cases by measures including the appointment of part time Judges to deal with the civil backlog within a specified time frame. US\$49,020 (forty nine thousand and twenty United States dollars).”

There was no measure, no part time judges. Where has this money gone?

Number five states:

“The introduction of VOICE Recognition Systems for recording evidence in the Criminal Sessions in the High Courts of Demerara, Berbice and Essequibo... US \$327,000 (three hundred and twenty seven thousand United States dollars).”

Ask anyone here, there is no recording equipment in either Berbice or Essequibo. Where have all this money gone?

Number six states:

“Introduction of Cybercrime Legislation... US\$58,200(fifty eight thousand two hundred United States dollars).

This is a total of about US\$1 million that this House was told will be spent by the Attorney General on these projects. As far as I am aware, none of these projects have taken off or have been completed. I would like to hear from the Attorney General before...

Again, as I conclude, I want to advise the Hon. Minister of Finance that there is a serious omission in his Budget because, currently, the Budget does not provide for a particular expenditure that is increasing every day. The expenditure I am speaking about is that provision has to be put in the Budget for the State to make allowance to pay judgements and costs for cases that are being lost in the Court. They are being lost by the dozens and the judgements are piling up. Only recently, we heard the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) rejecting an application. It was the wrong application filed. They said that, even if the right one was filed, they would have dismissed it because it was incredible. The Guyanese taxpayers now have to pay over \$400 million in cost and in judgement. There are many more to come.

Mr. Finance Minister, permit me, please, to advise you, that, under the State Liability and Proceedings Act, you are personally responsible for the satisfaction of judgement and contempt proceeding will soon be filed and you know, Sir, that contempt proceedings, once successfully prosecuted, carries with it the loss of liberty. Mr. Finance Minister, please be advised. I would represent you willingly because you know the type of representation you are exposed to.

With those concluding remarks, I have no reason to support this Budget. [*Applause*]

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Williams]: If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker, I, *ab initio*, take the opportunity to congratulate the Minister of Finance, the Hon. Winston Da Coasta Jordan, and his team for the transformative Budget that they have presented under the theme, *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*.

I am sure that the provisions in this Budget will redound to the benefit of all Guyanese and, in particular, the programmes of the Attorney General's Chambers and Ministry of Legal Affairs.

I will not attempt to deal with all of the erroneous statements that were made by learning Friend. I will go into my presentation and then, with time permitting, I will show the fallacious nature and the pyric characteristic of his contentions.

Let me first deal with the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT). That is something that would have been unprecedented in this country. In fact, I am not being uncharitable to my learned Friend, but, if I were to put out a list of things that he knew nothing about, he would say that I am being unfair. But, let us start with the AML/CFT.

Guyana, in this regard, is like the Phoenix, which "has risen from the ashes of its own despair" from the abyss of CFATF's reproach to rising to the head of this 25-member country organisation of CARICOM, Central America and South American Countries. The Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs has the honour to chair that Committee, unprecedented, and that deserves a round of applause, even from him. He is saying nothing.

A Financial Action Task Force (FATF) styled reporting body and a regional arm of the FATF, the CFATF's remit is to combat money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation of financing to protect the global and financial economy from dirty money, which had been the bane of this country under the last Administration, and to assist its members to be in compliance with the FATF's recommendations and immediate outcomes.

We successfully hosted the CFATF's 46th Plenary and Working Group Meetings and shaped the work programme for Guyana's year at the helm. His Excellency the President Brigadier David Arthur Granger must be commended for his unwavering support of Guyana's commitment to implementing the said recommendations and outcomes.

We have introduced an AML/CFT Coordinating Committee (AML/CFT CC), comprising of supervisory entities, including Bank of Guyana, Guyana Revenue Authority, Director of Public Prosecutions, Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU), Financial Intelligence Unit and the Attorney General's Chambers. This Committee is chaired by the Attorney General. We never had such a committee. What we had under the last Administration was an FIU that was FIU Guyana. That was what caused our being blacklisted by both CFATF and FATF.

We cannot *sit on our laurels* as we come up for mutual evaluation in 2022 in the Fourth Round of Mutual Evaluation which requires technical compliance and effectiveness in implementing the said FATF recommendations and immediate outcomes.

The Government will pursue institutional strengthening of the staff of the AML/CFT regime in Guyana and will host, to that end, an Assessors Training Seminar in January, 2018 and a Judges and Prosecutors Conference shortly thereafter.

The Special Organised Crime Unit - I think this might be of interest to some Members on the other side - continues to receive referrals from the Financial Intelligence Unit and is conducting investigations into money laundering offences involving over \$900 billion.

The AML/CFT CC has inaugurated a programme for countrywide sensitisation seminars which began in New Amsterdam, Berbice, to inform supervisory and reporting entities of the importance of complying with the requirements of the FATF and the CFATF regimes.

Anti-Corruption: The A Partnership for National Unity and Alliance For Change Government continues the fight against corruption, which has had a debilitating effect on the economy of Guyana.

SOCU, in relation to financial crimes, has conduct of the investigations of offences deriving from forensic audits that were conducted of Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies under the last Administration, involving billions of dollars of taxpayers' money.

It is in this connection that Special Prosecutors were appointed by the Government to prosecute persons charged with stealing State assets. Before embarking on any such prosecution, the Director of Public Prosecutions issues a fiat to empower them. Therefore, there is no question of any unconstitutionality in that regard.

7.57 p.m.

There are persons who like to cry unconstitutional for everything and what happens when you check the facts? They are unable to substantiate it with supplying any relevant information, evidence or facts.

In keeping with the principle enshrined in Article 13 of the *Constitution* of inclusionary democracy and participation of citizens this year, the Attorney General's Chambers held consultations and sensitisation seminars with the public on the State Assets Recovery Act 2017, something that some people do not like to hear about, the Witness Protection Bill and the Protected Disclosures (Whistle-blower) Bill to raise awareness on the Government's anti-corruption policies and on the protection afforded witnesses and other persons who assist in the investigation and prosecution of perpetrators.

State Assets Recovery Agency (SARA) - the State Assets Recovery Act of 2017 was passed in the National Assembly on 12th April, 2017 and assented to by the President David Arthur Granger on Thursday, 4th May, 2017. The Act created the State Assets Recovery Agency in consonance with the United Nations Conventions Against Corruption 2003. It is headed by a Director who is a corporation sole to recover, through civil proceedings, State property unlawfully acquired by a public official or any other person; to provide for investigations leading to the granting by the High Court Orders of Restraint and Civil Recovery, in respect of unlawfully acquired property; and also to engage in international cooperation in the recovery of stolen assets of the States within the contemplation of the Act, and for related matters.

This had its genesis when President Granger attended the Addis Ababa Financing for Development Conference in July 2015, as well as in September 2015, in the United Nations Summit where Guyana signed on to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) discussed global efforts to incorporate "recovery of stolen public assets" take notice. As a central feature of domestic resource mobilisation, particularly for developing countries, the conference committed to:

“Making the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) an effective instrument to deter, detect, prevent, and counter corruption and bribery, prosecute those

involved in corrupt activities, and recover and return stolen assets to their respective countries of origin.”

The AAAA promised to:

“encourage the international community to develop good practices on asset return, indicating its support for the Stolen Asset Recovery Initiative of the United Nations and the World Bank, and other international initiatives that support the recovery of stolen assets.”

SARA is now fully operationalised and has embarked on its mission.

The programme captioned *Support for the criminal justice system programme* is a Ministry of Legal Affairs (MOLA) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) collaboration. It is intended to contribute to the reduction of the high concentration of the prison the population in Guyana, by one - reducing the proportion of inmates who are pre-trial detainees and, two - increasing the use of alternative sentencing in the country.

In relation to reducing the population of inmates who are pre-tried detainees, initiatives include: A legal Aid pilot project under the Ministry of Legal Affairs to provide legal assistance to persons accused of minor and non-violent offences in pre-trial detention, and two - a restorative justice programme under the said Ministry to solve minor offences or disputes as alternatives to trials.

With respect to the second component, the strengthening of the probation services and the strengthening of the Law Reform Commission at the Ministry of Legal Affairs, in its role in drafting new legislation and introducing non-custodial sanctions suitable for different types of offences applicable to a variety of circumstances. This is what probably brought some confusion to the Hon. Member Nandlall’s mind, if it exists. There is nothing in this programme that limits Legal Aid to Georgetown only. Secondly, this is clear confirmation that the Law reform Commission in the Ministry of Legal Affairs is indeed something that is alive and well.

The IDB's loan is US\$8 million or \$1.6 billion. The programme is for a duration of (5) years.

The legislative agenda, and I am pacing myself so that I can deal with the real matters that I want to deal with shortly, let us get this on the record. This year, 2017, has been a very

progressive year for the Drafting Division of the Attorney General's Chambers and the Ministry of Legal Affairs. The Division has successfully drafted a total of 22 Acts. Eight Bills have been presented to the National Assembly, six of which are presently before Parliamentary Special Select Committees and two have been read for the first time. Some of the Acts passed, includes: the State Assets Recovery Act 2017; the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (Amendment) Act 2017, which increases the timeframe for investigations into complex money laundering offences; the Tobacco Control Act 2017, which aims to protect present and future generations from the devastating harms of tobacco use and exposure to tobacco smoke; the Motor Vehicle Insurance Third Party Risks (Amendment) Act 2017, to provide for the issuance of third party insurance coverage for motor vehicles coming into Guyana from a foreign country; the Broadcasting (Amendment) Act 2017, which provides for types of broadcasting zones and classes of broadcasting services; the Deeds and Commercial Registries Authority (Amendment) Act 2017, which provides for a much needed change of membership of the governing board of the Deeds and Commercial Registries Authority.

The six Bills in Special Select Committees are the Civil Aviation Bill 2017; the Petroleum Commission of Guyana Bill 2017; the Cybercrime Bill 2016; the Constitutional Reform Consultative Commission Bill 2017; the Animal Welfare Bill 2016; and the Food Safety Bill 2016. Two Bills are being presented to the National Assembly, the Protected Disclosures Bill 2017 and Witness Protection (Whistle-blower) Bill 2017.

Legislation to be brought before the Assembly in 2018 includes: the Public Debt Management Bill, Integrity Commission (Amendment) Bill, Copyright Bill, Electronic Communications and Transactions Bill, Electronic Single Window System Bill, National Payment Systems Bill, Bertram Collins Public Service College Bill, Juvenile Justice Bill, Industrial Court Bill, Gaming Bill, Local Authorities Amendment Bill and the National Accreditation Council Amendment Bill.

In addition, existing legislation will be amended to meet the Government's policy objectives with a view to the laws being more efficacious for the well-being of the people.

The Advice and Litigation Division of the Ministry of Legal Affairs and the Attorney General's Chamber - the Office of the Attorney General is the arm of the Government responsible for providing legal services to the Government and its various agencies. The obligations of these

Chambers derive from the constitutional functions of the Attorney General, and are to: One - act as guardian of the public interest, and to ensure that the rights of all citizens are protected; and two - to represent the State in civil proceedings in the name of the Attorney General.

The Office of the Attorney General provides the following services: Advising Cabinet and other Government Ministries on legal matters, representing the State in civil matters and drafting primary and secondary legislation on behalf of the Government.

In the year 2016, 191 pending court matters engaged the attention of the law officers of the State, for the period prior to December 2016. For the period of 1st January - 5th December, 2017, 352 new matters were filed for the period under review, making a grand total of 543 matters, engaging the attention of the Attorney General's Chambers. Of this number, 38% of the litigations were filed by the Attorney General's Chambers, whilst the remaining 62% were filed by the other litigating parties. Of this number, a total of 110 cases were concluded as follows: One - 45 were dismissed or discontinued; two - 37 judgments were granted in favour of the State with and without cost - you have not paid costs for some of those cases that you have lost - and 28 judgments were granted in favour of other litigating parties.

Matters on Appeal in 2017 - Court of Appeal. A total of 84 new appeal cases were filed for the period 1st January - 30th October, 2017. Thirty-three were filed by the Attorney General's Chambers and 51 were filed against the Attorney General.

Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) - there are five matters which are engaging the attention of the CCJ for the period 1st January to 30th October, 2017. These cases are on-going. It should be noted that this is not a true reflection of all the matters currently engaging the courts. Prior to the accession to Office of the Attorney General, there was no database which listed current litigation and its status. An attempt to do this was initiated in 2013 and the data has since been gathered and is presently being compiled. These matters relate to actions filed against the State going as far back as the year 1998. The former Solicitor General had introduced a central filing room to better manage and protect the States files.

Notwithstanding, the Attorney General discovered that many files were missing and could not be accounted for.

Consequently, Intuivi, a local information technology development and consultancy company, has been contracted by MOLA to design, build and deploy a customised electronic Case Management Software, which will streamline the management of court cases within the Ministry and will feature: Provision to capture all events, documents, correspondence and pertinent information for each case; a calendar of all scheduled events for all cases showing the assigned team as well; provision to easily search and retrieve all case information and documents; templates to prepare standard documents during the case lifecycle; provision to maintain contact information for involved parties; and security to ensure information can only be viewed by authorised individuals. The software will be installed on a server provided and managed by the E-Government Unit of the Ministry of Public Telecommunications. It will be accessible from all computers within the Ministry *via* the E-Government Unit providing high speed network connection between the two offices. Thank you Minister Hughes.

This approach avoids the wasteful duplication of resources by making use of State entities with the resources and expertise to manage the computing infrastructure. This is really one of the earliest problems that we had encountered, missing files given out by the last Attorney General without any record being kept in the Ministry. That included the \$400 million case, of which not a cent will go to anyone and we are going to deal with that more.

Let me continue with the registries now. We have the staff. The work of the staff, who are here in attendance in this honourable House, must be acknowledged. We could always deal with the frivolities later.

Land Registry - the 'backlog', which existed prior to the year 2015 - we would not have been in Office - has been cleared and all transactions are now current. Do you remember the fiasco that was the Land Registry under the last Administration? The public can now expect to have titles issued within a timeframe of two weeks maximum, all things being equal.

A lot of emphasis has been placed on delivering excellent customer service and our efforts have received positive responses from the customers. As such, there are no outstanding cases of customer dissatisfaction. Oh, what a revelation thanks to the APNU/AFC Government.

8.12 p.m.

In excess of 800 registers have been fully restored. That is, the previously *loose leaf state*, when the Minister of State had visited there and found all of that debris, no longer exists due to an exercise undertaken to have all volumes bounded. It was a pigsty. Well, what do you expect?

[**Mr. Nandlall:** Me?] I am warming up, you are in trouble. That exercise has been completed and it is now quite easy to store and secure these records in a fire proof environment.

The digitisation of all records at the Land Registry began in the second quarter of 2017 under our watch and is proceeding apace. Having regards to the fact that the digitisation project extends over millions of documents, the completion date is projected at the end of the year 2018. Attention should be drawn to the significant reduction in the transactions processed, compared to the previous reporting period. This fact is indeed a testimony to the elimination of the 'backlog'. Thank you Land Registry.

Deeds and Commercial Registries - the Deeds Registry is mandated to efficiently and expeditiously administer the laws enacted by National Assembly affecting land by way of transport, leases, mortgages or any other alienation thereof, as well as the powers of attorney, deed polls and miscellaneous deeds, and to earn revenue occasioned by the filing and registering of various documents which are recorded in the Deeds Registry. The Deeds Registry comprises two broad sections, the Conveyance Section and the Notary Section.

The Deeds Registry, that is, Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice and this is to be noted, has been able to earn \$683,888,000, as at October 2017. When compared to 2016, the amount earned for this revenue period has increased by \$184 million. This was accounted for by the amount of transactions that were processed for that period.

The Deeds Registry has benefitted from governmental initiatives, such as the establishment of an online web presence to provide efficient and convenient means of communication and information sharing for business purposes and to lay the foundation for the future, where electronic filing, registering of documents and their processing are deemed valid, thus eliminating personal visits to the Registry which is a vast improvement. The online website is 80% completed and should be completed in six weeks. When this new system is fully implemented, it is expected that attorneys-at-law, home owners, real estate agents and business persons, in and out of the jurisdiction, could access this online site without leaving their homes.

Commercial Registry - the Commercial Registry is mandated to administer the laws enacted by the National Assembly relating to companies, business names, trademarks, patents, designs, bills of sale, trade unions, copyright and geographical indications. This is fostered through providing a service that is both efficient and accessible to the general public.

The Commercial Registry, along with the Commerce Department of the Ministry of Business and the Rupununi Chamber of Commerce and Industry, entered into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to establish a mechanism through which business registration services would be extended to businesses of Region 9. The Ministry acts as a conduit by ensuring registration forms and fees are dispersed to either the Commercial Registry or the Rupununi Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Another identical MoU was entered into by the Commercial Registry, along with the Commerce Department of the Ministry of Business and the Mahdia Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in October 2017. Both memoranda have facilitated the smooth operations of the administration of businesses, in both Regions 8 and 9, by facilitating the process of registration in a more efficient manner. This, in turn, assists the Commercial Registry with fulfilling its mandate of providing these key Government services to all in Guyana, in the most accessible manner possible.

Hague Conference - the Ministry of Legal Affairs, in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Guyana and the Hague Conference on Private International Law, held a post-Hague Conference in September 2017, at the Pegasus Hotel in Georgetown, Guyana. The objectives of this one-day meeting were to consult with stakeholders on the conventions that should be prioritised for signature and ratification, and any related issue flowing from the conclusions and recommendations of the 2016 Hague Conference, which was also held in Guyana.

Stakeholders included children, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs), women organisations, Government Ministries, Diplomatic Missions, Bar Associations, members of the Judiciary, academia and civil society organisations.

The meeting found consensus on several of the Hague Conventions, including conventions related to the protection of children, child protection, adoption, abduction and maintenance; the

Apostille Convention and conventions related to legal commerce and trade, which would be pursued by the Government for adoption and reduction into Guyana's Municipal Law.

In light of these premises, it is clear that the *Journey to the good life continues*.

Part two, there were some contentions made by the Hon. Member, Anil Nandlall, who spoke about law revision and Dr. Zuru, may god rest Dr. Zuru's soul. I am appalled, but the law revision that was undertaken by the Hon. Member when he was in that Office was so messed up. It was in such a disorganised state that when one looked at the finish work, entire Acts had dropped out of the Law of Guyana, without been repealed. Subsidiary legislation were totally bereft from our Laws as though they never existed.

As a result, Dr. Zuru had to be retained from the Commonwealth Secretariat. He was on loan from the Commonwealth Secretariat to go to the Ministry of Legal Affairs to rectify. Do you know what the late Dr. Zuru said? Apparently, there was some apprehension that their work would not have been completed if it was done in the normal time it was supposed to done, in time before the next election. No chance was taken, just in case. As happened, in any event, they lost the election. So, when you look at the record, the record would have had Anil Nandlall's name as the purveyor of the revision.

That revision was a blot on the perfection that people have been accustomed to, in the legal profession, from Guyanese. As a result, to hear the Hon. Member saying, "What happened to these IDB programmes", all of those things that were mentioned by him were contained in an IDB proposal that was accepted by the Ministry of Finance and put to the IDB. And what happened? What happen was that there was donor fatigue. It had nothing to do with us. The *[Inaudible]* review and then let us deal with them one by one

The backlog of cases – my proposal was to hire part time judges. The IDB flatly refused on the basis that the very first exercise, under the last Administration, the backlog exercise that they had paid for, increased the backlog and enriched certain persons. I do not know why people feel that they could escape with the way they handle taxpayers' money. They are not in any position to tell us anything on this side of the House. In two and half years we have been cleaning up the mess that they left and we will continue to clean them up, that was one.

Then there is the digital recording system for the courtrooms. There was a pilot project funded by the IDB. When I entered that Ministry, someone came to me and said that they were looking for some microphones, so I asked, 'microphones'? I said that I did not know about microphones and the next thing I knew, when I went and look at the bond in the Ministry, there they were, many boxes of microphones, neatly stacked. The former Chancellor, Mr. Carl Singh, had asked me for them. Apparently, the former Attorney General had decided that he should be the one to lead this whole programme for the Modernization of the Justice Administration System (MJAS). He was the one who should advertise for the staff to operate the equipment. There was a big battle between them, to and fro, and the upshot of it all was that the microphones were hidden inside a storeroom in the Ministry of Legal Affairs and could not be access by the Chancellor of the Judiciary. That was the mess that we met.

As a result, only one courtroom, the Court of Appeal, has digital recording and the Chief Justice's Chambers. They have dealt us severe blows because we ought to have had, certainly in the assizes, digital recordings for murder cases.

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

Mr. Williams: Thank you Mr. Speaker. There was the backlog and the digital recording. I dealt with the Permanent Reform Commission, and the question of the constitutionality. I am surprised that this Government could be attacked on grounds of lacking constitutionality. The first act of the APNU/AFC Government was to pass legislation in this honourable House to make the judiciary financially independent. We have come off a period of 23 years of *jungle rule*. The Rule of Law was non-existent. The Constitution was turned upside down. They are boasting about tinkering with the 1980 Constitution and what did they produce? They have breached the doctrine of the Separation of Powers. What they have is the Chancellor, as the head of the Judiciary Service Commission (JSC), appointing registrars in the Executive Arm of the Government. What you have is a Minister appointed to administer by the President, the Deeds Registries, and you have the top two persons appointed by the JSC. The JSC, at that time, wanted to administer the same executive body that has an independent authority and an independent board, administer that body from where they are in the judiciary. That is the kind of constitutionality that was introduced by the last Administration. That is something that we will get rid of. Shortly, that will be removed because there is nowhere, that is what we are saying.

My Hon. Friend knows that they have breached the doctrine of the Separation of Powers, but we will restore the law in this country. Have no fear, we will.

You like to say that you are in control of the courts and you have just said that more cases would be lost. We do not mind that. We could defend ourselves. We have court matters going straight to the CCJ and that \$400 million case was your case, we inherited that. All we did was inherit large judgements from under the last Attorney General. There is one right now, the last one, which is for \$7 billion. Mr. McKay has sued us on behalf of Mr. Emile Elias and NH International Limited from Trinidad and Tobago. When we checked the records, the last Government did not represent the people of Guyana in the adjudication. I am surprised that Mr. Nandlall is trying to attack us. They have burdened us with all these big judgements. For the Rudisa Beverages Company case, Mr. Nandlall went and argued and that was another \$6 billion when he lost it.

8.27 p.m.

What did the CCJ say? The CCJ said that Mr. Nandlall did not lead evidence. So Mr. Nandlall cannot talk about winning cases because he has... I heard the Minister of Finance groaning that they have not given him, what do you call the space? **[Ms. Ally: Fiscal space.]**

Fiscal space. All that I have to say is that, all those who think that the \$400 million is going to go into their pockets they have another thing coming. Already, the tax man has decided that he has to get his money first. Secondly, Dipcon Engineering Services is indebted to the Government of Guyana by another \$100 million and that has to come out too. **[An Hon. Member from**

the Opposition: Why do we have to hear these people's personal business.] You raised it and the fact that you are saying some false procedure... *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member...

Mr. Williams: One last statement.

Mr. Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr. Williams: Yes Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I thank you. Hon. Members, we will take a short suspension for half of an hour and we will return at 9 o'clock.

Sitting suspended at 8.29 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 9.23 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will resume our debate. The next speaker is the Hon. Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams.

Minister of Public Affairs [Ms. Hastings-Williams]: As I stand to make my contribution, I would like to thank, the Hon. Minister of Finance and his hardworking and competent staff for crafting or putting together yet another budget that embraces our promises of a good life. Budget 2018, like the other budgets presented by the Hon. Minister, will continue to improve standards of living of our people, as the journey to the good life continues.

As per norm, Members of the Opposition will exercise their prerogative to criticise. However, I strongly believe that, if anyone is to criticise this budget, those Members should be the last. Over the past few days, we have heard tons of trumped-up reasons, as to why Budget 2018 will not deliver on our promises. An Hon. Member on the Opposition's side of the House, deluded himself that he resorted to comparing and counting the pages of past budget estimates to support his illusionary claim. Since when does the number of pages of our budget estimates determine whether or not a budget is good? Had the people of this nation had confidence in their guidance and leadership, they would have remained on this side of the House. For over 23 years, the Peoples Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), cleverly and successfully hoodwinked majority of the people of this nation by promising them populism, and then enacting plutocratic capitalism.

The people of this nation took a stance. We have heard so much criticisms about this budget, it is disastrous, a *yakard*, a big slip and slide and all these fanciful inventions about the 2018 Budget. Let me inform this honourable House that, in 2011, there was a big slide, but somehow or the other my Hon. Members remained on this side. In 2015, there was a bigger slide that slipped them from this side over to the other. In 2020, there might be the biggest slide that will surprise them and have them remaining over there, perhaps for the rest of their lives.

The people took a stance and decided that such devious acts will not continue. The magic tricks that they have worked and mastered over the course of time, by dangling social issues in front of the working class, who inadvertently voted for them, while losing sight that they were voting against their own interest, will no longer work, even if they changed course. Guess what? They

did change their course. The PPP/C once *Trumpism* of "strip and slap", while in Government, has now changed to *Gandhism* of "love and empathy", now that they are ousted. Should we not remind them of their former President who, during a meeting at Aishalton, in a macho gesture, called an Amerindian teacher "stupid", for the mere fact that he was heckling him? Should we not remind them of one of their members, who we may term, if we wish, as 'Jerry Springer', who threatened an activist to strip and slap her for fun? What about their Mr. Burns, who made violent threats against the *Kaieteur News* newspaper Publisher because he could not handle the truth? I could go on, Dr. Blight. What about their *Ali Baba* who built a mansion and a massive pool house within his first year in office? Not forgetting that *tootsie* who spent over \$3 million dollar of taxpayers' moneys to fix her smile? You can ask them to smile. They are accusing us of Ministers living comfortable lives and putting ourselves in front of the people. Let the people judge who were the Ministers smiling in comfort. Finally, what about their *Ursula* who verbally attacked the outgoing United States (US) Ambassador to Guyana? It is clear that their now self-appointed protagonist status would not hold. In the eyes of the people, they will forever be known and remembered as the lone villains.

I will now go to our economic gains. On another serious note, I would like to address the performance of our economy since taking up Office in 2015. This Government stands firm on its promises and is committed to its vision of fostering, by 2020, sustainable socio-economic development, good governance and human safety, all within a green economy. As we approach our mid-term, much has been done, and I must concur, much more needs to be done. However, our gains are numerous. In just over two and a half years in Office, we have raised old age pension by 45%. You have heard my former Colleague speaking on this about our Government caring for our pensioners. It took the PPP/C four years to raise from 2010 to 2014. What was the amount raised for our pensioners? Mr. Speaker, you and I know and the nation knows, so how could they have the audacity to accuse us of not doing enough for the elderly and the disabled?

This Administration understands the important role education plays in eradicating poverty. As a means of expanding educational opportunities to the less fortunate, since taking up Office, educational grants, in excess of \$7 billion, have been allocated. This figure represents an increase of \$2.3 billion. As it relates to our capital expenditure for roads, drainage, bridges, sea defences, *et cetera*, infrastructure that would benefit our farmers. People at the grassroots level,

commuters, *et cetera*, in 2017, total expenditure increased by \$7.1 billion, when compared to 2014. Within the same time span from 2011-2014, under the previous Administration, total capital expenditure increased by a miniscule 1.8% or \$900 million. I am not an economist, but overall, since this Administration came into Office, construction has surged by more than \$7.8 billion to \$45.5 billion. Yet, we have been accused of doing nothing. Once again, they have been exposed for their untruths.

We have all heard the slew of defamatory statements emanating from the opposite side of the House, such as "outstripping the private sector". For the records, in 2017, to offset our estimated budget deficit, and I sat here listening to the former Attorney General (AG) talking about ideology and philosophical deficit, let me inform this House where the true deficit was. For the records in 2017, to offset our estimated budget deficit, when compared to 2014, 52% or \$27 billion less will be sourced from domestic borrowing. If we were to go back three years prior 2014, to 2011, you will see that domestic borrowing under the PPP/C Government had increased by 769% or \$43 billion. In other words, within three years, this Government had reduced its reliance on domestic borrowing by 52% to fund its budget deficit, while the PPP/C, when in government... [Ms. Teixeira: ...Those figures are wrong.] You could say anything ...within the same time span, increased their reliance on domestic borrowing as I said earlier by 769%, it could be more. Who is the culprit here?

9.36 p.m.

In support of these numbers, from 2014 to 2017, private investment increased from \$125 billion to \$163 billion. If there is still any shred of doubt that this Government is not a pro-business Government, then why is it that the velocity of money has increased by 0.5 percentage point, when compared to 2014? What this means is that business activities have increased since this Government took up office in 2015. It means that consumers' confidence is high and growing; it means that this Government is clearly not outstripping the private sector as the Opposition claims; it means that the 'gloomy business environment and lack of investors' confidence peddled by the Opposition are fake news.

On export value, from 2014 to 2017, it has surged by more than US\$272 million or 23%. Yet, we have been accused of implementing failed policies. Our balance of payment in 2014 had a deficit

of US\$116 million, comparing that to US\$53 million deficit that was recorded in 2017. We can reasonably conclude that since taking up office, this visionary Government has been able to slash balance of payment deficit by more than 54%. Yet, we have been called out for our high balance of payment deficit. What is even more interesting is the fact that the then PPP/C Government dished or doled out US\$67 million from the net foreign assets to fund its deficit in 2014. While this Government, in 2017, adds \$20.1 million. Do you see the stark difference, Mr. Speaker? This Government adds to our net foreign asset reserve, while the then PPP/C Government took out from it.

If our Consolidated Fund account is looked at, in 2017 it is projected to record an overdraft of \$22.7 billion, which is 63.3% or \$28.3 billion less when compared to 2015. One year prior taking up office, the PPP/C Government in 2014 dished out more than \$71 billion in overdraft from the Consolidated Fund. Within our first year in office, we slashed that humongous overdraft by \$20 billion or 28%. Does this ring a bell to you? What this is telling us is that in 2014, one year before our general elections, the then Government raped our Consolidated Fund of much needed money to fund their perhaps "vote-getting" projects.

Now, contrary to other false news or fake news, our total debt in 2017 now represents US\$63 million or 4% less than what was recorded in 2013. Of that total, domestic debt made up US\$51 million, while external debt is US\$10 million. This clearly shows that we are reducing our external debts. An observation that warrants mentioning is the non-negotiable debenture of US\$46 million that was issued to the National Insurance Scheme (NIS), from 2016 to 2017, to assist the entity in recovering losses incurred from the investment in the PPP/C's hallmark scam, Colonial Life Insurance Company (CLICO). Had it not been for the PPP/C unruly corrupt practices, our domestic debt today would have been less. Yet, they accused us of mismanagement.

I would now come to the measures. I would now like to shift your attention to some of our measures planned for implementation in 2018 as we continue the journey to the "good life". As I studied and read the Hon. Minister of Finance Budget speech, "*The Journey to the Good Life Continues*", whoever said the journey is finite, the journey to the "good life" is not finite. Even if I am gone and someone takes over my space, the journey will continue.

This strategic move, that is, to boost the forestry sector, we intend to instil a restriction on pine wood. This move will increase market shares for our local lumber dealers, while stimulating growth. Furthermore, we intend to remove VAT from the supply of logs and rough lumber to sawmills. Lumber dealers can expect an increase in revenues which will further boost production. Since I am on forestry, I will address the elephant in the room. Yes. The forestry sector has declined over the past two years, but are we all suffering from amnesia? The reduction in production is directly linked to the confiscation of large forestry concessions held by foreign investors who were, unlike other investors, enjoying an unprecedented array of tax concessions and other incentives, while controlling a large chunk of our local market share, and even threatened to crowd out our local truckers. All of this was happening under the nose of the previous administration, as the Member sat quietly and did absolutely nothing, while our small and medium loggers and truckers were made to suffer.

Our small loggers could have never dreamt of owning their own concession. For them to survive, they had to rent concessions from other large concessioners at exorbitant prices. In 2016, this Government redistributed state forest, and for the first time a slew of small loggers became concessioners. The contracted forestry sector is the price we now have to pay. At the end of the day, it is a worthy cause, because we deliver on our promises to improve standard of living, and create wealth, especially for the poor.

Another measure that I would like to make a few remarks on is the exemption of VAT on the sale of a complete housing sold by the CH&PA. Once, again, I would suspect that the Members on the other side are not suffering from amnesia. In an attempt to reduce inequality and broaden our tax base, this Government in 2016 reduced VAT to 14%. In order for us to recuperate some of the loss in revenue, a few goods were taken off the zero-rated list. By removing VAT on the sale of housing units, homeowners will now enjoy higher disposable income. The ripple effect will trickle down to our local hardware in the form of higher sales. Again, since we are on the topic of housing, I would like to outline this Government commitment and dedication to improve standard of living of our people living in the hinterland areas and that is why you heard the Hon. Member Minister Patterson, my colleague, eloquently telling the House about the expansion programme of the sustainable hinterland housing. We are reaching out, we are not only sticking

to Regions 1 and 9 but we will be moving to Region 7 and we will continue to move and offer a “good life” to our people in the hinterland.

The amnesty proposed to delinquent taxpayers is another step in the right direction. This measure speaks to the pro-business approach by this Government. [Ms. Teixeira: What are the

statistics?] New statistics, 87 house replacements will be done in the Upper Mazaruni, and that is statistics. Granting amnesty to corporate and individual is equivalent to a tax rebate. These individuals could now enjoy higher disposable incomes, and importantly, start paying their fair share of tax without the fear of having to settle huge arrears. Only an anti-business Government would see this as a counterproductive move.

Finally, I would like to bring to your attention, and to Members on the other side of the House, a study that was done by the Development Finance International and Oxfam Research entitled *The Commitment to Reduce Inequality Index*, dated July 2017. The report, which measures Government action on social spending, tax and labour rights, three areas found to be critical to reducing inequality, listed Guyana fifth of the 80 middle income countries. This is clearly a positive message. It provides external validation that policy decisions by the Government since 2015, when the report was initiated, are positively moving Guyana towards an equitable society.

I would now come to the sector that I was responsible for and that is none other than water. We all know water is life. This is a Government of the people, by the people and for the people, regardless of race, ethnicity or religion. As I sat here listening, I wanted to know if the Members on the opposite side are actually in the National Assembly or they are on Mars or somewhere, because when I heard my honourable colleagues said that this budget has nothing for the hinterland brothers and sisters, I could not believe my ears. Under the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) which is the guardian for our water sector, in the 2017 capital programme, much has been accomplished. An Hon. Member from the other side of the House said that the APNU/AFC Government has not done anything for Guyana's first people, but the facts state quite contrary. Guyana's water guardian, GWI was able to advance training in the management and maintenance of photovoltaic systems for 14 Indigenous communities in Region 9 where 28 persons were trained. A new commercial office was commissioned in Lethem to provide improved working conditions for the staff and enhance customer service. To date, various

trainings were conducted in Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9, in areas such as management and maintenance of PV system, health and safety practices, well drilling techniques.

9.51 p.m.

In support of our mandate to improve access to treated and potable water, new wells were drilled in areas such as Yarikita, Port Kaituma, Koko, Koberimo. Works are ongoing at Tassarine and Lima Sand, benefiting over 15,000 persons.

For the first time, over 60,000 persons in Uitvlugt, Diamond, and Sheet Anchor will experience improved access to treated water through the construction of the three new treatment plants. Moreover, communities such as Timehri North, Sophia D and Sophia E Fields, Angoy's Avenue, Paramakatoi and Moleson Creek. This Government works from the top of map to the bottom of the map. Many others will experience, for the first time, improved access to potable water. Other worthy achievements by the water sector include the construction of a new water treatment system at New Amsterdam and ongoing repairs to the two water treatment plants at Mackenzie and West Watooka.

In Region 3, a total population of 105,919 have benefited from the installation of six independent transmission and distribution mains at Cornelia Ida and a well at Fellowship at a total of \$46 million. On the other hand, Region 5 with a population of 174 have benefited from the upgraded river crossings totalling \$13.7 million, Onderneeming, Fairfield, Lovely Lass, Onverwagt and Number 30 Village, all were done to improve the level of service to customers. Residents of Number 5 Village and Number 6 Village, West Coast Berbice are now receiving treated water. Region 6 has a population of 107,954 persons who have benefited from the installation of distribution mains and a transfer of connection from eight in to sixty distribution mains from Eversham to Philippi and Moleson Creek.

Also, it is worthy to mention the upgrade works done to the network at Angoy's Avenue. Lately I was there to re-commission the water system supply installed in Mara, East Berbice, benefiting about 45 households worth \$5 million. Hon. Members, these are some of the GWI's 2017 achievements, Hon. Members. The nation has witnessed how within one calendar year the Guyana's water guardian has put systems in place to provide potable water to the daughters and sons of this soil. These, I must say, are concrete actions that are being accomplished. It is not "if we

were in power” - “if we were in power, I would have.” The PPP/C had its chance and did very little, if not anything, to provide potable water to this nation.

Mr. Speaker, picture this scenario: Communities that were established and have been in existence for 60 years, and some, more years, never had access to a potable water system until this Government came into power. The APNU/AFC coalition Government is committed to developing a green economy in line with the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through GWI, Guyana’s water guardian, the APNU/AFC coalition Government is seeking to achieve the SDG “Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.”

With regard to water production and quality, SeaQuest is currently being used at pumping stations across the entire Essequibo Coast, Region 2 and other areas such as Ithaca, Agricola, Bachelor’s Adventure and Clonbrook, North Ruimveldt, Festival City, Edinburgh, Goed Fortune and Diamond. This product helps to maintain the clear quality of the water without iron being oxidised. Pertaining to GWI’s plans for the next three years, I must mention that it has completed their sanitation and water strategic plan for 2017 and 2021 which has been approved by the board and soon you will hear about more projects and plans that we have in our water sector.

Budget 2018 has delivered again, addressing core issues such as inequality, wealth generation, improved standard of living. It also exemplifies our commitment to macro-economic stability and good governance as “the journey to the good life continues.”

Mr. Speaker, I, therefore, do not hesitate to commend this Budget 2018 to this honourable House.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER (10)(1)

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is almost 10 o’ clock and I invite the Prime Minister to move his suspension.

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: Mr. Speaker, I would like to

move that the House continues to sit uninterrupted until the conclusion of our business on the agenda for this evening.

Question put, and agreed to.

Standing Orders suspended.

Vice-President and Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs [Mr. Allicock]: I am honoured to stand in support of Budget 2018. I would like to take this opportunity in commending the good work of the Hon. Minister of Finance Mr. Jordan and his hard-working team, including, our team at the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs.

I heard the 'honourable' *yackard* making statements that make him sound as though he came from the *tabia* group. I think it is because at times when you begin to lose the confidence or the control over people you begin to make these misleading statements.

The context for Budget 2018 was laid before this National Assembly by His Excellency President David Granger at our 71st Sitting. I understand that the Opposition Members, though present, would have missed that since they were more concerned with being on their best behaviour. I am quite certain you could remember that day.

I listened intently to the presentations of the Hon. Members of the Opposition as they discussed Budget 2018. I reflected, as I did, on the words of Dalai Lama who stated, "In order to carry a positive action we must develop here a positive vision". I have concluded that the Government of Guyana will receive no help from the Opposition with regard to the development of any vision, for vision appears to be outside of the scope of my honourable friends on the Opposition's benches.

I heard a number of points being made which vary the truth so much that I felt at times that we not only sat on different sides of this House, but in parallel universes as well. This budget sits solidly on the foundation of the Guyana Green State Development Strategy and targets the attainment of the SDGs. Budget 2018 speaks to holistic development. It allocates a significant portion of the economic pie to the development of Guyana's hinterland, which I prefer to call Guyana's heartland. Notwithstanding this pronounced fact, I have heard noises from the Opposition's benches suggesting that instead of bridging the gap between the coast and

hinterland, Budget 2018 widens that gap. Albert Einstein was right when he said, “Whoever is careless with the truth in small matters cannot be trusted with important matters.” I suppose that the seating arrangement in this House, therefore, speaks for itself.

It looks like only moments ago the Hon. Member Ms. Catherine Hughes, Minister of Public Telecommunications addressed this honourable House outlining her Ministry’s accomplishments and projections. Soon, every remote village will be connected through the information and communications technology (ICT). It is true that some Hon. Members of the Opposition feels that this has not happened fast enough. Guyanese waited more than 20 years as ten, maybe even hundreds of millions, of dollars were wasted on a cable, pieces of which can be found on the trail to the Rupununi, Region 9.

Budget 2018 provides \$1.5 billion for the rehabilitation of roads in Regions 1,7,8,9 and 10. It provides for the bridging of the Essequibo River at Kurupukari and for works on the Linden to Mabura Road in the sum of \$224 million. Bartica, Leguan and Supenaam stelling are scheduled for rehabilitation and completion at the cost of almost \$300 million.

Budget 2018 will see the rehabilitation and construction of hinterland airstrips in Fairview, Monkey Mountain, Baramita, Chi Chi, Bemichi and Kamana.

10.06 p.m.

The Lethem airstrip will soon become a regional air transport hub. The Hon. Member Annette Fergusson elaborated on the benefits that facility will bring and how it will open up further south, of the South American countries, and to bring businesses to allow our comrades in the Rupununi and in Guyana, generally. Tourism, we have to open up the industry and open up those areas. You must have a positive mind. We cannot remain in this doom and gloom situation. You have heard from the other presenters from this side of the House that things are there to celebrate, but we are so in the darkness, we are so below sea level that we do not see those things.

One could not have missed profile 134, Ministry of Public Infrastructure, which speaks to the allocation of \$1.1 billion dollars for the provision of an ocean going passenger and cargo ferry. Sir, there is only one ocean going destination for now for such a ferry, and that is Region 1. If

these projects, as proposed, do not address improvements in the linkages of Guyana's coast to its hinterland regions, then someone is being careless with the truth.

Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9, with a combined capital budget of more than \$1.2 billion, have proposed projects targeting improved health care delivery, improved education delivery, better roads, bridges, land and river transport and improved electricity supply, among other areas of development. You have heard it all from those responsible Ministers. This is additional to the \$3.7 billion of Ministry of Public Infrastructure allocations for projects in the hinterland region. I have not ventured into identifying the allocations to the hinterland by other Ministries. I do believe, however, that I have managed to establish that any statement which seeks to convey to the nation that there is no provision for improvement in the quality of life in Guyana's hinterland or for improving the linkage between the coast and hinterland is a false statement.

I would venture to say that the projects, to which I have alluded, are all geared toward the eventual realisation of a number of the sustainable development goals. These projects will change the quality of life in the hinterland for the better. They will improve the hinterland residents' access to public goods and services, including information. Attempts at effective development without quality and timely information has always been a hinterland challenge, but the Budget 2018 seeks to address that task.

Improved access to physical places, the internet super highway and radio, equity of access to the resources of the state along with improvements in the quality of public services are all way stations on the road to the "good life". We are only half way through our first term in Government, but our accomplishments cause our tenure to appear significantly longer. The next half of this first term journey will serve only to widen one gap, the gap in the number of seats which will separate the APNU/AFC Government from the Opposition in the National Assembly, come 2020.

In the grand scheme of development, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs continues to play its role. We continue to provide opportunities for the development of our women and young people. We continue to support the governance of Indigenous villages and communities, enhance opportunities for the economic advancement in areas, including agriculture and community

based tourism and the advancement of education and training. Hon. Member Valarie Garrido-Lowe, Minister within the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, spoke extensively on the projects and programmes that were successfully undertaken by the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs.

I wish only to mention that we have successfully trained 1,872 Indigenous youths in a number of skill areas, and that was the first batch of young people. Another 1,965 are nearing the end of their training, that will take us to a total of 3,830 Indigenous youths who possess a level of skill upon which they can rely for economic support for the rest of their natural lives and their communities. They are in a position to not say, as the last group that they had, that they do not know what to do. These are young people who are the future of this country and they are now being prepared for the contribution of national development. This is the first step away from mendicancy. It is the first step in the direction of personal economic independence. This, for our Indigenous peoples, is a major leap in the right direction. For too long they have been held in captive to the idea that sitting back and waiting for People's Progressive Party (PPP) hand-outs is the best way to live. Today, thanks to the great creator, the chains have been broken.

The Green Enterprise Development Centre, the Bina Hill Institute, will soon become a reality and we heard at length the contribution from the Minister of Education. There is where we train our Indigenous out of school youths. We prepare them for the world of work, equipped with skills and academic training in areas which are in demand in the geographic spaces that they occupy, in places where they are comfortable. We need to understand that the hinterland, the heartland, also needs attention and development and this Government knows that and it is pushing for that to become a reality. Some use the preparation to move up to higher levels of training while others simply market their skillset and go to work.

Budget 2018 provides for these young people, a greater scope and improved opportunities. It provides them with dormitories that offer greater comfort. It will provide for them laboratories and workshops to enhance their training. The Indigenous villages and communities will, from now on, produce young people who are better equipped to enter the national workforce and provide a superior quality of output. The Indigenous villages and communities will, from now on, have young entrepreneurs in their number who will possess the skill, desire, drive and competence for the attainment of success like never before.

We must, however, continue to support their efforts. Times are changing for the better and we must, of necessity, accept this fact. We must continue to work for positive change and I urge the Opposition to join with us in this regard. I make bold to say that you cannot beat this change. You cannot change it back to what it was. The resistance will be strong. Independence is preferred to mendicancy, so work with us. This change is good for Guyana. Viktor E Frankl puts it so well, “When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.”

Hon. Minister Valarie Garrido-Lowe spoke at length on projects. I simply wish to reiterate that all projects being undertaken by the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs remain in good hands and continue to be properly managed. I can assure the nation that when land titles are issued by the Government of Guyana to Indigenous peoples, they will not be taken back. That is cast in iron.

The Ministry has waited for more than two years for the National Toshias’ Council (NTC) and its executive to table its recommendations for the strengthening of the Amerindian Act. After several requests by my representatives and myself, as Minister, to the NTC, the Government has received no submissions. The South Rupununi District Council committed, since July, to having consultations in their villages, consolidating and submitting their recommendations, yet, I have received no such recommendations. All I see and hear from the media are stories about inadequacy of subventions and the Amerindian Act being a poor piece of legislation. Just the other day, the Amerindian Act was the perfect piece of legislation to address the land issue, so said the same person who now says otherwise.

I have grown tired of waiting and listening to contradictory stories from the NTC. It is the intention of the Ministry, therefore, to have at least two rounds of consultations on the Amerindian Act before the end of this year. The consultations will continue in 2018, as provided for in the budget.

Village elections shall, as provided for by the law, be held in 2018. The necessary arrangements have already been put in place to ensure that successful and clean elections are conducted. It is my hope that the newly constituted NTC executive will be free of the domination of the

Opposition, a situation which now obtains and is supported by the promise of high offices to Indigenous leaders. They have been promised ministerial positions and all these big positions.

10.21 p.m.

This type of interference adversely impacts the governance of the NTC and interrupts representation of constituents while preventing positive output.

In summing up, it is my considered opinion that Budget 2018 is good for Guyana. It is a product of consultation. Consultation was missing from our national Budgets for too many years. Its re-emergence is hurting the Opposition. That is a hurt that they could live with.

The forests producers spoke and the Government listened. The result was that Value-Added Tax (VAT) on local timber has been removed. Value-Added Tax is now being imposed on imported pinewood. You heard that before. I am just re-enforcing that.

The providers of private education have spoken and the Government listened. Value-Added Tax has been removed from education services. You also heard that.

The small miners spoke and Government listened. The tributors tax has been slashed in half.

Budget 2018 continues the positive development of Guyana's hinterland through massive development projects. Budget 2018 continues the development of capital towns and Hinterland regions and seeks to further the decentralisation of Government, thereby ensuring that the Local Democratic Organs assume their rightful roles in the grand scheme of governance.

Budget 2018 provides for the decentralisation of government services to the capital towns in the Hinterland.

These measures presented in Budget 2018 and the allocation of resources contained in the Budget are all progressive. The projects to be undertaken in 2018 will, in large measures, lead to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. Budget 2018 advances Guyana's movement along the green pathway and moves Guyanese closer to the good life which is a work in progress. These measures could only benefit Indigenous peoples.

I have heard so much about accountability. I have heard so many statements in a sort of doom and gloom situation, while we have so much to celebrate, as you have heard; things are happening. We have been able to bring the communities back to together. They have been left divided. We could do much more if only we had funding available.

There is one case where it is alleged that funding from the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission was sent to the account of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, the then Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, to the tune of \$1 billion. I would be seeking to have some help to find out what really happened to this \$1 billion so we could be accountable. These are difficulties that we face. We prefer to have that money – taxpayers' money - accounted for.

It was Socrates who said:

“The secret of change is to focus all your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new.”

Mr. Speaker, *not all shut eye is sleep.*

The good book states that young men have dreams but fully grown youths have vision. It is this vision that will pave the way for those to follow. For us, the visionaries over here, we believe in unity in diversity. We believe that, by unifying this nation, we could benefit. We have so much to benefit. We are not even 1 million people in Guyana. We all could be millionaires but we have to come together. We have to see the bigger picture. We have to rise above the six feet below sea level.

I therefore invite my Hon. Friends on the other side of this honourable House to join me and my Colleagues on this side of the House in supporting the free and safe passage of Budget 2018 as we continue the journey to the good life. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this brings to an end our business for today.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Nagamootoo: I move that this House be adjourned until tomorrow, Friday, 8th December, 2017 at 10.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Sitting is adjourned until Friday, 8th December, 2017 at 10.00 a.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 10.28 p.m.