

Official Report

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

8TH Sitting

Tuesday, 18TH August, 2015

The Assembly convened at 1.02 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

MOTION

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2015

“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 2015 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 2015-08-10.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2015, of a total sum of one hundred and eighty one billion, six hundred and ninety two million and twenty thousand dollars (**\$181,692,020,000**), **excluding thirty nine billion, three hundred and eighty six million, five hundred and eighty five thousand dollars (\$39,386,585,000)** which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in the undermentioned schedule, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to make further provision in respect of finance.”

[Minister of Finance]

Mr. Gill: Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members of Parliament, I wish to first extend my condolences to the Hon. Member, Catherine Hughes, and her husband, Nigel Hughes, on the tragic death of his mother. May her soul rest in peace.

I am proud to be a freshman Member of this honourable House and the Eleventh Parliament. I pledge to work hard in the best interest of all Guyanese and to represent the interests of the people of Region 5, where I reside.

During an election, politicians go to the electorate and promise to do good deeds for the country and their communities, programmes that will make their lives and those of their families much better than they are now but, while those with a different political ideology or affiliation are likely to reject everything we say, most, those who desperately need some relief to pay the bills and to provide a better standard of living for their children and their loved ones, believe us. They believe because we are all supposed to be honourable men and women of unquestionable character. They believe because most of them are low-income families struggling to make ends meet, and single-parent mothers trying desperately to raise their children without help from the sperm donors who left them with child. But is this what politicians do after they are elected to serve in this honourable House? Do governments really work to improve the wellbeing of all Guyanese regardless of race, ethnicity or political affiliation? Or do they, as is evident now,

waste valuable time and resources seeking retribution against the previous administration, as payback for all the years they have spent in the opposition?

Each of us has equal rights here because, by some divine fate and intervention, we find ourselves living in the same 83,000 square miles we call home. None of us are responsible for the colour of our skin or the family we are born into; that is God's will. But, as Guyanese, we are all part of a bigger family with common goals and aspirations. We have to learn to co-exist, bury the hate, and learn to accept and respect each other as members of the same family – citizens of Guyana. Our politicians have a moral responsibility to put an end to race baiting so that, together, we can find solutions to real problems to reclaim Guyana's leadership role in the region.

Much has been said about the good life in the 2015 Budget but, while the APNU stronghold of Linden is being rewarded with billions in electricity subsidies and another \$155 million to reactivate the Linden Enterprise Network, there is nothing of substance for the people of Region 5. The \$300 reduction in the toll to cross the Berbice Bridge is nothing more than symbolic for this Government to boast of having fulfilled a campaign promise. And, although I suspect this reduction will be another burden placed on the shoulders of our taxpayers, there seems to be no provision in the Budget for the allocation of this subsidy to the Berbice Bridge Company Inc. Are the people of Region 5 not deserving of a good life too?

Civil servants were promised a 20% increase in salaries but, when that is reduced to a mere 5%, and this increase is not retroactive from 1st January, as was done under the PPP/C Administration, how can civil servants enjoy the good life that is touted in this Budget? When the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) promised the people of Guyana to lower the Value Added Tax (VAT), how could the people of Guyana have a good life when VAT remains at what the APNU/AFC once considered a burdensome 16%?

Much has also been said by my Colleagues on the Government side about the glorious increase they will now be giving to our elderly. They have raised old age pension from \$13,125 to \$17,000 – big deal when the APNU/AFC had promised to double this benefit immediately upon assumption of office. The People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Administration ensured, at best, an equitable distribution of benefits to all Guyanese to help improve the quality of their lives. Our elderly received subsidies in water and electricity from the PPP/C Administration,

benefits that are now eliminated from the Granger Administration Budget. So, how would the elderly enjoy the good life when the measly \$3,875 increase proposed in this Budget for pensioners will have to be used to pay their electricity and water bills? Stop fooling our elderly.

When this Government takes away \$10,000 from every school child in the public education system and replaces that with \$500 increase in the school uniform vouchers, how does denying every child \$9,500 allow their parents to give those children a good life? Is this not removing an investment in our children's education? When 2,000 of our Indigenous brothers and sisters are fired indiscriminately and cannot now afford to provide basic food items, shelter and clothing for their families, how can the Government claim, in this Budget, to provide a good life for all Guyanese? Taking away an income from 3% of the Amerindian population creates desperate times for every member of those families. It is not just wrong and inhuman; it is downright criminal.

This Budget can be best described as plenty rhetoric and little substance. Whoever came up with the name "Good Life" as part of the Budget theme, should have named it 'Good Lie' instead. Throughout his Budget presentation, we have heard the learned Minister of Finance, the Hon. Winston Jordan, refer to accounting systems that were corrupt and the mismanagement of funds by the previous PPP/C Administration. We were told that the PPP/C Government mismanaged the PetroCaribe Fund and stole billions of dollars and Government assets from the taxpayers. But I must remind my Colleagues on both sides of this honourable House that, just a few years ago, the Hon. Winston Jordan served as Budget Director and, later, as Advisor to the Minister of Finance in a previous PPP/C Administration. Because of the positions he held, he would have been privy to any unscrupulous rapping of the Treasury he is now alluding to, if, in fact, that really existed. If he knew then that the accounting system was corrupt and the PetroCaribe Fund mismanaged, why did he choose to be part of a corrupt Administration or associated with it for so long while keeping his mouth shut all this time?

I believe this allegation of PPP/C corruption, as presented in the 2015 Budget, presents a credibility problem for the Hon. Minister of Finance. A reason had to be given for the inability of Government to reduce the VAT and to honour their commitment to raise public servants salaries by 20%. So, instead of admitting to being unrealistically overgenerous with their promises on the campaign trail, they blame it all on the evil PPP/C. What is new? Our Opposition Leader said it

best: “If the Treasury was empty, how then a budget larger than any other budget in our history, with a lower deficit, could have been presented to this honourable House? Credibility issues will also have to be debated.”

I am given the responsibility to serve in three sectors that I have tremendous interests in: tourism, labour and public security. I intend to work tirelessly with my other Members of those Committees to ensure checks and balances through transparency and accountable.

1.17 p.m.

Guyana is unique compared to other parts of the Caribbean and has tremendous potential for tourism but, as a tourist destination, Guyana cannot compete for the same market as Trinidad, Barbados and the rest of the region, for Guyana does not have white sandy beaches and blue waters. But Guyana has a product that is in demand and that is marketable, the beauty of nature. There is a huge market for ecotourism, the kind that Guyana offers and needs to focus on.

We, in the People’s Progressive Party, are proud that our accomplishments in this sector, building the Guyana brand, as evident by the leading organisations in the world promoting our destination, and the significant initiative of the Cheddi Jagan International Airport expansion, which is a cornerstone of promoting this sector. We are pleased that this Government has finally acknowledged that this must continue.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have seven minutes more.

Mr. Gill: More hotels have been built to international standards and the expansion of the Ogle Airport as an international hub is yet another major accomplishment of the PPP/C in building the Guyana brand. This helps to accelerate our entry into the wider tourism market, as most of our visitors now are Guyanese returning home on vacation from the diaspora.

Tourism, however, cannot be developed in a haphazard way if we expect to see long-term growth. Tourism is a delicate industry that must be carefully nurtured in its infancy. We must not harbour grand delusions that Guyana is ready for tourism; we are not there yet. Resources need to be targeted in special areas to develop the quality, hassle-free services that are the hallmark of the tourism industry the world over.

We need to accelerate and intensify the training of those now employed in the hospitality business and I am pleased that this has already begun. Excellent customer service is practically non-existent in Guyana. Those employed in the hospitality business and utility companies need to be properly trained to provide the quality, professional customer service that is required of them.

We also need to protect the tourist-driver and our own motorists from running off dark, dismal roads at night or from crashing into some stray animal on their way to Berbice. Our roadways need adequate street lighting and must be clearly marked with reflector paint, with glass beads that glow in the dark. This investment will save lives and reduce the carnage we are now having on our roadways, daily, but there is no provision in this Budget for this.

This Government needs to find the solution to the lawlessness seen every day on our streets and sidewalks to make Guyana more marketable for tourism.

Mr. Speaker: You have two minutes more, sir.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, there has been a discussion between the Whips where the backbenchers were given 20 minutes. I noticed, in the printed document, that he keeps saying 15 minutes. However, whether there is an agreement between the Whips or not, Sir, under Standing Order No. 38(9), I am moving that the Hon. Member, when his time expires, be given an additional time to conclude. He has a speech that is 20 minutes exactly and I am asking your support for this. Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. I know that when the speaker is addressing the Assembly, he will be allowed to do so. I thank you. The Speaker is guided by the listing and times provided. I am fully knowledgeable of the Hon. Members. Very few Members, yesterday, stuck to their time; very few Hon. Members were asked to end their speeches at the time given. It is no exception today. The present speaker has been on the floor for 14 minutes and 54 seconds when the Hon. Member rose to ask for further time. The Speaker does exercise certain amount of leniency in relation to the time. I will allow the Hon. Member, who was speaking, a further five minutes to complete his presentation. Thank you.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tourism will not thrive in a crime-infested environment. This industry and the image of our country will be severely damaged on the world market if the crime rate is not reduced to a manageable level. I agree with the Hon. Minister of Finance that the crime situation is the most pressing and most depressing problem facing the nation today. But, here again, he blames it all on the PPP/C Administration, as they normally do. Since mid-May, gun-related crimes and murders have escalated way out of control and this Government, with all the ex-military personnel available as advisors, has no plan and seems incapable of stopping it.

Based on the ad hoc way this Government seems to be running things, it seems that very little or no planning at all was done by the APNU/AFC in any sector to prepare its Members for assumption of office pre-election. And the hasty dismissal of key personnel in various Ministries has now left this Administration governing by trial and error.

The Government of Guyana now has a brand new Ministry, headed by the Hon. Winston Felix. In his column dated 13th August, 2015, in the *Kaieteur News*, political activist and friend of this Government, Freddie Kissoon, wrote:

“Trust me! I am on the ground where I hear the vibes from all types of citizens. Guyanese found the Ministry of Citizenship absolutely amusing. They still do.

I see the large Cabinet as a mistake. I see the Ministry of Citizenship as a mistake. I see the Trotman double portfolio as a mistake.”

For once, I agree with Freddie Kissoon. The Ministry of Citizenship is not just a mistake; it is an additional burden on our taxpayers to provide lucrative jobs to high positions for those loyal APNU/AFC supporters. Immigration is a police function. Why this dichotomy?

With all the security experts they have, the Granger Administration should have had a strategic plan, well prepared to hit the ground running on the first day of office. Instead, the creation and distribution of Ministries and the witch-hunting of PPP/C officials took precedence and gave the criminals the freedom to wreak havoc in our homes and places of business, and open old wounds of atrocities committed by “Fine Man” and his gang of ruthless killers some seven years ago.

I will wrap up now, Mr. Speaker.

The Guyana Police Force needs a complete overhaul of its operations and infrastructures to be an effective, proactive crime-fighting unit. Our police officers need to be respected by citizens and their civilian authority. Most police officers work in deplorable conditions and desperately need new office facilities and furniture. They need new technology and more vehicles to fight crime.

The previous PPP/C Administration spent hundreds of billions of dollars to train and equip the Guyana Police Force with the latest technology, boats and vehicles. But, as crime escalates to deadly levels, our security Forces need further training and more sophisticated weaponry to outgun and outfox the criminals. And they must have the training and ability to dispatch a rapid response team at a moment's notice. But they also need that 20% salary increase that was promised to them and I am afraid there will not be enough in the \$11.9 billion budget allocation for this to happen.

As I conclude my presentation, these debates will demonstrate: one, our accomplishments in the building of our nation from an empty Treasury to one where a new Government can propose a budget of this magnitude; two, the building blocks of a nation poised to move to version 2.0 as we outlined in our 2015 campaign and one which we plan to continue to advocate for the benefit of our nation; three, a better life is not about political rhetoric, but about an integrated approach to managing the business of our nation; and, four, that a discriminatory approach, as is obvious in the current version of the 2015 Budget, will not be accepted.

These debates will be about our continued success as a nation and, indeed, a better life for all of our people. I fully intend to be a voice to be heard and that our vision for this nation, as outlined in version 2.0 of our Manifesto, is given priority for the benefit of all Guyanese.

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

Minister within the Ministry of Education [Ms. Henry]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon Members of this House, I rise to make my contribution to this year's Budget debate. Before I begin my presentation, I would like to congratulate the Speaker of the National Assembly, Dr. Scotland, on his appointment as Speaker of this honourable House.

Secondly, to the Hon. Minister of Tourism, Mrs. Catherine Hughes, I ask that you accept my sincere condolences on the passing of your mother-in-law. May the good Lord guide and protect you and your family in this time of grief.

I would now like to turn my attention to my presentation. I have to say that it would be remiss of me if I were not to commend the Hon. Minister of Finance for his exceptional and cogent presentation of the Government of Guyana's Budget for the year 2015.

This year's Budget is very cross-cutting, comprehensive and cross-sectorial. There is a lot to be thankful for. I thank the APNU/AFC Government, this great coalition, which policies and philosophies, like my own, put people first.

There are a lot of ordinary people who are very thankful, like the child from Berbice High School, who sent me this thank you card, and many others who commute daily on the Berbice Bridge. They understand what it means to save a few dollars here and a few dollars there. They are the real people and every dollar matters.

As I speak on the issue of being thankful, I could not help but think of the pensioners. A pensioner came up to me in the market and said, "God don't come but he does send." Many of them have said, publicly, how thankful they are for the significant increase in their pension offered by the APNU/AFC Government. This is not to be taken lightly. I can relate to their thankfulness. As the Hon. Minister of Finance posited in his Budget presentation:

"All Guyanese yearn for the good life - one in which the country's patrimony is exploited in a sustainable and responsible manner that caters for future generations; where they have good jobs providing permanent incomes; where they have access to decent affordable housing, health care, pure water, sanitation and, of course, quality education. Our Government commits to providing that quality life."

1.32 p.m.

We in this Government understand the potential of education. It is enormous. Education not only informs people, it can change them. It is a means for personal enlightenment and for cultural

renewal. Education is not only central to sustainable development. In fact, it is humanity's best hope and most effective means in the quest to achieving sustainable development.

Allow me to quote His Excellency, Brigadier David Arthur Granger, who spoke of the good life concept while addressing the launch of the University of the West Indies (UWI) South Campus of St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago on 31st July this year. His Excellency said:

“Investments in education are therefore investments in the good life.

Higher education in the Caribbean, to my mind, is at the center of regional integration and human development. As a start, however, Caribbean states and peoples must cooperate with each other, not compete with each other, in order to achieve our common goals. The Caribbean is a unique community. Our language, our location, our political culture and our diversity should be seen as assets, not liabilities.”

Taking a cue from His Excellency, education, in this context, must help the Guyanese people, not merely to survive, but to thrive in this place our foreparents made their home. We must be able to look beyond our painful past, our differences, and even our current condition. We must develop the capacity to conceptualise a collective future made possible by a transformative education system.

Education, in general, has three tasks. Firstly, education must help to build an economy that is more resilient than the one we inherited from the planters and landlords. We have to build one that can compete with the eagles in the west and the tigers in the east.

Secondly, through education, we must build more cohesive societies in which the people are educated to surpass their outdated social and class differences and pretences. Our societies must eliminate inequalities and eradicate extreme poverty.

Thirdly, through education we must build a more inclusive political system where, by and large, people can be empowered to participate fully in local and national democratic organs and can feel confident in their elected representatives.

Quality education in Guyana, therefore, can no longer be treated as a privilege to a few. Education will function best when inequalities and disparities are removed, when access is

improved, and when an increasing number of persons can be better prepared to be citizens of the 21st century society.

A key pillar of education is learning how to live together in peace and harmony. This involves, firstly, strengthening one's own identity, self-worth and self-confidence, and, then, learning to appreciate the cultures of others; to respect others as individuals and groups; and to apply the same ethical principles to decisions about other people that one would apply within one's own culture. These are the key learnings for life in the 21st century.

As we have seen and experienced here in Guyana, change is essential and inevitable. As was posited by the Hon. Minister of Business in his presentation, we must reform our educational system to produce graduates who have the knowledge and skills to allow the country's industries and businesses to compete globally. We must also be innovative and focused on long-term value creation, not short-term profit-making.

Education was and still is the vehicle through which we can achieve the good life. Our people want a good life; they deserve a good life. We are blessed with sufficient talent and resources to ensure a good life for all. We need not be poor; we need not be ignorant; we need not suffer from debilitating lifestyle diseases; and certainly, we need not be victims of violent crimes. This Government is committed to the objective of securing a good life for all. It is for this reason that this Government will invest \$33 billion or 14.9% of the national budget in the education sector this year.

Let me turn my attention to our youth, our future. I have to say that for the past three months the staff at the Ministry of Education, Department of Culture, Youth and Sport, have been challenged to do things differently – to think out of the box; to meet the youths where they are; to consider that the needs of our youths are changing; and to appreciate that the programmes offered by the Ministry must constantly evolve to meet these needs. I thank the staff for their resilience and commitment.

We, on this side of the House, recognise youths in the national development process as critical to the long term growth of Guyana. It is for this reason that we have two Ministers, instead of one, who are responsible for youth affairs.

As was pointed out by the Hon. Minister of Finance in his Budget Presentation, a recent study by the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) has put youth unemployment in Guyana in the region of 40%, a staggering percentage when it is considered that 60-65% of the population is aged 40 years and below.

I want to say to our young people that we in this House are here to help you fashion the vision and develop the conviction to chart a course for your personal empowerment.

I would like to be very specific as I outline the Government's strategic approach to youth development. This Government has, first of all, continued to develop, modify and implement policies relating to empowerment of our youth. We will also develop programmes aimed to economically empower our young people. We will conduct youth development training programmes using evidence-based strategies. We will create a platform that fosters consultation on youth related issues, recognition, and youth participation in social and economic development. Additionally, we will expand the skills development programme and follow up initiatives to ensure they result in sustainable job creation. These strategies I outlined certainly do not exhaust the list of initiatives that we have begun and will continue to embark upon.

The data, both anecdotal and empirical, suggests that after 23 years of PPP/C leadership the main challenges affecting our young people are high unemployment at every level, teenage pregnancy, suicide, single parent homes and poor wages. These manifest themselves in anti-social behaviour, such as the one being displayed, crime, drugs, poverty, and reduced life expectancy. These challenges need cutting edge strategies to address them. It is on that note that I am happy to report to this honourable House that after three months in office and with consultation with various youth groups and organisations, a draft of the National Youth Policy 2015 to 2020 has been finalised.

The National Youth Policy 2015 to 2020 aims to build a nation where our youths are safe and healthy, have equal access to opportunities, can participate in public life, and are empowered to meaningfully contribute to Guyana's sustainable development. This comprehensive document captures the Government's vision for the youth of Guyana. It caters for the need of youths in the 15-35 age group cohorts, which is over 50% of our population. Once accepted, a National Youth Policy Action Plan will be crafted and implemented.

Yesterday, I listened to a disappointed and disillusioned youth on the other side of the House, and I could not help but think that when I was a youth we were excited about Guyana. Today, many of our young people with whom I speak are not. It is understandable, when it appears, that all they seem to be fed is a diet of doom and gloom, one that speaks about the country's debt, something they did not create, but will nevertheless be stuck with the responsibility for repaying when they grow up. Some think: why bother to grow up here? Why not look for opportunities elsewhere? They see crime and violence and many times they and their friends are the victims. They feel pain and frustration of unemployment and are distrustful of and even cynical about, their national leaders.

This Government is cognisant of these issues and the fact that youths are constantly looking for avenues for growth. It is for this reason that this Government will review the existing youth development programme, with a view of enhancing the employability of our youth, while promoting new initiatives for social and economic advancement. Further, we will upgrade the facilities at the Sophia Training Centre and collaborate with the private sector to create job opportunities for the trainees. We will go even further and design tracer studies to effectively monitor the employment of all trainees under national youth programmes. This is part of the fresh approach to a good life in a green economy.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn my attention to the issue of sports development. In doing so, Sir, I would like to emphasise that the Ministry of Education will remain committed to exercising sound judgement and adopting best practices in its mandate to moving this country forward in sports development.

With that being said, the fresh approach will include greater emphasis being placed on sports in school and the reestablishment of the national school tournament. Guyanese will become more sports oriented, gaining improved access to sports facilities and opportunities.

We are also going to review our national sports policy, which would articulate a role for sports in national development planning and take account of the importance of sports in the health and education sectors.

We will ensure that all Guyanese are provided with equal opportunities to participate through interactive programmes, while exploiting new economic frontiers that promote and foster

physical well-being, talents, abilities and social cohesion. By its very nature, sport is about participation; it is about inclusion and citizenship. Sports bring individuals and communities together, highlighting commonalities and bridging cultural and even ethnic divide. Sports provide the forum to learn skills such as discipline, confidence and leadership, and teach core principles such as tolerance, cooperation and respect. When these positive aspects of sports are emphasised, sports become a powerful vehicle through which the Ministry will work towards achieving its goal.

This APNU/AFC Government will ensure that community sports facilities are enhanced through the community enhancement project. We will provide and facilitate the development of clubs and associations by providing technical and financial support. We will use sport to bring communities together and explore opportunities for the training of teachers, coaches and athletes through bilateral and sport diplomacy programmes.

Now, I turn my attention to our culture, our arts.

1.47 p.m.

We are our culture and tradition; if there is no culture or tradition, we are no one. The richness of our history provides fertile ground for the cultivation of a diverse repertoire of literature, music, dance and theatre that is unique to our beautiful country and our beautiful people – indeed, the very essence of our cultural and national identity.

I have the privilege of working with Guyana's cultural agents to foster, nurture, protect and promote one of Guyana's most enduring assets, its culture. The preservation, protection, conservation and respect of our heritage, in particular our historic sites, artefacts and traditions; support for national festivals; and the strengthening of our schools of dance, art, music, theatre and drama all constitute essential components of the focus this Government has given and continues to give to this area.

Our strategic approach includes policy development. We, in the Ministry of Education, will create and implement a policy framework relating to cultural development.

We will also focus on capacity building. In this regard, we will build and strengthen the institutional capacity to train persons in jobs that would support the cultural industry.

Additionally, we will foster an environment that creates the promotion of and provides opportunities for people who work in the creative arts to have national, regional and international exposure.

We will also ensure that the necessary support and incentives are provided so that the talent, the skill, the training and the entrepreneurial abilities of our people are harnessed.

Many of our Guyanese artists have excelled, both in their work and entrepreneurial spirit, and they are to be applauded and emulated by our budding artists. Our Government remains committed to promoting and elevating our local artists in all spheres of endeavour which is comparable to their counterparts in other parts of the Caribbean and the wider world.

This Government will work assiduously to create an environment for the understanding, appreciation and tolerance of various cultures. To this end, \$233 million has been allocated to support our cultural institutions over the next four months.

As I continue on the theme of *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*, I cannot close this segment of my presentation without speaking to the lifeblood of the creative arts and cultural sector – its creative workers and practitioners.

I am speaking to the artist who designs and makes the jewellery; the artist who lives to feel the clay between the fingers; and the artist who wakes up to paint the canvas or to chip away at a log to reveal the magic form of sculpture.

I am speaking to the musician who lives with a song in her head and a tune in his heart, and the audio technician who skilfully manipulates sounds digitally to create a work of art.

I am speaking to the disc jockey (DJ) and the sound man; I am speaking to the box boy without whom the sound system could not be loaded and transported.

I am speaking to the writers, directors, actors, theatre technicians and crew through whom Guyana's life is brought to the stage.

I am speaking to the cameraman and the editor, the producer and the writer who bring our lives to the big and small screens.

I am speaking to the broadcaster and the news writer who hones his or her craft to keep us entertained and informed.

I am speaking to those who provide support services – costume construction and set construction, makeup and event management.

I am speaking to the graphic artists and designers.

Each of you continues to play an enormous role in our national development. Often, you feel not counted, as we say in Guyana. I know that your wait has been long for the recognition you deserve. I say to you that your possibilities are endless. There is a fresh approach to the good life in a green economy. Many of you have been working for decades, advocating for government to take your efforts seriously. That day has come. I hear you.

I urge you within the industries not to take a ‘wait and see’ attitude. It will take the unity of the industries to make the plans successful. We are counting on your involvement as much as you are counting on ours. This is the true meaning of partnership, and we, the Government, are committed to it. It is for this reason that as a part of our 50th Independence Anniversary celebration, I invite you to showcase your work and your talent to the world.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, with your permission, I turn to the significance of Guyana’s 50 years as an independent nation. The vision of the Administration is to use the occasion of Guyana’s 50th Anniversary to encourage serious national introspection of our achievements as a nation since 1966. It is an opportunity to create a national celebration, emphasizing our history and culture as a people. We will fashion events, memorabilia and merchandise so that the spirit of Guyana’s 50th can resonate within people’s minds now and for years to come.

We will create public and private sector partnerships which are critical for uniting this country.

We will work together to create legacy projects in education, heritage, infrastructure, culture, academic symposia, literature and the arts, which will themselves act as meaningful economic stimulants.

And, certainly, we will energise our youth as the generation responsible for taking Guyana forward into 2066.

This celebration is about Guyana and the pride of our people. As a people and a country, there is more that unites us than the forces that seek to separate us.

I am not sure how many of us will be sitting in Guyana's Parliament in 2066, 50 years from Guyana's 50th, but we have a duty, nonetheless, to ensure that the legacy we leave is one which takes every Guyanese nearer to their personal and collective aspirations. So, we will reflect and celebrate, being mindful of what the past has taught us.

Beyond that, we must use the experience and inspiration of Guyana's 50th to commit to a more enlightened path and a greater sense of urgency as we point our country in a new direction for those who are now our children and for those who are not yet born.

In this fresh approach, we are going to be more strategic in our long-term planning, more systematic in our actions, and more sensitive in our relationships. The mission to make Guyana great will require these positive responses from all of us. The politician, the private sector, the church and our youth must all come together for this mission.

As the Minister with responsibility for culture, I recognise that I have a shared responsibility to help shape this nation's pride through the transformation of our existing cultural attitudes and values. It is clear to me that we have to transform the mindset, especially of our children and youth, to a new thinking and purpose about what Guyana requires for the next 50 years. That is why a major component of Guyana's 50th observance will go beyond celebrations.

As I close, I pledge to my country the love and allegiance of my heart, the insight and audacity of my mind, and the strength and vitality of my body in the service of my fellow citizens and towards advancing the mission of *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*.

As Guyana prepares for its 50th year as an independent nation, let us all as citizens of this blessed land, as recipients of this rich heritage, before God and all mankind, pledge the positive energy of all collective beings to the attainment of a prosperous and cohesive Guyana.

I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Neendkumar: Hon. Members, let me also join in sharing my sympathy with the Member Catherine Hughes on the passing of her mother-in-law.

I listened carefully to the Hon. Minister. [Ms. Wade: You ought to have listened.] I did not heckle her because it was her maiden speech. Do not tell me that I had to listen.

The Minister within the Ministry of Education failed to provide details as to what policies and programmes the Government will be pursuing, as it seeks to build on the track record set by the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), under which our children outperformed the children in other Caribbean Community (CARICOM) countries.

As I stand here, I say congratulations to Ms. Najab who got 20 subjects with Grade 1s. I say congratulations to Ms. Wilshire, a champion squash player, who got passes in six Caribbean Advanced proficiency Examination (CAPE) subjects, and I say congratulations to all of those students who, at this time, are doing so well.

I have not seen anything in this Budget about more money for the University of Guyana (UG). I ask Dr. Rupert Roopnarine: what has happened to the money to build the University of Guyana?

As I rise to contribute to the 2015 national Budget debate, let me say that 10th August, 2015 was indeed a sad day for the stakeholders of sports in Guyana. The sports fraternity, particularly our sportsmen and sportswomen, were at a loss and were totally embarrassed. Those who listened to the Hon. Minister's Budget Presentation were shocked to hear that the word 'sport' was not mentioned in his Budget speech. Could you all imagine that?

Eight consecutive years of economic growth, with real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) expanding by 5.2% in 2013, represents the largest period of uninterrupted real economic growth in an independent Guyana. This is ample testimony of the quality leadership of the (PPP/C)-led Administration which no one on the other side can hope to match; none.

Let me set the record straight with respect to the development of sport in Guyana. In 1994, the National Sports Commission (NSC) advertised the vacancy for a Director of Sport in Guyana. Several persons applied for the job. The then Chairman of the NSC, Mr. Ken De Abreu, along with three other prominent personalities, called all of the applicants to an interview. Mr. Neendkumar was then recommended by the Commission to the then Minister of Sport, Dr. Dale Bisnauth, and he was employed as the Director of Sport in Guyana.

It went through a process. It is not like what the Government is doing now - victimising and kicking people out willy-nilly. Stop this discrimination. Do things the right way.

When I went to the department there was not even a chair for me to sit on and the late Mr. Ken De Abreu gave me a chair. Further, there was not even a bicycle in the department. There was one old bus with a driver who did nothing. Thanks to the caring and responsible PPP/C Government, when my services were terminated, the NSC could boast that it had two working 4x4 vehicles and two 26-seater buses. I must emphasize that I left the NSC with a new bus, only a few weeks old, not a reconditioned bus. I am making this point because when we came into Government, for 10 years we had no Auditor General's Report, so one could not have gone and scrutinised anything. I want to tell Mr. Greenidge to do things the right way. Do not come and witch hunt.

Neither the colonial masters nor the People's National Congress (PNC) saw it fit to construct or improve any proper sport facilities in Guyana. As a result, even the prestigious Georgetown Cricket Club (GCC) became obsolete.

Today, it is with extreme joy, a sense of pride and a great feeling of satisfaction that I must say thanks to a man with vision, a man of integrity, and a leader with substance, the Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo for the Guyana National Stadium at Providence which was built. Guyanese can boast that we have the best cricket stadium in this part of the world. You all went and enjoyed the inauguration of the President there. You had a right to do it; it belongs to Guyana.

2.02 p.m.

This *de facto* Government has put aside a mere \$77 million in the Budget for capital works for this year, 2015. While, in stark contrast, the construction of several diverse sport facilities around the country, over the last few years, was, indeed, motivational and a tangible manifestation of promises kept by the PPP/C.

The PPP/C Government spent approximately \$3 billion on the construction and maintenance of state-of-the art facilities to promote and enhance the various sport disciplines in Guyana. Today, the National Aquatic Centre is one such prestigious facility. All Guyanese, particularly the swimming fraternity, can boast that we have an Olympic-size 50 metre swimming pool, along

with a warm-up 25 metre swimming pool. Under the dynamic leadership of the PPP/C, Guyanese are proud to know that we have a swimming facility of international standard and we are fully prepared to host international meets.

Let us talk about the track record. Let us talk about what we have. The Synthetic Track and Field Facility at Leonora is yet another tremendous achievement by the PPP/C. Hon. Members, let me further inform this House that at Leonora the PPP/C Government also built a football facility, second to none in this country. The football field, along with the other infrastructure, was built to facilitate international football games. The world-class facility at Leonora was highly praised by a top United States of America (USA) athlete and other eminent sport personalities and sport administrators around the world.

The PPP/C Government must go on record as the regime that constructed multiple racquet sports facilities in Guyana when it refurbished the Lawn Tennis Court and built two state-of-the-art international squash courts at Woolford Avenue and established a National Racquet Centre. **[An. Hon. Member: Talk about the Budget]** This is about the Budget. I have to tell you what the country has, what we did, and what we left. Are you dreaming? Can you not take it? Take it.

When I took office as Director of Sport, the Sports Hall at Mandela Avenue was nothing but a barn. It was described as a barn by Mr. L.F.S Burnham to Comrade Shirley Field-Ridley. It was a structure with some zinc sheets around it. Mr. Williams could tell you about that because he used to play volleyball there and the place leaked all of the time.

The NSC, along with corporate citizens, built a proper Sports Hall. I am proud to report that it has a new floor and all of the washrooms and players' changing rooms are in excellent condition. Further, there is a perfect tarmac, which is used as a car park and for indoor and outdoor games and other social activities.

I would like to remind the stakeholders at the National Gymnasium on Mandela Avenue that that facility was in a deplorable state of disrepair before the PPP/C took office. The compound had no drainage to speak of; and to speak of the roof, it was comparable to a strainer. Most significantly, we must recognise that our excellent relationship with the Guyana Volleyball Federation (GVF) enabled us to share our synergies and install an excellent turf on the floor. Through good

management, that floor is in perfect playing condition and the roof is no longer leaking. Further, we have built an out-of-town facility to accommodate approximately 50 persons.

With all of the development in sports, the PPP/C recognised that it was imperative that it further developed the human resource capacity in this area. I beg of you Mr. Roopnarine and Ms. Henry, it was the PPP/C that constructed the National Sports Resource Centre. That \$55 million project adds to the ambience of the National Racquet Centre, which also accommodates the tennis courts and the squash courts.

The commissioning of that important and necessary facility was, indeed, the beginning of a new era in sports in Guyana. Ironically, at the first historic lecture series, the present Minister of Education, Dr. Rupert Roopnarine, was amongst the many distinguished participants. The National Sports Resource Centre was built to create opportunities for our athletes to be exposed to information via the print and the electronic media.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have 10 minutes more.

Mr. Neendkumar: I will continue telling them what we have done; the next time I will tell them what they are not doing.

This exposure will take them, in the various sport fraternities, to the highest level. We recognised that the access to information was extremely important, and it was our genuine intention to organise seminars and lectures to take the necessary awareness to all of the stakeholders in sports. Hence, the National Sports Resource Centre was built as a forerunner for the National Sports Institute, which is essential for Guyana to continue with positive development in the world of sport. Cde. Roopnarine, I hope you, along with Ms. Henry, will follow this and let us improve.

I would like to call on this *de facto* Government to recognise the importance of this educational facility and I challenge them not to transform it into a white elephant. It must be in operation and provide guidance, training, and certification to the stakeholders in sports. Athletes, coaches, umpires, referees, scorers, journalists, managers, chaperones, technical persons and the general public must benefit from continuous training.

I would like to further place on record that the PPP/C Government developed over 300 playfields around the country. In Berbice, the Albion Sports Complex is now well-furnished with lights to facilitate night games. Comrades, the PPP/C left a proud legacy. We are, indeed, proud of the performance of our young cricketers, and let us congratulate the National under-15 and the National under-19 players for winning both titles in 2015. Our squash players also played well and we must congratulate them also.

The PPP/C Government was the first to train and certify lifeguards in this country. We, in the PPP/C, are proud of our record and we want to assure you that we would like to see this *de facto* Government sustain and maintain what it inherited from the PPP/C Administration. Please maintain it because we know that you are not going to build anything more. We know.

This *de facto* Government loves to speak about putting moneys in the Consolidated Fund. I hope that Mr. Greenidge is hearing.

Before 1992, the gold and diamond revenues were not accounted for; it was not put into the Consolidated Fund. In 2013, the gold industry achieved a 9.7% growth to reach 481,087 ounces, the highest in the history of the gold industry, including the period during OMAI Gold Mines Limited operations. Let me remind this august House that all of the revenue from the mining industry was put into the Consolidated Fund.

Under the PPP/C, in 2013, export earnings amounted to US\$1.4 billion, while foreign direct investment amounted to US\$214 million. It cannot be denied that the PPP/C Government transformed the economy and our people enjoyed a better and safer life under the PPP/C Administration.

As for bauxite, everyone who worked in the bauxite industry knows that the industry became unprofitable and deteriorated under the last PNC Administration. The poor condition of both plant and mining equipment resulted in a tremendous drop in bauxite production and a heavy loss of market during the 80s and early 90s.

It was the PPP/C Government that took a bold decision in June, 2003 to have the Linden Mining Enterprise (LINMINE) operations managed by Cambior. In December, 2004, the Linden Bauxite

was privatised by joint shares, with Cambior having 70% of the shares and Government of Guyana having 30% of the shares.

The Cambior shares were sold to BOSAI China in 2007. Today, the PPP/C and the workers at Linden can boast that BOSAI is running the LINMINE operations at a profit over the last five years. Do not chase them away; keep them. The company employs approximately 600 workers directly, while more than 1000 persons are employed on contract and otherwise.

I wish to remind this House that the PPP Cheddi Jagan-led Government, 50 years ago, was removed from Government, in 1964, by two minority parties, and the PNC closed the Aluminium Plant that the Dr. Jagan Government had built in Linden.

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

Mr. Neendkumar: I will stick to my time, Mr. Speaker. They destroyed the Surapana Farm in Linden. They destroyed the Citrus and Agriculture Farm in Kwakwani.

Above all, the PNC ruined the Kwakwani, Ituni and Linden communities. The once vibrant Goat Farm on the Kwakwani -Linden trail was also destroyed.

With respect to the Berbice operations, the Berbice Mining Enterprise (BERMINE) died under the PNC Administration. However, the Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo brought the Bauxite Corporation of Guyana (BCGI) and RUSAL and they are presently developing that operation. The main activities of BCGI are as follows: Improving the quality of bauxite, decreasing the volume of transshipping from 2 million to 1.5 million tons, reducing the quantity of rental equipment, looking at the adoption of a satellite communications channel, and increasing the availability of efficient mining equipment

RUSAL considers development to be one of the main aspects of the company. The development of the Kurubuka deposits means that there are 33 million tons of bauxite reserves presently. The operational life of the Kurubuka deposits is 15 years. While there will be stable jobs for more than 1,000 full-time workers, subcontracts and otherwise will attract more than 2,000 workers. Let us save the bauxite industry. Mr. Jagdeo has put system in place to develop it.

The PPP/C can boast that the new development of the mining area on the Berbice River is a revelation of development under its Government. There is a new, well-constructed wharf. We can now see a new oil generator set. There is also a new conveyor system and a new dryer with a new warehouse for dried bauxite, and the community now enjoys a better road to travel on. The systems that the PPP/C Government has put in place for the future of the bauxite operations in Region 10 look exciting and are certainly most encouraging.

As the geographic Member of Parliament for Region 4, I am proud to let the Guyanese people know how satisfied and thankful the people in Region 4 are for the highly successful construction of the Hope Canal. Three cheers for the Hope Canal! A recent visit to the Mahaica area saw scores of people. Farmers, in particular, were high in their praise for their President Bharrat Jagdeo. Mere words were not enough as they were proud of the fact that their crops were not flooded out with the recent heavy rainfall.

In Region 4, the PPP/C Government enhanced the lifestyle of people in all communities. There were significant developments in agriculture infrastructure and roads to improve the quality of life of our citizens. Water, housing, and education were indeed successes. Our people's lives were transformed from depressing poverty to a promising civilisation.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I believe that our work can be considerably improved if we allow a little less ebullience to suffuse the atmosphere of our meeting. I hope that you can assist me in that regard.

Ms. Wade: Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members of the House, I am delighted, honoured and cheerfully thankful to be given this opportunity to participate in this debate on the 2015 Budget under the theme, *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*.

2.17 p.m.

Sir, the A Partnership for National Unity+Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government started campaigning for the 2015 Elections in March. We went into the villages, highways and valleys with limited resource. We spoke to Guyanese, young and old, rich and poor, men and women, in all 10 Administrative Regions, and campaigned on the theme, *It is Time for a Change*.

Sir, the end result is that today I can stand here in the National Assembly and join the rest of my Colleagues and thank all Guyanese, most profoundly, for agreeing with us that Guyana needed a change.

Mr. Neendkumar said that he stood to say what they did. I stand here to say what they did not do. Since taking office, it has not been easy for the new Government to deal with the mess that it inherited from the last Government, but we have made good strides in stabilising the economy and in restoring dignity and integrity to this nation. This Budget has all of the ingredients needed to transform the economy, reduce poverty among the poor and working class, and that we will do.

The purpose and function of any government is to sustain the welfare and well-being of all the people. Hence, the Budget is not a document to be taken in isolation. It is a plan to bring great happiness and comfort to Guyanese and that is what this Government will do.

I recall that during the previous Budget debate, I stood over there and spoke about some very critical problems affecting the people of Region 5, and, to date, the situation remains the same. I want to say, Cde. Speaker, that Mr. Gill is a stranger to Region 5; I want to welcome him now to Region 5.

I want to talk about electricity and about the poor who cannot pay \$238,000 per person to access the service in the cross streets in Region 5. Dr. Jagdeo, the Hon. Member, during his tenure, went into the No. 30 Village and promised the people a good life. As I speak now, they are still using flambeaus, they are still using lamps, and I say it is a shame. They cannot enjoy the one laptop per family; they cannot enjoy a simple television programme. Those young people there do not know anything about a refrigerator, a television or anything. I want to say to this House that not only the people in the No. 30 Village cross streets have that problem, but the people in the cross streets of other villages have that problem.

Unemployment created an army of beggars, drug addicts and wondering boys and girls; it created rape, robberies, abuse, suicide and trafficking in persons under the PPP/C. There was an irregular supply of potable water; there was flooding, lack of access roads to farm lands and bad or non-existent roads.

We are only in here for 100 days. They are blaming us for crime. I want to talk about some simple crimes in Region 5. In Bush Lot, at 11:00 a.m., high day time, there is robbery. **[Members of the Opposition: Mr. Ramjattan [inaudible]]** You cannot blame Mr. Ramjattan; you have to blame Mr. Rohee, Hon. Member.

The Regional Democratic Council (RDC) has to lend vehicles to the police. The police in Region 5 have a blue car. Those boys hear it as it comes, *tuka tok tuka tok*. When it is in Bush Lot, the boys in Lichfield has already cleared the distance. When one hears the guns, the boys have, *'Pow! Pow! Pow!'* and those boys have, *'Do! Do! Do!'*

How can crime be solved in Region 5, Sir? I want to say that I went to Linden for a funeral. I saw a police jeep and I saw it bolted with a big bolt. A youth passed and said to the officer, "Officer, please open your gate, I want to rest my feet". That is how bad it is in the police force; we think it is a joke, but it is serious business. I would not stand here to misinform this House, Sir. I want us to know that the Government will do something. It is because we know that those over there did not do anything. Do not blame the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan; blame the Hon. Member Mr. Rohee. **[Ms. Ally: We inherited that.]** We inherited that. Thank you. Let us get away from the blame game. Give us space to govern.

The university graduates, teachers, nurses and thousands of ordinary citizens race to migrate from their homeland. Let us not forget that a government that governs best is a government that respects the people and takes on their legitimate interests and desires. Mr. Gill is one who went; maybe he has now returned. I do not know. That is why I welcomed him to Region 5.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn our attention to rice. Region 5 is the largest agriculture region, and I want to remind this honourable House that agriculture is the backbone of an economy. Therefore, attention must be given to the sector. The only person over there who will understand my language is the Hon. Member Mr. Seeraj.

In Section C of the Budget Speech, Sectorial Performance, in paragraph 3.4, the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, an honourable man, spoke of the build-up of significant paddy stocks in the system – a situation which led to the outstanding payments to farmers. It is not only rice; I want to talk a little about sugar too. **[An Hon. Member: Are you done with rice already?]** I am not finished with rice; I am coming back to rice. Immediately upon taking

office, the APNU/AFC Administration had to give some \$3.8 billion to the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) for workers to be paid for three months. This year's Budget saw a further allocation of \$8.2 billion, for a total of \$12 billion. The fact is that the multibillion dollar white elephant in Skeldon is sucking the treasury dry. All that the past government did over the past years was bail it out because of the poor health of the sugar industry. This new Government will have to save this industry.

Over the years, claims of higher paddy yield – I am back to rice – the level of input in the rice sector and the increase of production have seen the industry in serious problems. The last time I spoke, I said it was in a crisis; it was on shaky ground. Now, it has gone to having serious problems. The new Government inherited a broken rice industry. The previous government failed to recognise the plight of the farmers. It did not implement an aggressive programme to market the rice; hence, there are still large quantities of rice at the mills yet to be shipped. This is causing a strain on the millers who owe millions to the farmers.

Last year, when we debated the Budget, there were farmers from Essequibo standing in front there. They said to the then Minister, “We have our children, our wives, our mothers and fathers. We beat water and come. Don't tell us anything. We are not little children to whom you can say, “done baby, done.”” These were the words of the farmers, Sir. I am saying that with all of that, nothing was done for those farmers.

The previous government had the opportunity to engage all stakeholders in the rice industry – farmers, millers, exporters and providers to support the service – to formulate strategies to ensure the long-term profitability and growth. Constructive discourse is urgently needed to take the rice industry forward and that we will do.

Some farmers are contemplating court action against the millers due to the non-payment of this. It is due to the farmers having to meet their expenses such as drainage and irrigation charges, their mortgages, and fertiliser debts. They need to return to the fields. We must understand the language because Guyanese are following the debates in here and when we look like jokers, they will judge us.

Over the past two decades, rice farmers have spoken about the cost of production, which is very high. The cost of seed paddy fertiliser, fuel, the chemicals, labour, transportation, machinery, spare parts and harvesting are also very high. Yet, the farmers are receiving low price for paddy.

The previous administration had an obligation to stabilise the process to benefit farmers and ensure that the necessary systems were in place to protect the livelihood of the rice farmers. They did not do that. It is very necessary that this Government ensures that rice farmers are protected. Hence, we will provide the very agricultural bank that the farmers wanted so badly.

Agriculture is the only means of survival for farmers. Over the years, there have been serious problems in the Mahaica Mahaicony Abary /Agricultural Development Authority (MMA/ADA). Farmers suffered victimisation, spitefulness, political interference, humiliations and insults; they went through all of that. There are numerous court battles going on right now with the MMA over repossession of lands and the dismantling of co-operative societies. As I speak here today, there are farmers whose names are being published by the MMA/ADA because of delinquency in payments to the Authority, but farmers are suffering. All that they have known for all of the years is nothing more than planting rice. They did it way back when with oxen and carts. Why, now, can they not enjoy the very process when they have tractors and trailers to take them through?

During the rainy seasons, farmers suffered losses in excess of millions. Listen to the stories. That is why we are here. This is always the case. No amount of compensation or aid can assist them.

One has to visit the farmlands and the communities and see the plights and the conditions of the working farmers – men and women. Mr. Gill, I invite you to visit the farmers out there. You can let the Hon. Member Seeraj take you along. Farmers need protection and this should be the priority.

Floods are all over the place. We hope that there would be a management system to take care of it. With this Government, we are going to do it. We are going to improve drainage and irrigation in the country because the previous administration did not see it fit to make sure that there was a workable flood prevention plan to ease the plight. And so the poor maintenance of the areas is causing a problem.

2.32 p.m.

Farmers were advised to utilise the same full use of the Burma Resource Centre services in order to have better yields for their paddy. But do you know what? Only a few, that is, colleagues and friends of the past Government, enjoyed that particular facility, amongst others. Under this new Administration, we are making sure that all, every one of the farmers, visits.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you something about Burma. Burma Housing Scheme has been neglected for years. The residents of this community have seen no development.

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

Ms. Wade: During the previous Administration, it took the lives of six children and one teacher because of the bad state of the road, which I stood up over there and spoke about. Hon. Member and former Minister of Education, Ms. Priya Manickchand, was there when she saw the six children and the teacher lying at the Fort Wellington Hospital. It was a sad scene. Do you know why, Mr. Speaker? Because when they over there, they never used to listen to you. So it took the lives of six children and a teacher for them to get there. During that time no Government person ever visited Burma; with no regrets I say it. Any person can go there. But after then, we had the President going in [*Member made the wailing sounds of sirens*]. The residents of Burma thought it was an ambulance or the Guyana Fire Service coming in, but it was the President, after seven persons had died. That is the caring Government we all heard about.

Youth, Sport and Culture – My Hon. Colleague spoke about that. It is the same problem in Region 5 - the health facilities. We had a working theatre in Region 5. The Hon. Member, Dr. Norton, can bear me out. They closed that theatre; it is not working. In Region 5, we had surgeries done at the Fort Wellington Hospital. Now – nothing. We have to come all the way to Georgetown and wait with our names on the list for months. Under this Government, that will be nowhere around us.

The residents of Region 5 - we spoke about a malaria centre, so that when the boys and girls come from the interior, they can get access to treatment in the Region. But do you know what? Nobody listens. So they have to travel either to New Amsterdam or Georgetown. Look at the distance. Some of them, even before they reach, they pass away. Under this new Government, that will be a thing of the past. Fort Wellington Hospital – I am happy that the Minister of Health visited. He knows what we need and we know that he will deliver.

I want to say that on 11th May, 2015, Guyanese people spoke and brought the end to the one-party rule. The new Government, 100-day old action plan, we see it on the scene. We have kept our end of the bargain. We are happy that the Government will provide and be committed to its people and this is true leadership.

We are talking about leadership. When the Hon. Member, Brigadier (Ret'd) Granger took his Oath of Office, he went to the church the next day, the Sunday. On Monday morning, he was out by the Square of the Revolution and we can see and testify to that place. When one passed there in previous times he/she had to hold their breath. Look at the Independence Arch, some of you over there did not even know it was an arch. We are happy that brides can go there now and take pictures. It is under this Government. We set the pace and we will continue with it. Only 100 days. What a good office.

As an elected representative of Region 5, I can safely say that the residents of Region 5 are now breathing afresh, the dawn of a new era. I want to join with my Colleagues to congratulate the Hon. Minister, Winston Jordan, and the new Government for presenting such a detailed budget in a short space of time.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have two minutes more.

Ms. Wade: Yes Sir. A fresh approach to a green economy is what we will deliver. The road ahead of us is a long one. We will not get there in a day or two, but what I know is that this new Government will get there.

I want to close with a piece of Scripture that I always use in this National Assembly. Proverbs 3:27 reminds us:

“Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act”

Do not say no to your neighbour or come back later, when you could give the person today. I say to the residents out there, who are following this debate and I say to my comrades of Region 5 and all Guyanese, we will give today what is due today.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much for allowing me to present on this budget. [*Applause*]

Dr. Jagan: Mr. Speaker, first of all let me congratulate you Sir on becoming the Speaker of this National Assembly. Secondly, I would like to extend my deepest sympathies to our Hon. Minister, Mrs. Catherine Hughes, on the passing of her mother-in-law.

The opportunity to serve in this Assembly, that represents the pinnacle of decision making for the governance of Guyana, is a great honour and privilege for me. While I have been engaged in politics for a long time and have especially been engaged with the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) in the 1980s, in the struggle for the return of freedom and democracy from the People's National Congress (PNC) dictatorship, I have never sought or have been interested in political office. However, I do see ominous signs and dangers of us falling back into those dark times, and having considered, I believe that I can make a contribution for us to stay on course and advance the freedom and democracy that were restored and nurtured by the PPP/C in the last two decades.

It is my conviction that, like myself, the purpose and desire of every Member sitting in this august Assembly is to work for and to contribute selflessly and honourably for the creation of a highly developed, peaceful and safe Guyana. A Guyana where every citizen is valued and can enjoy his or her life in peace, comfort and dignity. A Guyana where opportunity is equal, access is unrestricted and where everyone, irrespective of race, religion or gender, has the opportunity and best chance to fulfil his or her potential.

However, with due regard to the fact that we all want the same thing, it is perhaps unfortunate that we are organised on two sides in essential opposition to each other and are too often trapped into opposing for opposing sake. While this arrangement of Government and Opposition may be the highest form of democratic governance, the eye on the vote to win elections can too often lead to battles, to obstruct the one or the other side, to the detriment of the national interest.

Our progress since independence or lack thereof, perhaps, belie my conviction that all are united and agree in wanting a better Guyana over and above everything else. At the onset, therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to exhort that we always refer, in all our deliberations and decision making, to that vision for a better Guyana, which we all share, that commitment to service to which we all subscribe. Let it at all times inform our deliberations and prevent us from

being diverted or seduced by opposition-ism, prejudice and petty zero sum games of ethnic advantage.

It is perhaps apposite for those Members, who were on this side in the last Parliament and who are now sitting on that side, to reflect and determine if it was in good conscience that they served Guyana, when they blocked or refused to support any number of important legislation from the then minority Government. For example, since before I was born and all through my life growing up, I was told that Guyana needs cheap clean energy if we were going to be able to take advantage of our natural resources for our development. We heard that we had a great potential for hydropower. How much was done to actualise these words? The last Government advanced the process of hydropower; had the project for execution; had arrangements for financing and you blocked it. The time, effort and money extended have been reduced to zero. Was it opposition for opposition sake? We all know how much harm can accrue to Guyana, if we did not comply with the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism legislation, but you refused to cooperate. Was it opposition for opposition sake? Again, I call on all, let us not oppose for opposition sake, let us work for Guyana.

Allow me to quote Dr. Cheddi Jagan from his speech in this Assembly in May, 1966, when the instruments of our sovereignty were passed to us.

“Parliamentary democracy has an important place in this country, and a heavy onus lies on us all, but more particularly on the Government, to see that it works”

Our history and development in the period before independence and since independence have been a roller coaster ride with peaks and troughs. The peaks have been under the watch of the PPP and the troughs have been under the watch of the other group. We cannot go on like this. We must always move up, up and further up.

The economy taken over by the People’s National Congress/ United Force (PNC/UF) Coalition in 1964 was a growing economy. The education system was among the best in the Caribbean. To quote from the first line of chapter 18 of the National Development Strategy 2001-2010:

“Guyana’s educational system was considered to be one of the best in the Caribbean during the 1960’s, it is probably among the weakest today.”

Today, of course, refers to the 1990s when this strategy was being undertaken.

2.47 p.m.

We had sugar, rice, timber, bauxite, gold, and most importantly we had a young energetic and imaginative population with the will and desire to build a great country. We were seen as the country that could become the bread basket of the Caribbean. Unfortunately, by the time the PNC was done, we had a shrunken economy. We had little sugar and rice and we were the basket case of the Caribbean. Most importantly, the PNC, paramount in all things, had beaten the population down into pessimism and pushed them into emigration that even to this day we cannot stem. By the time they were done, we were a highly indebted, low income country, with inflation of over 100% and a currency that had moved from GUY \$2.00 to US\$1 to GUY\$125 to US\$1.

They did not improve the electricity generation capacity barge and all. By 1992, the PPP/C inherited barely 50 to 60 megawatts of installed capacity with old turbines and generator equipment beyond repair, and a decrepit distribution system. Water, even in the city, was unreliable, inconsistent and brown. Most of the rest of the country had no potable water. We may recall images of little children with little carts moving buckets of water on the East Coast and the East Bank. The institutions of democracy were totally undermined. We had no free press and we had rigged elections.

What are we getting today after the herculean efforts of the PPP/C in the last two plus decades? We have an education system that is clawing its way back to be comparable to the best in the Caribbean, with more than 460 schools distributed equitably to the farthest reaches of the country, and primary enrolment above 95%, compared to the dismal under 70% in the PNC years. More children are graduating from primary schools and more entering secondary schools and matriculating with five or more Caribbean Secondary Examination Council (CSEC) subjects. The number of persons in the work force with tertiary education is up from 3% to 5% in the 80s to 7% to 9%. The exchange rate has stabilised. Rice is at its all-time high of 600,000 tons per year and gold and timber have been making increasing contributions to our Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Life expectancy is up to 70 from 60, which it was in the 60s and had stagnated through the PNC years.

Electricity generation is now over 225 megawatts, not counting the solar energy installations in the hinterland. The equipment is new and the distribution system is improved and rationalised. The number of households connected to electricity have increased in all parts of the country.

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

Dr. Jagan: Thank you Sir. There is more than 83% access to potable clear water, not the brown muddy water of the PNC years. All across the country, in more than 145,000 homes, people can turn there taps and get water.

The institutions of democracy have never flourished as they flourish now. Let us watch the *Stabroek* and *Kaieteur News* and see how they will strut their pump and ridicule in the coming months. They are more radio stations; they are more television stations; and more online news. This very Assembly has become a place free from fear in the last 20 years, where representatives, freely and fairly elected, could have expressed their views and where inclusivity was institutionalised through Select Parliamentary Committees.

Who will dispute the autonomy and the freedom of Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) from interference from the previous Government? Say what you will, the PPP/C never compromised in its commitment to freedom and democracy. It has had its quarrels with these institutions, but it did not ban them nor stifled them.

By any parameter, the country which has been handed over to the now APNU/AFC Coalition is a better country than the PPP/C inherited in 1992. All the important indices have become better than they were in 1992. In short, we were better off on 11th May, 2015, than we were on 5th October, 1992. From a least developing country, it has become a middle developing country, with a GDP that has grown from US\$250 in 1992, to more than US\$3,700 today.

I am an optimist and I believe in a greater Guyana, but, unfortunately, I am already seeing portents of a return to the dark days of economic woes and dictatorship. All across the world, as countries grapple with their economic problems, the mantra is job creation. In the first 100 days in this Government what do we see? We see job destruction. Already this Government has fired

more than 3000-4000 people and the private sector has probably had to lay off another 3000 to 4000. What is worst is that they have assaulted one of the most vulnerable communities in the country, the Amerindian people.

On 9th August, Guyana joined the rest of the world in celebrating International Day of the World Indigenous People and the Secretary General of the United Nation called on all to ensure that our Indigenous people are not left behind. What have this Government done? It has fired nearly 2,000 Amerindian workers and, immediately, threw them and their families into hardships, without any second thought.

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

Dr. Jagan: Thank you Sir. We see that dark dictatorial attitude reminiscent of that period we want never to happen again. When a Deputy Chief Executive Officer (CEO), in the company of police officers, marches into a workplace and put two staffs out of their jobs. In all these firings, we are seeing the first signs of ethnic cleansing. What good life is in store for those people who are out of jobs? We also see duplicity and deceit. This budget might have raised the old age pension, but it removed the subsidy of water and electricity from these pensioners. The net effect is that they would be worst off. Is that a good life?

Judging from the performance of this new regime, even in the early days, it does not inspire confidence. The ominous signs are not good for a good life for Guyanese. The signs of regression are already there. I wish to take this opportunity to call on my Colleagues across the floor to clear your heads, rise above pettiness, free yourself from obsolete ideas and pig headedness, in wanting to prove those ideas right and to reboot yourself to selfless, unambiguous and intelligent service to our country. I challenge you to show us that you too can be inclusive and that you too can move Guyana forward. Mr. Speaker, thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Figueira: I rise, acknowledging this noble opportunity bestowed on me by His Excellency, my party and this coalition Government to serve as representative of the people of the gateway region – Upper Demerara Upper Berbice. I am most humbled and honoured to serve my constituency, and by extension the Guyanese people. Further, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your election as Speaker of this honourable House, as my Colleagues before me have done. I, like them, am confident that you will continue to serve with dignity and

humility, as you have already done. I am confident that you would preserve the respect and civility of this honourable House. Mr. Speaker, I respectfully crave your indulgence in allowing me four more minutes to finish my 19 minutes presentation.

I would also like to give support and to commend and congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance for his competently and skilfully crafted budget; a budget, that amply suits the proposed theme, *A Fresh Approach to the Green Life in a Green Economy*. With the Minister's permission, I would like to refer to this budget as a people's budget, one with a human touch.

It is my wish and hope that all Members of this honourable House will see the wisdom in accepting this budget, as the Guyanese people beyond these walls have already done.

It is known by virtue of being Opposition in this Chamber, that it is not for them, especially after being voted out of Government for more than two decades by the majority of the Guyanese, to exchange congratulatory commendations and noteworthy approbations to the Hon. Minister and Government for this comprehensive and far-reaching budget that gives satisfaction to the Guyanese people, inclusive of their supporters.

Like Government, I respectfully accept and appreciate criticisms, when they are warranted. However, the disparaging remarks being uttered by the Hon. Members of the Opposition, who are on their deserving side of this honourable House, are birthed out of anger, bitterness, and myopic fuzzy perspectives.

The Hon. Members of the Opposition are now pretending to have all the answers to develop this great and beautiful nation of ours, having squandered their opportunities with profound mismanagement and ineptness. Ill-conceived and big cats and voodoo projects were the order of the day, since they became disconnected with the people and the issues that affected them.

3.02 p.m.

This confused Opposition has Members with the temerity to claim our vision and others who seek to besmirch it, even though they had almost my entire lifetime to do what this Government is on the path of achieving in less than 100 days and what *Budget 2015* endeavours to do.

The Hon. Members across the House are angry and bitter because our Government has begun to demonstrate, by its actions, that we, in this coalition, really care about our public servants, our policemen and women, our nurses, our teachers, our sweepers and our pensioners. We have demonstrated that we care for the thousands of sugar workers and rice farmers.

This Budget demonstrates how Government is serious about serving the people of Guyana. This Budget provides the realisation that His Excellency was serious about providing a good life for all Guyanese citizens. It is not my desire to use a strong term as “incompetent” to describe the previous Administration, for this Budget says it all.

I have heard Guyanese saying that the Granger-Nagamootoo Administration has achieved more in 100 days with this Budget than the previous Administration did in one five-year for the people of Guyana, excluding their families, friends, cronies and associates.

The citizens of Region 10 are now breathing a breath of fresh air. We, in Region 10, were in a chokehold by the previous Administration. We felt the blunt of their arrogance that was so evidently displayed by the Hon. Member, Mr. Neendkumar. I now understand, vividly, why sports were stagnated. It is because of their injustice, marginalisation, stifled development and promotion of gross unemployment. Our Region was battered and beaten but never broken for 23 years because we exercised our democratic right to vote for who we wanted as leaders.

Today, I can say, on behalf of our Region, that we are breathing with a renewed hope and unrelenting aspirations towards our development. The shackles of bondage and the obstacles of oppression have been removed and replaced with an indomitable spirit of optimism. The fish bone in our throat has been removed and that monkey on our back is no longer there. Region 10, Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice, for the first time in 23 years, will finally get its budget request honoured to aid its development programmes.

The people of Region 10 do not wish or desire, in any way, to be a parasitical region that is dependent on Government’s handouts and assistance. It is the Region’s ambition to become a region that is independent and self-sufficient to the point where it can escape the cycle of poverty, where it can give assistance to Government in a tangible way as it promotes a fresh approach to the good life in a green economy. Region 10 wants to be the leader in creating employment opportunities for Guyanese in all of Guyana and provide a skilled work force to

meet the demands of the vast development Guyana will be experiencing this year and the years to come under this rainbow of 'hope coalition Government'.

Those ambitions of the Region will be met with employment, job creation and the involvement of our young people. Region 10, like most of Guyana, has been plagued, for many years, with unemployment and joblessness. According to a recent study by the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB):

“The regional countries with the highest persistent youth unemployment were Guyana and Suriname which, since 2000, have consistently been above 30%, with the rate in Guyana hovering around 40% since this time.”

Sixty per cent to 65% of our population is below the age of 40.

Referencing the World Bank study on countries in the Caribbean, Guyana tops the list with 89% of its tertiary level graduates leaving their country in search of jobs elsewhere. The youths in our country are inordinately affected by Guyana's record breaking rate of suicide that gained worldwide attention. This trend must stop and a fresh approach to the good life in a green economy is the first giant step in the right direction.

It would be remiss of me if I fail to take up this opportunity to inform the Hon. Member, Mr. Charles Ramson, that those statistics and unwanted realities all existed under the 23-year rule of the PPP/C Administration. Another point to note, Hon. Member, is that our Government does care for its youth; my birth certificate and my being here reflect the real youth of Guyana that is not connected or aligned to the hierarchy of party leadership. Even one of our former Opposition Members has been given the opportunity to serve as Opposition Member, again, in this honourable House. This Government has recognised the importance of our youth in our quest to develop Guyana in every sphere and sector, from the hinterland to the coastland.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have 10 minutes more.

Mr. Figueira: The national youth policy initiative proposed for the first time by this Government should be applauded by all Guyanese.

I stand here not only to represent my constituency and Government, but also the majority of our population, the youth, which is over 60% of our people. I, like Government, understand the plight of our youths. We have concerned ourselves with what is needed for them to meaningfully contribute and participate in our nation's development.

Our national priority, as a responsible Government, is clearly to stimulate economic growth, to generate employment, to tackle crime and violence, to service our national inherited debt and to secure the needed foreign exchange to satisfy the needs of the economy. The need to solve these integrated problems requires a fresh approach, a cooperative effort and the involvement of our young people. Can we do it? **[Hon. Members (Government): Yes, we can!]** This Government can.

We have already begun to promote and advocate a new way of thinking to encourage and sensitise our youths to get their participation. Further steps will be extended in channelling our young people into entrepreneurship and export-driven industries as a means of earning more foreign exchange.

Government's common sense initiatives, such as tax exemptions to medium and small scale miners, many of them being young people, from paying custom duties on fuel, All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs), engines, pumps, *et cetera*, are giant steps in helping young people to succeed. Many of our citizens in Region 10 are overjoyed for this significant help from Government. My strong appreciation and support for Government's foresight in this sector have nothing to do with the fact that many of our small miners, in the constituency which I represent, particularly the over 400 miners in the Omai and its bordering sites benefitting tremendously, but because of the incontrovertible fact that this progressive thinking will promote long-term employment and encourage investment in this sector.

For the 13 Amerindian communities in Region 10 and many others around Guyana, I am happy that our Government has seen it noteworthy to exempt customs duties on motor vehicles and ATVs for the Toshaos in those communities. This will most certainly help them in carrying out their duties more effectively and efficiently.

All of the residents of Region 10, especially the mothers, wives and grandmothers who are the real economists in the homes, are overjoyed for the zero rated VAT on basic food items that had

caused them much needed moneys. How could a Government which claims to care about the people put VAT on Nestum, a food that is used by mothers to feed the nation's babies? How inhumane can one really be?

The pensioners in our region, particularly my 85 year old grandfather who makes it his duty every year, by the grace of God, to listen to the Budget presentation, with special attention to pension benefits, are always disappointed, but, this year, I have never seen his denture smile shine so bright. He recognised me sitting behind the Hon. Minister of Finance and thought, for some reason, that I said something to the Hon. Minister. I had to remind him that His Excellency is a serious man who keeps his word and is determined for his Government to provide a good life for all Guyanese.

In conclusion, I, like most Guyanese, eagerly await budget 2016. A fresh approach to the good life is progressive. It will be a year in which we will continue to celebrate, with the Guyanese people, our freedom from 23 years rule from an uncaring, selfish, corrupt and tyrannical administration, a year in which our Government will continue our pursuit to end the political rat race of one party domination by promoting a Government of national unity as we usher in Guyana's 50th year as an independent nation of 83,000 square miles of our space.

I would like to reiterate my embryonic opening remarks that the Hon. Minister of Finance has skilfully crafted a budget that can arguably be categorised as the best budget that has ever been presented to this honourable House, a budget that is pro-business, pro-development, pro-people, a budget with a fresh approach towards promoting a good life for all Guyanese in a green economy.

It is my wish and hope that all Members of this honourable House will see the wisdom in accepting this Budget as the Guyanese beyond these walls have already done.

With the words of a popular Jamaican artiste, Jacob Miller, "forward ever backward never".

Thank you. [*Applause*]

3.17 p.m.

Mr. Mustapha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I would like to join with my Colleagues on this side of the House to extend to the Hon. Member and Minister of Tourism my sincere condolences on the passing of her mother-in-law.

After 86 days, this Government was finally able to present a budget to this National Assembly, and today is 96 days. When the consideration of the Estimates will be completed, it would be 104 days after and many of the 100-day plans cannot be fulfilled by the APNU/AFC Government because they will exceed the 100 days. We, on this side of the House, were shocked to know that the Minister of Finance presented a budget of \$221 billion, which is \$1 billion more than last year, when he said, in his Budget speech, many times, that the PPP/C Government was corrupt and there was no money in the Treasury. I have been weary of hearing all of the adjectives that he used to describe the PPP/C Government. All of the projects... [Ms. Ally: Who is he?] The Hon. Minister of Finance. As I said, I am weary of hearing what we did while in office was wrong, to put it mildly. All manner of negative adjectives, as I said earlier, were used to describe the many initiatives embarked upon to bring development to our country. But I would like to refer to two documents; the two documents are the Budget speech of 2015 and the 2014 Budget speech delivered by the then Minister, the Hon. Ashni Singh.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at pages 32, 33 and 34 in the 2014 Budget and you look at pages 30, 31 and 32 in the 2015 Budget, all of the major projects that were in the 2014 Budget are in the APNU/AFC 2015 Budget. It is a wholesale copy of the PPP/C's projects.

The Hon. Member, who just spoke, is probably too young to know what we went through as a people in this country. I want to recap some of the things we went through as a people. The first thing I want to say before I go is that I have here *Stabroek News* dated February, 1989. For the Hon. Member, he must learn - "Guyana dollar devalued, Greenidge's present Ten-to-One is murder budget". Those were the times when the infrastructure...when Guyana was not creditworthy. To get to the point of where we are today took a lot of sacrifices and courage. As I said, I would like to recap a bit before I get into my main presentation.

When the PPP/C assumed office 23 years ago, Guyana, in local parlance, was bankrupt, in a state of ruin and an international embarrassment. Everywhere Guyanese went, they were hunted down and chased back to Guyana.

Moneys were borrowed to pay wages to public servants in those days. Guyana was for the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was dead and that is just to put it mildly. I want the young Hon. Member to learn.

Many essential food stuff were banned and you hear, again, that this Government wants to reintroduce rice flour. Hope that Guyanese people do not get back “white corner”.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to jerk your memory and the memories of the Hon. Members over there. Guyanese leaving these shores were only permitted or given US\$15 to travel. I have, in my hand, a passport. I travelled in 1987. I had to go to the Bank of Guyana and it was US\$15. Ask the Hon. Khemraj Ramjattan. He and I went to the World Festival in North Korea. His father, he and I were in the car when they went to buy money on the Wall Street Black Market because they could not get it from the Bank of Guyana. Today, the economy is free. Mr. Speaker, that is the achievement of the PPP/C Government and, perhaps, you can remember that.

We heard Hon. Member Mr. Neendkumar when he said that, in 1964, two parties combined and the PPP was out of power. We are having history repeating itself; we are hearing the APNU is not the PNC but karma is a great thing. Ask the outgoing Mr. Ramayya; he is going to tell you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to refer to page 4 and quote from the Hon. Minister of Finance. He stated:

“I wish to state here that the Coalition remains strong, and its viability and longevity remain unthreatened...Our passion, in this regard, remains unshaken and undiminished.”

Mr. Speaker, ask the AFC’s main campaign man in Berbice. Ask him of how he is so bitter. He was on national television and he lambasted the leadership of the AFC for the betrayal of the Berbicians and the Guyanese people.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Mustapha: The AFC is now realising that it has been fooled and it is trying to save face. Today, we are witnessing political and ethnic cleansing in Guyana. Many bright and young people are in Government services but, because of their political affiliation, they are being sent home without any benefits. Is that the green economy you are all talking about? Is that the green economy - witch-hunting, political victimisation and ethnic cleansing? Mr. Speaker, time is going. Hon. Member, you should stake a loss. This is a nightmare as Minister of Finance, the

worst Guyana ever had, the worst Minister of Finance. That is why the coalition threw you out and put Mr. Winston Jordan.

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Williams]: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, Standing Order No. 40 (a), the Hon. Member has gone on a cliff. He is not supposed to do that to another Member of this House. He cannot use such infelicitous language against another Member of this House. I believe, Sir, that he should apologise and withdraw that remark.

Mr. Mustapha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to refer to that part of the speech where the Hon. Minister of Finance talked about local government elections. All of us who are here, including my good Friend and Colleague over there, the Hon. Attorney General, knew what took place and why we did not have local government elections. I want to make it clear in this honourable House that this party, the party of Cheddi Jagan, is never afraid of an election. We were cheated but never defeated.

For any election to be held, it must be free and fair and free from fear. First of all, there must never be any fake statement of poll. Anytime there is one fake statement of poll, the whole electoral process is compromised.

Ordinary people must not be threatened and suffer losses because they support a political party. In the last Elections, remember what took place in Sophia. Up to now, people are looking for help because their properties were burnt down. They were threatened and beaten because they supported the PPP/C. This is the fear and intimidation that the APNU/AFC is putting on the Guyanese people.

The Hon. Minister of Finance stated that we are going about putting our own people in local government. Mr. Speaker, let me tell you what happened. We have had Interim Management Committees (IMCs) in Rose Hall, Corriverton, Anna Regina and Linden. We have had petitions.

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

Mr. Mustapha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We listened to the people's concerns. We had consultations and installed IMCs. The Hon. Member, Mr. Bulkan, went and threw out those members and installed his own. Is that the democracy that they are talking about? Why has he

not been to Linden? Linden has an IMC but he is bent on witch-hunting and, as I said, ethnic cleansing. That is the way this APNU/AFC Government [*inaudible*].

3.32 p.m.

The record of the PPP/C Administration in regional development is a proud one. Our party is proud of the legacy it is leaving in the area of regional development and regional governance. I want to take this opportunity to share with Colleagues on the other side some major achievements by our party whilst in Government. I am certain that many of them on the other side would have travelled throughout the country but, without having done so prior to 1993, they are not in a position to appreciate the phenomenal development that has taken over this country for the last 23 years.

Under the PNC Government, regional government was not realistic; rather, the PNC Government was more concerned with national, political mobilisation. That was the way but, as a consequence, this resulted in many of Government's critical services remaining under central Government control. Things changed during the 23 years of the PPP/C Administration.

The original objective of regional Government and development were generally achieved through systematic introduction of measures to give governance to the people. This became possible through the commitment of the PPP/C to ensure that every citizen, regardless of where he or she resides, has an equal opportunity to benefit from Government intervention.

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

Mr. Mustapha: Today, every region - and yes, the interior region - boasts of all the services that the PPP/C Government offered: health, education, housing, solar panel, water and others. Mr. Speaker, do not forget the number of young people from the interior who are, today, engineers and doctors, thanks to the PPP/C Government. That is the way we work. We do not witch-hunt and dismiss people.

The education standard, over the years, has improved tremendously, so much so, that today people in Essequibo, people in Region 9, and young people in Berbice are topping the Caribbean

Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examinations with 20 and more subjects. That is the development we are talking about.

In concluding, I see the Budget, as presented, as a burden to the people of this country. I say so because the Regional Democratic Council in Region 6 submitted 37 projects and 31 were cut by this Government; 31 capital projects were cut by this Government. With the cuts...

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

[Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I would like to recall to you the provisions of Standing Order No. 41 (4). With your permission, I shall read it:

“It shall be out of order to use offensive and insulting language about Members of the Assembly.”

I will also draw to your attention the provisions of Standing Order No. 41 (6). I shall read it, with your permission:

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

I thank you.

Minister within the Ministry of Public Infrastructure: [Ms. Ferguson]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to offer you warmest congratulations on your ascension to the Office of Speaker of the National Assembly.

I would like to crave your indulgence by extending my deepest sympathy to my Colleague and Friend, the Hon. Minister, Mrs. Catherine Hughes, on the passing of her mother-in-law. My dear, I know that God is going to give you the strength and the comfort, at this time of your bereavement.

I rise, in this august House, to add my contributions and give my support to *Budget 2015* under the theme, *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*.

I would like to first extend congratulations to the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, for a well-crafted and comprehensive inaugural budget presentation which will inject \$221 billion into the economic vein of this dear land of ours.

I would also like to commend my Colleagues in the Government and the Cabinet for their efforts, energies and co-operation to realise *Budget 2015* within four months. Indeed, it is a people's budget.

Last but not least, I would like to publicly express thanks to His Excellency the President, Brigadier David Arthur Granger, and other senior Members and Colleagues of the Government for bestowing upon me the honour of service at the level of central Government. Indeed, I stand here, today, the embodiment of this APNU/AFC Government's trust and confidence in the young people of this dear land of ours. Sir, I wish to assure you that, with God's guidance and wisdom, I will serve the Guyanese people with pride and distinction.

The theme for this year's Budget is an apt starting point for the enactment of the vision of a green economy and of this APNU/AFC Government. As quoted from one of His Excellency's writings, *One Nation, A Good Life for All Guyanese under Human Development Crisis*, paragraph 1:

“Guyana is facing a human development crisis as a result of the PPP/C's chronic maladministration. Public protests have become the visible and voluble expressions of resistance against the PPP/C's mismanagement of public health, public security, public works and public schools. Guyana, in the new millennium, has become more unsafe and more unstable than ever before, owing to the high rate of crime and low quality of life.”

This crisis is what guides us in the development of policies, programmes and projects for all. We have to correct and analyse current projects, and create and develop innovative responses.

Infrastructure, by its very nature, is dynamic and responsive. But that is postulated on the position that you have something to respond to, a framework, so to speak, that encapsulates the very philosophy of your development thrust. Sadly, in the past, such basics were not adhered to. Instead, we had the pseudo-development of policies, weak-kneed and half-hearted responses that

seemed more geared towards short-term achievements. At this juncture, though, we cannot focus on the past. We need to marshal our resources, both human and technical, to ensure a better quality of life for all.

Infrastructure is too pivotal a sector to be left to chance. Indeed, it is the chief enabler of development. Its role span from ensuring that businesses have the necessary foundations upon which to build the economy and that people have various amenities for the good life to ensuring... As such, emphasis must be placed on creating the infrastructure that connects our people and changing the existing access points by developing new roads into the hinterlands by creating enabling infrastructure for new industrial, residential and agricultural communes. This has to be augmented with studied approaches to harmonising our port authorities, ensuring strategic plans are in place for all of our agencies, developing business plan and having a cohesive, well-developed overarching national infrastructure development plan for Guyana.

The Ministry of Public Infrastructure will create and table in the National Assembly a state of infrastructure report at its earliest opportunity. This report will set out the state of existing infrastructure and will also delineate critical responses to ensure longevity, connectivity and value. *[Interruptions]* I am here to get the people's business done and I do not need to be distracted. Listen and learn. No more will we be doing things over and over again, but will, in a systemic manner, consult with local stakeholders, craft long-term responses and create interventions that will redound to the benefit of all.

I now turn my attention to some of the agencies under my remit. I am compelled to put on record that, in the two months and three weeks since I have assumed ministerial responsibility for these agencies, I am appalled at the level of neglect and mismanagement of these agencies by the previous Administration.

Mr. Speaker, allow me first to examine and give an overview of the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA). The GCAA is a regulatory body, vested by statute with responsibility of regulating the civil aviation sector in Guyana.

The agency was established to better Guyana to fulfil its obligation as a signatory to the International Convention on Civil Aviation, commonly referred to as the Chicago Convention.

Unfortunately, this agency has not been able to fully realise its mandate. Since I, as Minister, was assigned responsibility for the GCAA, I observed that this critical organisation has been plagued with a number of problems, including, poor management and a lack of competent and qualified technical personnel.

Guyana, which falls under the auspices of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), South American Regional Office, suffers the indignity of having the lowest level of effective implementation of the standards and recommended practices established to ensure the safe and orderly development of civil aviation in South America, Georgetown - a paltry 44%. The regional average stands above 70%.

3.47 p.m.

This has been the position for the last eight years - Mr. Speaker, eight years. Time and again, officials from the International Civil Aviation Organization had expressed their concerns to the previous Administration. It would be no longer. I, as Minister, will ensure that this embarrassing state of affairs ceases to exist.

Our Government understands the benefits of Guyana obtaining a Federal Aviation Administration/International Aviation Safety Assessment (FAA/IASA) Category 1 rating and, as such, will spare no effort in ensuring that Guyana is able to attain same in the shortest time possible.

Under the International Aviation Safety Assessment programme, the United States' Federal Aviation Administration determines whether another country's oversight of its air carriers that operate or seek to operate in the US or code share with a US air carrier complies with safety standards established by the ICAO.

Specifically, the assessment performance programme focuses on a country's ability, not the ability of individual air carriers, to adhere to international aviation safety standards and recommended practices.

In order to realise our objectives in this important endeavour, emphasis must be placed on the recruitment of qualified and competent technical personnel for the GCAA. We must ensure that

the Authority is staffed with the required number of inspectorate staff, particularly in the areas of flight operations and airworthiness.

The GCAA is vested with a dual role, that of regulator and that of service provider. Specifically, I would like to turn our attention to the provision of air navigation services in Guyana.

The introduction of the use of the Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) system to enhance aeronautical surveillance is a worthwhile initiative commenced by the GCAA and one which I, as Minister, intend to fully support.

Recognising the indispensability of civil aviation to the growth and development of Guyana, the budgetary allocations in *Budget 2015* will be put towards institutional strengthening to ensure a well-equipped GCAA, one which is able to carry out its mandate and, thereby, facilitate the development of the aviation sector.

The APNU/AFC Government has no intention of shirking its responsibilities on delivering on the promises made to the people of Guyana. I recall that, in the APNU/AFC Manifesto, we promised that, in terms of the maritime and aviation sectors, we would ensure that the legal and regulatory framework would be examined to ensure that these sectors are properly constituted and equipped to meaningfully contribute to the growth and development of the Guyanese economy. In this regard, I am pleased to announce that I will, shortly, be seeking to pilot, through the National Assembly, a Civil Aviation (Amendment) Bill, which Bill will seek to make critical changes to the current regulatory framework for civil aviation in Guyana, geared at ensuring a robust, responsive framework. I expect as well that, shortly, industry consultations on a new set of operating regulations will commence.

I now turn my attention to the Demerara Harbour Bridge Corporation (DHBC). The Demerara Harbour Bridge is a floating steel structure which is 6,074 feet in length and spans the Demerara River from Peters Hall on the East to Plantation Meer Zorgen on the West.

The accounts for the DHBC for the years ending 31st December, 2011 and 2012, respectively, were laid in the National Assembly in July, 2015. The financial statements for the year ending 31st December, 2013 have been submitted to the Audit Office of Guyana (AOG) for auditing.

The projected sum to be spent on capital works for the DHBC in this four-month period is \$90 million. This sum will facilitate extensive rehabilitation work. The construction of a new crossing between the eastern and western banks of the Demerara River is a priority for our Government.

It might be recalled that, under the previous Administration, through the National Industrial and Commercial Investments Ltd. (NICIL), an expression of interest process using the public-private partnership model was initiated.

Sir, I can assure you that this new Administration, in its pursuit to construct a new crossing, will be developing a more creative and cost-effective model to construct a new fixed bridge across the Demerara, as indicated by the Minister of Finance, Hon. Winston Jordan. This will be done with the involvement and consultation of the appropriate agencies and stakeholders, hence the theme, *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*.

The asphalt plant, which is now under the management of the DHBC, in 2014, produced a total of 48,408.88 tonnes asphaltic concrete.

The Demerara Harbour Bridge Corporation has recently acquired a new mobile asphalt plant which would assist greatly in enhancing productivity and supporting the Government's intensive road rehabilitation programme not only in Georgetown, but in the rural areas.

Under the previous Administration, the Transport and Harbours Department (T&HD), sadly, was reduced to a mendicant state, from a profitable department to one dependent on handouts. There has been a systemic decimation of capital forming assets. There have been no increases in rates for the last 10 or more years, whilst, simultaneously, the already beleaguered Transport and Harbours Department has been saddled with two other vessels whose only distinction are 'drinking' fuel and increasing costs. This situation cannot be allowed to continue. It is time to acquire an efficient, proper, cost-effective fleet to service the Transport and Harbours Department, and it is on this that this Government will concentrate its energies.

For the past 10 years, the previous Administration had injected \$1,828,000,000 in a failed policy of repairs on vessels, each over 50 years old, which take over five hours on a trip from Parika to Bartica, depending on tide conditions, whilst failing to retool critical income-generating sources

of revenue such as the dockyard at Mazaruni and the central workshop, both of which can service the existing fleet and provide repairs and other services to sister agencies such as the Demerara Harbour Bridge Corporation. Ironically, some contractors use the very dry dock facilities and some of their equipment to effect repairs to vessels for the Transport and Harbours Department, costing hundreds of millions of dollars.

In similar cavalier fashion, the then Minister of Public Works halted the operations of the Transport Sports Club (TSC) which was not only income generating, but also provided much needed recreation and social space for employees of the Transport and Harbours Department.

The need to address the total welfare of our human resources was clearly lost on the previous Administration. I was appalled to see the working conditions and environment under which staff of the Transport and Harbours Department was expected to perform and produce. We cannot allow these types of situations to continue. We would embark on a programme to ensure that the Transport and Harbours Department becomes a viable, well-coordinated entity, able to support the developmental thrust of this APNU/AFC Government.

This programme envisages the phased development of critical infrastructure, supported by a sensible repair and maintenance scheme, geared towards ensuring the solvency of the Department. Further, we will ensure that the establishment of the Advisory Council, as contemplated under section 5 of the Transport and Harbours Act, Chapter 49:04, is given priority. Instead of casting persons with institutional knowledge aside, we will utilise their energies and expertise to lift the Department to stardom.

This Budget also seeks to find synergies among the various agencies. The Works Services Group (WSG), which will be dealt with more extensively by Hon. Minister Patterson, in his presentation, will ensure that our roads, bridges and sea defences are optimally advanced, taking into consideration proper checks and balances to ensure value for money.

Our Force Accounts Unit (FAU), as you are by now aware, is going through a systemic resurfacing of most of the streets in Georgetown and the region, and, with the full commissioning of the mobile asphalt plant, will be going into the various regions to deliver these critical services. Indeed, the Unit will be equipped and provided with the requisite machinery,

equipment and personnel to ensure that it can deliver quality works as we build on its internal, self-sufficient capacity.

There will be no more patches for the eyesores we call our streets. We can and must build in-house capacity to deliver services in a more responsive, time-bound fashion, instead of farming out contracts right, left and Hon. Jagdeo to sycophants and cronies.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have 10 minutes more.

Ms. Ferguson: Additionally, the programmes and projects of the Hinterland Electrification Company Inc. (HECI), which is tasked with ensuring the necessary energy infrastructure is in place for persons utilising services in the interiors of Guyana, will be expanded to include not just the 6,000 households that were given access to power via solar panels, but to also ensure that schools, community centres, health clinics and other development nodes are given access to increased power supply through the creation of energy hubs for development.

4.02 p.m.

These nodes will facilitate access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT), further processing and other services of like kind. We also need to maintain and replace components over their critical life.

We will also develop mini and macro hydroelectric facilities to capture the latent energy running in our numerous rivers and falls such as Kato, Tumatumari, and Mocomoco. These are all initiatives that we are proposing to secure and preserve our common energy future, and for which we are seeking broad-based consensus.

Time will not permit me to elaborate on the woes facing the Guyana Post Office Corporation (GPOC) nor the state of its infrastructure. Suffice it to say, we are in the process of crafting a strategic plan to take that agency into full service mode, utilising all of the available technology, coupled with unique financial services provision. Monthly, the post offices pay out billions of dollars on behalf of other state agencies and receive little value for services. We will ensure that we revisit some of these arrangements and come up with creative strategies for sustainability, utilising its physical presence in various parts of the country.

Finally, I am compelled to point out that the measures outlined in the 2015 Budget are geared towards rooting out endemic inefficiencies, building staff and organisational morale, improving infrastructure and capabilities, and catapulting these agencies into increased productivity and profitability.

We can and we must develop public service institutions with creative approaches encapsulated in the tenets of a new public management system. Everything must make economic and social sense.

No longer can we afford to plod along; no longer can we leave development to chance; no longer can we hope to create change by muddling around. Rather, we, as a Government, must be responsible, change oriented, development conscious, and purpose driven, to ensure that the Guyanese people are the beneficiaries of all that a productive and prosperous Guyana has to offer.

In short, Mr. Speaker, no more campaign roads, no more half-baked, bird-brained responses to crises; and no more sacrificing the Guyanese people on the altar of personal aggrandisement; no more. It is time to create a prosperous Guyana. It is time we realise our common destiny. It is time we walk hand in hand with those who want to walk with us.

Be assured, Mr. Speaker, that Guyana will advance a stronger, resilient and purposeful nation. She will be endued with the latitude to breathe again; she will survive and thrive, naysayers notwithstanding. It is to this that we commit ourselves as a Government, and it is to this that we pledge our lives.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I think this is a good time to take the suspension. This sitting is suspended for one hour. Thank you.

Siting suspended at 4.05 p.m.

Siting resumed at 5.01 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting is resumed. Please be seated.

The next speaker on our list, Hon. Members, is the Hon. Bheri Ramsaran. You have the floor, sir.

Dr. Ramsaran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Allow me, first of all, to congratulate you on your ascension to the post of Speaker, joining with my other Colleagues to recognise the good work we expect of you and the good work that you have been doing so far.

Allow me, also, to join with my other Colleagues in expressing condolences to the Hon. Catherine Hughes on her recent loss. I must pause here to expand a little. This loss is close to us because it occurred to one of the Members of our House. It is as avoidable as it is sad. I am pained. We need, in passing, to pause and decide as a nation, on both sides of this aisle, what we will do to stop this...I do not want to use un-parliamentary language by saying 'nonsense', but for this degree I can do so. We need to put an end to this carnage. We need to put an end to the abuse of alcohol which puts at risk valuable citizens like the one who was lost. Mrs Hughes, my condolences. We need to join forces to end this madness.

I also would like, in my opening remarks, to congratulate the Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo on his unanimous election to the post of Leader of the Opposition and on his return to the National Assembly. This latter development was particularly welcomed by the youth of our country.

Allow me, also, to recognise that there are several new, debutant parliamentarians. I would like to welcome them. We have already heard some of them and we have seen that we definitely are going to have a good mix, a good interaction. I would have liked to see a few more young people but we will make do with what we have. Those of us who are not so young will try to assist them in their youthful endeavours. Allow me, particularly, to welcome all debutants but, more especially, the Hon. Clive Jagan. It is good to have a Jagan back in the House!

Mr. Speaker, recall that Guyanese, a few months ago, on 11th May, 2015, came out in their thousands determined to ensure the continued expansion of wealth creation, inclusivity, personal, family and community empowerment, upliftment and well-being initiated in October, 1992. Guyanese came out in their thousands on 11th May, 2015 to return to Office the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), which had lifted the country out of the morass, helplessness, hopelessness and haplessness that had stifled the country up to then. Guyanese, in 1992, had finally been able to free themselves of the stench of rigged elections, of corruption, of nepotism and of discrimination in the immediate post-independence decades. They were determined on

11th May, 2015 to return the PPP/C Government that had liberated our society, infused it with energy and hope, with dignity and renewed dynamism.

The PPP/C had inherited an economy which could only afford less than 1% of the then People's National Congress (PNC) budget for the Health Vote - that was way back in 1992/1993 - but has now bequeathed the current Administration an Economy which can allow the Hon. Winston Jordan to allocate a whopping 10.5% of this year's Budget, which is, also, incidentally, vastly larger overall than the last Budget of the PNC of 1992.

These hopes and aspirations of 11th May, 2015 were shattered by the stout refusal of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) to conduct a recount, which should have been automatic in the circumstances of such close results. This, Mr. Speaker and Colleagues, could have been completed in a day. That might well have put us on a better path of national reconciliation and the national conversation might have ended less acrimoniously.

These same thousands of Guyanese stood dumbstruck when the extravagant swearing in and the subsequent inauguration of Mr. Granger took place. The Guyana National Stadium at Providence hosted the grand inauguration. It was the first confirmation of the suspicions of the Guyanese masses of the extravagance that would follow an APNU/AFC victory.

The recent 100% increase in the emoluments of the coalition's Cabinet Members should not then come as a surprise, although we still shudder at it. The inauguration with pomp and ceremony was also instructive in another way. It was the same PNC/APNU/AFC outfit which had maligned the Guyana National Stadium, created division around this issue, and had harassed the Jagdeo Administration at every step in the construction of that transformational project. As a matter of fact, every transformational project of successive PPP/C Administrations was pillaged - the Hope Canal and the Speciality Hospital among others.

The Hope Canal recently proved its worth. It quietly proved its worth. There was no pomp and ceremony; there was nobody cutting ribbons and nobody having opening ceremonies because that was the 'Jagdeo relief canal' - another Jagdeo project. The Hope Canal has proved its worth already, although it has not officially been launched. I am told that it is only partly operational. At that time it took off an ocean of water, avoiding massive flooding of the extensive areas of Mahaica and Mahaicony, which it served. It was pressed into early service for this purpose. It

also prevented the flooding of thousands of pit latrines and septic tanks. This is the point I want to make: this, in turn, Hon. Members, prevented the emergence of diarrhoeal diseases usually expected during such heavy rainfall and flooding. The distress and misery that these diseases usually unleash on our vulnerable children in previous times simply did not arise. This Public Health function of the Hope Canal is easily overlooked. But it is valued and would continue to be with us for the existence of this Canal.

The savings from medical interventions avoided is obvious; the suffering avoided is welcome. The success story of the PPP/C initiative will continue to contribute to the reduction of diseases, and improve quality of life, beyond the other obvious benefits which the Canal brings.

This Administration, now, must provide adequately for its upkeep. I did not hear much reference to it, nor did I see, in my quick perusal of the other documents, the three Tomes, much allocated to it.

The much anticipated and vaunted Speciality Hospital is another Transformation Project. This Speciality Hospital is erased from the 2015 Budget. What a shame! The Budget presented by the Hon. Mr. Winston Jordan has only a paltry sum for “closure of the project”. This is myopic! The closure of this project is extremely myopic. It is vindictiveness overcoming reason and enlightenment. To quote the Hon. Clive Jagan, “this is pig-headedness”.

Over US\$4 million has already been invested in site preparation and specialised weight bearing foundation, which has a specific footprint of the Speciality Hospital. *[Interruption]*

5.10 p.m.

I would not reply to the noises, but I must remind you, Mr. Speaker, that works that have been paid for are measurable on the ground. I am sorry that the Prime Minister is not here because I was particularly disappointed with his interventions when he was on this side of the House. He kept saying that there is only bush on the site. There are over 1,800 piles driven and a lot of other preparatory work has been done.

Any honest person would want to know why the country would want to abandon US\$4 million in the ground. What is going to be done with it? As a matter of fact, when I heard the Hon. Jordan in his Budget Speech, I said that this Budget is bereft of new ideas.

What should be done? Get this project done and add to it! Your Budget should have included the Speciality Hospital plus other things.

The Jamaicans have jumped ahead; they have gone ahead and they are building it. Some of the market that we should have gotten has gone. Your new ideas, Hon. Jordan, through you, Mr. Speaker, should be not only to complete this project, but to outdo the PPP/C; it will be a Specialty Hospital Plus. That is why we specially selected that choice piece of prime real estate. It is larger than the footprint that we have now set up. You need to establish it and extend it. You need to build on what is existent.

The Hon. Minister of Health would have already been able to see, from the documents left, the epidemiological transition – in which Guyanese are now contracting other diseases. Only during the last debate, while we were discussing this said project, we heard of the collapse of a certain military officer, in his early forties, who was exercising. He conked out. It is incumbent on the Administration to complete this special project and that is why I take some difference with the paragraph in the Minister’s Speech where he refers to getting rid of this Capital Project.

I would like to move to another aspect of the Budget Presentation. The Budget speech refers to ‘Health Vision 2020’ about which the Hon. Minister stated:

“This Government will invest significantly in the health of our people to realise the successful implementation of Health Vision 2020.”

Here it is. I was one of the main authors, along with a multitude of other support staff, including a multitude of people from the Ministry of Finance, for example, and other ministries...It was a collective work. I am happy that Mr. Jordan, the Hon. Minister of Finance, sees the wisdom in looking at the Road Map until 2020. It is being done in two phases – up to the year 2015 and then from 2015 to 2020.

We would like to recognise that, but what we would like to say is we do not see the vigour in the Budget. We do not see the allocations, which should be there, to support some of the pronouncements. For example, it states that a strategic plan for programmatic areas within the Health sector will inform our actions over the next five years. It further goes on to state that these

actions are aimed at “arresting non- communicable diseases (NCDs), eliminating maternal infant mortality and providing universal health coverage”.

I want to note, and the Minister should be aware of this, that, if we want to address or eliminate maternal deaths, there needs to be blood products. Only recently, and probably currently, there is a blood shortage. I am not gloating about this. I am just pained. Only last year, the Ministry of Health was able to harvest the largest ever units of blood donated. It was 11,148 units. It is shocking now that there is a blood shortage. I am certain that the Minister would do all that he could to prevent this. This is an unacceptable plunge. I noticed, for example, that there have been certain changes in the ministerial office. Some of the persons who were there were placed there and tasked with working closely with the National Blood Transfusion Service (NBTS) to ensure adequate harvesting – large numbers. For example, a certain Call Centre usually gives lots of that; a certain religious organisation on the West Bank of Demerara, in Cornelia Ida (CI) gives us a lot; and a certain private school gives us a lot. Where are these efforts?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Ramsaran: I thank you. I will be finished long before that. It means that the dismantling of certain aspects of the Ministry, with the change of a new administration, has redounded to the *disbenefit*, if I can invent a word, or to the harm of the Guyanese public, especially, potentially, our pregnant women.

I further would like to refer to another Paragraph. Incidentally, not only is there the Road Map, Hon. Speaker, but there is also the Strategic Plan for NCDs. It is all there and all that the Government has to do is get up and run with it. There is hardly any tweaking to be done.

What I have noticed is that the Hon. Minister of Finance is very much enamoured, and rightly so, with the Presidential Commission for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases. Non-Communicable Diseases account for as much as 78 – 80 % of our deaths and morbidity, that is sickness or disease and it needs to be addressed it.

Last year, on the 12th September, 2014, Caribbean Wellness Day, there was a launch, at the Guyana International Conference Center (GICC), of the Presidential Commission for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases. This means, Colleagues, that Guyana

has now joined 10 other Caribbean countries in creating such a Commission. This will give it certain powers. What I noticed is that the Government does not seem to have the same vigour or the same energy in providing for this in the Budget.

This prompts me to think that this is a little “cut and paste”. You have looked at some of the things in Vision 2020. You have looked at some of the documents you have, for example, another good document that we have here – the National Commission for NCDs and the Strategic Plan for NCDs.

I would like to encourage the Hon. Minister of Finance to address this matter more comprehensively. Obviously, there are certain weaknesses in his Ministry. I must note that there are two Ministers to replace Yours Truly, so I do hope that they can put their heads together. Two of them have taken over a job that one man used to do and I think that could very well be a part of the problem. The Minister of Finance is urged to look at the real needs of the people.

Another point is this: much of the interventions in the Speech made by the Minister of Finance, especially those under ‘Universal Health Coverage for Wellness of the Nation’ on page 38, would need other support. For example, there needs to be the human resource to execute or to deliver these projects, programmes and services. I do not notice anywhere in the Speech much emphasis on training and I have notice that there is not much provision for training; for example, the expanded need for nurses. In the Manifesto of the People’s Progressive Party, we were demanding, calling and encouraging that an entry capacity of 250 nurses per year is kept.

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

Mr. Ramsaran: Thank you, Sir.

I have looked quickly at the Budget and I have looked at the speech and I did not see the necessary emphasis. Here again, is where the Ministry of Finance could probably relook at some of the approaches in the past because it was the Ministry of Finance that worked closely with the Ministry of Health and decided that the intervention into nursing training is critical. We need to encourage the Ministry of Finance to re-craft this Budget and to put some more ideas into it. For example, the Georgetown School of Nursing Annexe in Kingston is a very good place. It was

well selected for quick adaption but it will cost some moneys and some resources to get it up to par and to keep in the classrooms 250 nurses yearly.

I do not see that emphasis and I do urge that the Government tries to get more resources for the creation of the workforce.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would like to say that only recently another 100 of the ‘Jagdeo scholars’ returned from Cuba. The Government has been given that on a platter. Previously, 500 came in. Most of them are doctors. I would like to encourage the Minister of Finance and his Colleague, the Hon. Minister of Health, to craft programmes where these 500 doctors and, more so, the 100 or so who came in recently can be quickly deployed in the Primary Health Care System.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have two minutes.

Mr. Ramsaran: Thank you, Sir. I do not see much provision for doctors’ quarters. I do not see much capital for the provision of housing. In the regions, there is some but it is not enough. The regions need to fight for that provision so that not only would the doctors be available but they would also be able to go the regions and deliver services.

Sir, I want to say that the PPP/C has handed over a very robust Health Sector, which still needs nurture, upkeep and support.

I would like to close by repeating what we stated in the Manifesto. We need the Government to have the Speciality Hospital completed and probably expanded. We need there to be a 100-bed facility at the East Bank Demerara Regional Hospital at Diamond to take pressure off of the Georgetown Public Hospital.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your indulgence and I do hope that these points that I have brought to you would be able to create good food for thought to fashion and create a proper budget, a deeper budget with more thought and with more ideas.

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

Mr. Williams: If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker. I have already, on a previous occasion, extended salutations to you, Sir, on your ascension to the Office of Speaker.

I now wish to extend congratulations to the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Da Costa Jordan, for the preparation of this Budget on behalf of the APNU/AFC Government. I have known Mr. Jordan over the years and I am not surprised as to the quality of his Budget. I expect no less from someone who has prepared every Budget speech between 1981 and 2007, a year or two excepted... [Dr. Jagdeo: Did Winston Jordan tell you all how he got the job?] As you are bringing this up... Mr. Speaker, some years ago, when in Opposition, the Members on that side of the House noticed the improved quality of my contributions on economic matters. The first year, they observed it. The second year, they were palpably disturbed. The third year, they were determined to find out where I got my economics from. But my advisor was no person less than the Hon. Minister of Finance.

5.25 p.m.

True to form, when it was discovered that that was my advisor, Budget Director at the time, services were terminated. But what they did not know was that my venerable friend was a seed. They did not know that he was a seed. When they buried him, he burst forth from under the earth and he has ascended in glory. And that is why he is here seated to present this Budget that takes account of the working class people of this country. Sir, I salute the Hon. Minister of Finance because he stayed the course.

Mr. Speaker, it is apposite that I should also welcome the Leader and Members of the Opposition to this new Parliament which I describe as a House of inclusiveness. We now embark on a new ethos in Guyana, a new era, and we are prepared to work with the Leader of the Opposition and his Members. We are willing to do that and we are willing to include them, Sir, in the decision-making processes of the State for the benefit of all Guyanese. But it is all up to the Leader of the Opposition and his Members.

After 23 years in Opposition, the APNU/AFC Government now offers the Guyanese people, “*A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*”. The ‘ship of state’ must be geared up in preparation for this new journey. And I cannot help but to be reminded of an analogous mission of the Israelites, as the Promised Land beckoned. And so, as I quote, I refer you, Mr. Speaker and this honourable House, to Deuteronomy 31:7-8:

“And Moses called unto Joshua and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, “Be strong and of good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the lord hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shall cause them to inherit it. And the Lord he it is that go before thee; he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee. Fear not neither be dismayed.””

We were in an abyss of despair, a land where there was no respect for the rule of law, the Constitution, the Parliament or the doctrine of the separation of powers; bad governance and lasciviousness prevailed.

I am pleased to announce that within 100 days of the APNU/AFC Government, with its fresh approach, has assented to Bills passed in this honourable House, has restored the independence of constitutional bodies and has restored the subvention to the Critchlow Labour College. And I must talk about this because, for years, it was voted and laid in the Estimates annually. But the then Government, on that side, refused to give the students of that College the grant that the people voted for year after year. But, as the saying goes, God does not sleep. There is an old aphorism, “moon runs until day catches it”. Daylight is here. And so, the subvention to the Critchlow Labour College has been restored.

Within two weeks, the APNU/AFC Government passed the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Finance of Terrorism (AML/CFT) Bill. Sir, you knew the problem we had with that and also the regulations; all of that we have passed well within the 100 days.

I could leave this to my other Colleagues, but, need I tell you, Sir, about the increase in old age pension? That is another thing we laboured under; we laboured a lot with that. One year, we had to put our foot down and we said that we are not starting this Budget unless you do something to increase the old age pension. And it is only after applying that pressure that they barely increased it by a nominal amount. I do not know what it is they have against the old age pensioners of this country but, fortunately, the APNU/AFC Government is here and we will take care of the pensioners of this country.

Another burning issue in my heart...for well over a decade and a half, we have been beseeching the Members on that side of the House now to pay the Guyanese workers a living wage. For nearly 15 years, they kept giving them 5%. What does that mean? There was no real increase in

the wages of our workers. What they had them doing was marking time, going nowhere. But, fortunately for us, the APNU/AFC Government will take care of all of our workers. We have started by doing this in this Budget. I have my tutors here so I do not have to go into the economics of it all to let you know that in one case it is 26% and in another case it is nearly 50%. I am going to leave that for my teacher. [Mr. Damon: And what are you paying yourself, Mr. Williams - 100%?] It is a good thing he has asked that question, Mr. Speaker. Maybe it might cause a different mindset with the Members of the other side of the House. I do not know if they knew, but that is the only thing that all the Presidents of this country ever agreed to without let or hindrance. President Burnham, President Hoyte, President Cheddi Jagan, President Janet Jagan, President Bharrat Jagdeo, President Samuel Hinds, President Donald Ramotar – they have hidden him from us and we cannot even remember his name - and now President Granger have all agreed to one thing and that is that the salary of the Attorney General, which was just enquired about, must be fixed to that of the Chancellor of Guyana. No President, from the First Executive President of this country, ever changed that. So, you do not have to ask me anything about that. All of your Presidents approved of that payment, and you have a former one here too. So, I do not know why you asked me about that. When the time comes, my Colleagues on this side of the House need to be paid what they have to be paid and we will deal with that.

A fresh approach indeed as the pillars of justice are being erected and the doctrine of the separation of powers restored... Our vision is that of a justice system that is characterised by fairness for the Guyanese people that is efficacious, that they can embrace and feel safe and secure in the knowledge that they live in a country of law and order – and you all should listen, my Comrades – and, if one is prepared to do the crime, he must be prepared to do the time.

In this fresh approach, there will not be one law for the rich and one for the poor, Mr. Speaker. Justice in Guyana must be blind and colourless. The law will take its course. No longer must mothers send their sons on errands only to locate them days later in a police station lock-up. This Government will set its face against arbitrary arrests, unlawful detention and excessive delays in court trials, whether criminal or civil.

We will revisit and review paper committals, which were intended, if Members of this House would recall, to speed up preliminary inquiries in Magistrates' Courts but are rarely resorted to by our magistrates. Criminals must not walk free because of incapacity in the administration of

justice. The APNU/AFC Government will implement measures to enhance capacity in the trial process.

Crime Scene Investigations (CSI) where investigators are trained to collect, collate and preserve evidence whilst preventing contamination of the scene, fingerprinting, ballistics, deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) testing and others must be developed. Investigators will be trained to prepare their cases, including documentary evidence and critical review of witness statements to pass the admissibility requirements during trials. Training police and state prosecutors to present effective cases and trials and training of magistrates to enhance their capacity to appreciate and deal with such evidence...

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 and disposition. [Mr. Nandlall: *[inaudible]* read the Estimates.] When we are dealing with the Estimates you will see - patience.

Our Government will seek to create a pool of legislative and treaty draft persons for the State Offices, including this Parliament Office, and emphasise model legislation for the Caribbean Community (CARICOM); to explore and increase access to alternative dispute resolutions and restorative justice and community justice services and to access legal information.

The APNU/AFC Government recognises the importance of combating cybercrime and enhancing cyber security. Already, we have received reports of cyber-attacks and noted the absence of cybercrime legislation to counter such attacks and guarantee cyber security in Guyana. The Attorney General's Chambers and the Ministry of Legal Affairs will spearhead the creation of cybercrime legislation and will seek to harmonise it with that of other member States of CARICOM.

5.40 p.m.

The capacity of the Chambers of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel (CPC) has been enhanced by the participation of three staffers in a Cybercrime Legislation Workshop in Miami, United States of America (USA) and stakeholder consultations will be undertaken.

The Attorney General was invited to lead a delegation, including the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), Mrs. Shalimar Ali-Hack and Justice of Appeal, Ms. Yonette Cummings, to a Regional Cybercrime Workshop for Judges and Judicial Officers in Sao Paulo, Brazil later this month. But the Hon. Attorney General, I am afraid, will not be able to attend because of his participation in this Budget 2015 process. *[Interruption]*

The need for commissions of inquiries and inquests into the deaths of hundreds of Guyanese men during the years of the killing fields, 2000-2008, is an imperative. The mothers and families of these victims want answers and they want closure.

The Drafting Division of the Attorney General's Chambers is currently examining legislation to widen the class of persons who can qualify as coroners to conduct inquests into these unnatural deaths. It is expected that inquests will begin shortly.

The situation of the University of Guyana (UG) law graduates automatic entry to the Hugh Wooding Law School; the sudden imposition of nearly a 40% increase in tuition fees; the reversal of the decision to permit students of the Hugh Wooding Law School to pay 50% of their tuition fees up front and 50% the following January; and now, the requirement where they are demanding the entire 100% up front, is engaging the attention of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) Government. All students of this Cooperative Republic of Guyana; their interests; their welfare; and well-being would be of importance to our Government, but because of the way in which we have inherited this economy. I do not know what the quarrel is. How could this country not be bankrupt if we have to find \$12 billion this week and \$23 billion the next week? We are not even a month in Government. I am going to come to the other debts that keep popping up like the on and off super course in the Attorney General's Chambers just now. **[Ms. Teixeira:** I hope you were not doing your finances when you were a lawyer. You accounting system... *inaudible]* The Hon. Member, do we have a grazer?

The previous Government never informed the nation that the automatic entry of the 25 UG law graduates was limited to the academic year 2013-2014. There were no files in the AG's Chambers speaking to this issue - none. So it was up to this Government to seek to amend the agenda of the Heads of Government, to bring this issue up and to be able to get the blessings of

the Heads of Government. I must thank the President of Guyana and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, both of whom facilitated this, to ensure the automatic entry of the 25 UG law graduates for the years 2015 and 2016 to the Hugh Wooding Law School. “No weapon formed against us could prosper”.

This Government, the APNU/AFC Government, will continue to make representations to the CARICOM Heads of Government on behalf of these students and certainly on the ground that the notice for this 40% increase, which in Guyana dollars is about \$800,000, was short notice and it is unreasonable to give such notice of such a large increase within only a matter of weeks before the new law school year begins. We will continue to act in the interest of our Guyanese law students.

Let me move on now to Nandlall’s Law Revision.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have 10 minutes more.

Mr. Williams: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Those lovely purple books, they are here on display. Those Laws of Guyana, the revision of those Laws, were both costly and mediocre. After spending more than US\$420,000, the revision was replete with errors, gaps in subsidiary legislation, regulations were left undone and entire Acts and many provisions have been left out, though not repealed. One such Act is the Guyana National Service Act. I do not know why they selected that. Many other Acts have been omitted. [*Interruption*] As a result, 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 attached to the CARICOM Secretariat, and he is offering his services free of charge to all CARICOM Member States. Thank heavens.

The correction exercise was divided into two phases to wit:

1. To verify errors and mistakes in the general index of the published volumes; and
2. To verify errors, mistakes and omissions in all the volumes of the published laws.

That correction exercise is on-going.

The situation we have is that those nicely bounded volumes are largely useless and really are of no value, unless you read them with the old green volumes. To correct them having spoken with the Professor, the exercise will have to be to determine whether we have to do an entire reprint or whether it is feasible for us to insert the corrections.

This is an abject case of the need to follow sound legal advice. The advice proffered was that the six months desired, by the then Attorney General was folly inadequate to do a proper revision exercise. That advice was not heeded, and that is the result we have; so much for the Nandlall's Revision Exercise.

I will move on. The Chambers of the DPP in the reporting year received over 160 depositions, of which 107 indictments were prepared. Ninety-nine matters were prosecuted in the assizes - 75 in Demerara, 14 in Berbice and 10 in Essequibo. Thirty-six matters were *nolle prosequi* by the DPP, including cases where the victims did not wish to proceed with trials. There were 55 paper committals under the Sexual Offences Act, but none were reported in relation to the preliminary inquiries (PI) under the General Criminal Law Offences. Counsels from that Chamber appeared in 50 matters in the Court of Appeal, eight in the full court and four in the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ). Out of 568 bail applications before the Chief Justice, 485 were granted.

The Chambers intend to expand in New Amsterdam, Berbice and there is a building there, where on the upper floor, they will build offices which will be headed by the Assistant Director of Public Prosecutions (ADPP). There are a total of 263 cases pending in the assizes, 199 in Demerara alone, 49 in Berbice and 15 in Essequibo. This is where the policy of the last Government was lopsided. No effort was made to get rid of the backlog of these criminal cases, serious cases, murder cases and manslaughter cases. We are saying that we will require judges to work in the assizes, so that we could get rid of the backlog and stop having people languishing in jail awaiting their trials.

The AG Chambers require serious enhancement. The Litigation Division requires senior law officers to effectively service the claims against the Government and its agencies and departments. The APNU/AFC Government has inherited a mountain of debts in the form of large sums in damages awarded against the State and left unpaid by the Opposition, RUDISA International NV is one which comes to mind, but that is a small sum. NH International Ltd - that

is a judgement of nearly \$3 billion unpaid. Instead of settling this matter with the Company, some flimsy attempt was made to go to the CCJ on appeal, which did not last long. So we are saddled with even more interests on something that could have been dealt with years ago. This was years ago. We have the case of Trinidad Cement Limited (TCL), that has not been paid; and the Bergassi Group that has not been paid. That is the point I am making, we did not seem to win cases at all during the period of the Opposition, and so we have to enhance the capacity of the Attorney General's Chambers and put senior people in that Chambers.

The Drafting Division of the Chambers also requires senior drafts persons to deal with the burgeoning demand for innovative legislation. The digitalisation of the records of all the registries is desirable. With the Deeds Registry, we need to widen the process that has started, so that we could cover and implement the digitalisation, in both the Land and the Commercial Registries.

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

Mr. Williams: A Land Registry Registrar has been appointed and will be sworn in soon. I notice that there have been several letters written, but to me it is simple learning. Anybody on the mere visual apprehension of the relevant section, Section 7(1) of the Land Registry Act, would recognise that it was a sunset provision. When that Act was passed, it said that the Registrar and Deputy Registrar of the Deeds Registry would be the Registrar and Deputy Registrar for that Land Registry for the time being, which mean that once a Registrar and Deputy Registrar were appointed for the Land Registry, that provision had no further relevance whatsoever. It is even more so a *fortiori* that the Deeds Registry now, as presently constituted, is overwhelmed with work and there is no way, no how, that that Registrar could also be the Registrar of the Land Registry, where the whole world is complaining that all the backlog in cases have been for nearly 10 to 15 years. There is no question about that. I do not know if people are feeling that they need to invoke a section that has long ago slid into the sunset, so as to get some particular person in that Office. But we are well advised that that cannot happen and we will swear in the new Registrar shortly. It is quite obvious, if they are not right, that is it.

The New Building Society (NBS) is a building on the Avenue of the Republic which has been acquired by the Government and will house the Commercial and Land Registries. The budget

caters for dedicated lines and wide area of network to facilitate the interconnectivity between the Commercial Registry and the sub-registries in Berbice and Essequibo. A single jurisdiction database for registration of businesses and companies within CARICOM is due to be installed in the Commercial Registry this year.

5.55 p.m.

A Registrar of the Commercial Court will also be appointed shortly and the Deputy Registrar. There is also a vacancy which was left by Ms. Nicola Pierre, when she was Chairperson for the Board of the Deeds and Commercial Registries. That vacancy will also be filled.

The Supreme Court now has financial independence since the passing of the Constitution Amendment Act 2015 in this honourable House by the APNU/AFC Government. We will honour this Act of restoration. Their independence was taken away from them by this device of a budget agency.

The Family Court now has two judges identified for it, along with two courts that are well furnished. The Hon. Carl Singh, Chancellor of the Judiciary, is awaiting the completion of the Family Court Rules and will make an announcement shortly.

Rehabilitation works on the Georgetown High Court, including the east to west wing, have been done. The elevated catwalk connecting the Family Court building to the High Court building has been completed.

There are 14 court rooms in the Georgetown High Court; three in Essequibo; and three in Berbice.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have two minutes more.

Mr. Williams: Yes please. The complement of judges in the Supreme Court is 14, which are the Chief Justice and 13 Justice judges. The Lethem Magistrate Court is due to be completed shortly. I propose to repair there with the honourable Chancellor, where we would open that court which will be housed with the Registry, *et cetera* for that area and accommodation for magistrates.

So, the future of the administration of justice in Guyana is bright under the APNU/AFC Government. We say, as my friend would say on his television programme, “There will be

justice for all". So I have no hesitation in commending this budget, this well-crafted budget, by my tutor, to this honourable House for passage. I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Nandlall: I want to take this opportunity, as I did in your Chambers, to extend to you my warmest congratulations on your appointment as Speaker of the National Assembly. I have no doubt that you will serve the Office as Speaker with distinction. I also would like to take this opportunity to convey to Mrs. Catherine Hughes my deepest sympathy on the passage of her mother-in-law.

It is a privilege to be afforded the opportunity to serve in the Eleventh Parliament and to serve the people of Guyana, once again, and to participate as one of my first exercises in the Debate of the 2015 Budget. I have the honour or dishonour of speaking after the Hon. Attorney General and learned Friend. We are all gathered here to debate a motion presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance, regarding the Estimates and Expenditure for 2015. My friend, in his presentation, has not made a singular reference to the budget.

What he did was to simply give us some information that is available in the office of the Attorney General, without telling what he has planned for the justice sector of this country. Indeed, the Budget Speech of the Hon. Minister of Finance is conspicuously silent on any matter concerning the administration of justice. Experts all over the world have told us that there is indeed a strong causal connection between economic prosperity and a functioning justice system. This budget, at this Budget Presentation, does not *ex facie*. It is not confined to a 2015 Budget Presentation because at page 15, it outlines a 20/20 Vision for Guyana. This is what the Hon. Minister regaled the House with on the 10th August, 2015.

“As Members of this House we are all task with realising the common vision of a good life for all who live within our nation.”

I now want to share with all Guyanese, across the length and breadth of our 214,970 km, our vision of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, in the year 2020. So, for the next five years, the Hon. Minister of Finance has written some 70 pages and not a single sentence is dedicated to the administration of justice; to the rule of law; and to the fundamental rights of our people that we keep hearing about all the time. That must be a worrying thing. [*Interruption*] I thought the Hon.

Attorney General would have used the occasion to fill the vacuum created by this document. Instead, he regaled the Minister as his tutor, compounding the problem.

Before I address my learned Friend's presentation, I want to make some remarks about the Budget Speech itself. The first 14 pages, I moved straight to page 15 just now because the first 14 pages really consisted of area citation, some jaundiced political reports of events preceding the elections and post elections; politically jaundiced from the views of the author. Then there is one page of a report on the development on the world's economy. Then, there are some statistics extracted, I assumed, from the Bureau of Statistics, which the Minister, later on in his budget said they are unreliable, and we need to reform that institution. He utilises three pages to regale us with these statistics about economic growth, *et cetera*, that he himself said, later in his presentation, were unreliable.

I want to move quickly back to the 2020 Vision. There is a paragraph here about macro-economic stability and it has the usual, I heard the adjective "fluff" being used. This budget is like an expensively and exquisitely wrapped receptacle, but when one opens the content, it is very insubstantial. Right here, in the first paragraph, speaks about what will happen over the next five years and there is a positive projection of economic growth and they said that they are committing to low inflation and stable exchange rates.

For the ordinary Guyanese, listening to me on the loud speakers, living in Guyana, experiencing three months of this Government, what have they experienced? Only in three months - economic downturn. We speak here about stable exchange rates. The US rate has move from \$206 to \$212, now. That is what the ordinary Guyanese can relate too.

Low inflation - inflation has increased over the last three months, but we have a five year commitment that all of this is going to be solved within the five years. This is a budget for the year 2015 and the people have experienced your stewardship of the economy for the last three months and the US has increased from \$206 to \$212. That is the reality.

We are hearing how we will get this economic growth in the 100-day plan. They promised reduced taxation and VAT. Here in the five year plan says,

“We will reform the tax system to make it more robust, allowing the efficiency of gains from greater compliance and an expanded tax base.”

So, the 100-day plan promises reduction of taxes and here it is, we have a Vision 20/20 that speaks to a robust taxation and increased tax base.

I move quickly over to another part of the Budget Speech. The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector; great weather is made at page 18. This ICT sector is described in the headline as, “Knowledge driven Government and industry” and I presumed that this is going to be the engine that will drive the modern Guyana - the ICT sector.

One of the first things that this Government did was to shut down and scrap the One Laptop Per Family (OLPF) programme. I do not know how we will speak about an ICT sector, when you have shut down the State’s largest initiative that is computer driven. Then at the bottom of the next page, we replace it with 9,000 computers being distributed. We were going to share 90,000 computers throughout this country and it has been...How much did we share already? [Ms. **Teixeira:** We shared 54,000 computers.] [Mr. **Jagdeo:** There are 9,000 computers that are on their way from China that we bought.] And the 9,000 computers we bought and we were going to share under the OLPF Programme, 90,000... [Interruption] Not with our money; obviously, with the State’s money. But you are not going to do that, you are reducing it by 90%. As my learned Friend said on there, everyone on that side must get his salary, so the money must come from somewhere. We have four Vice-Presidents; the Prime Minister has nine security guards. [Interruption]

Mr. Williams: Under Standing Order 40 (a), this is sufficiently important that we get this record straight and that the Hon. Member withdraws his statement. There is nowhere I said anything about anyone else having a salary like the Attorney General. He should withdraw that remark and correct it.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member.

Mr. Nandlall: Under the OLPF programme, we have distributed already...

Mr. Speaker: Are you continuing your statement or are you addressing the...

Mr. Nandlall: I never made the statement that my learned Friend is attributing to be.

Mr. Speaker: Proceed please.

Mr. Nandlall: We distributed 54,000 computers and here it is, as part of a 20/20 Vision, not a 20/15 Vision, the Minister of Finance is telling the country that he is distributing 9,600 computers and that will apparently be the key generation in the ICT sector.

6.10 p.m.

Then the Hon. Minister speaks about setting up of institutional mechanisms which will ensure that we have business doing centrally in Government, using technology. He then went on to say that there is a long journey ahead of us and the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

Since 2006, we launched an initiative to have e-Governance and to amalgamate, centrally, several institutions so that better services can be delivered to our people. That is why, through the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, there was the competitive strategy. The functions of the Deeds Registry and the Commercial Registry which were joined with the Land Registry were consolidated.

We have already integrated all the various departments of the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) and the entire process is now centralised. There is an e-Transaction Bill and an e-Governance Bill that have already been drafted and are at the Chambers of the Attorney General. Clearly, the Attorney General is unaware of those Bills. All the Attorney General has to do is ask the Chief Parliamentary Counsel (CPC) and get the consultant to put the pieces together since time has elapsed because of misbehaviour of a one-seat majority Opposition in the last Parliament that had placed a hold on economic progress.

Mr. Finance Minister, this one step that you plan to start, we have completed more than three-quarters of the journey, so there are moneys to be spent elsewhere and your energies can be used elsewhere as well.

I move to speak about the sugar industry. There is one paragraph, a 2020 vision... we all acknowledged, perhaps for political reasons, some of us may lack *bona fide* when we speak

about the importance of the sugar industry, but I believe that we express a unanimous view about the importance of this industry. One paragraph is dedicated to the sugar industry and all it tells us is what we know, and that is that there are problems in the sugar industry. It tells us that the Skeldon Factory is producing sugar at three times the value of the world market and there is nothing else. It tells us that there is a Commission of Inquiry and we are awaiting the outcome of the Commission of Inquiry. Is that the vision of this Government for the sugar industry, that we will await the outcome of the Commission of Inquiry? The Commissioners have already telegraphed their findings. They have already said that the factory should be privatised and that it should be sold out. That is their verdict delivered in the newspapers.

Mr. Greenidge knows that there is a comprehensive turnaround plan for the sugar industry. It was presented to the Economic Services Committee, but that is being thrown out of the window and we are now listening to the distinguished professor, Clive Thomas, a gentleman whom I have the greatest of regards for, but his latest work on sugar is *The Poor and the Powerless*, a study of plantocracy sugar in the 1970s, from slavery to independence. With the greatest of respect to the distinguished professor, he is out of sync with the realities of the sugar industry. There is no real solution for the sugar industry that will come from the Commission of Inquiry. If the nation is holding its breath in relation to what this Budget holds for the sugar industry, it holds closure for the industry.

The paragraph on the sugar industry is followed quickly by a paragraph on the rice industry, another significant industry in our country. I remember, distinctly, during the Elections campaign, the distinguished Prime Minister, Hon. Mr. Moses Nagamootoo, accompanied by two distinguished farmers, Jinnah Rahman and Turhane Doerga, was on every television station in this country, advancing every solution to the rice industry. Three months after, the rice industry is bankrupt. Turhane Doerga and Jinnah Rahman are nowhere to be found and the Hon. Member, Mr. Nagamootoo, is quiet. They promised the farmers \$9,000 per bag. The farmers were so elated that one of them, I understand, dropped his pants on the road. The police had to step in and the gentleman was charged.

Today, what does this Budget say to the rice industry? Do you know what solution it advances, Sir? It states that it must diversify market. That is a euphemism; it is a big word. We all know that we need more market but the farmers want to know when, how and where.

They do not want a 2020 vision. They do not want to hear about increased varieties because they have done so already and are producing at 690,000 tons annually but there is no market. I spoke to the farmers at Mahaica/Mahaicony and at Black Bush Polder last Tuesday. They have paddies in their factories. There are paddies in their fields. There are paddies at the wharves... [Mr. Ali: And on the road.] ...and on the road. Hon. Minister of Finance, the farmers want to know where they will get their moneys and when they will get their moneys. [Mr. Ali: Release the \$23 billion.] The \$23 billion, I understand, is clouded in a lot of secrecy. I do not know much about it but they are expecting it. That is why I am not commenting on the \$23 billion.

The Budget speaks to governance and, under the heading of “Governance”, this is what the Hon. Minister of Finance said to the nation:

“The Government will seek to re-establish the pillars and tenets of good governance by placing particular emphasis on the strengthening of governance institutions. A Constitution Reform Commission will be established to begin re-examining the Constitution in an open and inclusive manner, and reforms introduced where recommended.”

I opened the newspapers, saw a very radiant photograph of the Hon. Prime Minister - and all of us know how he likes to be pictorially represented in the press - embracing my Friend, Nigel Hughes, and Gino Persaud; they have established a Constitution Reform Commission. I immediately called my Friend, Mr. Basil Williams, and told him that they are undermining him; the AFC is undermining the APNU. More importantly, we are speaking about constitutional reform; we are speaking about good governance; and we are speaking about respecting institutions of governance. This is the supreme law of the land. Article 119A (1) states:

“The National Assembly shall establish a Parliamentary Standing Committee for Constitutional Reform for the purpose of continually reviewing the effectiveness of the working of the Constitution and making periodic reports thereon to the Assembly, with proposals for reform as necessary.”

The last Chairman, who is now sitting as the current President of the Republic of Guyana, held one meeting in three years. I said then that he was the first soldier to ever head a Constitutional Reform Committee and he never came back to another meeting.

The Constitution speaks to a Constitution Reform Commission. [Mr. Williams: You are attacking people who are not in here.] No. That is a statement of fact. You know that. The supreme law of our land is being tossed aside. Dr. Jagan, when he spoke, said that the Parliament is the pinnacle of decision-making forum in this country. I believe he was quoting his uncle who said that Parliament is the foremost institution in our governance structure. Why is it that they are ostracising and alienating this august Body from constitutional reform, and then speak about governance?

The Budget also speaks to improved accountability and forensic audits and accounting system. I must put on record my views on the appointment of the forensic auditors. The laws of the land are being violated, while accountability and transparency are being spoken of. The Procurement Act of Guyana speaks to the process of procuring goods and services. It must be done by a public bidding process, as is outlined in the Act. Either Mr. Jordan or Mr. Sharma has taken upon himself, severally or jointly, to handpick a set of people and put them to audit State books. The method by which these people are appointed is wrong; it is non-transparent; it is corrupt; it is nepotism. Perhaps, someone may be getting a kickback. I understand that over \$200 million will be paid to the auditors who have been handpicked by Ministers.

Again, I am drawing attention to the Constitution because there is a deliberate effort to subdue and violate this document. Article 223 (1) of the Constitution states that there shall be an Auditor General for Guyana and that the public accounts of Guyana shall be audited by the Auditor General or someone authorised by him. [Mr. Williams: Can only the Auditor General audit?] Yes, only he can or he can authorise someone; the Constitution states that. So, if there was an award of contract, it should have been done with the authority of the Auditor General.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have 10 minutes more.

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you very much, Sir. We speak about a transparent Government and about corruption, and here it is that the biggest act of corruption is committed within three months of the APNU/AFC being in Government.

I want to turn to page 59 of the Budget, under the caption “Consolidated Fund”. Here, the Hon. Minister continues, like Mr. Greenidge, to misrepresent what the Constitution and the laws of this country state about the Consolidated Fund. I keep saying over and over that one must read the entire article in the Constitution.

6.25 p.m.

Words are plucked out. This is what article 216 of the Constitution states, Sir:

“All revenues or other moneys raised or received by Guyana (not being revenues or other moneys that are payable, by or under an Act of Parliament, into some other fund established for any specific purpose or that may, by or under such an Act, be retained by the authority that received them for the purpose of defraying the expenses of that authority) shall be paid into and form one Consolidated Fund”.

So, what they did was delete the entire words in the bracket and they came to the conclusion that all moneys must be paid into the Consolidated Fund. Two sets of accounts are exempted here: where you have an Act that allows you to defray expenses and then put them into the Consolidated Fund – that is one set of accounts - and then the Constitution provides for a second set that Mr. Ramjattan seems to never be able to understand. That is where the Act provides for it to be put elsewhere, like the Lottery Fund, where section 7 (1) of the Government Lotteries Act states:

“All moneys received from the sale of tickets in every Government lottery shall be paid into a deposit account in the Accountant General’s Department and such account shall be called the Government Lotteries Account.”

That is why we cannot have progress in this country. That is why we are bringing in horses and dogs to fight crimes. Section 7 (3) of the Act states:

“At the end of each financial year there shall be paid into the Development Fund of Guyana, after allowing for all expenses and the amount reserved for prizes, the amount standing to the credit of the Government Lotteries Fund.”

They must not go anywhere; there is no provision for the Consolidated Fund. If it is, Mr. Minister of Finance, that you feel so strongly about it, put it in the Fund now - instantly. Do not defray any expenses.

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

Mr. Nandlall: Yes, Sir. My learned Friend raised some issues about the laws of Guyana, for example. The law revision exercise, if he had read the entirety of my speech last year and the year before – he only took one page but he should have read the entire speech where I traced the history of how these books came into being, their entire exercise... It was not started by me. It was started by my predecessor, Mr. Doodnauth Singh, under the Justice Sector Modernisation Programme since 2006. It was the first time, in 30 years, that we were revising the Laws of Guyana. It continued, after Mr. Singh demitted office, by my other predecessor, Mr. Charles Ramson, and then it was completed by me. This entire project was financed by the International Development Bank (IDB); there was a team of experts which was in charge of this project. It was always known and expected that we were going to have slippages and omissions because it was a 35-year exercise of laws and regulations that we had to find. They were nowhere around. We had to go to Cave Hill campus in Barbados, Norman Manley Law School in Trinidad, Hugh Wooding Law School in Trinidad, Parliament Offices; we had to go as far as the colonial offices in London to get some of the laws that were missing. The project itself has money for remedial work in anticipation of there being slippages, and there are slippages. I have assembled a team of experts that are now completing and will be finishing within a few months. Well, if they do not have the proper guidance... If I were there, it would have lasted a few months but I cannot speak for my Friend.

The Hugh Wooding Law School: My Friend continues to make populist statements because he wants to score political points, thereby misleading the students and the nation about our problems at the Law School. The Law School is a regionally driven process, as Your Honour would be very well aware. We are a signatory to a Treaty, the agreement which we had that facilitated Guyanese students for a decade came to an end and then we had another agreement for nearly another decade that expired in the year 2011. Since then, I have managed to persuade both the Council of Legal Education and former President Ramotar, at the level of Heads of Government at the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), to continue the entry into the Law

School on the same basis that the contract existed. But, obviously, that was not the solution; that was only a stopgap measure.

The solution lies in a decision at the CARICOM Heads of Government to hold an inquiry into legal education in the region, which will include the establishment of more law schools, possibly one in Guyana. So, it is a regionally driven process. We are part of a region; we cannot make insular statements about establishing a law school in complete disregard for our treaty obligation.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have two minutes.

Mr. Nandlall: Yes, Sir. My Friend, energies will be better spent - and your Honour can advise him on his diplomatic skill as well... This is not a monkey and back situation. You have to go with proper diplomacy and argue for there to be a regionally sponsored law school in... [Mr. Williams: So why did you not do it?] I was going to do that. I was in the process of doing that.

My Friend spoke about a number of judgements accumulated, the Rudisa judgement as well as the NH judgement. The NH judgement was a 2007 judgement. Mr. Doodnauth Singh had appealed because we felt that we should not pay that \$3 billion. Why is there a haste to pay all of this judgement all of a sudden? I am concluding now, Sir. There is no need to pay the Rudisa judgement. Honour the judgement but there is a way you can work out a set-off arrangement with the company. [Mr. Williams: So why did you not do it?] I was going to do all of that. There is a reason why they want to pay all of this judgement.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you must wind up in the next couple of sentences or take your seat.

Mr. Nandlall: Yes, Sir. I began by saying that this is an explicitly packaged Budget but the contents are completely disproportionate with the fancy package and the value that is on its face.

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

Minister within the Ministry of Social Protection [Mrs. Charles-Broomes]: Mr. Speaker, let me say how pleased I am to have you as the Speaker of the House.

Let me also take this opportunity to say to my Colleague Minister, Catherine Hughes, and husband, my condolences on behalf of my family.

Mr. Speaker, before I go into my presentation, I just want to mention a few things so that we could set the tone right in this House. It seems to me as if the Opposition is in 'airplane mode'. My Prime Minister was referring to our Manifesto the other day and we were striking out and saying, "Done!" I want to say today that the Guyanese public, while we were on the campaign trail asking them to elect us into office as Government of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, heard us and made the decision. I want to say to my Colleagues, "It is done."

Mr. Speaker, fellow Members, invitees and all of this august House, permit me to acknowledge the desires of the people of this nation to start living up to its motto of *One People, One Nation, One Destiny*. I would like to say to my fellow Guyanese that we heard you and we will work with you and for you. It is with sunken heart and mixed emotion. I say mixed emotion because it seems as though, with the 'airplane mode' attitude of the Opposition, the plight of Guyana is completely ignored.

During my lifetime, I have witnessed so many outrageous, uncaring policies and decisions but what I have recently observed as a legacy of my predecessors is yet to be matched within the Caribbean. Such a state of affairs and plight is in the labour sector and in this House as well as out of this House, one will agree with me - the Opposition must agree with me - that the Opposition has failed the working class of Guyanese people. I am saying right across the board and it is sad enough. With the commitment of another President who is now the Leader of the Opposition in saying that he will work with the Government for the best interest of this nation, your commitment, Hon. Member Bharat Jagdeo, that you will work with this Government to change such a condition...

It was just two days after swearing into this Administration when I was made to witness the worst indentured accident in the history of the nation. It was on the 19th May that I travelled into the interior with my Colleague, Minister Roopnarine, and, at that time, not even being appointed as a Minister, to witness the death of 10 miners.

6.40 p.m.

When I talk about mixed emotions, it is because I am saying to this honourable House that these things must change, have to change and, under this Government, will change. To see the reality of decomposed bodies - and I say bodies - and this is no joking matter of cats and dogs... Those

were bodies being washed out of the dirt, decomposed human beings' bodies, all because there was a lack of social protection. This Government has brought social protection to the Guyanese workers.

In social protection, in the area where it used to be the Ministry of Labour, I must say to this House that a Government...and A Partnership for National Unity - and may I remind all that the Guyanese voters voted for unity - it is with that that this Government will continue. We will re-examine.

I want to make mention of some of my recent visits with my team from the Labour Department, which was, for some time, being suppressed by the past Administration. In fact, let me say to this House that the Minister before me had placed a ban on inspection.

I sat with that very Minister before me who said, in my office, that he did that because it was reported as harassment. Because of such neglect and disrespect by the past Administration, today, our working class of people are suffering. They are suffering. I want to make it clear that gone are the days when workers are neglected. That is why, immediately, you can get your notepad and start to tell me how you can help. I want to invite the Opposition because, Hon. Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, it is not a nice reality to go and to witness workers in those conditions. They are being victimised right across. The workers in the media houses that were in State care were afraid to say their plights to the labour officers. I visited sites and met hundreds of men who cried and said, "We were neglected. If only the truck had a horn, my co-worker would have been alive." To see the conditions which our men and women are faced with out there is a sad reality. But we hear you. We will work with you. We will serve you because we are a Government of national unity.

This Budget presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan - let me commend you on such a task - laid a blueprint for *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*. Through this approach, our Government will manage the nation's assets and resources from a platform - and listen to these words - of integrity for the benefit of all.

The task is mine, this afternoon, to examine the allocation - and I say examine the allocation - and, as the Minister within the Ministry of Social Protection, I will ensure that the allocation

given is well spent and the people benefit. The sector is one that realises the importance of citizens and workers in a nation's building and maintaining a stable industrial environment in pursuit of our objectives.

Without a doubt, our human resource is most essential to the development and, because of this premise, of the place in the developmental chain. As the workers voice in this House, it has been asked of me to deliver a message to this august Body, a message that is grounded in hope, committed to the fundamental rights and freedom, International Labour Organization co-labour standards and International Charter.

This is a Budget which can be properly described as a green budget that has not only placed you at the centre of the development, but, as a subject Minister through this Government, I commit to continue to work with you to improve your standards of living conditions of workers' welfare, even into retirement.

It is now your time - and I say it is your time - to make a difference and of which difference will be made. As globalisation takes route throughout every shade in this society, Guyana, as a matter of necessity, has to carve out methods and programmes that will cushion or minimise the negative impact brought to this nation and to the workers. To this end, as we engage in regional and trans-athletic agreement, International Labour Organization co-labour standards, will always be in the focus, since these are the standards embraced by the United Nations (UN), Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), World Bank, CARICOM and similar institutions in ensuring that workers are guaranteed a level playing field, a chance to be heard, and their views to be factored into the decision-making process. Some of these co-labour standards are: the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948, No.87; the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1951, No. 98; the Forced Labour Convention, 1930, No. 29; the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957, No.105; and Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999, No.182.

This opportunity is taken to assure the people of Guyana and, more particularly the workers of Guyana, that this Government will not sacrifice your well-being at the altar of the expedient and unto the enrichment of a few. Those days are over. In fact, they were with us for far too long.

This is not a Government that will make empty claims to the working class in a nation and to pursue policies which will enrich and fortify the upper class at the expenses of the workers.

Our commitment to furthering and advancing the well-being of workers has been included in this Budget within the context of its 2020 vision and a good and green life. These measures are the beginning of a relationship with this Government of the people - and the Government will remain committed to the people - and for the people.

The Labour Department within the Ministry of Social Protection is considered key and critical - and I say key and critical - in satisfying the needs of the working public. Already, we have commenced a process of engaging stakeholders, with a view of developing an agreed mechanism to eliminate conflicts among labour, union and employers, some of which have been lavishing for months, even years. This unfortunate state of affairs will be brought to an end.

Denial of justice remains a black eye on this nation's history and it must be removed. This Government further commits to our workers that we will not - and I say we will not - organise or have groupings of people that will take the opportunity to pay our working class workers minimum, below the minimum or just a little bit above of the minimum wage. I must reiterate that we are a people's Government. As a people's Government, we will give our best to ensure that all times we operate in service to the people - and I say service to the people.

The recent visits that were conducted by myself and the Executive have unearthed some of the most atrocious conditions under which our workers, some of our workers, most of our workers and, in fact, all of our workers... Some workers were even paid less - and I say less. It is such a disease in our society that a large company takes pleasure in saying, "It is just a dollar below the minimum wage." That is a sad state of affairs.

Our men and women are forced to work in sad conditions and even being robbed. For one company, it is half its workers. Whether the workers work or not, and, if a worker is sick and cannot go to work, that worker is made to be paid for a meal, even if he or she did not have that meal. Such conditions our workers were subject to. But, like I said, gone are those days. It is not only for the poor woman who has nine children that it was contracted by the then Government which allows for policies that are in breach of the law...a company that the woman was

contracted and signed a contract that she must work for 12 hours... And, because one of the mighty masters declared to her that she was taking something out of a garbage bin, she was dismissed. Not only - and I say not only - was the woman given her job and was paid for the two weeks for wrongful dismissal, but, upon the investigation, it was unearthed that she was being robbed by her employer. The employer then had to pay her a sum of \$350,000; such a Government we are talking about. I want to make it clear. Even to workers and contractors that fall under the Government will have to abide by all the laws - and I say even the labour laws.

I heard a lot of mention about young people - sad. Gone are the days when you had young men with certificates and trades working hard and... Just yesterday, two young men with certificates in my office, just 21 years old and 23 years old, employed by a contractor who is working with the Government, worked for five weeks and their families are hungry. There is bullyism; the contractor refused to pay.

With the intervention of myself, the contractor showed up to my office and said, "Yes, I have moneys for these men." Because of the bad practice - and this is one of the famous contractors who works with the Office of the President - he said to me that the men will have to wait. Such bullyism leads our young people into crime. The money allocated to social protection will see a vast change right across and labour is no exception to that. We have already started to make a change and it is evident. My Colleague over there, you are looking at me; you know and I hope that you all would help me to cushion the effects of this problem.

6.55 p.m.

Let me direct my attention to a subject which is dear to me. I know that persons are being misled and they use the issue as gimmicks. This is a serious problem. Let me direct my attention to Trafficking in Persons (TIP). I am not speaking about girls, men, prostitution and runaround. I am speaking about human trafficking. Even though there are those who believe that this situation does not exist, the Ministry of Social Protection wishes to have it on record that perceptions, assumptions and wishful thinking cannot change the reality. The reality is that our vulnerable...I note that my Minister of Finance, in his budget presentation, mentioned the vulnerable.

Since 2005, this Act was passed, but to add any value to this Act, this very Act which combats human trafficking, it was being ignored. We will add to this Act; we will have a regulation to this

Act; we will implement this Act. In the past, one might have believed that such an Act would have been placed in a library and as a trafficker passed by it would have fallen on that person's head who would say, "I am a trafficker". Human trafficking is something that one has to find. One has to search for it. I am a living evidence and testimony that we have the best skill to identify, find and eradicate it.

We will not have such lawlessness in that one is being charged for human trafficking and prostituting, sentenced to prison and would have taken it as a joke, appealed and walked the streets. I know of many such cases where justice was denied.

I want to mention a report, which came out at the then time when I was President of the Guyana Women Miners Organisation (GWMO), *Justice Denied*. It is my President who moved the motion in this National Assembly to have an inquiry in human trafficking. He was then the Leader of the Opposition and he is now His Excellency David Arthur Granger. We will have that commission. In fact, the draft for this commission is already in place. What am I saying? For those vulnerable out there, who thought that there was no law, and in fact there was no social protection, the Ministry of Social Protection is here to protect all Guyanese. When I say all Guyanese, I am not referring to my colleague, who I noticed had a wonderful article in the newspaper, with reference to "We have visited 34 shops in Tiger Creek, Kanaruk, and Mahdia", and the amount of places that were mentioned. What I learnt is that that Member does not know the constituents because 34 shops are in but one of those areas that were mentioned in the media.

Human trafficking is not something that is in our interior location. It is right here in this city. As head of the Guyana Women Miners Organisation, I, myself, rescued a youngster, on Regent Street, from labour trafficking. The Chief Labour Officer (CLO), in the Labour Department, has no skills. The officers cannot identify... They were never trained. The words "labour trafficking" were never mentioned.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have 10 minutes remaining.

Mrs. Charles-Broomes: With the resources that is allotted for us, this Government will ensure that the Labour Department ... We will re-examine the whole silly idea of the merged with the Industrial Relations (IR)... The Occupational Safety and Health (OSH), we will demerge it and

give full rights to both departments. Our staff will be well trained and equipped and we will add staffing to the Labour Department.

I want to say to this House, and I want to say to the persons in this National Assembly, and out of this National Assembly, that this Government, A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), is the answer for Guyana's time and the cries of the Guyanese people. This Government will continue because we have started to demonstrate the concern, the care and the kind of protection...

My Ministers and colleagues after me will conclude on some very important points, but let me thank you all in this House.

I stand to defend and to support *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*.

I thank you. [Applause]

Ms. Selman: I rise to offer my contribution to this year's budget debate. The budget's theme is captioned *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*. The theme suggests new innovations, new policies and programmes to improve one's way of life.

Mr. Speaker, before I get into the substance of my presentation, allow me to ask, through you, Sir, what is the Hon. Minister, Mrs. Broomes, doing about the young Community Development Officers whose contracts were terminated? Are they too not disadvantaged?

Permit me, too, Mr. Speaker, to divert a bit to express sincerest appreciation to the Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, and the leadership of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) for granting me this opportunity to represent the people of Guyana. I wish to inform the young Member of Parliament from Region 10, who spoke earlier today, and any other person in this House, or outside of this National Assembly, that I do have the right to choose which political party I want to be associated with, and I have chosen to bear allegiance to this nation under the People's Progressive Party. That is my right.

Further, I would like to remind the Hon. Member that God gives us our freedom and He will always respect our freedom to make choices. While we are accountable for our choices, and there will always be consequences for those choices, both good and bad, which may include

being in the Opposition, God fosters the spirit of freedom and He knows that the human spirit requires freedom to effectively serve, and that is what I am doing here - and serve I will.

Budget 2015 comes at a time when Guyanese are expecting the fulfilment of the promises made by the APNU during its election campaign and the theme offers much hope. Regrettably, the approach being employed by the APNU administration, though it may be fresh because it is new in office, does not meet the aspirations of many of the Guyanese citizens. I have no doubt that many Guyanese are disappointed and dissatisfied with this budget.

I say this, premised on the fact that many, if not all Guyanese, were looking forward to the phased reduction of the Value Added Tax (VAT). Investors anticipated tax incentives, particularly those who are desirous of investing in the tourism sector. Sadly, Guyanese are still saddled with the burden of the Value Added Tax. Taking the VAT off of a few items of the Government's choice does not offer any relief to Guyanese. Were Guyanese consulted on the items that the APNU Government chose to zero rate? How do we know that if they were given a choice those were the items that they would have chosen to be zero-rated? All Guyanese must be consulted on policies that have far-reaching consequences on their lives. That is what happens in any functioning democracy.

Any action, which seeks to disregard the importance of consultation, is a violation of Guyana's Constitution. The APNU Government will be well advised to desist from its undemocratic practices.

The parents and guardians of children in public schools were very disappointed with the announcement by the APNU administration of the discontinuing the disbursement of the \$10,000 assistance. With mass public outcry by parents, they were hoping that the APNU Government would have been responsive to their concerns and would have reconsidered its position and would have designed a package for their children, which would have compensated for the withdrawal of the \$10,000 assistance that the former Government had given to children in public schools. I was hoping to hear the Hon. Minister, Mrs. Broomes, who appears to be the champion of the disadvantaged, unveiled such a programme, but sadly we saw the unresponsive and undemocratic nature of the APNU administration. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I must ask us all, in this chamber, to conduct ourselves in a better manner that we have so far been doing.

Mr. Selman: The question, which can be asked and should be answered by the APNU Government, is whether ignoring the plight of the poor and the cry of our children, in its view, constitutes a fresh approach to the good life. Such an approach certainly does not guarantee a good life. I urge the APNU Government to reconsider this approach.

Those of us who are teachers and who are in constant contact with parents and their children understand and appreciate the extent to which that sum of money contributed to the purchase of exercise books, paste, geometry sets and other school supplies. It is my submission that that form of assistance should not have been taken away from our children but it should have been increased, perhaps to \$20,000, in light of the rising cost of living. That is an increase that the PPP was contemplating.

Mr. Speaker, I wish, through you, Sir, to call on the Minister of Finance and the two Ministers of Education to reconsider the position of the APNU administration and move an amendment to include the \$10,000, which our children more than deserve.

7.10 p.m.

Let us, by our actions, make a reality of the Budget theme, *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*, by formulating programmes and implementing policies which would address the plight of the poor and the disadvantaged.

I wish to turn my attention to tourism. A perusal of the section on tourism creates the impression that nothing was happening in the tourism sector over the last 20-odd years. I wish to refer to page 26, paragraph one, of the Budget Presentation where the Minister of Finance states:

“For years, the sector has struggled from a poorly-resourced marketing effort - one that has been responsible for sluggish growth in the industry, while the quality of the product offering and the visitor experience still require strengthening in many areas.”

Contrary to what the Minister of Finance would want Guyanese to believe, I wish to inform the nation that the tourism sector has experienced tremendous growth under the People’s Progressive

Party/Civic to the extent that, in the year 2014, Guyana was referred to as the best kept secret of South America by the *National Geographic Traveler* magazine, and it was also touted to be among the 20 destinations to visit in 2014. That list reflected what is authentic, culturally rich, sustainable, and superlative in the world of travel today. Consequently, the Minister of Finance could not have been describing the tourism sector which saw tremendous growth under the PPP/C.

I wish to quote from page 27, paragraph 4.36 of the Budget Presentation of 2014.

“In 2013, visitor arrivals totalled 200,122 reflecting a 13.3 percent increase over 2012.”

That, in my view, speaks to a growing tourism sector.

The Minister of Finance, on page 27 of the Budget presentation, referred to the establishment of a tourism hospitality school. The establishment of such a school is commendable, but the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) Administration could not have been serious about a fresh approach in the execution of this project. This project was conceptualised by the PPP/C, and a proposal was designed which would have seen Government spending \$800 million dollars to establish a hospitality institute.

Why is the Government reinventing the wheel, so to speak, if tourism is a priority for this Government? The APNU Administration needs to be creative rather than rely on plans of the PPP/C whom they claim did nothing. Allow me to remind the APNU Administration that Guyana already has the basis for a hospitality school in our well-renowned Carnegie School of Home Economics which, with a little creativity, can begin the process of training individuals for our hospitality industry.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have 10 minutes remaining.

Ms. Selman: Thank you, Sir.

It is prudent that the Government builds on what we have. The Minister of Finance has recognised that in order for tourism to flourish a multi-sectoral approach is necessary as is stated on page 27 of his Budget presentation, and I quote:

“Mr. Speaker, for tourism to flourish, a cross-sectoral effort is required among Government, private sector and civil society to ensure a visitor experience that results in repeat visits and positive stories here and abroad.”

The PPP/C agrees with such an approach, but it is our view that a tourism policy needs to be developed and executed through a multi-sectoral approach which involves the Ministries with portfolio responsibility for public infrastructure, tourism, culture, education and indigenous affairs.

The Minister of Finance during the Budget presentation failed to mention a tourism policy. The question which, therefore, looms large is: what is the policy of the APNU Administration that would ensure tourism acts as an engine for growth, through foreign exchange earnings and the creation of direct and indirect employment? Where is the vision for the tourism sector so that it could play its rightful place in the growth and development of Guyana?

Indeed, it is our hope that the APNU Administration would formulate a tourism policy to guide all tourism developments, operations and management so as to meet the Government's immediate and long-term objectives for tourism. This policy must be premised on the principles of sustainability and be in line with international best practices.

It is our submission that the marketing of tourism has to take on a holistic approach, one that comes out of a policy position, as opposed to the *ad hoc* and piecemeal approach the APNU seems to be employing.

Another important issue that can be attended to immediately by this APNU Administration is: when a tourist comes out of the Cheddi Jagan International Airport, he or she is confronted by numerous taxi drivers who are soliciting passengers. If the APNU Administration is going to make a reality of the term ‘a fresh approach’, it is incumbent upon them to consider instituting taxi regulations at both the Cheddi Jagan International Airport and the Ogle International Airport. We do appreciate that the Cheddi Jagan International Airport has an official taxi service and taxi drivers can be identified by their official badges and uniforms. However, there is no system in place which ensures that taxi drivers wait their turn nor is there any means of knowing into which taxi a tourist went into in the event that that tourist goes missing shortly after

boarding that taxi. As a means of improving security, the Government is urged to consider the possibility of putting in place a taxi dispatch and monitoring system at the airports.

Another issue of vital importance to building a strong tourism industry in Guyana, and which should be a top priority area for the APNU Administration, is that of search and rescue. There is the urgent need for the creation of a national search and rescue programme. The implementation of this programme would serve to prevent the loss of life and injury through search and rescue alerts. This programme can be incorporated into the Coast Guard section of the Army and would serve to create employment for pilots and medical personnel. The People's Progressive Party/Civic wishes to urge the Minister of Finance to give urgent consideration to this critical area, not only for the creation of a safe tourist destination, but for the many Guyanese who traverse the interior of our country in order to secure their livelihoods.

The Minister of Finance on page 26 of the Budget presentation, referred to the fact that, as a result of the most recent marketing review, the APNU/AFC Administration will be pursuing a policy which will see more tourists coming from South America. This is stated on page 26:

“It is expected that more visitors will originate from target markets than previously.”

This is, indeed, commendable. However, we need to take into account the language barrier that separates Guyana from other South American countries and begin to implement compulsory language courses starting with frontline staff such as Immigration Officers, Customs Officers and Tourist Guides. That would certainly address the question of a fresh approach as Guyana seeks to attract tourists from South America.

In concluding, I do agree that there is need to improve and enhance the visitor's experience. I, therefore, anticipate that the Hon. Minister of Tourism will provide details in relation to the fresh approach that the APNU Administration will be employing to accomplish its aspirations. The Minister of Finance also mentioned the APNU Administration's proposal to at least double the tourism marketing budget over the next five years.

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

Ms. Selman: Thank you, Sir. But side by side with that is the need to mention an increase in funding for product development.

If the APNU Administration has the political will to make a reality of the Budget theme, I wish to urge them to take on board the recommendations and proposals which emanated from, and which will continue to emanate from this side of the House so that all Guyanese can, indeed, benefit from a good life in a green economy.

I thank you. *[Applause]*

Ms. Bancroft: Mr. Speaker, the pleasure is mine to congratulate you on your ascension to the Office. I would also like to extend my condolences to my sister.

This being my second time in Parliament, I am honoured. I was a member in the Eighth Parliament, and now I stand here representing my constituency, Region 8, Potaro/Siparuni.

I rise in support of the 2015 Budget that was presented to this noble House, last week, by my Colleague, the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, under the theme, *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*.

Allow me to make some comments before I go further. Region 8, Potaro/Siparuni, is often described as the most difficult region in Guyana to administer due to its mountainous terrain. Despite its riches in gold and diamonds, it was poorly funded by the past Central Government.

This 2015 Budget for this region serves to correct the attitude of the previous Government, and the moneys now provided in this Budget will see a change for betterment in the quality of life for its residents. Also, it will allow the Regional Democratic Council (RDC) of Region 8 to fulfil its mandate of enhancing the earning capacity of the residents, having free and open consultation with the public, solving the many social ills that they experienced in the past, and changing their frowns to smiles.

I am moving on to the specifics to be dealt with. Health is an important issue because, as we are all aware, the human resource is an extremely critical one, and, as such, we will deliver proper primary healthcare to the residents of Region 8. Taking into consideration that our region is one that is mostly comprised of miners and accidents are likely to occur, it is vital for us to offer the best health services that would be needed in the event of any mishap. In addition to that, our health centres in the North Pakaraimas will be upgraded so that effective healthcare can be carried out.

I just want to take a moment to say that I listened to the Hon. Bheri Ramsaran. I am wondering if this Hon. Member ever went to Region 8, and, more particularly, sub-region one. At Cheong Mouth there is a building and no equipment. When one goes to Kanapang the health hut is in disarray; Kamana is out of order. I want to believe that when my Hon. Minister of Health, Dr. Norton, speaks we would get more of that information.

7.25 p.m.

I think before people come to this House, they should get their facts because what I am saying is from experience. I have walked, flew, and ridden Region 8 at length and at breath.

I come to education. Education is necessary for the proper upbringing of our youths. We need and we will provide services for those who need it, from the young child to the common adult who wants to complete what they have started.

In the past, when programmes were being offered, the information took quite some time to filter down to Region 8, so projects were not properly carried out. I am of the firm view and I know that this Government will create an environment in which the education of the child on the coastland is directly aligned with that of a child in the hinterland. I speak for Region 8, the most remote and the most expensive region where lots of people are afraid to go.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Social Protection, we shall seek to decrease the absence of school welfare and probation officers because the presence of crimes such as rape, trafficking in persons and domestic violence, just to mention a few, is evident. If there are true mothers in this august House, I want them to understand what trafficking in persons means.

In the Eighth Parliament, I did the training; I went to the conferences under the trafficking in persons' law. I made the first trafficking in person case in Guyana. But due to the trafficker's death by an accident and the victim committing suicide, the case was washed out. Only people with children would understand that when something is wrong with an 11-year old, the heart bleeds. If one is not a mother, then one would not understand anything about that.

I turn to public works. I recall that my Colleague mentioned the water project for Region 8; some are new and some are old. He mentioned a few villages but, in my opinion, all of the villages will

receive water. In Paramakatoi, where the education complex is situated, millions of dollars were spent for a water project that was unsuccessful.

There are also new educational facilities which are presently being worked on at Kato and which would require water; water is important. Our region is depending heavily on nature and this is proving difficult because during the dry season, the creeks become dried up and when the miners work in the rivers the waters become contaminated.

There are few villages, like Bamboo Creek, that get water from the mountain. While on the campaign trail, His Excellency, President David Arthur Granger, and team visited Bamboo Creek where we had a first-hand view of the water system. This Government is committed to giving all Guyanese a good life. I say that to say this: access to clean water is important in all of Region 8 and it will be done under this new Government.

I am not finished with public works as yet. I now move to the bridges. In the North Pakarimas, I have noticed that bridges that were built were poorly done resulting in them being washed away during high tides. This shows that the past Government settled for less than acceptable work, so moneys went down the river. In this case, I mean that literally. This new Government will have to change all of that and examine work before final payment is made.

Mr. Speaker, roads are very important. Since the topic of networking and transportation is a country wide discussion, in the future, we should look at all-weather roads. As it is now, we only have trails and when weather conditions are grim they become impassable.

I turn my attention to electricity. Mahdia has a project called the Mahdia Power and Light or MPL which supplies electricity to Mahdia and its immediate environs. But there is an existing hydro station at Tumatumari that will be resuscitated to offer electricity to the whole of sub-region two. When resuscitated, Regions 7 and 10 can also have current from that hydro station.

I want to reintroduce a new topic, which is agriculture for Region 8 and I would like to quote from the Manifesto of the A Partnership for National Unity + Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC). It is on page 26 and the heading is: Production Transformation and Economic Diversification. It states:

“The APNU/AFC Coalition will:

Restore agriculture to its former vibrant self by consultation and collaboration with farmers to determine the support needs of the sector”.

Region 8 has very rich soil and would be an excellent area for crop production. Testimony to this is the fact that in the past at national exhibitions, close to three decades ago, Region 8 had varied produce that were displayed and were ultimately used for consumption. To this day, Region 8 produces legumes, yams, corn, pumpkin, spring onions and many more. We also boast a range of citrus fruits that are bountiful when in season, so much so that they are being wasted.

We will ensure that factories are set up and that some marketing skills are brought into the area so that we can feed Region 8, Guyana, and, if faith allows, the Caribbean.

Mr. Speaker, I am winding down on my Budget presentation.

Region 8 is known for its spectacular natural beauty. I would even venture to say that it is the most beautiful region in the county. Since this Government is embarking on ecotourism, I am positive that Region 8 will add revenue to this country by being a tourist destination. Included in this region’s tourist must-see are the Majestic Kaieteur Falls and the North Pakarimas with sights ranging from Taruka to Kopanang including the Orinduik Falls.

This is my input into the 2015 Budget. I conclude my presentation to this noble House under the theme, *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*.

I thank you, Sir. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have exhausted our list of speakers for today. I think we have done very well.

Before I conclude our business for today, I wish to announce that leave has been granted to the Hon. Adrian Ananmyah to be away from yesterday, the 17th August, until 27th of August, 2015. This concludes our business for today.

Adjournment

Mr. Speaker: I invite the Hon. Prime Minister to move the adjournment.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Mr. Speaker, I move that this House be adjourned until tomorrow, the 19th August, 2015 at 1.00 p.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 7.36 p.m.