

# 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*

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10<sup>TH</sup> Sitting

Thursday, 20<sup>TH</sup> August, 2015

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*The Assembly convened at 1.07 p.m.*

*Prayers*

*[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]*

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER**

### **Leave to Members**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, leave has been granted to the Hon. Member Basil Williams from 20<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 2015. Leave has been also granted to the Hon. Member Dr. Jennifer Westford for her to be absent today.

## **PUBLIC BUSINESS**

## **GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

## **MOTIONS**

## **NOMINATION OF MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE OF SELECTION**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the Assembly will now, as required by Standing Order No. 81, nominate Members to comprise the Committee of Selection. I invite nominations accordingly.

**Minister of Social Cohesion [Ms. Ally]:** Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I wish to nominate the following Hon. Members to serve on the Committee of Selection of this Assembly: Ms. Amna Ally, Mrs. Volda Lawrence, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, Mr. David Patterson and Mrs. Catherine Hughes.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, the Members for this side of the House to the Committee of Selection are as follow: Yours truly, Ms. Gail Teixeira, Bishop Edghill, Mrs. Gillian Burton-Persaud and Mr. Neendkumar.

**Mr. Speaker:** Is there any other nomination? Do I have a seconder for these nominations?

**Minister of Education [Dr. Roopnarine]:** I beg to second the nominations from this side.

**Mr. Ali:** I wish to second the nominations from this side.

**Mr. Speaker:** I thank the Hon. Members. There being no other nominations, I declare the nine Hon. Members as elected to serve on the Committee of Selection.

## **HOURS OF SITTING**

WHEREAS Standing Order No. 10(1) provides for every Sitting of the National Assembly to begin at 2.00 p.m. in the afternoon and unless previously adjourned, end at 10.00 p.m. on the same day;

AND WHEREAS Standing Order No. 10(2) provides that the Speaker may at any time suspend the Sitting for a stated period but, unless the Assembly otherwise resolved, the Speaker shall, at 4.00 p.m., suspend the Sitting for one hour, and at 7.00 p.m. suspend the Sitting for half an hour;

AND WHEREAS Standing Order No. 10(3) provides for the Assembly at any time by motion made and carried without amendment or debates suspend or vary the provisions of paragraphs one (1) and two (2) of Standing Order No. 10;

AND WHEREAS Standing Order No. 10(4) provides for the Assembly from time to time, alter, by Resolution, the hours provided by Standing Order No. 10 for the beginning and ending of a Sitting.

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That Standing Order Nos. 10(1) and (2) be suspended to enable the Assembly to sit during the following hours to complete the consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the 2015 Budget within three (3) days:

- 1.00 p.m. - 4.00 p.m. – Sitting
- 4.00 p.m. - 5.00 p.m. – Suspension
- 5.00 p.m. - 7.30 p.m. – Sitting
- 7.30 p.m. - 8.00 p.m. – Suspension
- 8.00 p.m. - 11.00 p.m. – Sitting”

*[First Vice-President and Prime Minister]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have being given the consent in accordance with Standing Order No. 28 (2) to the following motion to be proceeded with at this sitting. Hon. First-Vice President and Prime Minister, will you move the motion?

**First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]:** I move the following motion in my name.

“WHEREAS Standing Order No. 10(1) provides for every Sitting of the National Assembly to begin at 2.00 p.m. in the afternoon and unless previously adjourned, end at 10.00 p.m. on the same day;

AND WHEREAS Standing Order No. 10(2) provides that the Speaker may at any time suspend the Sitting for a stated period but, unless the Assembly otherwise resolved, the Speaker shall, at 4.00 p.m., suspend the Sitting for one hour, and at 7.00 p.m. suspend the Sitting for half an hour;

AND WHEREAS Standing Order No. 10(3) provides for the Assembly at any time by motion made and carried without amendment or debates suspend or vary the provisions of paragraphs one (1) and two (2) of Standing Order No. 10;

AND WHEREAS Standing Order No. 10(4) provides for the Assembly from time to time, alter, by Resolution, the hours provided by Standing Order No. 10 for the beginning and ending of a Sitting.

BE IT RESOLVED:

That Standing Order Nos. 10(1) and (2) be suspended to enable the Assembly to sit during the following hours to complete the consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the 2015 Budget within three (3) days:

- 1 p.m. - 4.00 p.m. – Sitting,
- 4.00 p.m. - 5.00 p.m. – Suspension,
- 5.00 p.m. - 7.30 p.m. – Sitting,
- 7.30 p.m. - 8.00 p.m. – Suspension,
- 8.00 p.m. - 11.00 p.m. – Sitting”

*Motion proposed.*

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, with due respect, this motion is not in order for the following reasons. Standing Order 73 (1) states:

“There shall be allotted a maximum of seven days for consideration of the Estimates of Expenditure in Committee of Supply.”

Further, the motion, itself, does not suspend Standing Order 73 (1) to allow it to be amended on the floor. Mr. Speaker, you are suspending Standing Order 10 but you are not suspending Standing Order 73.

Outside of what is a procedural matter, I think this augers very badly for the new administration to want to restrict the debate on the Estimates of Expenditure to three days. Again, Mr. Speaker,

you are a new kid on the block, this is with no derogatory intention, I assure, but debates on the Estimates of Expenditure, Sir, have taken place between five and seven days. In some cases, we used all seven days, up to the last minute, when the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) was in Government.

We will not support this motion with regard to the consideration of the Estimates of Expenditure being reduced to three days. We understand that the consideration of the Estimates of Expenditure can be reduced based on a motion. However, there has been no discussion... Usually, Sir, this is a matter that is discussed between the Chief Whips. Apparently, there is a new approach of surprises each day, motions coming with no courtesy. That has always been extended on both sides of the House, Sir.

We have no objections to the motion with the times: 1.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m. – sitting, 4.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. – suspension, 5.00 p.m. to 7.30 p.m. – sitting, 7.30 p.m. to 8.00 p.m. – suspension, for half an hour. We are opposed to the three days to which the consideration of the Estimates of Expenditure is being cut from what is a maximum of seven days. This is unacceptable to this side of the House and we oppose it on that ground.

**Mr. Nagamootoo:** Mr. Speaker, my learned friend, Madam Gail Teixeira, has referred to Standing Order 73 which clearly defines and delineates the word “maximum”. [Ms. Teixeira: I can read.] Yes, you can read, but the word “maximum” does not mean that this House, in its competence, cannot set a minimum period, if it so wishes, save and except that Standing Order 10 provides only if it is otherwise stated by the Constitution. I do not believe that the Hon. Member has cited a constitutional violation in relation to the motion under the Standing Order, permitted by the Standing Orders, for the hours of sitting to be varied as stated in these two paragraphs (1) and (2). It is competent for the Speaker of the National Assembly to rule on the motion.

**Ms. Teixeira:** In response to the Hon. Prime Minister, I did not quote from the Constitution. I am quoting from the Standing Orders. I want to go back to what is parliamentary practice and convention. In the Business Sub-Committee of this House, which meets once a year, only during the budget presentation, and that is why the Committee of Selection is being appointed today...I

assume that sometime this evening we have to meet to look at the schedule of all of the agencies that have to come up for consideration in the Estimates of Expenditure.

In this particular budget, because of the renaming of a number of Ministries, we would have to deal with the allocations for the original Ministries, up to the month of June, and then we would have to deal with the new Ministries, from the month of June to December. This will double up the work.

Secondly, in all of the budgets of this House – let us just deal with the last three years – we, on this side of the House, have never ever tried to prevent the Members on the other side from asking questions and using the time.

In fact, the Hon. Speaker, Mr. Trotman, who was in that seat then, did what Hon. Speakers Mr. Ramkarran did before him; Mr. Zephyr did before him and Mr. Derek Jagan did before him, and that was to keep to the schedule that was agreed to in the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply, whether it was an hour or a half of an hour for each agency, and on that basis the breaks and suspensions are included. It comes to the floor and we vote on that.

To try to pre-empt the work of the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply is unacceptable. The parliamentary Committees have their mandates and responsibilities based on the Standing Orders. [Mr. Seeraj: It is a sleight of hand] You call it a sleight of hand; I call it trickery. It is because we have not met as a Business Sub-Committee as yet

*1.22 p.m.*

I am asking you, Sir, to declare this motion out of order and to allow the Business Sub-Committee to be set up, do it works - even if we have to work late tonight - and bring back it to this House, and have the schedule approved in accordance with parliamentary practices and norms, and the Standing Orders of this House.

**Mr. Speaker:** It seems to me that the text of Standing Order 73(1) speaks... [Interruption] Is there another speaker? Does someone else wish to speak to this matter? Does none other wish to speak?

It seems to me that Standing Order 73(1) speaks of the maximum time and not the minimum time. I can find no fault with the motion as presented.

*Question put.*

**Ms. Teixeira:** Division.

*Bishop Edghill rose to his feet.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Is there a Point of Order, Sir?

**Bishop Edghill:** Yes Sir.

**Mr. Speaker:** What is the Point of Order?

**Bishop Edghill:** Before we take the count traditionally the bell would be rung for all Members to assemble. Could I ask that the bell be rung so that all Members would be assembled?

**Mr. Speaker:** Mr. Clerk, would you proceed with the division?

*Bell rang*

*Assembly divided: Noes 28, Ayes 32, as follows:*

*Noes*

Mr. Gill

Mr. Ramson

Dr. Jagan

Mr. Dharamlall

Mr. Charlie

Mr. Damon

Dr. Mahadeo

Mr. Chand

*Ayes*

Mr. Rutherford

Mr. Rajkumar

Mr. C. Persaud

Ms. Patterson

Mr. Figueira

Mr. Carrington

Mr. Allen

Mr. Adams

Mr. Neendkumar

Mrs. Pearson-Fredericks

Mr. G. Persaud

Mr. Mustapha

Ms. Selman

Dr. Ramsaran

Mrs. G. Persaud

Mr. Croal

Mr. Hamilton

Mrs. Chandarpal

Dr. V. Persaud

Mr. Seeraj

Bishop Edghill

Mr. Lumumba

Mrs. Campbell-Sukhai

Dr. Anthony

Mr. Nandlall

Mr. Ali

Ms. Teixeira

Mr. Rohee

Ms. Bancroft

Ms. Wade

Ms. Henry

Mrs. Broomes

Dr. Cummings

Mr. Sharma

Mrs. Garrido-Lowe

Ms. Ferguson

Mrs. Hastings-Williams

Mr. Holder

Mr. Gaskin

Mrs. Hughes

Mr. Patterson

Mrs. Lawrence

Mr. Trotman

Mr. Jordan

Dr. Norton

Mr. Bulkan

Dr. Roopnarine

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon

Ms. Ally



Mr. Ramjattan

Mr. Greenidge

Mr. Nagamootoo

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28

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32

*Motion carried.*

**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]*

*Assembly resumed budget debate.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members we will now resume the debate on the budget for the year 2015. The first speaker for today is the Hon. Member Clement Rohee.

**Mr. Rohee:** I rise to speak on behalf of 49.3% of the electorate that stood solid and strong behind the People's Progressive Party/Civic. I have heard, in this House, from the Government benches that this is the best budget they have ever had. Well, it is not the best though the first budget. I have in my records all the budget speeches by Hon. Member Nagamootoo that he has made in this honourable House. In the debate in 1997 this is what he had to say, according to the *Hansard*, at that time he was the Senior Minister of Information with the PPP/C Government:

“I can say, Sir, that in my long experience in these chambers, this has been the best budget debate I have experienced, and it certainly has been the best budget ever presented in this House.”

[**Ms. Teixeira:** Which year?] It was the 31<sup>st</sup> January, 1997. This is what he said in relation to the budget presented, at that time, by Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo. I thought I should open with this to lay the basis for the rest of what I have to say. I consider that my opening gambit.

There is something else I would like to refer to of recent vintage. It is a statement that caught my attention by the same Hon. Member, who has now been elevated to the Prime Ministership of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. He was trying to capture the cameras as he is usually wont to do. He sought to ask a question of me when he said that I said “who do not end up dead will end up badly wounded.” He sought to invoke the spirit of the previous Parliament. I was tempted to send the Hon. Member a letter, inviting him to Freedom House, to provide him with the answer he was seeking. I thought I should take the opportunity in this Parliament to provide that answer. The Hon. Member has a problem with the timing of his transmission and, secondly, he has a problem with the English language, because he conveniently left out the word “politically”. I am quoted, as saying, “those who do not end up dead politically will come out badly wounded”.

We are considering the first budget of this coalition Government. We started out the debate in public when the Hon. Member, the Leader of the Opposition, made a public statement to the effect that this is a copycat budget. In saying that, a hue and cry was created on the other side,

led by the Hon. Member Mr. Harmon, himself, when he rejected the claim that it was a copycat budget.

*1.37 p.m.*

I have done my research, and of the 34 projects under the budget agency of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, there are 27 or 79 % of those projects that have their origins in the PPP/C's manifesto. It is as clear as crystal.

I went to the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) website, and I found this document, the 100-day action plan, deliverable by the 24<sup>th</sup> August, 2015. As I did a check of all that was supposed to have been delivered, I found that of the 21 action lines, seven are expected to be delivered in this budget, although it is recorded here that they have already been delivered, two are partially completed, eight are in progress and four are in advance progress. In order words, the score card states zilch.

Guyana has become a haven for audits, investigations, probes and reviews. It is amazing what is happening - nine audits, two probes, 12 investigations, two commissions of inquiries and four reviews, all are taking place simultaneously, either vertically or horizontally. Let me warn the other side that experience in other countries have shown that it is precisely exercises of this nature that slows down a country's economy. That is precisely what is happening in Guyana.

This country will suffer from collateral damage as a result of these actions that are taking place in this country. During our absence from this House there were a lot of calls for us to return to the House. The Government, Ministers, ghost writers and many others called for us to return to this House. I just heard another manifestation, but it is in a different light in respect to that call. We said in public that when we return to this House we will return firing at all cylinders. We have arrived.

I just heard from the opposite benches asking questions as to why we stayed away from the House. Why did we stay away for such a long time? We just witnessed what Dostoevsky described as crime and punishment. Number one, a crime has been committed with respect to this Parliament and, number two, according to the Hon. Member Mr. Harmon, the PPP/C is being punished for exercising its democratic right when it did not take its seats in this House.

**Minister of State [Lt. Col. (Ret'd.) Harmon]:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order. The Hon. Member must indicate at what point I did say that the PPP is being punished. I never spoke on the matter. [Mr. Nandlall: That is the purport of what you said.] That is not purport. He said that I said it. Let him take it back. I never said so. [Interruption]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, we cannot proceed in this way.

**Mr. Rohee:** The People's National Congress (PNC) stayed away from this Parliament for seven long months. Those Hon. Members, who were associated with that party, are living in the shadows of that history. The People's Progressive Party/Civic single-handedly beat a seven-party alliance called the APNU/AFC alliance - the PPP/C alone. It took a coalition of seven parties to confront the PPP/Civic and for us to end up in this Parliament with the 32 seats. Had it not been for what they know, and what we know, this House would have been differently configured.

What I heard during the debate from the Opposition or the Government benches was a lot of rhetoric, declarations, slavishness, buffoonery and plagiarism. At one time I thought I was listening to the Discovery Channel. I suspect that they are some who chose the drive-through and pick up my speech service in order to arrive at this honourable House.

Congratulations are in order to our workers, farmers and all those in the productive sector who have contributed to the growth and development of our country. We salute our rice farmers and their families whose industrious work has resulted in 18.6 % increase in rice production. We encourage our rice farmers to stand firm in the demand for payments from the Government, under the PetroCaribe Agreement. Our farmers must be prepared to protest any economic injustice and political discrimination that Government might want to exhort on them.

We salute, on the occasion of this budget, our sugar workers who, notwithstanding difficult circumstances, have toiled hard in the cane fields. We call upon our sugar workers to remain vigilant and to resist any attempt by the Government to sell out, privatise or close down the sugar industry. All those who contributed to the increase in production and productivity, as reflected in the budget, ought to be congratulated and we on this side of the house so do.

It is interesting to see that those who now defend the budget..., especially those on the opposite side of the House, some have learnt and some have not. When we were on that side of the House

defending a budget, there was laughter and jollification. Now they are the ones who are defending the budget, and now the shoe is on a different foot. It is interesting to see the effort they are making to defend the budget. I am happy that they now know what it means to defend a budget.

I am trying to understand exactly this “good life” that they are speaking of - what is it about? When they speak about this “good life”, it strikes me as a misnomer. When they say that they are taking “a fresh approach” to this “good life” it strikes me that the “good life” was there before and all they are doing is taking a different approach to the good life which was there before. This “good life”, which they are speaking about, is seen completely differently by the 49.3 % of the people who voted for us. For them, the “good life” is what they enjoyed under the PPP/C. They want a return to that “good life”. The “good life”, which they spoke about, on this side of the House, is not a saleable product and it does not even offer after sales service.

This “good life” concept seeks to create, seeks to frame, a certain paradigm to make us believe that there is this mirage about a “good life”. For many, a “good life” is a simple life and not a complicated life. Everywhere we go in this country people are complaining. What are the people saying? People are saying that money is not turning...; that things were never so bad; that business is ‘flat’. They are also saying that if this is what they voted for then they do not want it.

Sensing the anxiety on the ground and the backlash that is germinating, the coalition scampers off to Stabroek Square - there is the leader of the pack who is sitting in this House - to try to pacify the people, to quell their mounting uneasiness and to make them feel that this “good life” is on the horizon.

*1.52 p.m.*

Who are these people who are complaining? They are street vendors, small contractors, taxi drivers, small hotel owners, minibus drivers, speedboat operators, stallholders, music chart vendors, newspapers vendors, caterers, water coconut vendors – the ‘small’ man on the streets. Those are the people who are complaining, Hon. Member Mr. Harmon.

Contrary to what we hear that people are smiling; people are laughing and people are feeling a sense of “deliverance”, quite the opposite is happening. Someone spoke about the budget ending

“adult suffering”. I say the contrary is happening. This budget is the beginning of teenage and adult suffering, with 2,000 Amerindians and others. People are not enthused. I want to advise – free advise Mr. Speaker, without any commission - to walk the streets and listen to the common man and woman.

I am not impressed with the hype from the Minister of Tourism, the Hon. Member, when she promoted or sought to promote tourism. I am hearing that Guyana is opened for business, but a person has to write an exam before that person enters. I hear that we would clamp down on work permits but at the same time we would grow in tourism. I feel so sad, as a Guyanese, when I see four Indian nationals sitting on the tarmac of our airport. It reminds me of the Guyanese sitting on the benches in Barbados. Is that what we want, Mr. Speaker?

We talk about upholding human rights, but we reject the universality of these human rights. The Hon. Members found it useful to begin publicising who they are deporting from Guyana. Deportees are now being publicised – how many people are being deported. When did this country come to this? Never in the history of this country did we ever publicise deportees from this country.

We saw recently where the European Union has removed visa restrictions on a number of Caribbean Community (CARICOM) countries to Schengen countries. We are tightening up. We are going in the opposite direction. The PPP/C was seeking to put in place a more liberal visa policy. That is what we were working to do. We were working to put in place the tourist card facility – tourist cards, Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge. All the person would need is a tourist card to enter Guyana, not an exam, as the Hon. Member Mr. Felix is promoting.

There is a saying, “The King is dead, long live the King!” Enter Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan. He has inherited - you, the Hon. Member - what I left at the Ministry of Home Affairs. To say that “the crime situation is depressing”, and whatever else, is an understatement. It is not improving. The previous Government had put in place reforms at every one of those agencies under the Ministry of Home Affairs, including the Ministry of Home Affairs, but the Minister never said a word about that.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have ten minutes remaining.

**Mr. Rohee:** Reforms and the Ministry of Home Affairs: Reforms at the Guyana Police Force, reforms at the Guyana Prison Services, reforms at the Guyana Fire Service, costing billions of dollars. What have you done with it? Mr. Speaker, I want to address you. The Hon. Member never mentioned one iota in respect of these significant reforms. And if to add insult to injury, when we brought here Bills calling for the change of name of the Guyana Police Force, from the word “Force” to the word “Service”, and change of name from the “Guyana Prison Service” to “Correctional Service”, and change of name of the Guyana Fire Service to “Rescue Service”, they rejected it all. That is kind of change that we want to see, Mr. Speaker.

I am looking for the dictionary of “who is who” in the Ministry of Public Security. I do not know “who is who.” One minute I heard the Hon. Member Mr. Harmon speaking about Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan’s matters. Another time I heard Mr. Edward Collins speaking about Mr. Ramjattan’s matters and another time I heard Hon. Member Mr. Felix speaking about Mr. Ramjattan’s matters. I do not know what is happening. All of a sudden there is so much confusion in the camp.

The Hon. Member came here yesterday and he flashed a piece of paper saying that was what he was given by the police to show what the situation is with crime in Guyana. I was given so many of those pieces of paper. As you know, Mr. Speaker, the public out there has a different perception. Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan knows that perception and reality are two different things. Statistics are something completely different. There are unreported crimes. Let us ask Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan about how many unreported crimes are reflected on that piece of paper he brought here. How accurate is it?

I heard the Hon. Member speaking *ad nauseam* about going after rogue cops. It has become like his mantra. I want to tell the Hon. Member that when going after rogue cops he has to thread delicately because if he does not he will end up violating the Constitution. The Hon. Member has pecuniary interest in a particular matter and he is going as far as to the Police Service Commission to issue instructions as to what should and should not be done.

Let us talk about the dog-and-pony show. The Hon. Member made mention yesterday about sniffer dogs. Let me tell the Hon. Member that when I brought the K9 experts from Texas the purpose for bringing those experts was because the dogs at Timehri and Ogle airports were not

catching anyone with drugs. The drugs were passing through the airport and not a single bag with drugs was being caught. I asked the question: How can we have sniffer dogs at the airport and the drugs were not being found? It was necessary to bring the experts to make an assessment. Read the report, it is at the Ministry. I took the decision that the Government must have value for money. We were not going to bring additional dogs unless the police accepted the recommendations from the experts from Texas. Then when those recommendations were accepted then we would have moved on. Mr. Ramjattan is now the Hon. Minister, he can choose to do as he likes, but he will learn.

Let us talk about piracy. The Hon. Member went up to Berbice and he promised the fishermen guns but they said that they were not interested in guns. [Mr. Ramjattan: They want a helicopter.] Talking about helicopter and planes, Hon. Member Mr. Felix, in the last budget, said that they must have an aeroplane. Where is the aeroplane, Mr. Felix?

There is an anti-piracy plan at the Ministry of Home Affairs, where the Minister now sits. He must ask the Permanent Secretary for the plan. There is an anti-piracy strategy at the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Permanent Secretary, Ms. Johnson, has a copy. I am sure, professional as she is, she will lend the Hon. Member a copy and he can see all that we have bought because we hear talk about reconstructing the marine wing of the Guyana Police Force. [Mr. Ramjattan: We can do that.] You better ask the right people the right questions.

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

**Mr. Rohee:** I heard remarks yesterday about demoralization in the police force. Let me inform the Hon. Member, since he is rather green to the sector, that it takes a long time for a promotion to come through. First, the Police Commissioner has to make the recommendations and then the Police Service Commission has to do so. Adjustments have to be made at the level of the Assistant Superintendents before the Cadet Officers could move up. The Cadet Officer cannot move up unless the Police Service Commission promotes the Assistant Superintendent to Senior Superintendent and then the Cadet Officer can move up to fill the gap.

Reference was made about refusing leave to senior officers. The senior officers were told at Christmas time, elections time, during the crime wave and during cricket world cup that the senior officers will be needed at home. It is like cutting the nose to spoil the face if leave is given



to most of the senior officers at a time when they are needed at home. The exigencies of the service demands that. Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan is there now; he can give them leave, but he will have to bear the consequences. In the same way as Hon. Member Mrs. Hughes was accusing me of what the police should have been doing, he will be accused of doing things that the police should be doing.

I want to say that we heard that we must give respect.

**Mr. Speaker:** You have three minutes remaining.

**Mr. Rohee:** We have to earn that respect. If those Hon. Members, over there, continue to behave just the way that they are behaving they are not going to get any respect from us. Trust me, they are not going to get it, if that pattern continues, they are not going to get the respect from us, Mr. Speaker, trust me. So let them be warned.

*2.07 p.m.*

There is so much to talk about but I will conclude now. Mr. Ramjattan, in an interview, said, notwithstanding the difficulties in the security sector, he will nevertheless conduct himself like a good soldier. But there is a famous novel called *The Good Soldier Švejk* written by a famous Czech author. The Good Soldier Švejk was a man or a character in the book that roamed Europe. They did not know whether he was undermining the then Emperor of the Austro-Hungarian Empire or whether he was serving it, by virtue of his actions. But eventually he ended up in the mad house. A question was then put to him, listen to the question Mr. Speaker: Do you believe in the end of the world? What was the Good Soldier Švejk's response? I think that his response was quite instructive. He said: "I would have to see the end of the world first before..."

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have a minute to wrap up.

**Mr. Rohee:** I want to say that the sector that Mr. Ramjattan now has responsibility for, notwithstanding the fact that it has been chopped left, right and centre, I am still trying to figure out how he is making out because there are a lot of intrusions and all kinds of things happening there. But I want to say that, if one checks the assignment of responsibilities, in respect of the Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit (CANU), there is nothing there in the gazetted responsibilities with respect to Mr. Ramjattan. It does not fall under Mr. Ramjattan, but yet in the estimates, it is

there, under Public Security. So Mr. Jordan, the Hon. Minister of Finance, will have to clarify that for me because I am interested in this fight against drugs. How come there is money for CANU in the budget for Public Security, but Mr. Ramjattan does not have the gazetted responsibilities?

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

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

**Ms. Ally:** Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, congratulations are in order to you for your ascension to higher Office. I would like to also convey our sympathies to my sister Mrs. Catherine Hughes on the death of her mother-in-law.

Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members of this House, 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2015, sent a strong signal that Guyana needed a change, a change to take this nation out of a poor governing state to one where the Guyanese people can enjoy a good life. This good life can only be delivered by this new Government, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) Government. Hence, congratulations are in order for this visionary new Government, the APNU/AFC Government.

I would also like to extend heartiest congratulations to our Finance Minister for his elaborate and well-structured Budget Presentation, piloting the changes and challenges for our country. Surely, Guyana is back on track and ours is the task to put an end to the perpetration of divisionary politics and to build a new Guyana.

Despite the many difficulties and challenges that our new Government faced upon the entry to Office, we were able to inculcate our vision, which was promised in our 2015 Manifesto, into the 2015 Budget. Though limited in terms of the given time-frame for implementation, we are quite confident that all the policies and programmes presented will be implemented through effective and efficient mechanisms.

In the Budget presentation at page 44, it was stated:

“...there is a clear nexus between social cohesion and nation building. Social cohesion is an intricate interplay of culture, geographic space, language, religion, race, social

phenomena and status; and provides impetus for economic prosperity. In order to achieve the “good life”, Guyanese must be willing to cooperate with each other.”

On 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2015, the electorate tasked us in this august body to work together to find creative ways of utilising the talents of all of our people in the task of nation-building. Just under 100 days ago, His Excellency President David Granger addressed this Assembly and committed to implement measures to instate inclusionary democracy and social cohesion in every municipality, neighbourhood and region, and in the National Assembly. Naturally, this Government will be striving to find the correct balance in this new terrain.

What is crucial, however, is that we forge a national consensus going forwarding on the broad objectives of our country’s development. This consensus will neither be an imposition of one party over others nor a honeymoon premised on the fickle whims of a fleeting romance. Guyana needs... [Ms. Teixeira: What do you know about that?] You taught me. Guyana needs the overriding commitment to a joint national effort to reconcile our nation and improve its well-being for a good life for all.

May I say that this does not subtract from the fact that there are different constituencies with divergent interests, represented by our diverse parties. We should not be fearful of the obvious consequence that there are bound to be differences of emphasis and approach on a variety of matters. To reiterate the fact of the clear nexus between social cohesion and nation building, I wish to say that, my Ministry will seek to facilitate dialogue and participation at every level of Government. This will be done by working with Government agencies, civil society, faith-based organisations among others, organising regular stakeholders outreaches and round table, to build national consensus on important issues.

Already, we have begun our outreaches to various regions and I am proud to report that the response has been a most welcoming one. In the regions, there were representations from all political parties, including the Opposition, our faith-based organisations and many other stakeholders.

This is Guyana’s business and all Guyanese must participate. I want to allude to the fact that, this being a new Ministry, established under the APNU/AFC Government, we understand the importance of making this Guyanese change. Our visionary President recognises that, with a

cohesive society there will be nation-building. As a consequence, Hon. Members, the Ministry of Social Cohesion will create the opportunities in partnership with stakeholders and Guyanese generally, for building capacities to empower Guyanese to respond constructively and to overcome the legacy of ethnic conflict. Not only ethnic conflict, discrimination and the concomitant challenges that face the country.

Looking forward, we should keep in mind the reality that the progress we make in building national unity will determine the pace at which our development programmes are implemented. On the other hand, national unity will remain elusive, if it is not accompanied by thorough changes in all the areas of life.

As I reflect, I want to say to the honourable House that we must not stop progress to achieve political gains. Members of the Opposition must stop running around various regional democratic councils (RDCs), telling councillors not to support Budget 2016. You must understand that the projects contained therein are geared for the development of the Guyanese people. It is geared to take Guyana out of the dismal slumber it has had for 23 years.

2.22 p.m.

Therefore, Comrades, I urge all not to be distracted, but to commit yourselves to the development of Guyana and let us work together to make Guyana the treasure island of good governance. Let it therefore be understood that the Ministry of Social Cohesion is an all-encompassing institution that will contribute to the processes of transforming our security in its totality to ensure a better life for all.

Accordingly, the Ministry will facilitate social cohesion around four things: (a) - Socio-economic programmes to improve the lives of all Guyanese. In this regard, we must ensure that ordinary people are fully involved in the planning, implementation and management of these programmes; (b) Economic growth that is sustainable, this generates employment and development of human resources and it is characterised by a high degree of equity; (c) Reform of Institutions, particularly the civil service and the rest of the public sector, to make them more representative, efficient and effective; and (d) Educational... *[Interruption]* If you sit and listen you will learn and you will not remain in the doldrums as you are right now... educational, scientific and cultural programmes which reflect non-racial and democratic principles.

Underpinning the objectives is our determination to utilise all resources available to the Government, to their optimum, without waste, duplication, and management. This is best achieved by insisting on, among other thing, fiscal discipline, reorganisation of expenditure patterns and careful planning. Take note Mr. Irfaan Ali, Hon. Member.

Significant progress towards the sustained take off has been made. However, this Government does not claim to have all the answers. There needs to be broad consensus all around these issues. The progress now underway to consult widely, is the drafting of the strategic plan for the Ministry and this will be done by consensus, ensuring that the nation as a whole commits itself and acts as one to meet these objectives. In order to achieve this; the Ministry of Social Cohesion has begun a participatory planning process for a national cohesion round table in September, 2015. The first preparatory meeting was held on 11<sup>th</sup> June, 2015. At that consultation participants endorsed the social cohesion round table and other proprietary meetings that will be convened, prior to the 3<sup>rd</sup> September round table.

The goal of social cohesion round table is to engage and garner contributions from key stakeholders to enhance social cohesion in our communities and country... **[Mr. Ali: Social cohesion when you fired 1974 Amerindians.]** It happened because you terminated their jobs at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> April... as a whole, as well as to develop a strategic framework for implementing a social cohesion five-year plan. Specifically, the Ministry aims, through the social cohesion round table, to understand regions specific and national factors that should be examined in the formulation of a social cohesion strategic plan and work programme.

It also aims to identify practical options, strategies and capacities for building social cohesion, addressing inequalities and monitoring mechanisms for evaluation. And finally, to create national awareness and sensitisation, among the widest possible set of stakeholders, on issues of social cohesion in planning for effective programme implementation.

Speaking of programmes, let me say to this National Assembly that this Ministry of Social Cohesion is determined to reduce, if not eradicate, the inequalities existing in our regions. Already, we have piloted projects to facilitate the education of our young people by providing transportation for our hinterland school children. Only four days ago, His Excellency President David Granger commissioned a 25-seater boat to ensure that transportation is not a hindrance to

education. May I also say that, tomorrow, Friday, 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2015, His Excellency will be travelling to Region 2 to commission another 40-seater, fully accessorised boat to enable the children of the Pomeroon to enjoy a good life under the APNU/AFC Government. [Mr. Ali: It is the rice farmers' in the Essequibo money?] Not too long from now... You can write a cheque for the rice farmers' money. All the money, bring it back. My apologies Mr. Speaker.

Not too long from now, this APNU/AFC Government will commence providing road transport in the Berbice area to cushion transportation costs for our young school children, who have to cross the Berbice River Bridge. Time constraints do not permit me to outline the many projects the Ministry of Social Cohesion will undertake to eradicate inequalities and to provide opportunities for a good life under this APNU/AFC Administration.

Let me say, we started, we will continue and certainly we will succeed. We are very conscious of the fact that central Government can only provide the framework for social cohesion and national unity. Implementation has to be carried out by local structures. It is for this reason that the Ministry is putting in place mechanisms to coordinate the work and facilitate the processes at the local level.

My Ministry is paying particular attention to this as well as the matter of speeding up the holding of Local Government Elections. Without the latter, our attempts at building social cohesion, and by extension national unity, maybe unduly delayed. I therefore support the Hon. Minister of Communities, Mr. Ronald Bulkan, in his efforts to hold Local Government Elections by December.

It is the Government's view, in an effort to make social cohesion sustainable, two principled issues need to be addressed.

**Mr. Speaker:** You have 10 minutes more Hon. Member.

**Ms. Ally:** One of them is the urgent need to involve communities in a proactive manner in the decision-making process. In the implementation of programmes, this requires that community-based organisations take up its responsibilities of mobilising the people for this purpose.

Weaknesses of civil society organisations are clearly an issue. In this regard, the role of parliamentarians in mobilising for and monitoring the process of building social cohesion is of

great importance. Let me emphasise that our politicians have a great role to play in this business of social cohesion.

The second crucial question pertains to the task of ensuring that the public service becomes the servant of the people. In fact, we commend members of the public service who have demonstrated their professionalism and preparedness to adapt to new conditions under which they are now expected to work. In line with the new reality, the Ministry of Social Cohesion will pay keen attention to the public sector reform processes, including, but not limited to the following: One - restructuring the service was to make it truly representative; two - developing links between the service and the public through various forms of consultations; three - inculcating a culture for employees to take pride in serving, in outlining and underdeveloped areas; four - simplifying the grading system; and five - restructuring the salary package, sensitive to both qualification and merit, and the unacceptable wide gap between the lowest and highest grades. The spirit of the public service needs to permeate all levels of work, including the intelligence.

*Speaker hits the gavel on desk.*

Community - what is needed is adherence to the letter and spirit of the Constitution; including, in particular, commitment to the protection of the country's interest and recognition of the rights of all citizens.

*2.37 p.m.*

In this regards, I would like to congratulate the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which has over the past months spent long hours supporting me and my staff. The UNDP globally has done much work in this area of social cohesion. Here in Guyana, between 2003 and 2006, the UNDP implemented the first social cohesion project. There is no doubt that we have the capacity, as a nation, to realise the dreams and aspirations of our people to have a good life.

I want to call on Guyanese to resolve to take Guyana to another level. We have the capacity and we have the need to. Let us think on building our country, not breaking it with cheap political deviousness, whether you or me. Let us make Guyana a comfort zone for the entire country.

Therefore, let us harness the nation's energies to more rapidly develop our country. In this way, our society will experience meaningful and lasting social cohesion and national unity. Let me leave with you the words of the Hon. Harry Gill and I quote:

“None of us are responsible for the colour of our skin, learn to cooperate, bury the hate. Politicians have the responsibility to end race bait”

In closing, I wish to commend this budget to this august body and to call on my Colleagues from both sides of the House to support it. I thank you. *[Applause]*

**Mrs. Chandarpal:** Mr. Speaker, Hon Members, please permit me to express my congratulations to you on your appointment as the Speaker of the National Assembly, in this Eleventh Parliament. Likewise I wish to express my congratulations to all the members of the new Government on their respective appointments. I also wish to congratulate all the new Members of Parliament (MPs) on their selection to this esteem Chamber and hope that their tenure will be a rewarding one for themselves and more importantly, for Guyana.

The theme for the 2015 Budget “*A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*” seems a good enough title, but as I examined the theme I had to ask myself, what exactly is this fresh approach that the Hon. Minister is referring to? How can it be a fresh approach when they are very few new policies and initiatives? Almost all the major development programmes and projects that are referred to were conceived and initiated by the previous Government. They have simply been re-branded with new titles. The Minister Finance, in his introductory remarks on page 2, section 1.4 said:

“The Guyanese people came out in their thousands; they were determined to bring an end to the morass, hopelessness and helplessness that had enveloped our country. They were determined to bring an end to a Government that had wreaked havoc on our society - sapping it of its energy and stripping it of its dignity and dynamism.”

I think that the Minister must have extracted that from a document dating back to the early 90s. What he has described is exactly what happened to bring the PPP/C into Government in 1992. The Guyana of today, which the PPP had been shaping for the last 23 years, is infinitely better than the Guyana his colleagues left us back then.



Hon. Members, the PPP is proud of our decades of sterling service to the Guyanese people, but our work is not done. We recognise that many important members of the new APNU/AFC Government were also important members of the PNC dictatorship that brought great sufferings upon this nation. It is for this reason that the PPP will work tirelessly, through this National Assembly, to ensure that history does not repeat itself.

To more the than 200,000 Guyanese who came out and voted for the PPP/C and won us seven out of the 10 regions, we are eternally grateful for your confidence in our support. To those who did not vote for us, we endeavour to work even harder to gain your support in the future. The PPP Members of this National Assembly are committed to defending the rights and representing the best interest of every single Guyanese, whether you voted for us or not. It would be opportune to remind the Hon. Members on the Government side that only a single vote in Region 8 is responsible for it having the majority in this National Assembly, please do not ever forget that.

When the PPP/C came into office in 1992, President Dr. Jagan said:

“There will be no recriminations and no one should be afraid of the Government, going after them”

This was in response to a top official of the then PNC Government, who was creating hysteria in the public services by telling the workers that their jobs would be taken away. A certain journalist who, in revisiting the PPP/C's tenure in office, made reference to 40 persons who he claimed were discriminated against by the PPP/C, when they came into power, in 1992, even though some were implicated in the old age pension fraud, among other things. So, 23 years later, 40 persons were removed and now we have more than 3,000 persons in less than 100 days. Is this one of your fresh approach Hon. Minister? The PPP has highlighted numerous instances where persons were sent on the breadline without any proper explanation or justification.

Additionally, many qualified and experienced professionals have been sent on leave and have been replaced by less qualified persons who were loyal to the present Government. Later on I will give you the latest person who has just become a victim.

In other cases, persons who have kept their jobs have claimed that they are being harassed at their places of work, due to their association with the past Government. We are happy that some prominent voices in society are now speaking to this issue of arbitrary dismissal.

The Hon. Members of the Government side, during the elections, claimed that they would bring back dignity, righteousness and respect. What is dignified, righteous and respectful about what you are doing? You have violated the constitutional rights' of these workers to employment by your actions. It seems to me, based on your action, that anyone who is view possibly as a PPP supporter has no right to employment. I call on all Guyanese to stand united against this discrimination.

The beauty of our country and our people lies in our diversity. When you start going after people in this manner, you are destroying the freedom to have diverse views, whether on politics or anything else. This discrimination also has serious economic repercussions. The environment for doing business will not be conducive to those who feel that their association with or support of the past Government will hamper their business. This could lead of loss of jobs, flight of capital and loss of investment opportunities that can benefit all Guyanese.

The new Government has been busy at creating an oversized bureaucracy of four vice-presidents, 27 ministers, 20 advisors and numerous others. This is clearly a case of creating jobs for a loyal few at a tremendous financial burden to the nation. Despite this large bureaucracy, the Government still found it necessary to dismantle the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport. Think of the resources wasted in re-branding the various Ministries. It would be necessary to remind you, Hon. Members, that when the PPP/C came into office in 1992, they did not seek to dismantle the structure of the various ministries. Some changes were made in 1998 with the formation of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, as well as the Ministry of Human Services to give greater emphasis to youth and women. Maybe this is a good time in our country's history for Guyanese to become involved in a discourse to the type of Government structure that they would like to put in place to prevent situations such as the one that we now have.

What about the good life, referred to in the theme of the budget. This is a goal that we all aspired to. This goal must form part of the collective psyche which has to start from home, where we must inculcate in our siblings and families the value of hard work. The State must create the

enabling environment for a better life and based on the recent action by the Government, I am not convinced that this enabling environment can be provided. The good life can only be realised when all are treated with an even hand, irrespective of their difference and opinions.

The Minister in his Budget Presentation made reference on page 4 when he said:

“We recognise that Guyana would not develop, nay survive intact, if the people are not allowed to participate meaningfully in the affairs of the country, whether individually or through their elected representatives at the national, regional and local levels.”

*2.52 p.m.*

I wish to remind the Minister that meaningful consultation is something which the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) embraces. In 2008, more than 100 civil society organisations, representing religious, business, labour, women, youth and Amerindians’ interests, amongst others, formed the National Stakeholders Forum.

Over 16 such stakeholder forums were organised on various issues such as crime, violence against women, the budget and Parliament, among others, where 1,600 representatives representing over 200,000 citizens...that is consultation.

All of the Presidents under the PPP/C embraced cultural celebrations at their official residence where all religious groups were invited and participated. Ministries also undertook consultations with stakeholders in various policy decisions.

The People’s Progressive Party/Civic started the process of giving a good life to our people by ensuring that the goods and services they required were made available to them and that they benefited from continuous improvements to their quality of life. A concerted effort was made to expand, as far as possible, opportunities for everyone. Unfortunately, this is still a work in progress because there are still many who are vulnerable and in need of various types of assistance. We may not have done all the things we wanted to in the way we wanted to. However, the sum total is that we were able to change the face our country by undertaking numerous actions in the five terms that we were elected.

What about the green economy? Was this not a major aspect of the PPP/C’s agenda since 1992?

We have worked extremely hard to move Guyana towards a low carbon development path. And did we not undertake a whole plethora of measures to safeguard the environment and support sustainable development? Did we not put measures in place for Guyana to benefit from the agreement with Norway, where US\$250 million has been pledged to support the development of a low carbon economy?

Through the Norway agreement, Guyana and its people stand to benefit from many major green initiatives and the Low Carbon Development Strategy. But we are now informed that the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project will be discarded, and I hope that that is not true. It is a shame that such an important Project that is expected to improve national development, provide jobs, provide energy security and help us to develop into a successful green economy is now being thrown away.

The green economy is nothing new for Guyana. But what we are seeing now is more of the colour green with little traces of yellow everywhere. Green carpets, green curtains, green walls and green chairs in State buildings seem to be a new trend. There are even Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) vehicles painted with the same colour. And to top it off, the market vendors at La Penitence are being told that they have to paint their stalls in the same colour. Wow! Is that not great?

There was party paramountcy for more than three decades and I do hope that this is not where we are heading again. For Government buildings and public offices, we need to stay neutral and not impose any party colour on the citizens of this country. [Mr. Greenidge: Did the PPP/C abide by that?] We abided by that rule, Mr. Greenidge. See if there are red chairs anywhere.

The other trend which is fashionable is the forensic audit. I had been a member of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) for some time and I have often heard the now Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Finance criticising the previous Government on procedures to ensure accountability, so I find it very strange that now that he is sitting on the opposite side, he feels justified in his action of choosing whichever auditors he wants, without even going through the correct procedures. Did I hear someone say, "What is wrong with that?" I would like to ask whether the Office of the Auditor General (AG), which is the authorised entity to undertake audits, had any role to play in these audits. I would like to ask what the costs for these forensic

audits are so far. I am sure it was not done for free or, maybe, for the love of Guyana and the return to righteousness and good governance, it was free. However, I heard different amounts being touted; some say that it was as much as \$200 million. [An Hon. Member: Rumours.] Maybe it is rumour, Comrade.

On Tuesday, 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2015, the Minister within the Ministry of Finance referred to a number of accounting firms that were involved in the forensic audits. Minister, can you please provide the names and amounts that were allocated to each firm? Is it true, Hon. Minister, that, because of time, you were unable to advertise for these audits? I am sure it could not be true because you are a stickler for accountability and touted the mantra of accountability and transparency. So, I do not think it is true because you are an honourable man.

What about all the new people who are now employed to fill the places of those whose services were terminated? Were those positions advertised? Where can I find those advertisements? Are these contract workers? Are they being paid the same amount as the workers they are replacing? Where is the outrage? Those who attacked the previous Government on everything seem to be very silent.

The coalition has promised to make us comparable to Singapore. We would all be happy if that happens, but that dream will not materialise when you start by removing capable and hardworking people from their jobs without any proper evaluation.

We talk about the brain drain, yet we are prepared to let go of people because we perceive them to be supporters of the PPP/C. You have started your term in office in bad faith. All those persons have families who depend on them for their survival. Imagine parents' pain when they have to tell their children that they have no job.

The constitutional reform process of 2003 saw the establishment of the Rights Commissions. These Commissions were set up in 2009 and started to function in 2010. At no time was any attempt made by the previous Government to interfere or get involved in the business of these Commissions. I have noted, with interest, that the allocations for these Commissions are now under the Ministry of Social Protection, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs and the Ministry of the Presidency.

It would be useful to remind the Hon. Members of this Assembly of Chapter 212G (2) which states:

“(2) A Commission shall be independent, impartial, and shall discharge its functions fairly.

(3) A Commission shall be funded by a direct charge upon the Consolidated Fund in accordance with article 222A.”

The Minister within the Ministry of Finance, in his budget presentation, said, on Tuesday, 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2015, that the passage of the Constitution (Amendment) Bill was to ensure that the Ministry of Finance stops interfering and meddling in the affairs of independent constitutional bodies. Are you saying, Hon. Minister, that the Ministry of Social Protection and the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs are autonomous agencies? [Ms. Teixeira: And do not forget the Ministry of Social Cohesion.] Yes, thank you very much, and the Ministry of Social Cohesion, and, that by placing the allocation under these Ministries, they will not come under political interference?

Article 212I states:

“The Human Rights Commission Secretariat shall be the Secretariat for all the Commissions established under article 212G (1).”

I believe it is a violation of the Constitution to place these Rights Commissions under the Ministries identified. These should have been placed under the National Assembly, rather than under political operatives.

I also wish to remind the Members of this Assembly that the processes in electing those who form part of the Commissions were completely open, and, again, the innuendo of political interference is utterly baseless. The National Assembly had oversight over the entire process.

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

**Mrs. Chandarpal:** Thank you, Sir. Guyanese are still trying to come to grips with the fresh approach in the way in which the Ministries are now branded. The creation of a Ministry of Social Protection was quite a novel one. Therefore, I was interested to see what its portfolio was.

And, in looking at the Official Gazette of 6<sup>th</sup> June, 2015, I noted that equalities and ethnic relations fall under this Ministry.

I also noted, on page 44 of the Budget speech, under Social Cohesion, the Minister of Finance said:

“...there is a clear nexus between social cohesion and nation building. Social cohesion is an intricate interplay of culture, geographic space, language, religion, race, social phenomena and status; and provides impetus for economic prosperity.”

All this may be true but my question is, how will this be undertaken by the said Ministry? I know that the Constitution provides for that equality and the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) has a very wide mandate, including some of the aspirations alluded to, and I want to make reference to them. Article 212D of the Constitution provides:

“The Functions of the Ethnic Relations Commission are to-

- (a) provide equality of opportunity between persons of different ethnic groups and to promote harmony and good relations between such persons;
- (b) promote the elimination of all forms of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity;
- (c) discourage and prohibit persons, institutions, political parties and associations from indulging in, advocating or promoting discrimination or discriminatory practices on the ground of ethnicity;
- (d) foster a sense of security among all ethnic groups by encouraging and promoting the understanding, acceptance and tolerance of diversity in all aspects of national life and promoting full participation by all ethnic groups in the social, economic, cultural and political life of the people;”

*3.07 p.m.*

It then goes on to talk about the composition of the Ethnic Relations Commission. It states that it shall consist of not less than five nor more 15 members nominated by entities by a consensual mechanism determined by the National Assembly, including entities representative of religious

bodies, the labour movement, the private sector, youth and women [*inaudible*] the entities are determined by the votes of not less than two-thirds of all elected Members of the National Assembly.

The question I would like to ask, Hon. Members and Mr. Speaker, is: where do you think those ideals would be better served, under the Ministry of Social Protection, which is a political operative, or under the ERC, as constituted by the National Assembly? All of the Rights Commissions come under the ambit of the third Schedule, in which these Commissions will have a direct charge on the Consolidated Fund.

As I pointed out earlier, this is a clear attempt to violate the Constitution and all Guyanese who believe in the protection of civil liberties and constitutional rights ought to take note.

A number of organisations and individuals have made the case for more women to be included on Government boards; not only should there be more women, but we would like to see more people of all ethnic groups in the composition of these boards. We have agreed, as lawmakers, to the principle of one-third women in decision-making bodies in the Constitution and I hope that this principle will be respected and adhered to in a much broader way. Guyana is well respected in the Caribbean and further afield for being proactive on women rights and empowerment.

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

**Mrs. Chandarpal:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my fervent hope that some of the positive and progressive measures adopted would not be cast aside because they were done by the PPP/C. In this regard, I hope that the Women's Leadership Institute, which was established after the Fourth World Conference of Women, will remain a flagship programme for underprivileged women and those who do not have formal education.

We constantly refer to the truism that Guyana is a land of six peoples and, in recognition of that reality, we are closely watching the actions of the Government as it undertakes the peoples' business.

We were vilified by those who were opposed to the PPP/C when they sought to paint a picture that we were not ruling in a balanced way and the supporters of the People's National Congress (PNC) were not treated with an even hand. This is far from the truth and we have the evidence to



support it. Every action taken in all sectors, whether it was the old age pension, the provision of school uniform, the Spectacle Care Difficult Circumstances Programme, housing, infrastructure, scholarships or the One Laptop Per Family, it was done in a fair manner.

The PPP is keeping an eye on all acts of discrimination and victimisation and we will be making the necessary recommendations on behalf of the people who voted for us. I have listened to the Hon. Minister, Ms. Amna Ally, when she talked about all of the things that the Ministry of Social Cohesion will be doing. I hope, Hon. Member, that we are not revisiting the Ministry of National Mobilisation, please. **[Ms. Ally: You are worried that... [inaudible]]** No, dear; I do not worry about these little things. We know how to fight and we will fight.

As I have said before, we will expose all the acts of discrimination. Mr. Speaker, I am quoting from INews, in which it revealed:

“Mr. Jevon Steven has been earmarked to occupy the post of Regional Health Officer for Region 6. However, his selection is not sitting well with some people who would describe him as an unqualified person for the job. INews sources revealed that Mr. Steven has been acting in management capacity of the New Amsterdam Hospital since the Regional Health Authority was disbanded by the Government. Dr. Jordan explained that the administration needs persons who are vibrant and willing to get the job done. It was Dr. Norton who revealed that Steven is earmarked to be the Regional Health Office for Region 6.

The Minister of Health pointed out that if one were to follow the statutes governing such appointments, then there would hardly be anyone willing to do the job of the Regional Health Officer. He said that this is where the cream is. He said that most of the qualified persons that take up such positions do a lacklustre performance and just go through the motions of holding the post. The problem, he said, in the Region 6 area is that we have to put people who we know will do the work, who will go and make certain that hospital, health huts and centres are visited right up the Oreala/Siparuta area, right down the Berbice River and around the coast. The Minister said that if he waited for qualification, then we will not be able to fill any of the health posts.”

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

**Mrs. Chandarpal:** Thank you very much.

“...who added that if the statutes were followed, the Regional Health Officer for Region 7 and the Director of Health Services may be jobless.”

It is such a shame. You now have, Hon. Members, the opportunity to speak about the largest Budget because we did not leave the country insolvent, as you had indicated earlier. If it were so, you would not have been able to present such a budget. We have left you a country that has moved leaps and bounds; let us see how you will move it further. I thank you. [*Applause*]

**Minister of Social Protection [Mrs. Lawrence]:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Christ the solid rock I stand and all other ground is sinking sand. I rise, this afternoon, in support of the 2015 Budget titled, *A Fresh Approach to a Good Life in a Green Economy*, and wish to have placed on record my congratulations to my Hon. Colleague, Mr. Winston Jordan, the Minister of Finance, for his presentation of the best and most achievable Budget in the last 23 years.

This Budget embodies the underlying goal of social protection, which is the achievement of a good life, a life free from the ravages of poverty, a way of life that Guyanese have been aspiring to for a very long time. The first step in realising that good life was signalled by the election of the APNU/AFC coalition Government whose number one priority is a good life for the people.

This commitment is clearly expressed and demonstrated in the 2015 Budget. It has been validated by the previous presentations of all my Colleagues, especially those in the social sector, who have articulated plans and programmes to improve the standard of living of Guyanese so that they could enjoy a good life, backed by sound economic policies to stimulate the economy and propel growth and development.

**Poverty Eradication:** In order to address one dimension of inclusive growth, which is the protection of the disadvantaged and marginalised groups of the society, Government will continue to put in place measures to improve the efficacy of our social welfare programmes. These measures will ensure availability of social safety nets to reduce poverty and the promotion of opportunities for special groups such as women, the elderly and people living with disabilities in all 10 Administrative Regions.

Meanwhile, the Ministry is pursuing a six-point action plan as its blueprint to meet these objectives. The overarching plan falls under these headings: Early Childhood Development Programme; Training, including Specialised Training for our Indigenous Peoples; Improved Benefits for Pensioners; Programmes Specific to Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Groups; the Provision of a safe and Clean Environment for those Persons in Need of Shelter; and Labour. This plan will serve to guide all efforts of the Ministry towards poverty eradication and to ensure consistency in action and results.

**Early Childhood Care and Education:** This APNU/AFC Government expects to achieve universal early childhood care by December, 2015. The establishment of our childhood centres will be initiated by the Government and is expected to move towards public-private partnerships. These centres will provide quality teaching that will facilitate learning for our infants to eight-year-old children and, in the process, ensure their easy transition to primary education.

By the end of September, 2015, the Ministry of Social Protection will be revealing this programme which encompasses a comprehensive approach of policies and programmes targeting children from birth to about eight years old. Their parents and caregivers will also be beneficiaries of these programmes. This strategic plan aims to help protect the child's right to develop his or her full cognitive, emotional, social, physical and spiritual potential, and addresses many of the very persistently pressing social issues. One such issue is the raft of legal problems associated with contemporary children. As a consequence, a childhood centre will be set up and will be housed in the Family Court.

**Training, including Specialised Training for our Indigenous Peoples:** The Ministry of Social Protection is currently undertaking a comprehensive restructuring programme. It seeks to identify gaps and facilitate capacity building with a view to fulfilling its mandate of providing a good life for all our citizens, especially the vulnerable, through quality services.

The Ministry recognises the need to raise the level of assistance currently available to the Indigenous Guyanese families and has had discussions with the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs on inter-Ministry partnership with a view to collaborating on the implementation and delivery of several of its programmes. This initiative includes the training of persons who will be

fluent in speaking different Indigenous dialects to acquire competence in the various fields of social work so that we can impact this section of the Guyanese community.

The APNU/AFC Government believes that the time has come for more of our Indigenous brothers and sisters to become actively involved and to assume more prominent roles in the decision-making process of our country. No more handouts; no more dependency; rather, we eagerly look forward for them to take their place alongside us, like the Hon. Vice-President, Mr. Sydney Allicock.

*3.22 p.m.*

As a consequence, we have approached several organisations to provide technical assistance in upgrading the skills and other competencies of the Ministry's staff in vital areas, namely probation, welfare, trafficking in persons (TIP), child protection, caring for the elderly and labour. This is a peoples' Budget; it addresses the needs of our people, as identified and highlighted during the recently concluded Elections campaign.

This brings into focus such needs that have been addressed, a significant increase in the old age pension and an increase in public assistance. While the Government was hoping to provide our senior citizens with an even greater increase, being cognisant of the available financial resources of the country, we are pleased to start with a 30% increase or \$3,875. This is a sizable sum. Old age pension now stands at \$17,000, moving up from \$13,125.

My learned Colleagues on the other side of the House would recall that it was the advocacy of members of the coalition that was instrumental in bringing this pension to that amount in the first place. In 2012, it was a mere \$7,500 and we fought for at least \$10,000 and subsequent increases.

The 2014 Budget presented by the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government gave a mere \$625 increase to each pensioner, while hoodwinking the nation with programmes such as old age electricity and water allowances, which, ultimately, discriminated against the elderly in all regions - in Regions 1; in the Pomeroon River in Region 2; in the islands of Region 3; in Regions 4, 5 and 6, up the rivers; in the Upper and Lower Mazaruni of Region 7; in Regions 8 and 9 and several parts of Region 10. I am speaking of approximately 35,000 pensioners who

did not have Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL) nor Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) metres in their names and so derived no benefit.

This move by the APNU/AFC Government to share these allowances with all pensioners has found favour with many, while a few grumble and spew untruths even as they cover up a \$6 million per month salary to their crony at the GPL company.

Further, allow me to remind the Opposition of a few facts. I would like to read, Sir, from *Budget 2014*, paragraph 6.16:

“Mr. Speaker, in addition to the old age pension we pay every month to our senior citizens, Government also assists our old age pensioners to pay the water charges due to GWI at an annual cost in excess of \$200 million annually. Last year, we introduced an annual contribution of \$20,000 payable annually to every old age pensioner who is a customer of GPL, helping them to meet the electricity charges they incur with that company.”

I would now like to quote from the *Hansard* dated the 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2014:

**“ELECTRICITY DISCOUNT FOR PENSIONERS**

**Mrs. Lawrence:** Could the Hon. Minister tell this House:

- (i) How many pensioners applied during 2013 for electricity discount?
- (ii) How many pensioners qualified and how many were disqualified?

**Minister of Human Services and Social Security [Ms. Webster]:**

(ii) Of the 7,283 pensioners who applied, 7,026 were eligible, while 257 pensioners did not qualify to receive the electricity subsidy.”

I would now like to quote from the *Hansard*, once again, dated 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2014:

“**Mrs. Lawrence:** Mdm. Minister, I note that in 2013 a budget of \$7.4 billion was allocated but, in your response to my question with regard to the number of persons who have accessed the electricity programme, your answer revealed that only some 16% of

the money allocated, which was \$590 million in last year's Budget... But when I look at the amount of moneys used in this line item for 2013, I note \$7.3 billion. So if only 16% of the moneys allocated for the electricity programme was allocated, how come almost all of the moneys were spent?"

We, the Government, hope to continue the trend of increases until the old age pension reaches a decent amount that could cushion the elderly and assist them to enjoy a better standard of living. We will make concerted efforts to be in a better position to effect these increases when we would have cleaned up the social security system inherited.

It is our belief that the list of pensioners is not authentic. We want to ensure that the people who are legally eligible for old age pension receive it, for it is not a pay-out to friends and relatives who are residents in other countries and enjoy pensions there. It must be for the deserving Guyanese people.

The same obtains for public assistance. This is means testing so that the most vulnerable Guyanese are the beneficiaries. This year, there will be a \$600 increase, bringing the public assistance payment to \$6,500. I would be the first to agree that it is inadequate, but, yet again, it is anticipated that this assistance will be increased over time.

More importantly, the APNU/AFC coalition Government intends to improve the economic situation of Guyanese, over the next five years, to a point where dependency on public assistance will be significantly reduced. It is our aim to empower the beneficiaries so that they could become economically independent. This brings me to the next burning issue of women's empowerment.

**Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment:** It is no secret that, for economic reasons, most of the public assistance recipients are female single parents who have no viable source of income. These women turn to the State for assistance after the fathers of their children have neglected them and after society has failed them. Many become teenage mothers and are now struggling to provide for their families. Many have been abandoned by their husbands. We intend to work with women so that they are empowered to take care of themselves and their families. At the same time, we will hold men more accountable. There is an urgent need to diversify and expand our horizon, to embrace new avenues and sectors, and to create more

opportunities for women.

We are addressing the gender inequalities that still pervade the society and further disadvantage women. Everywhere, women are rising to the challenge of securing their independence, including being paid equally for equal work. We must be cognisant of that. Women not only require social protection, but greater opportunities to secure their independence, to study, to work and to excel. In this context, I am proud to announce that we have started consultations to produce the country's first national gender policy and a national consultation will be held on 27<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> August, 2015.

This policy will steer the mainstreaming of gender issues in the public sector and offer guidance to the private sector. Business as usual is over. We have to get to the point of implementation and facilitation of gender sensitive policies because our biological differences do create some hardships. We have seen the case in point of women who were dismissed because of their pregnancy. The *Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana* is the supreme law of the land and it allows for women who are pregnant to work without hindrance. The Government is aware that women and men are biologically different, and some of the biological differences place women in situations where they seem to become an economic liability to their employers.

Hence, the Government, through the Ministries of Social Protection and Public Security, has begun a process with key stakeholders, including military and paramilitary organisations, to explore issues of employment policies to ensure that every pregnant woman on the job is protected and her human rights upheld in accordance with our Constitution.

Further, on gender, the Gender Action Plan (GAP) 2014-2015 provides a road map for work in the Latin America and the Caribbean regions. With regard to the four targeted gender priorities, it is important to note that one of the most crucial problems affecting women and girls in the region is gender-based violence, including sexual violence, sexual commercial exploitation, domestic violence, sexual harassment, femicide and physical and emotional violence. Across the region, prevailing violence, organised crime, high levels of impunity and gender stereotyping further exacerbate this problem.

In September, 2015, a summit of the Heads of State will adopt the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The new development agenda will be based on the preliminary set of 17 goals and

169 accompanying targets on the SDGs, many of which target children directly. In order to be able to measure progress on these new targets, the international community is calling for data revolution that will allow for timely and high quality data for decision-making and to measure global, regional and national progress. The Ministry of Social Protection has already responded by restructuring and strengthening our statistical department within the Ministry, for we recognise that, like our programmes, our budgets must be data driven.

**Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Groups:** A troubling issue in our society is the callous way we treat vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. It is distasteful. However, this Government intends to place greater emphasis on the disabled members of our society, focusing not only on developing their capabilities, but ensuring their enhanced participation in public life so that they could have an input in the making and shaping of policies that influence their lives.

Our Government, upon assumption of office, recognised that, despite our signing on to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and our own legislation, Persons with Disabilities Act 2010, many challenges remain for persons with disabilities in our country, such as the lack of reliable data on children with disabilities; their access to institutionalisation; education services; discriminatory practices; violence, neglect and abuse; and the absence of services in rural and remote areas.

*3.37 p.m.*

The Ministry of Social Protection has met with several organisations, including the Commission on Disabilities, where the numerous issues affecting them, individually and collectively as a body, were ventilated. These are, namely, their inability to access public and private buildings; unemployment; markets for their products; lack of training for families with disabled relatives and persons who become disabled; lack of training in life skills; and the need to acquire medical reports to access public assistance on a biannual basis, to name a few.

During the last 90 plus days in office, the APNU/AFC Government has ensured that persons with disabilities have been nominated to boards so that they can be involved in the decision-making process. We have also removed the biannual medical report previously required for public assistance. Presently, we are working with these groups to address other concerns as we pave the way for them to enjoy a good life.



Further, the provision of a safe and clean environment and nutritious meals for those persons in need of shelter is of vital importance. May I inform this honourable House that although our records will show that this honourable House approved, over the last 5 years, a total amounting to some \$860 million for capital works to be carried out on the Night Shelter, Mahaica Children's Home, Drop-In Centre and the Palms Geriatric Institution, visits to those places, which house our children and elderly, will, perhaps, Sir, bring you to tears, as it did me.

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

**Mrs. Lawrence:** Sir, allow me to give you a quick overview. The Night Shelter will fail any sanitary inspection, since there has been no running water in the bathrooms for five to six years; the floors have not been washed in years; the bugs and termites live in the furnishings just like tenants with tenancy agreements; and the food I need not describe. Neglect and despair are evident in several areas of the other buildings.

While a visit to the homes for our children would reveal conditions, not as deplorable as they are at the Night Shelter, the homes are in disrepair; they, too, lack running water; and there is evidence of broken tiles, broken cupboards and broken toilets. How can we honestly declare that we are providing a clean and healthy environment for our little boys and girls, when we have them living in spaces of neglect and dehumanising conditions?

I can state categorically that this Government will not allow such neglect to continue. In fact, we have begun to address these dire situations. Not a day goes by without a painful reminder of the high number of people sleeping on the streets of our country. It is the belief of many kind and generous Guyanese that they can be rehabilitated and reintegrated into society, where possible. There are facilities that can accommodate them, but no programme is in place to transfer persons into these institutions.

The Ministry of Social Protection recognises that given the extent of the tasks ahead, it cannot effectively address all of the many issues alone, and has committed to collaborate with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and other governmental agencies to address these issues, including establishing one-stop centres for victims of abuse. This will help to reduce the trauma children and families face and improve the services available to support them. To help facilitate this, existing child care regulations and the Child Care and Development Services Act of 2009

will be amended to reflect contemporary practices. In this vein, the Ministry of Social Protection will also review its policy of assistance rendered to poverty-stricken families and others experiencing economic distress, since the Ministry's focus for the next five years will be the elevation of the family structure.

Guyana urgently needs a restoration of the family drive. The family structure has been beaten and it is depleted. We, at the Ministry of Social Protection, have started working with various stakeholders to address the prevalence of dysfunctional families. We recognise the need to create greater opportunities for people for them to progress and, at the same time, we will hold people more accountable for the protection of their family members. Child abuse, sexual exploitation, neglect and domestic violence are too commonplace. By June of this year, the Child Care and Protection Agency (CC&PA) responded to 1330 child abuse cases and placed some 113 children into alternative care; it also attended to 39 cases of sexual abuse and exploitation and these cases were referred to the advocacy centres. The CC&PA provided assistance to some 2,225 vulnerable families, with some 547 children prevented from separation.

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

**Mrs. Lawrence:** Thank you. The number of children in institutional care is alarmingly high. We need to help our families to better provide for their children. Every child must be with a family, biological, adoptive or foster. Research has repeatedly shown the advantages of children being raised in a family environment which brings stability, safety and support. We intend to address the family and the employment relationship with State and private employers because there is a larger picture of productive workers for nation building. Healthy families produce healthy workers.

Even as the Ministry of Social Protection bolsters its Probation and Social Services Department, it has established two new units, namely a Public Relations Department and a Projects Unit to improve service delivery to both young and old and to help them make more informed life choices and better protect themselves. We intend to work assiduously on enhancing the protection of our children, women, the vulnerable and the elderly.

The Ministry certainly has its work cut out. Guyana has made some terrible headlines for alcohol consumption, teenage pregnancy, young offenders, low prosecution rate for rape, domestic

violence, child labour, trafficking in persons (TIP) and the highest suicide rate in the world per capita. After 23 years in office, the PPP/C Government did not see it fit to at least implement comprehensive policies and programmes to tackle these social issues. The new Government, I assure you, Sir, will not fail in this regard. Many of these social ills are linked to poverty and lack of economic opportunities for people to earn a decent livelihood.

During her presentation, the Hon. Member, Mrs. Gillian Persaud, alluded to the renaming of the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, more particularly the Department of Labour. May I take this opportunity to point Mrs. Persaud, at whose statement I am very surprised, given her knowledge about the Department of Labour, to a report titled, *Social protection: a life cycle continuum investment for social justice, poverty reduction and development*. This was done in Geneva in November, 2003 by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Time does not permit me to read it.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate that the Ministry of Social Protection will spare absolutely no effort to address the concerns and issues affecting our citizens, irrespective of creed, colour, and race. The APNU/AFC's vision and mission is to serve, not only in Georgetown, but throughout the length and breadth of our dear land of Guyana, to provide a service of quality and transparency, so that all can benefit and enjoy a good life.

This people's budget has my full support. I thank you. *[Applause]*

**Dr. Persaud:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to add my congratulations to the slew of good wishes, which you received on the ascension to your good Office. Congratulations. I trust that with your presence in this House, we will see what I did not see in the last Parliament – equality and justice being served.

However, today, I am deeply disturbed by what I see happening in a House that should be known for its democracy; in a House where no voice should be muzzled; in a House where everyone has the right to speak and to be heard; and in a House where all of the conventions ought to be followed. These conventions were established on ethics, on solid principles. These conventions may not be written ones, but they have been adhered to long before any one of us came into this National Assembly. In fact, I follow in the footsteps of an illustrious son of this soil and a well-known parliamentarian, who enjoyed one of the longest stays in this House, my father Reepu

Daman Persaud. I would like to say clearly that he has given his life to ensure that Parliament remains an institution and an arena where people will be allowed to speak. When I hear, see and am confronted with what occurred today, it disturbs and saddens me. We are told that not only will the conventions be flouted, but we are told that Standing Order 73 (1) would not be adhered to.

How can you do this when the very same Members, most of you were in the last Parliament, requested of the PPP/C Government not only five days, not only six days, but seven days? **[Members of the Opposition:** It was 12 days]. It was 12 days. Thank you. These days were given to you and you were given the wherewithal to ask as you wished. You were allowed to request any document that you wished. The thing is you were given the time. The thing is the PPP/C did not allow Standing Order 73 (1) to be thrown in the garbage. Is that what I am hearing today? Am I hearing that for this entire budget we will be given three days, with all of the changes that were made and with it being the largest budget?

My good friend and Colleague, Minister Volda Lawrence, for whom I have tremendous respect, spoke of the word “transparency”. While I was very happy to hear some of the policies that you mentioned and some of the initiatives that you will be implementing,...

*3.52 .p.m.*

**Vice President and Minister of Foreign Affairs [Mr. Greenidge]:** Mr. Speaker, I apologise for interrupting the speaker. I am somewhat puzzled because I believe that you, in ruling, a little while ago on the motion before you, drew our attention to Standing Order 73(1)...

**Mr. Speaker:** Is this a Point of Order, Hon. Member?

**Mr. Greenidge:** Yes.

**Mr. Speaker:** Please cite the Point of Order.

**Mr. Greenidge:** The speaker is alleging that we have thrown Standing Order 73(1) into the dustbin. Standing Order 73(1) sets a maximum limit. Nothing that is happening now and nothing about your decision contests Standing Order 73(1). It is either a point of fact or it is not. Is Standing Order 73(1) being infringed or not? That is what I am asking.

**Mr. Speaker:** I thank the Hon. Member for his statement.

**Dr. Persaud:** I merely said that I am disappointed in your request. The Speaker ruled as he has the prerogative to do, but you requested it. What are you telling us? You are telling us that you do not want to hear our questions, that you do not want to be accountable not only to us but to the people of this country.

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

**Dr. Persaud:** Does this Government not want the people of Guyana to know what it has in the budget? If people are prevented from asking questions, where is the transparency you, the Members, speak of? Where is the democracy that you, the Members, request? Mr. Speaker, I urge you to exercise your wise counsel and guide my colleagues, on the other side of the House, so that in the future we will not have to deal with this type of inequity. I feel very disheartened if this is how, in this very early period of our Parliament, we are going to proceed. If this is the “good life”, if this is the change of which the Members speak, and if this is the “fresh approach” that they tout, well then, I say to my fellow Guyanese, God help us. We will help you, my fellow Guyanese; we will stand with you as we have done. We will represent you, my fellow Guyanese, but I say hold the Government accountable. If you want questions to be asked of them, give us your questions and we will pose them. Let us see when we ask those questions if we will get the response that should be given.

Further to that, it has been brought to my attention that tomorrow we will flout that convention, of which I speak, yet again, in which the Leader of the Opposition is the penultimate speaker on the final day of the budget debate. Has this become the level to which we have sunk ourselves? Have we descended, degenerated to such a level that we are going to flout that convention? The father of which I spoke of, so proudly, was one of the persons in this House who wound up those debates as the penultimate speaker. Why do you want to muzzle our Leader of the Opposition? I am betting that by tomorrow we will have a *volte-face* and we will see a turnaround because of the pressure applied here today. I will say, no, it is wisdom. Stick to those conventions, show that you are magnanimous, but more than ever show that we all deserve the title of “Honourable” which is bestowed on us when we become Members of Parliament.

Guyana was on a steady course of growth and development over the last two decades. It was a process of an enabling climate driven by the PPP/C administration. That enabling climate and environment encouraged Guyanese of all walks of life to own their homes, to move toward entrepreneurial avenues and to work towards personal development. It saw the creation of numerous initiatives to improve so many facets of their lives and to tackle compelling social issues.

One of the things I pride myself on is that I use good indicators. I will take the Members right back to the Millennium Development Goals which are tangible indicators of what our Government achieved over two decades. The proportion of people who suffer from hunger was halved; reduction of the prevalence of undernourishment from 19.5% pre-1992 went below 5.1% post-2013. The proportions of persons living in extreme poverty declined from 28.7% pre-1992 to less than 18% post-2008. Those are not my figures; those are from the Millennium Development Goals report. As I said, they stand as tangible indicators of two decades of progress - solid progress.

With the advent of the Budget 2015, fuelled by expansive promises made to the electorate by the current Government, many of which were to be fulfilled within 100 days since it assumed office, expectations ran high. The reality, while not everyone has seen the film *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, many will agree with me when I say that after 16<sup>th</sup> May we have the real life experience of almost four months of fumble and a budgetary bungle. The promises have receded into a litany of broken recordings – we cannot, not now, not this budget. Then when? I am humbled to be a Member of this National Assembly and to once again be given the privilege and opportunity to represent all Guyanese on matters which impact on their lives directly or indirectly. Every Guyanese yearns for economic advancement as it ushers in the security of home ownership and the accessibility to amenities and services. Also, it improves one's quality of life and ultimately creates stability in homes. Even if that is achieved, all of it could be negated if persons live in fear, not only for their lives but for those of their families. This is what persists in today's Guyana.

The recent climate of horror, brutality and crime has driven many to this point of fear. It is a real fear. We are now looking over our shoulders when we open our gates to go into our homes because we know not what lurks there. Daily persons are beaten, robbed or killed for their hard

earned belongings. The escalating crime wave continues to claim the lives of loved ones. The most vulnerable are rendered helpless in the face of blatant and unrepentant criminal activity - the elderly of whom my colleague spoke; the children, the grandmother – remember the one who scaled the fence - the women. No one is spared. Persons have become deluded by feelings of paranoia and fear of becoming another statistic. Businesses are robbed and yet people have to swallow constant loss and move on, hoping that they can make ends meet every time they lose their small or large investments. The response to that widespread cry of fear and pain hurts and dogged. Can you not see it is not working? To even consider this as an answer is ludicrous. Guyana's people need protection and they need it now. I am tired of the excuses and sickened by the reported and unreported cases of crime that affect my Guyanese brothers and sisters. It is not right. In Opposition, the current Government claimed to have the answers. Now, only four months into Government, what has it done to stem the tide of crime?

I am going to make a proposal here. I hope the Members of this Assembly will push this proposal forward and adopt it. I am asking simply that a fund be set up for children and women - widows, grandmothers, family members - so that they can survive after their breadwinners would have been killed. I am asking for that fund. There is approximately \$800 million a day to spend in this budget. Please, I am just asking for that fund, as someone who is always pleased when our citizens benefit in a holistic manner so that every facet of their lives is improved.

I meticulously scrutinised Budget 2015 for far-reaching social reforms, innovative and new initiatives to improve the lives of our most vulnerable, for efficient budgetary measures to provide effective answers to some of our most burdensome and debilitating problems – suicide, alcohol abuse, domestic violence and unemployment. In the generally insipid and uninspiring budget document, decorated with a few bright sparks of faithful plagiarism of the People's Progressive Party (PPP)'s vision, I made a startling and disturbing discovery. What was that discovery? I have to say though that my good colleague, Hon. Member Mrs. Lawrence, tried her best to remedy that. Do you know that in the entire budget the word “women” is mentioned thrice? We have been ignored. There is a fleeting mention of one of the most vulnerable and largest groups in this country and not a woman-centric programme or initiative is mentioned in that budget.

In fact, women's developmental programmes have been blatantly neglected, instead scope has been given to fluff, bluff and bluster. There were no announcements of short-term empowerment initiatives or benefits for single mothers. Imagine, the Women of Worth (WOW) programme, a public-private partnership, which facilitated a number of women with the wherewithal to start their own businesses, and in some cases to even to expand their own businesses - a lot of them would have done that - has been scrapped. Where is the alternative? Tell me, I want to know, so that when women ask me what is in the budget for them I can say. Surely women matter and no one should have to scrutinise budget documents minutely to find what should be done or what is going to be done for one of the most vulnerable and important groups in our country.

In a world where attention has been riveted on women empowerment in an effort to decrease their hardship, to alleviate their poverty and to remove every social issue of their life, the Hon. Minister of Finance has stated emphatically, by his mere silence, that we do not matter. He has told me, and thousands of other women like me, that we have been relegated to the back-burner much like his own female colleagues were relegated to the back-burner. Then, as an afterthought, a few Ministers, a few Members are brought into the Parliament. The media has been replete with the voices of women's activists. Why are they speaking? Is it because there is a paucity of women on state boards? Maybe this Government likes the number three. Three of 22 state boards are chaired by women. Are you saying there are no brilliant, capable and competent women in this country? I am affronted for all the women whom it is telling that to. What other conclusion can I arrive at?

The stench of neglect of our womenfolk permeates the budget. Allocations toward major training programmes for women and youth have been chopped unceremoniously. Much work has been done by the previous Government to develop women in areas of leadership - the Guyana Women Leadership Institute (GWLI). Having been very much involved with that institute, I admire the rate at which women are churned out more than one time a year, equipped in various areas so that they can be financially empowered. The GWLI, like the Board of Industrial Training (BIT) and the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes, all of them, gets less money, yet you have \$800 million a day to spend – the Government that is, Mr. Speaker.

*4.07 p.m.*



Then there is that promise, free education for all. Everyone has gone silent. I hear no mention of that anymore. Is the Government going to go back to the University of Guyana (UG) to tell it what happened to that promise? Imagine after all the talk of unemployment that exists, the Government even quoted a figure in its budget speech and it is now contributing to those figures of unemployment because this Government has engaged in an macabre wanton witch-hunting dance. What has emerged? There is more unemployment, bread has been snatched from the mouths of families, women and youths, because the Government summarily dismissed them from their jobs.

What is in it for the women and the youth of this country? I say nothing. I say indignity; I say humiliation and then, to top it off, the bread and the salaries, which they would have been earning, removed from them. Imagine if it is in a single parent home and that mother was the only provider of the bread in her home, what happens to the children? Has anyone been thinking about all of these things? An entire family is affected when someone loses his or her job and when those mothers lose their source of income, do you think they will be able to purchase the fresh carrots, the sausages, the yogurts, Mr. Speaker? No. They need to survive and that does not even become an option.

Imagine the plight of the women and youth from the One Laptop per Family agency, the indigenous communities and other public service agencies who suffered the indignity and humiliation of callous removal from their jobs. The *volte-face* of the Hon. Minister Allicock, yesterday, left me in some shock. I read this, and I think that I am reasonably analytical. Now, what was he saying? He was saying that the some 2,000 Indigenous People, who were removed, ripped from their source of income, will be eligible for training. There is no guarantee there. They will be eligible for maybe employment, and there is no guarantee. What are the Members saying there? I read it; all of them read it. Therefore they were having \$ 30,000 a month - that is real; that is tangible. What about the overzealous Minister, who swept or tried to sweep a few female members out of the Ministry? You have some problems there my honourable colleague. I wish you all the strength in the world. How will that woman provide for her child if she loses her job? How will the youths fulfil their potential in dreams if they have no job? I was told by a tearful mother... We talked about labour laws. I was impressed by the presentation of my fellow colleague, Ms. Burton. A young office assistant, on his first job, is being removed from the

office and put under a step. The mother brought her 21-year-old son to me, from the East Coast of Demerara, who was placed under a step. Rain, sun and sand, he is under that step; he cannot go into that office; eats his food under there and conducts his business under a step because it is perceived that he supported the PPP/C Government.

Then we have to hear Members of the other side of the House tell us about their employing people and qualifications are unnecessary. We have to watch an ostentatious inauguration ceremony. We have to see people flimsy grounds.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have ten minutes remaining.

**Dr. Persaud:** Where is the equality? Where is the justice? Where is the humanity? Now, as the consideration of the Estimates of Expenditure approaches, we want to know who this Government is hiring? Who are they? What are their qualifications? Where are they going to be placed? Are they contracted workers? Who are they going to replace? A lot of questions are coming their way.

What about the social issues which confront women on a daily basis? Yet, conspicuous silence in the budget speech, I heard some of these alluded to today by my honourable colleague. Sexual violence and abuse are disturbing realities in this country, yet the Sexual Violence Unit has been dismantled and now even in the budget speech wanted a mention. These dismissive actions coupled with an unimaginative, ineffective budget, all highlight the glaring incompetence of this new Government. Our women, angry women and fired women should not be taken lightly. Hon. Finance Minister, did you not consult with your female counterparts? I guess not.

Alcohol abuse has ravaged the lives of persons and families and there is no strategic programme to deal with this. Everyone knows I am passionate on the issue of alcohol abuse. I am willing to work with this issue so that we can establish a structured programme to benefit all of the Guyanese who suffer from this, so that we do not have to see the tragic loss of lives or we do not have to see the dysfunctions in homes.

Budget 2015 was singularly blinkered when it came to social reforms. Guyanese young and old receive minimum increases in certain areas, while solid support was yanked from their feet. There is talk about the old-age pension. I heard talk about doubling the old-age pension the last

time, and I would have agreed with that. I heard talk about \$20,000 the last time, I would have agreed with that. Give the people the \$20,000 at least that was promised the last time. Now that the shoe is other foot, make good on the promise.

When we compare what was given and what is now \$990 water subsidy and \$2,500 Guyana Power & Light (GPL) subsidy, there were cheques and balances because those were paid directly to GPL and Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI). Now, what have been attached to the existing sum of \$16,000 that the pensioners received with their pensions plus their subsidy? Only \$385 was added. If that is not a patronised pittance, I do not know what it is. The give and take back mantra is pervasive; it pervades the entire budget.

Also I want to talk about public assistance. Public assistance is very important, and, of course, we want that care and compassion to be extended to all those who require it. Six hundred dollars of public assistance was added on and not even from the beginning of the year. Shame Mr. Speaker! Shame! This public assistance would be going to the medically and financially disadvantaged persons. The Government is saying that it is going to remove the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) cushioning effect by the PPP/C Government that was to benefit the poorest people who do not comprise the public service. They are the poor shop girl, the carpenter, the fisherman. Those are the people who fall outside of the public service. They do not benefit from the \$50,000 yet they still have to pay NIS so Government has disenfranchised thousands of poor underprivileged people. Mr. Speaker and the Hon. Finance Minister, is this the “good life”? Is this how you are going to spend \$800 million, so that you that take most and somebody else does not get an ice cream?

I want to say that the economy has stagnated. There is talk about people feeling happy. It is just to walk down Regent Street, visit the shops, stores and speak to the people there. I have been speaking to so many people, not only the employers are crying out for business but also the employees are suffering of this stagnant economy, because they are being laid off.

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

**Dr. Persaud:** Is this the justice? Is this the equality? Is this the change that you preach? Is this the fresh approach? If all this damage has occurred in such a short span of a few months, imagine what will happen by the time we get to next year.

Businesses have ground to a halt and I anticipate that more persons will join the ranks of the unemployed if this untenable situation persists. Impositions have become the order of the day, even the head of the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) has described the way in which sweepers and cleaners were dealt with as insensitive. There was no consultation. He has taken umbrage. I forgot one of his words which was “inadequate”, and insensitive. He registered the union’s disappointment as to how this matter was addressed. If that gentleman, as a representative of the workers, could have registered his disappointment, are we saying imposition is the order of the day? There is lack of consultation.

Imagine this Government is touting the Budget 2015 as the largest budget, giving it a whopping \$800 million to spend daily and public servants are told not only will the promise salary increase dwindled to 5% from the promise 20% but they are not getting it retroactive from 1<sup>st</sup> January - absolute shame.

**Mr. Speaker:** You have three minutes remaining.

**Dr. Persaud:** We are talking about Value Added Tax (VAT) and there is a long list of VAT-able items. Let us talk about the Berbice River Bridge toll. How is that filtering down to commuter? What I have heard from the Hon. Minister of Finance sounds like the Blues Brother record, *There are more promises, broken promises.*

As soon as this Government assumed offices, it rubbed it in the faces of thousands of people right across Guyana. Budget 2015 adds to the prevailing frustration and displeasure of persons out there. Our country weeps for its people. The elderly, man, woman and child are bewildered by the callousness displayed by this Government. Remember, the Government measures not only impact on a family but they impact on the whole country. It spoke about the School Uniform Assistance of \$1,500 but it ripped away \$ 10,000. Compare \$840 million which would have allocated to \$1.6 billion which was allocated previously. We spoke about investment, but do not confine external investment. That is investment in our children. Not only would the Government remove disposable income to families but it has also removed it from the economy because that money would have been spent in book stores, paying a seamstress to make uniform and paying the ‘small’ man to provide services. Almost \$2 billion is no longer in the economy. Every mother and father is bleeding and reeling from this fresh hurt. I hope you understand, my honourable

colleagues on that side of the House, of the havoc that you have caused since your assumption of office.

I believe, as Members of this august House, we have a responsibility to all the people of Guyana, to act in their best interest, to never diminish their hopes and dreams. The process of consultation and dialogue must never be trivialised. I re-emphasised my party's call to work in a construction environment - this certainly was constructed so far - where we can share diverse perspectives, where we can make meaningful decisions for the benefit of every Guyanese and not just some.

We of the PPP/C promised to continue to work tirelessly representing, all the people of the Guyana, to champion all of their causes and, yes, to hold this Government accountable, not only for the welfare for every Guyanese, but for the preservation of their dignity, their right to equal opportunity, free from the taint of political *bullyism* and marginalisation, and most importantly that which the PPP/C has fought so hard for, and I know it because I lived in a home where a man...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have one minute to wrap up.

**Dr. Persaud:** ...give much of his life for that democracy. We want to see you maintain democracy in this beautiful country of ours.

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

*4.22 p.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, this is the time when we should take the suspension. I want to remind you that there is a meeting fixed in my Chamber, to discuss matters connecting with our business, arising from the appointment of the Members of the Committee of Selection, where I lost the Hon. Prime Minister. The suspension will be for one hour and we will return at 5.20 p.m.

*Sitting suspended at 4.22 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 5.26 p.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the sitting is resumed. Please be seated. Hon. Members, the next speaker on our list is the Hon. Ronald Bulkan.

**Minister of Communities [Mr. Bulkan]:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If it pleases you, Sir, I rise to add my support to the motion before this House for which the background and framework are elucidated in the Budget Speech which was given by the Hon. Minister. There are no ifs and buts. I congratulate and commend the Hon. Minister and his team for the presentation of his maiden, as well as marathon Budget Speech – the first of what would be many in this the first term of this A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) Administration.

It is a Budget that caters for the expenditure of almost \$182 billion, excluding a further \$39 billion, which represents statutory expenses. It is a \$221 billion Budget, which many Opposition Members are seeking to reduce to fluff. We have just heard from the previous speaker and it was referred to as bluff, as well.

I have been trying to make some sense of how \$221 million can be reduced to fluff or bluff. I am informed that the budget cycle is a continuous one; it never stops. It begins in July of one year and, more importantly, it is expected to be tabled and approved early in the following year to allow for the effective and efficient execution of the projects and activities being funded. That the latter could not happen is the equivalent of inflicting a grievous wound on this nation. By definition, therefore, when the Government assumed office, following the General Elections held in May of this year, much preparation took place. That cannot be denied. It is not to say, however, that the Administration's and the Ministers' *imprimatur* are absent.

After listening to the Budget Presentation, reading it and, most importantly, talking to the ordinary persons, I am convinced that this is a people's budget, in addition to it being one that is designed to bring about progress and development in our country.

My first observation has to do with the elation of housewives over the removal of Value Added Tax (VAT) on a range of items that make up their shopping list. Those items are stated in the Budget Speech, for which the estimated revenue loss is some \$680 million - moneys that would go directly into the purses of the working families to help lower the cost of living.

It tells me that the Hon. Minister was thinking about the average person when he set about the crafting of his Budget. Acknowledging this is important, as it signifies that this Administration

cares about people. This is why I and, practically, all of my Colleagues who have spoken have described this Budget as a people's budget.

On the other end of the scale, there is a 30% increase in monthly pension, from \$13,125 to \$17,000.

This Budget, therefore, caters for the working persons, as well as the retirees. Despite being crafted in exceedingly difficult circumstances, this is a progressive and humane Budget, and the Hon. Minister will earn the gratitude of the young as well as the old for these as well as other budgetary measures that are included in this Budget.

I wish to focus on the theme of this Budget and, in particular, the first part of this theme that speaks to a Fresh Approach. This fresh approach is vital and necessary if our country is to take its place among the countries of the world where there is respect for the rule of law, the Constitution, as well as the Democratic Organs established by or under this Constitution. This fresh approach is necessary to break with a past, in which the stench of corruption, nepotism, and discrimination was endemic; and where for too long our people had to suffer under a government that cared less about them and more about their friends and associates.

The Hon. Minister must be commended for not pulling any punches and for calling a spade a spade.

A fresh approach and a new beginning are required because it is what the people decided when, on 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2015, they were asked to choose. This choice was between a political party that believes in winner takes all or a coalition that rejects such a philosophy and believes in alliance politics as well as shared governance.

That early choice came about as a result of a Proclamation that was promulgated on the 10<sup>th</sup> November, 2014, to prorogue the Tenth Parliament. That Proclamation effectively paralysed the parliamentary process and smothered the voices of the people's legitimate representatives in this National Assembly. It prevented the debate on the No Confidence motion that was tabled. It prevented debates, as well, on financial excesses and impropriety, and this was designed to protect the reputations of ministers from parliamentary sanctions; to permit the People's Progressive Party/Civic's (PPP/C) campaign for the General and Regional Elections to proceed

unimpeded; and to permit the continued expenditure of State funds without parliamentary scrutiny, as well as other things.

As I have already alluded, the effects of the prorogation of Parliament in early November of last year has had crippling and debilitating effects on the management of our country and, in particular, on the economy. This is so because no capital expenditure for 2015 could have taken place or can take place until a 2015 Appropriation Bill has been approved by the Parliament.

In each of our ten regions, capital projects had to be shelved as a result of this. In fact, the capital allocations in this Budget are some 26% less than it was in 2014, or a sum of some \$749 million. In this regard, the country has, essentially, been forced to mark time for almost one year, with the management of the regions being thrown into a tailspin.

You can listen, Mr. Dharamlall.

This recklessness and irresponsibility arose out of narrow and selfish political considerations, namely out of a desire to have control of Parliament – to have back what the Opposition called the one seat majority. The Hon. Member Mr. Hamilton, as well as other Members, including Mr. Damon and Hon. Member Irfaan Ali, spoke. What Mr. Hamilton said is that less than half of capital allocations will not be spent this year, and that the time between the end of the debate and approval leaves little time for execution. [An Hon. Member: It will be more than half.] His words were it would be less than half.

The Hon. Member understands the import of the actions of the Opposition – those actions described – but the Opposition would not own up to the consequences of its actions. Instead, we hear that the Government is not being honest with the people of the country. That is what Mr. Hamilton said. Hon. Member, some of your more pious Colleagues perhaps might wish to draw your attention to that biblical injunction that speaks about taking the beam out of one's eye before one tries to find the mote in the eye of one's neighbour.

Yet, we had statements of disconnect such as that made by the Hon. Member Mr. Ali, who started with the debate, and who very early in his presentation had the effrontery to say ...  
*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I ask that the Hon. Member be allowed to conclude his statement.



**Mr. Bulkan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope that you can hear me, Mr. Speaker. I was saying that we were treated to statements of disconnect such as that made by the Hon. Member, former Minister, Mr. Ali, who started the debate for the Opposition, and who very early in his presentation had the effrontery to say:

“The PPP put the people and the country first”.

If the Opposition had wanted to put people and the country first, it would have cooperated as well as collaborated with the majority of the National Assembly in the last Parliament in the interest of national unity and nation building. What have we heard? We heard the Hon. Member Mr. Rohee, who spoke earlier this afternoon, say that audits are responsible for the slowdown of the country; not the actions of the Opposition; not the prorogation and the dissolution; and the fact that the country has been marking time for almost one year.

However, if the Opposition had heeded the wise call of the former Leader of the Opposition, Brigadier (Ret'd) David Granger, who, immediately following the 20<sup>th</sup> November, 2011 General and Regional Elections and who having recognised the minority status of the Executive, called on President Ramotar to establish a tripartite budget committee – that is a Committee made up of the three parties represented in the Tenth Parliament – for the fashioning of a national budget. Agreeing to such a call would have sent the clearest signal that the Opposition... [Mr. G. Persaud: *Inaudible*] Mr. Persaud, what did you do with Mr. Whitaker? Why did you throw out Mr. Whitaker? ...truly believes in putting the people first, putting the country first, and it was not acting out of narrow selfish interest.

That, of course, did not happen. [Mr. G. Persaud: *Inaudible*] Mr. Persaud, I am unaware that you have employed anybody in your life, so I really cannot take you seriously, sir.

The PPP/C decided that it had no interest in pursuing national unity. Clearly, it was shackled to an inappropriate winner takes all philosophy.

Then there was the Hon. Member Nandlall who, seeking to attribute reasons for certain conditions, had this to say when he spoke of the misbehaviour of the Opposition which had the one seat majority. He was referring to the last Parliament. Note, there was no respect for the majority and this is why a fresh approach is necessary.

5.41 p.m.

I trust that the foregoing provides some clarity to the Hon. Member, Mrs. Indranie Chandarpal, who enquired as to the need for a fresh approach. One clear signal of a fresh approach is the creation of the Ministry of Communities, a Ministry that encompasses the former Ministry of Housing and Water, as well as the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. What is the rationale for the creation of this new Ministry? The creation of a Ministry of Communities is long overdue. It is only logical and sensible to have a single Ministry that will be responsible for delivering all the services which pertain to creating decent and dignified living conditions. A Ministry that has at its heart human needs and the interest of citizens - human needs, Hon. Members on the other side. Simply put, a single Ministry, under one administrative structure, would be better able to coordinate activities in a holistic and comprehensive manner rather than multiple separate agencies. It is for efficiency and rational delivery.

A fresh approach... [Mr. Hamilton: Tell us about regional development.] I am coming to that. If you continue to remain in this House, you will have many years to hear about this Administration's plans, programmes and policies. I can do without your advice Sir. Listen and learn.

A fresh approach – Regional Development and Local Government - the budget speaks to a fresh approach and, therefore, I would like to look at how this new coalition Government has reshaped and remodelled its investment strategy to give priority towards equipping and empowering the 81 local democratic organs (LDOs) to sustainably manage their own affairs and development.

[An Hon. Member: Do they have 81?] Yes, they have 81. [Interruption]

Regional Development – this Administration believes in decentralised Government. The Ministry of Communities, in returning to the Constitutional provisions for local democracy, will empower and equip the 10 Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs). The vision is for each region to be more meaningfully involved in managing and developing their jurisdiction, which includes the crafting of development plans and programmes, whilst central Government provides support to enable them to become productive and self-sustaining. No longer will our regions be viewed as administrative entities, dependent only on central Government's hand-downs for their

existence. As stated by His Excellency, “Strong regions will lead to strong Governments”.  
[*Interruption*] Mr. G. Persaud, what did you do with Mr. Whittaker?

The Ministry’s initiatives to regional empowerment have already commenced. A Regional Democratic Council’s leadership... [*Interruption*]

*Speaker hits gavel on desk.*

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We seem to have an entire collective on the other side that have bees in their bonnets.

A Regional Democratic Council’s leadership forum was held in July of this year, under the theme *Unveiling a Vision for Regional Empowerment*. At that forum it was endorsed that Plans of Action for Regional Development (PARDs) will be developed by the RDCs, with support from the central Government. Based on those plans, central Government will work hand in hand with each RDC to implement those developmental ideas and programmes. The RDC’s capacity to develop these plans will be built through a regional strategic planning workshop that will be held later this year in collaboration with other Ministries. The development of the PARDs will involve an assessment of resources that exist within each Region. The PARDs will, overtime, ensure that our regions are not only administrative regions, but productive regions. Ultimately, our regions will develop the capacity to be self-sufficient and contribute significantly to economic growth and to a good life for the citizens of those regions, the citizens of our country- a good life, Mr. Speaker.

Critically, these plans will not only be developed, but will be implemented and evaluated for the benefit of our people. It is not a paper exercise. The RDCs will be expected to use their resources as the tool for advancing regional development, for efficiently and effectively executing their mandate, for developing and managing sustainable communities and for attracting investment which will lead to new economic activities and job creation. Each Region is expected to meaningfully participate in improving the lives of their residents. The same expectation of participation applies to the villages, as well as the Community Development Councils (CDCs).

The wealth of our regions must be optimised. Each Region possesses its own resources, resources that can create better lives; resources that must be exploited for the benefit of our people, not only for a handful of persons.

I am coming to a question that has been asked, the one about a regional emblem. The introduction of emblems or flags for each region is part and parcel of this new strategic vision. Each region having a symbol, which embodies and heralds its unique identity, is consistent with the idea that we must each take pride in the unique region in which we live, work and play. It gives us a symbol that we can call our own, of which we can be proud. The emblem encapsulates our region's unique resources.

All regional democratic councils have been invited to participate in creating a regional standard, reflecting their resource base, as part of the fresh approach and the new strategic vision. They will have an emblem which will proudly depict and display the unique resources and the assets available to them. The emblems will give the regions a symbol that they can each call their own and which we can all be proud of.

The announcement of this regional standard and of a regional emblem has evoked a hysterical response from the Opposition, who are seeing damnation; who are seeing doom; they are seeing fragmentation and disintegration of the nation. The fact is, a person living in Everton or Eversham in Berbice, in Aruka in Region 1 or in Achiwuib in Region 9, sees a person differently, but taking pride in our own community and in our respective regions, does not mean that we are less committed to our nation and to nation building.

Our local democratic organs below the level of the RDC, this system of local government of our municipalities and our neighbourhood democratic councils (NDCs), is damaged, degraded and has been rendered dysfunctional.

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

**Mr. Bulkan:** Our local government system must be rebuilt and will be rebuilt. It will be done via a three-phase plan, which will involve a democratic renewal through Local Government Elections; secondly, institutional strengthening and capacity building; and thirdly, reforming the financial support structures of our councils.

Some initiatives in our 2015 Budget include the Community Investment Improvement Project, the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development or the SLED Initiative and it includes a Georgetown Restoration Project.

The Ministry has started collaboration with the Canadian funded Caribbean Local Economic Development Programme (CARILED), which has committed to undertaking information technology assessment and management assessment within our municipalities. Together, we will also be working with municipal councils to develop similar plans of actions for municipal development. These plans will pave the way for municipal empowerment, development and self-sufficiency.

This Administration accepts that our country is too large to either be efficiently or effectively managed only from Georgetown, whether it be from an office in Fort Street, Kingston or from offices in Shiv Chanderpaul Drive. Lest I be misunderstood, let me make it clear, the central Government is not abandoning its role and responsibility for providing guidance, support and leadership to local government organs to ensure that they are operating within their lawful remit and in the best interest of the residents of their areas. In fact, Chapter 28:09, of the Local Democratic Organs Act, at section 35, imposes on each council, the requirement for them to be guided by the central Government's plans and policies, as well as for each councillor to be guided to take into account the respect for the minority councillors.

The Georgetown Restoration Project, of which I have spoken, will see an injection of an allocation of \$300 million, to help improve the state of our capital city. None of our local democratic organs suffered as much under the oppressive political culture, as did the city of Georgetown and the Mayor and City Council (M&CC). Our garden city has become the garbage city under the PPP/C's yolk and which saw itself as fighting a war against the residents of Georgetown.

Integrated water resources management - water is life and Guyana is blessed with an abundance of this resource. Careless use and poor management can degrade the availability of fresh water and negatively impact on our social, economic and environmental activities. This coalition will adopt an integrated water resources management. The Department of Water will lead a process which will include the re-establishment of a National Water Council, working with the

community at Wisroc in Linden to develop the Dakoura Creek Protection Plan and to develop a new strategic plan for the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI), where its revenue losses are to be reduced from 70% to acceptable levels.

In this year's budget, to ensure that every Guyanese has access to reliable, safe and quality potable water, a total of \$2.9 billion has been allocated, of which \$690 million is allocated for coastal water supply; \$80 million for the Linden water supply and rehabilitation; \$252 million for the Hinterland Programme; \$282 million to the Urban Sewerage and Water Programme; and \$950 million to improve the Water Supply and Improvement Project. There are many outputs under this programme. *[Interruption]*

*Speaker hits gavel on desk.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, let the speaker complete his statement.

**Mr. Bulkan:** As part of the fresh approach, in providing an improved quality of life for all Guyanese, this Administration will pursue an integrated sustainable water management strategy to eliminate the negative effects that improper waste management has on human health and the environment.

*5.56 p.m.*

An important new creation of the Ministry, as part of fresh approach, would be the introduction of a Technical Services Group (TSG).

**Mr. Speaker:** You have five minutes remaining Sir.

**Mr. Bulkan:** Thank you Mr. Speaker. The introduction of this new Technical Services Group will ensure that projects undertaken by the Ministry will no longer be implemented without the risks and the environmental compliance and the sustainability of these projects being fully established and defined. This Technical Service Group will be task with ensuring that all projects are feasible and can be built within cost and specification, prior to commencement of work on these projects.

The housing project - my Colleague, Minister Keith Scott, has already provided this honourable House with details with respect to how the new coalition Government will be approaching the

paramount mission of housing our nation in new cohesive and sustainable communities. With regards to this housing programme, the Government has inherited a mess. The system of allocating house lots is inefficient. The system created and run by the PPP/C regime was discriminatory and lacking in transparency. If one had contacts and lines in the corridors of power, he or she could get a house lot, otherwise, he or she was placed in a never ending queue. This caring Administration will change that. The Government will fix the system so that every person, whether on the coast or in the hinterland, will have equal access to affordable dignified housing with the entire attendant infrastructure, to make homes where they can live comfortably.

This Administration has made campaign promises. Those promises are now Government policies. In our manifesto, we had referred to the housing programme as renewing the dream. We intend to make that dream a reality; we will keep our promises; we will implement our policies. We have allocated \$2.9 billion to improving water supply; we have pledged \$1.9 billion to the housing sector; we have allocated \$1.6 billion to community infrastructural works, such as roads and drains.

In the coming weeks and months we will implement solutions with the following goals and objectives. The time between applying for a house lot and being called for an interview must not exceed one month; and the time between submitting an application and receiving an affordable house lot must not be longer than one year. The days of waiting 10 years for a house lot are over. The days of getting a piece of land at the back of a cane field, without roads or water are gone. This budget marks a new beginning. This document represents a fresh start.

The allocations in this budget for regional development are not stingy. The total capital and current allocations in this budget represent \$28.611 billion or 6% greater than 2014. With the capital component being \$2.11 billion or as we have heard \$749 million less than last year, as a result of the actions of the outgoing Administration, the current allocations are \$26.494 billion.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have one minute to wrap up.

**Mr. Bulkan:** Thank you Mr. Speaker. In addition to that \$28 billion for regional development, the Department of Water has been allocated \$2.975 billion; and the Department for Local Government \$227 million, for a grand total of \$33.7 billion. That is a lot of money. The expenditure catered for in this budget, is designed to bring about improvements in people's lives

and the development to our country. This budget caters for the spending of huge sums of money and the people of this country expect that such spending will be done in an efficient, open, accountable and transparent manner.

Finally, the Minister of Finance inherited a difficult situation, but he has crafted a budget that is both pro-people and pro-development; a budget that points the way to and lays the foundation for a good life. This is why I commend this budget to this National Assembly and urge for its unanimous approval. Thank you. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Croal:** I rise as a proud member of the People's Progressive Party, representing the over 200,000 voters who voted for our party. I also want to say that when I entered this hall I was excited but what I have seen over the last two days is bordering on travesty of justice. I remember coming here representing my Ministry to provide any necessary information for my Minister then that would have been required for the Committee of Supply. [**Ms. Ally:** You did a bad job.] Shush, I will tell you just now. We heard then that when we were over there we were always accused of using our majority and not taking into consideration the full mandate and the full view of the House... [*Interruption*] That was from 2011. But, yet, when we come now...

*Mr. Speaker hits gavel on desk.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member you have been given the floor, you must speak to the Speaker.

**Mr. Croal:** Yet, now we have been given an opportunity to hear that the Government side wants to muzzle us. The Committee of Supply provides an opportunity for the people of Guyana to understand where the resources are going to be placed, what it is going to be doing and provide clarification for the populist out there. And, they want to muzzle us for three days. I cannot understand. If one takes the local government sector alone, with the 10 regions and the Ministry that alone will require a minimum of two days. Maybe, the Government side was anticipating the amount of questions that would come their way; and so they want to hide behind answering questions.



Then we also learnt that, as traditional, the Leader of the Opposition, who is the final speaker on this side of the House, is provided an opportunity to speak first to the last with the Finance Minister concluding the budget debate.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member. I wonder whether you would wish to speak to the budget. You may be wholly mistaken by what you have just said and I would not want someone else to raise a question about it.

**Mr. Croal:** I thank you Mr. Speaker, but I see that I am being muzzled already.

**Mr. Speaker:** I would thank the Hon. Member to remember the position in which he is.

**Mr. Croal:** Mr. Speaker, I withdraw and I have no problem apologising. On Monday, 10<sup>th</sup> August, the Hon. Minister of Finance, Winston Jordan, in a lengthy, and may I add, laborious presentation, presented to us the budget title *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*. I believe that it was the printers' devil because I am reliably informed that the theme was intended to be *A Continue Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*.'

Hon. Minister of Finance, there is nothing shameful in admitting that the People's Progressive Party Civic left a good life for our people, transforming every single sector. It was us who started the process of moving Guyana to a green economy. We on this side of the House, while in Government, have been accused of implementing arbitrarily the imposition of wages and salary for public servants. However, that is the very thing that the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) has just criticised the Government about. It exposes, at an early stage, this Government's intention to display arrogance and contempt for our citizen.

The stable economic growth that has been achieved for the last nine years is an indication of the remarkable achievement of any young developing country such as Guyana, which we thought had moved from an era of rigged elections. What is for sure is that Guyana has moved from an era of a heavily indebted country to a middle income status. This stable economic growth has been achieved in the face of great difficulties when our neighbouring countries were practising wage freeze and retrenchment. Guyana has been doing the opposite; increasing salaries every year.

Allow me to add some comments on this 2015 Budget Debate. I note in the Budget Speech mention was made about internal auditing, that it has become a factor for the new accountability and control era. The Speech went on to mention implementing a proper system of internal auditing. What the Hon. Minister of Finance failed to mention was that it was the PPP/C Government that first of all invested and expanded, as well as strengthen, the Internal Audit Department at the Ministry of Finance. And, I am aware that that Internal Audit Department would have conducted audits for health and education, within the regional system.

At the very Ministry of Communities there was an Internal Audit Department set up at the then Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. And, may I add that the staffs were not contracted, they were all Public Service Commission employees. We have also not heard about the implementation about District Tender Boards. I will place some focus in the Ministry of Communities. I want to quote the relevant section because one thing that I have learnt in the five days, one hour and 25 minutes that I have worked under the new Hon. Minister of Communities is that it is important to refer to the relevant section, the Procurement Act, Chapter 73:05, section 21(a):

“The National Board may at its discretion create District Tender Boards for the procurement by Neighbourhood Democratic Councils herein referred to as District Boards.”

It would be interesting when the Hon. Minister of Finance, in his wrap up, update us as to what is the status of that Board. That is, the establishment of 17 District Tender Boards across the 10 regions and it is another layer just below the Regional Tender Board system. This I make mention in the same vein of ensuring transparency.

*6.11 p.m.*

Empowerment of Regions and RDCs - the regional election were held on 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2015, with the results being officially declared by the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) on 16<sup>th</sup> May, 2015. Yet, it took 45 days - it was on 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2015 to be exact - for the regional democratic councils to be convened, to have their councillors sworn in and the elections of regional chairpersons and vice chairpersons held. I will also read from the Laws of Guyana-Local Democratic Organs, Chapter 28:09, Part 3, section 20(1):

“Within seven days after the declaration under section 99 of the Representation of the People Act (as modified as aforesaid) of the results of any election of councillors, the clerk of the council to which the election has been made shall call a meeting, to be held not later than fourteen days after the date of the declaration...”

Where was the Hon. Minister of Communities? Regional chairpersons and vice-chairpersons were sworn in by His Excellency President David Granger, on 10<sup>th</sup> July, 2015, it is 41 days and counting, yet to date the regional chairpersons and vice-chairpersons have not been sworn in as justices of peace, as has been the norm. This allows them to perform their civic duty as part of their role, and yet, we speak of empowerment. Is it because the PPP has won seven out the 10 Regions?

I come to the leadership forum, flags, and emblems. At the swearing-in of the RDCs and the regional chairpersons and regional vice-chairpersons, His Excellency President David Granger called on them to be regional leaders and not party chairpersons. On the first day of the debate, the Hon. Ifraan Ali referred to this budget as “full of fluff”, but I do not think that the Hon. Minister of Communities, who was present at that swearing-in, heard the President correctly because the forum was held on 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2015, at the Arthur Chung Convention Centre for the very RDCs councillors. Geographical Members of Parliament (MPs), and I thank you, were also invited. I may say, it was called a leadership forum, but this forum was anything but a leadership forum. Mr. Speaker, if you look at the programme and the activities you would understand; if you look at the cover of the programme and the contents and the folders that were all use, I would not be surprised, if one day we have a referendum where they sought to remove the three colours of the Golden Arrow Head, which are the red, white and black. State functions are now decorated in green and yellow, we even had a recent function at the Headquarters of the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) and we saw how it was decorated. Is this a part of the fresh approach?

Speaking about flags, and I have no problem green because I like bright colours by the way, approximately five minutes before the leadership programme concluded, the Minister of Communities distributed to all the regions, a proposal for various regional flags and emblems. I was unable to get a coloured copy, but I can share and provide to the House because I was given the copy for the flag that was for Region 1 and I have a vested interest in Region 1. The timing for the introduction of the various flags at the programme can be considered dubious. I

mentioned earlier the new colourisation of Guyana, but I would refer to the Constitution Part 1, Chapter 1, Article (4), page 32:

“The national flag of the State is the flag known as “The Golden Arrow Head” as set out in the Second Schedule”

And the second schedule sets out clearly the flag of Guyana. More importantly, the elected representative of the region have rejected the flag. Were the people consulted? Reference has been made to the use of flags by sports teams or those in competitions, but our regions are not in a sports competition. Let us referred to the development of the RDCs. Like the neighbourhood democratic councils (NDCs), they are considered tiers within the local government system. They were given constitutional and legislative teeth, hence, RDCs must be respected with the highest dignity. Whatever happened to consultation with the people?

For clarity, yesterday, the Hon. Minister Dawn Hastings, Minister within the Ministry of Communities said that in the past councillors were brought to Georgetown and left alone. That is far from the truth. The last regional training programme, following the 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2011 Elections, was conducted in January. The Regional Elections’ orientation and training were done with councillors in regional clusters or their specific regions and Councillors were provided manuals that guided them on how they should perform their role as a councillor. The Government then, through the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, would have funded and provided the necessary travel and reimbursements for all persons travelling. Expanded also was the local government department, which saw the recruitment of a number of senior Regional Developmental Officers and Regional Development Officers, who served as liaison between the Ministry and the respective local authorities.

Political witch-hunting discrimination:

“REOs will now be required to be better qualified and experienced, given the complexity of managing five sectors within the regional.”

I agree nice words. An advertisement was seen for REOs for the regional administrations with the deadline for applications being 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2015. This Government has consistently said they

are not in the habit of witch-hunting. The Hon. President Granger, on 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2015, denounced political appointments within the public sector.

The Regional Executive Officer (REO) of Region 9, Ms. Claire Singh was sent on immediate leave and then off the job completely. Who did the Minister of Communities appoint? Mr. Carl Parker. Mr. Parker was a regional candidate for the APNU /AFC during the 2015 Elections. Mr. Parker was not only a member, he is a known activist. The very Hon. Minister of Communities said public servants must practice neutrality. Is it a principle that, I am the Minister and I do as I please?

Regional Executive Officer for Region 8, Mr. Ronald Harsawack, was removed immediately following the national and regional elections. Who replaced Mr. Harsawack? Mr. Ralph Downes. Who is Mr. Downes? He was a regional candidate for the APNU/AFC in the 2015 Election. How do you explain that, Hon. Minister of Communities? I say double standards.

The Regional Executive Officers for Regions 3 and 4, Mr. Donald Gajraj and Mr. Deolall Rooplall, have all been sent packing, while the on-going advertisement for the Regional Executive Officers was placed in the public domain.

I come to land and water transport - Regional Administration and Finance. I read, “Agency 74, Region 4- Demerara/Mahaica, \$14 million for the purchase of vehicles; Agency 77, Region 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni, \$7 million for the purchase of vehicle; Agency 78, Region 8 – Potaro/Siparuni, \$3.565 million for the purchase of ATV; Agency 79, Region 9 – Upper Takatu/Upper Essequibo, \$6 million for the purchase of ATVs; Agency 80, Region 10 – Upper Demerara/Berbice, \$11.5 million for the purchase of outboard engines and vehicles.” Mr. Speaker, do you see a trend? For which regions were motor vehicles budgeted for under “Administration”.

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

**Mr. Croal:** Thank you Mr. Speaker. In case we missed it, the only regions under “Administration” that would be benefiting from vehicles, are Regions 4, 7 and 10. I want to refer a recent article with respect to Region 4 and the postponement of capital works projects. I do not think that the full information has been disclosed to the public. [Mr. Ramjattan: Disclose it]

I will do that Hon. Ramjattan. First of all, there was a circular sent by the Permanent Secretary of

the Ministry of Communities dated 18<sup>th</sup> June, 2015, which referred to, among many things, for the regions to prepare their revised 2015 budgets, in keeping with a three-month period, that is September to November. I have it here. The regional executive officers were then call and asked to prepare a press release and they were guided on how it should be structured. Yet, under the guise of Mr. Deolall Rooplall, who coincidentally has been off the job, a press release from Region 4, would have written on 25<sup>th</sup> June, 2015, to be sent to the Ministry of Communities, outlining a number of reasons why they needed to slash the 2015 Budget based on the instruction that was given by the Ministry of Communities. I want to refer to an article of *Stabroek News* dated 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2015:

“Region Four refutes postponement of capital work projects. In a bizarre case of the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing, the Region 4 administration, yesterday, disputed the contents of a press statement issued by the Ministry of Communities.”

6.26 p.m.

The Ministry of Communities would have issued that press release out of the email of Mark Da Costa, Research Officer of the Ministry of Communities.

I turn to this:

“Toshaos in approved Amerindian Communities shall be exempt from Customs duties on motor vehicles and ATVs.”

We welcome and have no objection to such initiative. However, we do question the timing and the sincerity. Motor vehicles and ATVs, once procured for the communities, have always benefitted from exemptions of customs tax. I, therefore, throw out a challenge to the Government to grant the same exemption to all the Chairpersons of the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) since the regional chairpersons already benefit from such package. Maybe the Hon. Minister of Communities did not advance on behalf of his constituency while the Hon. Minister of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs did.

Local Government Elections were last held in 1994 and were constitutionally due in 1997. As part of the local government reform, five Bills were looked. One is the Local Authorities (Elections) (Amendment) Bill, which was assented to by former President Bharrat Jagdeo in

2009. With this legislation, there was nothing legally preventing the holding of local government elections. This legislation cleared the way for the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) to carry out its mandate of hosting local government elections through the introduction of new electoral system. Three of the four additional local government reform Bills were passed in this very House on 8<sup>th</sup> August, 2013 – the Fiscal Transfers Bill, the Municipal and District Council (Amendment) Bill and the Local Government Commission Bill - which came into law on 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2013.

I want to reiterate that the People's Progressive Party/Civic is ready and prepared for the holding of local government elections, but, just as we were cheated in the General and Regional Elections by agents of the Guyana Elections Commission, we have learnt our lesson and shall not be burnt twice.

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

**Mr. Croal:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Therefore, we would want to ensure, as part of the conditionality, that we have, clearly, each elector placed in the specific constituency, the boundaries of the NDC and constituency being settled, completely satisfactorily, because we still have grey areas. There should be public re-advertisement for officials who are desirous of filling specific positions and taking up specific responsibilities for elections day. Launch an aggressive public relations campaign. This is an important one: there must be public vetting of polling day staff that are already in the pool at GECOM. We are not interested in where they will be placed in their polling stations, but we are interested in the quality of electoral staff to ensure that they are impartial. The PPP/C will also be pressing for the sanitisation of the voters' list and implementation of e-voting systems.

I am disappointed. The Hon. Minister of Communities made no mention of the Solid Waste Management Bill which is ready to be laid in Parliament. All that he has to do is to pick it up and bring it to the House.

Allow me to speak a little on Region 1. Since last night, I got a number of messages expressing disappointment in the representation made by the regional Member of Parliament (MP), my Friend, Mr. Richard Allen. The concerns that he raised yesterday were mainly Matakai bias. And since we are talking about youth, the leadership of youth representation of Region 1 has been

entrusted to a Regional Chairman, who is 28 years old, and a Regional Vice-Chairman, who is 23 years old; that gives an average of 25 ½ years under the leadership of Regional 1. If the representation is added by this MP, with 36 years, one will get an average of 29 years. I acknowledge the number of programmes mentioned in the Budget but time does not permit me to mention them. [Ms. Wade: Next time do not mention your age.] I have no problem; I am still looking young.

However, there are some concerns that the people of Region 1 have asked me to raise and I will raise some of them. First, the elections at Four Miles and Eclipse Falls... I am surprised that the Hon. MP did not raise that. To date, the election has not been conducted and the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs has said that it does not have a mandate over Community Democratic Councils (CDCs). There are two separate CDCs, one under the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs and the other under the Ministry of Communities. The Hon. Member clearly highlighted it in the daily newspapers.

The people are also asking about the 33 computer hubs that were constructed. What about the laptops for those hubs? Many of the hubs are completed. They have been asking because quick Mathematics will show – and time does not permit me to tell you the number - 20 computers were budgeted for every hub.

When the Hon. Ganga Persaud spoke, the Hon. Minister of Communities asked where he has been disbanding of recent. It is interesting that we are heading – and we all agree - towards local government elections, yet the Hon. Minister of Communities is busy with the Corriverton Town Council, the Rose Hall Town Council, the Anna Regina Town Council, replacing councillors, [inaudible] NDC. I ask, what is the objective of replacing those Interim Management Committees (IMCs), at this time, when they are existing IMCs in place?

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity and I hereby rest my case. [Applause]

**Mr. Speaker:** I thank the Hon. Member. I cannot let it pass without offering congratulations to this House for the courtesy and decorum with which Members listened to the last speaker. I hope that you will find it convenient to do that for the rest of the evening.



For the speaker who just took his seat, I would commend his urgent consideration of the Standing Orders of the National Assembly. Thank you.

**Minister of Public Infrastructure [Mr. Patterson]:** Mr. Speaker, my Colleague Ministers, Members on this side of the House, Members of the Opposition, I now rise to support my Colleague and his team and to congratulate them on a job well done.

Before I go any further, allow me to wish my Colleague Minister, Annette Ferguson, a happy birthday.

Of course, I want to offer my condolences to the Hon. Member, Catherine Hughes, and her family on the passing of her mother-in-law.

This Government has set itself meaningful and realistic goals which it intends to accomplish. That expectation will be attained despite the slowing down of the economy as a result of the deteriorating political climate precipitated by an uncaring Opposition that is motivated by selfish considerations.

Notwithstanding all the many challenges, this Government has visions of building a better Guyana for all Guyanese. Thus, beginning with this Budget, the Government will be implementing policies, programmes and projects in a bold and forceful way so that the PPP will impact, in a positive way, on the realisation of the Government's stated objectives - real growth and strong macroeconomic performance.

This Government has set its sights to take this beautiful country which abounds with natural, physical, mineral, water, productive, human and other resources out of the morass into which it has found itself because of the previous Administration, and build a better Guyana where sustainable socio-economic development and good governance will generate wealth for our current and future generations. Yes, out with unplanned and disorganised programmes and projects which were poorly conceptualised and implemented. We are a Government for and of the people, a Government which believes in inclusivity, a Government which will engage in visionary and insightful planning.

To achieve this, our plan will be to transform the public infrastructure, which is pivotal to Guyana's economic development; initiate energy policies for development by exploring alternative

energy sources, re-entering discussions with the Brazilians on the development of our hydropower capacity; construct the promised Linden/Lethem all-weather highway; and develop sea and river defence capacity, among others.

6.41 p.m.

We intend to pursue a new kind of development, which will exemplify a quality of life which is superior in such a vibrant way that it will lead to a strong and healthy economy where growth and development will lead to a better life for all Guyanese. This Government is looking to a better Guyana for now and the future, a Guyana where all will be delighted to be a part and where all will participate in the process.

Mr. Speaker, before I commence dealing with our plans for the Ministry, permit me to highlight, in real terms, what some of the measures included in *Budget 2015* mean to my Ministry. Several Members of the Opposition side have made mention of the minimum wage increase. Some have even scoffed at the amount given since, to them, it simply represents numbers on a paper. They have long ago lost touch with the workers, the true champions of this country, and, maybe that is why they are now sitting over there.

Under the various departments and agencies within my Ministry, this is what the measures in *Budget 2015* mean: in the Ministry, which includes the work services group, there are 442 employees. With the new minimum wage, 142 persons will benefit. That is 32% of that Ministry. One hundred and forty-two persons will now be eligible for the minimum wage. This increase, obviously, as we know, is a start. In the Transport and Harbours Department (T&HD), out of 421 employees, 178 of them were below the minimum wage that is now raised. In the Maritime Administration Department (MARAD), 49 employees out of 150 employees will now benefit - 32%. While the persons in the Opposition will make light of these measures that have been proposed in the Budget, I would like to say thank you to the Minister of Finance, on behalf of the 370 workers in my Ministry, who will be carrying home something extra as soon as this Budget is passed. I invite you, Minister of Finance, to visit the Ministry at any time so that we can express our gratitude in a more meaningful way.

I have noticed something very interesting about this Parliament. When I was a Member of this House during the Ninth Parliament, I sat through five Budget debates and, during those debates,

the then Government, which is now the Opposition, always accused us, in the Opposition, of not offering any suggestions, never making any recommendations and not contributing anything meaningful to the debate. I now note how easily they have slipped into Opposition, how comfortable they are, because all that they are doing is criticising the Budget and offering nothing. This is made worse if you only think about it. Ninety-six days ago, they were going around telling the people of this country that they had all the ideas; 96 days later, all they can do is criticise.

I propose to put some context into my presentation so that this House can be fully aware of where we are coming from, particularly in infrastructure, as well as where we intend to go in the next five years. As well, I intend to give you our vision 2020 and beyond.

Before I address a fresh start, the Opposition has been speaking about all the transformative projects that started under its stewardship. Permit me to enlighten the population on some of the costs associated with these transformative projects.

First is the Olympic-size swimming pool. We, in the Government, agree and acknowledge that the idea behind the Olympic-size swimming pool is sound. However, the implementation is what we always queried. Work on that pool commenced in February, 2008 and the pool was commissioned in November, 2011, almost three years later. After numerous missteps, too many to mention, it was completed at the cost of \$592 million. The country needs to know what they did with our money - \$592,164,000. It was over-budgeted by 42% or \$167 million. I can say this because I spoke on this several times when I was in the Opposition. The then Opposition stated that the project was poorly designed and informed the then Government that it did not have a warm-up pool.

Realising the mistake of the Opposition, which I told them about, they proceeded to construct a warm-up pool a year after. As old people would say, "*Easy lesson hard fuh dunce*". The second attempt was over-budgeted by 52% or \$53.6 million. After working for four years from when they started, we have a pool that they call...and Mr. Neendkumar kept saying how great they did. The pool costed this country US\$750 million; US\$3.8 million this pool costed this country. I want to put this into context. A standard residential size pool, like some people would have in their backyards, currently cost about \$9 million, so this Olympic-size swimming pool's cost

could have built 82 residential pools. If that makes good sense to you, Sir, then it does not for us. I am just telling you what we had.

I now turn my attention to the Amaila Falls access road but I will not address the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project since the comments by the Minister of Finance captured the findings on that Project, in its current form, aptly, when he stated:

“...it would not only be irresponsible, but a downright criminal act of deception, were we to proceed with the Amaila Falls.”

I am glad that the Leader of the Opposition is in the House now because maybe he can explain to the House, when he gets up to speak, what really went on here; obviously, no one else seems to know. They awarded a contract for US\$15.4 million and we are still paying for it. My Ministry has paid out US\$41 million on this road and it is still incomplete. This Budget has a sum of \$126 million to complete the last 15 kilometres that are incomplete and I am tasked with finding millions of cost recovery on the road, since, as the Minister of Finance has stated, the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, in its current contract would be... [Mr. Jagan: ... *[inaudible]*] Well, of course, that is the only suggestion you came... *[inaudible]* we can put a toll station. We are exploring options to ensure that we can somehow... I do not know of how we can. I do not know what levels of toll we would have to put on the citizens to recoup almost US\$42 million but that is another issue that we would have to deal with.

I would like to address another project which I have inherited and which I saw the Hon. Member, Mr. Ganga Persaud, was speaking of, the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) extension. First, I would like to tell Colleagues, the persons who were in the Tenth Parliament, that your actions in disapproving sums for this project were fully justified. I would like to take this opportunity to retract a statement that I made earlier about this project, where I had stated that the feasibility study for the project was done on the back of a postage stamp before the signing of the contract. I now withdraw that statement because I have since discovered that the now Opposition did not have a pen so it just licked the stamp and stuck it on to the contract.

The Opposition Members regaled us that they were building an airport for \$150 million. Of course, what it never told the country was the hidden cost. Mr. Ganga Persaud, you have to listen to this because you were asking. The contract was signed in November, 2011.

**Mr. Speaker:** I would ask the Hon. Member to address the Chair.

**Mr. Patterson:** My apology, Sir, thank you. It commenced on the 16<sup>th</sup> January, 2013. In addition to what the previous Government has said to us about the cost for the project, the previous Government omitted to tell us these costs, and I will read them into the records officially: for handling equipment and car park, an additional \$19 million was not catered; navigational aids - we had to move and relocate the localiser and the glide park as well as the infrastructure for the Georgetown Cricket Association (GCA) at US\$1.4 million; the airport infrastructure - we had to relocate the generator building and the pump house, the Police, Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Canine staff, construct a security fence and road, relocate an addition mall for US\$500,000.

As the project was proposed and all of the costs were hidden, they had to relocate the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) Engineer's Course and, to be very disingenuous to keep the cost down, they gave the money to the GDF so that they could pay and then they said that it is not in the project cost. When we actually completed the review, we were almost \$65 million over budget. Thankfully, the 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2015 Elections arrived just in time to save the country from further debt, which was US\$65.2 million. Therefore, the price jumped up to US\$225 million.

*6.56 p.m.*

I have in my hands, Sir, the first draft of the renegotiated project and I am pleased to tell you that we are getting a new runway, full 11,000 feet; we are getting a renovated and extended terminal building; we are getting handling equipment, renovations, new taxi ways, car park, everything, a brand new project, and we are still \$11 million under budget. I have the remodelled CJIA plan and it will be completed by December, 2017.

I am particularly hurt about the claims by the Opposition that my recent actions regarding GPL could be deemed as "ethnic cleansing" or any such motives. I have personally asked that they should not go down this rabbit hole because it has a rat trap at the end. I take no pleasure, whatsoever, in defending my and my Government's actions. However, the record must be set straight, since I fear they will continue repeating these comments unless I set the record straight.

I caught, from a letter dated 22<sup>nd</sup> December, 2014:

“The board considered the matter and does not support a renewal of the CEO’s contract. In keeping with the code of governance, this matter is referred to the shareholders for our consideration and final decisions.”

They proceeded to list reasons:

“Failure to respect the board...

Poor management style: The CEO’s style of management has been autocratic and ad hoc, leading to times of almost dysfunctional level of organisation.”

Sir, they further went on to state:

“GPL has seen substantial sums invested, over \$150 million of taxpayers’ money, in the last year. Despite the substantial investment, there continues to be a significant level of blackouts.”

In specific terms, GPL mostly failed to achieve its technical targets for blackouts, average duration and average frequency, which targets themselves were considerably higher than those set between the ESPDT time. Most importantly, the average frequency implied that some areas were more exposed than others.

In the last few years, GPL consistently failed to expend more than 40% of its planned budget for repairs, maintenance to the networks, simple routine matters as clearing of trees, *et cetera*, were rarely followed through.

In the last few years, GPL has engaged in many projects, most of which have lacked proper project plans. These include, but are not limited to - I will pull out one - the Vreed-en-Hoop project. I give you, Sir, some details on this project. This project started out at \$483 million. It currently stands - because it is not completed yet - at \$1.1 billion. And, on top of that, I would like to read this into the records: the wharf and pipelines are, however, incomplete at the time of commencement of commercial operations, which was in November, last year. It was rushed in November, last year. The wharf and pipelines could not accommodate the receipt of bulk fuel shipment. A decision was taken by the board to truck fuel to the location by road tankers.

The total cost incurred up to the end of July is approximately \$90 million, and it continues. GPL, hard pushed as it is, is paying \$10 million a month just in transportation cost because of the incomplete works. And, for that, for all of the things I have mentioned there, we paid an individual this monthly: a basic salary of \$3.8 million; gratuity - \$875,000; accommodation - \$500,000; security - \$525,000; leave passage - \$210,000; and medical - \$210,000. So a maximum of \$6,196,249 per month or an annual total of \$74,354,994 was paid. I think I have made my point.

I would now highlight some of the infrastructural projects.

**Mr. Speaker:** You have 10 minutes remaining, sir.

**Mr. Patterson:** Thank you very much. Some of the infrastructural projects that will be done in the 2015 Budget: we have \$13 billion to spend between now and December. I heard the Hon. Member, Joseph Hamilton, query how we can spend this. I would like to report that one of the things we did last Monday was meet with the bankers and the insurance companies because we recognised that they will pay a large part in it. I have briefed them on the requirements of performance bonds and financing as well as bridging finances for contractors. Coming out of that, the Bankers Association and the insurance companies have agreed to work better. We will be signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for sharing of information, and it is particularly done to ensure that the contractors have ready access to capital. I can assure the Hon. Member, Joseph Hamilton, that, under this Government, the contractors have access to the full amount. There will be no 15% deductions for things that have been happening in the past.

We will be doing miscellaneous roads. In this Budget is \$590 million for that. We will be going to areas such as Goed-Intent, Sawmill, Bus Shed Road – I do not intend to go through the entire list. I made a promise to the people in Uitvlugt; we will be doing Bus Shed Road in Uitvlugt. There is one in the miscellaneous roads that gives me great pleasure in announcing. During the campaign trail, I had the fortune of speaking in Caneville; “wrong turn” is what they call the road. I never knew why a road could name “wrong turn” until I turned down it. It was horrible. It is the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; no urban road should be like that. I would like to tell the people in Caneville that we are coming. [An Hon. Member: What about Mr. Basil Williams’ road?] He is

not here. I have already communicated. I would be doing the Hon. Odinga Lumumba’s road, just

to show... In particular, we will be doing the Sophia Ring Road and that will be \$387 million. We will be constructing new roads plus installing lights, speed bumps and eight new bridges; we will link Sophia to Guyhoc.

Under urban roads and drainage, I have \$55 million remaining from \$75 million that was given to me by Cabinet to clean up the City. But I want to say this on the record: the City is the cleanest it has been in decades, and you can deny it. The Government and I cannot take the credit; it was just the peoples' way of washing out the dirt out of the City and we thank them and we ask them to continue.

Under hinterland roads, we have \$641 million, and, in particular, in this is \$300 million which is to repave all the internal roads within Mahdia, and this is the start of a pilot project. We will be going next to Bartica, all the way to Newtown, completely paved roads.

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

**Mr. Patterson:** Sir, as you know and as was already discussed, we will be rebuilding the Umana Yana. We have funding for sea defence, for stelling... I would like the people in Bartica, Parika, Leguan, right over there - Stabroek - and Vreed-en-Hoop to know that, under this 2015 Budget, we will be repairing their stellings. I want to also let you know, Sir, all of these are already out to tender.

Under energy, we are examining proposed hydros in Tumatumari, Mokokoko, Hope Canal, Whim Farm and other areas. I would like to also say that the International Development Bank (IDB) is conducting a least cost study on renewable energy for us, which will guide us in our part. We are reviewing proposals to have Bartica powered by clean energy. This would be a model which we intend to roll out as the resurfacing of all the internal roads in the new towns. This is a model we want to roll out whereby all our new towns are powered by renewable energy.

**Mr. Speaker:** You have two minutes remaining.

**Mr. Patterson:** The consultants are now compiling the Telecommunications Bill and they have informed me that it will be completed next week. I will be carrying this to Cabinet and, after



Cabinet has reviewed it, we will be bringing it back to this Parliament, this year, to lay and pass this year.

Finally, in line with our proposal in the Government, I would like to invite whoever the shadow Minister of Infrastructure is to have monthly meetings where he or she can meet our staff every month. Therefore, no more can they say that they are not being consulted.

*7.11 p.m.*

I support this Budget and commend it to the House. [*Applause*]

**Bishop Edghill:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Since it is the first time that I have risen to speak in this Parliament, please allow me, Sir, to offer to you my congratulations on your ascension to the Office of Speaker.

I am here as a representative of the People's Progressive Party (PPP), representing more than the 200,000 people who supported us at the 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2015 Elections, and who asked us to be their representatives in this House to articulate their views and to ensure that their concerns are addressed, and I will do so.

During the last few months, while the PPP was absent from the House, there were calls made for us to show up. But the PPP is not in this Parliament just to put in an appearance. We are here to represent the views of people. We would like, at all times, to ensure that our presence is not just for the photographs, but for democracy to be served and for the views of the people, through their representatives, to be made known in this House.

I have been a Member of the last three Business Sub-Committees of the Committee of Supply of this honourable House – from 2011 to 2014. Every year, we sat as a Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply to determine how the Estimates of Expenditure would have been considered. We sat to consider which agency would come first, the amount of time to be allotted, and the number of days to be allotted. I stand here, this evening, extremely disappointed because we are continuing to see a pattern and a trend, which is: might is right and democracy has been thrown out of the window. A motion came to this House, today, even before a meeting of the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply, to ensure that the time for the examination of the Estimates is reduced to three days.

I put it to the Hon. Members on the other side of this House that if they are confident that they are capable of managing their sectors and answering the questions, they should withdraw the motion and let due process be followed in this House. If not, I could only conclude that there is a gross level of incompetence or that their ineptitude is so pronounced that they are prepared to hide behind the banner of time.

I respectfully request that democracy be served again in this Parliament. If not, every word in this Budget is thrown out of the window.

On page 55, paragraph 4.110, under Governance, this is what the Hon. Minister of Finance had to say in his Budget presentation:

“Mr. Speaker, the Government is committed to governing in a transparent, efficient, inclusive and decisive manner, paying due regard to respecting and upholding the rule of law and the rights of all the citizens of Guyana.”

The actions which took place in this honourable House, today, during this Sitting, and the motion moved by the Hon. Prime Minister cannot be considered to be in keeping with the spirit and letter of what is stated in this Budget presentation about governing in a transparent, efficient, inclusive and decisive manner. This is nothing but bullyism; might is right. There was no discussion; there was no negotiation; and they are hiding under time. Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame!

*Budget 2015*, according to the Minister of Finance, as recorded on page 4, paragraph 1.9, states:

“This budget, Mr. Speaker, may have been long in coming and would be unavoidably short in implementation...”

I think the Hon. Minister missed something here. What it is short on is not implementation; it is short on vision. This document is short on vision.

The speaker before me, the Hon. Mr. Patterson, who spoke on behalf of his Ministry, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, and who spoke about his Government, did not articulate, for this House, one new project or initiative.

In the previous Government, I served as the Minister within the Ministry of Finance and I had specific responsibility for overseeing the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) and all of the projects that took place in this country. Everything that Mr. Patterson spoke about in this House is part of the 2013-2014 PSIP of the PPP/C Government. There were no new initiatives. There were no new programmes.

I would also like to put to the Hon. Minister of Finance, who presented this Budget, that he failed to let the House know that there is no new mobilisation of funds. All of the funds that are going to be spent are funds that were mobilised by the PPP/C, whether through loan arrangements with the IDB, the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), the Caribbean Development Fund (CDF), the World Bank or through technical cooperation. There was no new mobilisation of resources. Where is the fresh approach? There is no fresh approach.

What we find in this Budget, however, is that there is an admission and a quiet embrace of the policies and programmes of the PPP/C. At minimum, therefore, there should have been an acknowledgment, somewhere in this document, of the foundation that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) will be building on. What is that foundation? It is a solid foundation. I know that my Colleague, Mr. Patterson, who has some expertise, would know that a foundation determines the size, the strength and the shape of a structure. He should know that. In order for one to build, one must recognise what one is building on. There is a solid foundation that the Government is going on. It has to admit it because, even in its document, it referred to the growth in 2014 as 3.4%. That is an acknowledgement that, over the last nine consecutive years, Guyana has experienced uninterrupted positive economic growth. That is a period of time during which the PPP/C had responsibility for the governing of the economy.

He has acknowledged, in this document, and that is the foundation that he is building on, that, regarding the foreign reserves, Guyana now has three months plus of cover. Inflation is at 1.2%. These are not my numbers. They are the Minister's numbers in this document. The exchange rate is stable.

A booming housing programme and development; a booming construction industry across the country; and access to credit where the small man can get his loan, build his house and repay it at affordable rates are what the Government is inheriting. That is the foundation that it is on.

While there is this unwillingness to admit that *Budget 2015* is a continuation of the PPP/C's economic plans and programmes, we have to make it very clear that the Government cannot take the PPP/C's plans and projects, put them in a microwave, bring them out and then call them fresh. There is nothing fresh about this Budget. It is a simple continuation of what has been and what has been put in place. The people of Guyana must know that.

It is noteworthy, however, for us to note that there has been a clear tinkering with the projects and a tinkering with what was taking place. I would have imagined that, having invested in our public servants, permanent secretaries, heads of budget agencies, in training, in monitoring and evaluation, where the budget cycle is not just about number and projects, but the impact is stated, this Budget would have told us, with all of the expenditure that is being made in the various sectors, who would benefit and what the impact is. It is void of such.

What there is in this document is certainly a reordering of priorities. This reordering of priorities is reflected in what I want to call an urban upper middle class, Judeo-Christian elite thinking. That is the point I want to make. It is being heard all over the House.

*7.26 p.m.*

I repeat for emphasis: this reordering is an urban, upper middle class, Judaeo-Christian elite thinking, because the measures and impact of what will be done is to benefit specific groups and not the masses. I want to make the case. When the PPP/C Government put out its budgets, 2012, 2013, 2014, which I was a part of, the measures in those budgets impacted thousands and hundreds of thousands. For example, when we put in Budget 2014 \$2 billion towards the Because We Care cash grant programme it was to ensure that the approximately 107,000 children in our public schools benefit. When we applied subsidy to the GPL it was to ensure that the 160,000 people on the GPL grid did not have to pay increased light bills. When we implemented our One Laptop per Family programme it was to ensure that 90,000 low-income families would have benefited from the technology that they would not have otherwise been able to afford. What we have today, in this urban, upper middle class, Judaeo-Christian elite thinking, is a reordering of priorities. It is not one laptop per family that is poor; it is one laptop per teacher. Four teachers in an Amerindian village will get laptops. What happens to the other Amerindians? What about the barbers, the nail technicians, the garbage collectors and the

farmers? What about the taxi drivers? What about the domestics? What about the security guards, the women who work 12 hours to make a living to take care of their children? What about the ordinary people? What we had was PPP/C working class philosophy that informed our budget on how we made allocations. What we have today in Guyana is this urban, upper middle class, Judaeo-Christian elite thinking that is only benefiting a small group of people. I want the people of Guyana out there to hear me: Do not fall for the fluff. This is about benefiting a small group of friends and cronies and the privileged elite class of Guyana.

When we built the Berbice River Bridge it was because we considered the suffering that the people endured when they were trying to cross the river, the hours of wait. When the toll was fixed at the Berbice River Bridge it was indexed to the same cost of the ferry crossing. When the bridge was declared opened there was no increase in cost to use the bridge. Whatever was the cost for the motor vehicle to cross with the passengers it became the cost of the toll, to go and come. In this budget measure, with the \$300 reduction on motor vehicles to cross the Berbice River, a back peddling from the notion they brought to the House and passed of \$1,000, do you know who would benefit? It is only the owners of the vehicles. The ordinary man, who has to travel in that bus, would not benefit. If the bus is paying \$300 less, to go and come, it is 30 passengers, it is \$10. The buses and taxi drivers are not dropping the fare. If a budget measure is put, the measure must affect the masses of the people, not just the elite. All of that is gimmickry.

In a very supercilious manner we heard this grand announcement about the One Laptop per Teacher programme. Mr. Speaker, I may bring to the attention of this honourable House that it is not new moneys, it is not new laptops. It is the same laptops, which were ordered and on their way, which the ordinary people of Guyana were expecting to receive, and the Amerindian communities and those 100 hubs that were built, in the Amerindian communities, are now being taken away from the working class and given to that elite group they would like to give them to. I call upon the Government to honour the commitment to the ordinary working class people of Guyana and deliver all 9,000 laptops to the low income families that they were intended for in the first place. Give the people what they deserve.

I am afraid that there has been an introduction, or I daresay a reintroduction, in the class system when it comes to the distribution of Government's goods and services. It would appear that the APNU/AFC have reintroduced a class system when it comes to the distribution of goods and

services. This is dangerous for Guyana and we need to bring it to an end. I highlight this in this honourable House.

I heard a lot of quotations from the sacred scriptures in this House. Some of those quotations had no relevance, whatsoever, to the presentations that were made. I am sorry the learned Hon. Attorney General is not here because he made a big fancy quotation that had no relevance to what he was saying. I want to make a quotation that is relevant to Budget 2015. Ecclesiastes Chapter 5, verse 5, states not to make a vow if you do not intend to keep it.

“It is better not to make a promise than to promise and not fulfil it.”

The PPP calls upon the Government to ensure its entire 21-point promises of its 100-day plan be implemented immediately. Stop the excuses. It duped the people of Guyana. It frustrated a process by telling people that it would do something that it never had the intention in the first place of doing.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have ten minutes remaining.

**Bishop Edghill:** Let me use my remaining ten minutes to deal with some issues that were raised by my learned honourable friend Mr. Patterson. I want to say this: The Minister of Finance said that it will be almost criminal to continue with the Amaila Falls Hydroelectricity Project because at the cost of \$1 billion dollars we will have to pay \$130 million per year, for 20 years, which will turn out to be \$2.6 billion. I will make another quotation for him. The first to bring his case always appears right until the other side is heard. What the Minister of Finance did not tell us was what would be the cost of not building the Amaila Falls Hydroelectricity Project. I am putting it to this House that it would cost this country US\$4 billion, only taking into consideration the annual fuel bill. It is just the annual fuel bill and nothing else. I would say it could be considered as a criminal dishonesty to mislead the House by not telling us what it would cost not to build the Amaila Falls Hydroelectricity Project. Amaila Falls Hydroelectricity Project will give us more; Amaila Falls Hydroelectricity Project will give us reliable electricity. We just heard Mr. Patterson, standing and talking about GPL and all the problems it is having. We are misleading the people of Guyana.

His Excellency the President is on record speaking to the National Assembly, when he opened, it asking about value-added. How could the furniture man make the bed if electricity price is high? How could we go into canning? How could we go into agro-processing? How could we stop the dumping of pumpkin and bora and passion fruit on Bourda Market with the price of electricity? In Guyana, there is the I-cee drink, but Busta and Thrill drinks are imported. Busta and Thrill drinks are selling cheaper in Guyana than the I-cee drink. Do you know why? It is the cost of manufacturing because of the cost of electricity. Trinidad, where the Busta drink is brought from, has oil. Suriname, where the Thrill drink is brought from, has hydroelectricity. The foreign goods are able to come to the local market and sell cheaper because of the cost of electricity. It is the opportunity cost that matters.

I come to the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA). I will like to bring to the attention of this honourable House that it is my belief that an illegality has taken place. One cannot take a fixed price, designed and built contract, and renegotiate it. I will like to announce to you, Sir, and to the people of Guyana, that with the renegotiated contract we are getting less and paying more. It is a rip-off on the people of Guyana and full disclosure must be made in this honourable House.

**Mr. Speaker:** You have five minutes more.

**Bishop Edghill:** I want to turn my attention to a few other things in these five minutes. Yesterday evening this House was regaled with the benefits of the Linden Enterprise Network (LEN) and the \$155 million that is in this budget for the Linden Enterprise Network. We support it, Sir. Let me tell you why we support it. The Hon. Minister or the Hon. Member Mr. Joseph Harmon went into the Office of the President and found a Cabinet paper that was submitted by yours truly for the recapitalising and retooling of LEN.

*7.41 p.m.*

What the Hon. Member did not tell this House, apart from the 55 million dollars to repair and the \$100 million in the revolving fund, it is that there are tens of millions of dollars out there to be collected. Some of the people, who owe this money, are prominent political activists in Linden and they must pay this money back.

I have the list of names, and if time would have permitted me I would have named some names. We must call on the people... Do not hoodwink the people of Linden by telling them that you are giving them \$100 million, when their leaders, who occupy political position, have borrowed tens of millions and they have not returned it yet to the treasury. The ordinary people of Linden must get their money back.

I heard the Hon. Minister of Social Cohesion talking about this new Ministry - an unnecessary Ministry. Mr. Speaker, let me tell you why. In constitutional reform the recognition, in that there is an ethnic problem in Guyana, was put on the table and the people of Guyana said let civil society arbitrate and deal with the ethnic problems and that led to the formation of the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC). What we have is a hijacking of that process by the Minister of Social Cohesion saying gazetted responsibilities, inequalities and ethnic relation, which is a usurping of the functions of the Ethnic Relations Commission, and this evil must be exposed. I am putting it to you, Sir, that it is my firm belief that the Ministry of Social Cohesion is the rebirth of the Ministry of National Mobilisation, which will be used for political purposes and taxpayers' money must not be allowed to be used in such a wasteful manner.

The extravagance of this Government is being exposed. I know that I do not have a lot of time but let me just use one example. The Presidential Guard allotment in Budget 2015 has gone up by \$50 million.

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

**Mr. Edghill:** This superfluous, ostentatious behaviour must come to an end. As I said, a bit earlier, the reordering, excessive... - it is like having excessive body parts, Mr. Greenidge - must come to an end. We have to put it out for what it is worth.

In my closing remarks, I would want to ask you to ensure that the debates on this budget and on every other matter in this House be conducted in such a manner that the real meaning of Parliament must be expressed in speech. People must be allowed to speak and we want everybody to speak so that the voices of the people can be heard.

Thank you very much Sir. [*Applause*]



**Mr. Speaker:** I thank the Hon. Member for his statement. I can reassure him that I did hear him. I am wondering whether we are in the House, given what you just said and the carnival atmosphere that greeted you when you sat down.

Hon. Members, we are now at a quarter to eight. We have gone beyond the time fixed for us to have a break. We will have a break now, at a quarter to eight, and we shall return at a quarter past eight.

*Sitting suspended at 7.46 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 8.17 p.m.*

**Mr. C. Persaud:** I rise to present arguments in support of Budget 2015 which was presented to this honourable House by a man who, in the past, was the architect of many budgets. He is truly an economist, a designation he worked assiduously to acquire, not one that was gifted to him by some wayside university. He is none other than Mr. Winston Jordan, the Hon. Minister of Finance. This is an APNU/AFC budget and we all support the contents of this far-reaching and extensive budget.

Before I delve into my presentation proper, I wish to seek leave to commend this APNU/AFC Government on an excellent choice of Speaker of this honourable House. It is a choice that has met with favour with Members of the Opposition. I congratulate you, Sir, on your appointment.

While I have done so personally I wish to openly offer condolences to my sister and ask that she conveys the sentiments to the soon to be, or not too far in the distant future, Senior Counsel Mr. Nigel Hughes.

I wish to welcome also Members of the Opposition. After having missed six sittings, they have decided to come out and give justification in the votes cast in their favour. We welcome them. I welcome them, and it is better late than never.

In listening to some presentations by some Members of the Opposition I experienced a significant spell of nostalgia. I somehow thought that I was, again, in an election mode, walking the election trail, 2011 and 2015, because what I heard was the usual mudslinging, name calling and degradation of Members of this honourable House in the name of budget presentation.

The fact that this is a debate which allows for Members to offer rebuttals, I will offer few rebuttals. Before I do that, I wish to look at the Hon. Members of the Opposition. When I look I really see some intelligent faces; I see some excited faces; I see some depressed faces. I attribute the look of depression... Perhaps there is some bitterness and anger that can be shown on all the faces and that I attribute to the word “closure.” When one loses a loved one and the body of the deceased cannot be located, one wonders where, what and why when one looks for closure. One comes to find later on, if the body shows up, that, yes, this death is real, my loved one had gone. The Hon. Members of the Opposition needs to come to grips with the fact that the election is over. The 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2015 was a decisive day in the history of this country and they have lost the elections. Come to grips with that and enjoy being on the other side of the fence.

I have just one question to ask all the Hon. Members of the Opposition, and that is, are you here to work towards the benefit of the people of Guyana and the country? I should hear a resounding yes. Well, that is what we are here for. It was a simple question, and so I ask whether or not that is their purpose because for 23 years I could not see that. We are here with a common goal, the APNU/AFC, and I am sure Members of the Opposition, to present the Guyanese people with “...a Good Life in a Green Economy.”

I will now offer some rebuttals to arguments that were presented by Hon. Members of the Opposition.

We are led by a man who is a retired soldier. He and some of his associates, who were also soldiers, have been condemned. I wonder who amongst the Opposition will find any reason to criticise the late great President of the United States of America, John. F. Kennedy. He was a soldier - a wonderful soldier and an excellent President. I have no doubt that the His Excellency the President of this Cooperative Republic will do just as good as President Kennedy did for the United States of America to the people.

*Power outage.*

The brief interlude, which we just had, is what the PPP condemned, that the previous administration for the 23 years could not fix. We are left to that and we will do it.

*8.27 p.m.*

As I was listening to the presentation, there was an individual on the other side, one Hon. Member, Rabbi – sorry my secretary made a mistake – who wanted accountability for the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday bash that His Excellency President Granger had. I celebrated my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday about three to four years ago and I did not pay a cent for the hall, music or anything. It was given to me by friends, relatives and loved ones. I attended that 70<sup>th</sup> birthday party and it was not in any posh hall anywhere. It was on the lawns of the army compound – on the grass and in rain. It was presented to the honourable President by family, friends and loved ones, not family, friends and favourites. There is also talk about the exorbitant gifts that were presented to this gentleman. I will tell you this, Mr. Speaker, so that my friends who were not there can understand: The President made a public request, all he wanted was school boats for the children in the Upper Mazaruni, the Pomeroun and riverine areas.

I will say this of the President: He is not a man of exorbitance; he does not own a house in *Pradoville 1* and *2* and he does not own some of the luxury vehicles that we hear a Minister is owning on a Minister's salary. He, during the campaign, exercised extreme humility. A lot of that was noticed by the people. That is what has brought the APNU/AFC into Government. He slept with his wife, who is now the First Lady, many nights on the floors in Congress Place, not in the luxury of houses in Guyana Sugar Corporation Inc. (GuySuCo) compound, which, by the way, were not paid for, as the PPP enjoyed.

I would just flip the pages to go to the issue of youth as was described and mentioned by few of the Members of the Opposition. The Hon. Member Mr. Dharamlall, in his opening line, said that he did not understand the word “incoherence”. Well, the word “incoherence” means rambling in speech or in reasoning. He kept referring to the Budget 2015 and claimed that it was a wholesale copy of the Budget 2014 that was presented by the PPP/C, now Opposition. Now, the incoherence, which my friend will get right now, is that if it was a good budget then, why is it not a good budget now? He is condemning what we are presenting and yet saying that it is theirs. That is incoherent.

On the subject of the youth, I do not know if it was related to the budget, but I could not find any relevance, so I have to ask the very youthful - how do you define youth? What age group is to determine who is a youth? [Mr. Dharamlall: Obviously, it is not 62 years old.] I never laid claim. I will lay claim to one of the *Fifty Shades of Grey*. It is no problem there. When I

look around to my right, there is a young attorney—at-law and to my left there is a young lady, a wonderful young schoolteacher, very dynamic. Then I go across there, fiery, sassy, the fireball, soon to be, Ms. Simona Broomes, very quiet in appearance but very sassy, Ms. Nicolette Henry. I am only pointing out a few. I see the Hon. Minister Hastings is looking at me. What is wrong with the youngsters or the youth that we have on our table, on our side of the table?

The eloquent attorney-at-law, Hon. Member Mr. Ramson, spoke of us, with the grey, as flaccid. [Mr. Dharamlall: The word is “flac-cid”.] Mr. Speaker, the old eye, sees wiser and my young friend will learn something right now. The word is spelt “f-l-a-c-c-i-d” and it is pronounced “flaksid”, not “flac-cid”. The pronunciation is not his fault. It is attributed to the fact that he is too young to understand some things. While we are on the subject of youth, we heard - the learned Members I do not see them here - from two prominent doctors, who are on the side of the team that wants everything for youth. I have a young man in this particular House, right now. He is a medical doctor, Your Honour. They may ask for proof. He is right here and he can understand the questions they may want to ask. This man was rudely fired, dismissed while still under contract with that Government, as a student who graduated from the medical school in Cuba. I have right in my hands here, Sir, an article, in the newspaper, captions, “Health Minister breaks silence on sacked Berbice doctor issue”, the Hon. Member Dr. Bheri Ramsaran.

He stated: (This part, not only is it sad, Mr. Speaker, I find it derogatory. It cannot be somebody discriminated politically).

“Was he on the job? I know that there was some little boy masquerading as a doctor somewhere under his mother’s bottom house. I wonder if the police should go and arrest him.”

He knows what arrest is about. While that was questioned, I have, in my hands, a letter from the Skeldon Hospital, signed by Dr. Vishalia Sharma, Medical Superintendent at the Skelton Hospital, questioning the attendance of the doctor at Skeldon Hospital. As somebody mentioned, “right hand does not know what left hand is doing”, that is exactly what had happened with Hon Member Dr. Ramsaran and the Hon. Member Dr. Vishnu Mahadeo. They sacked a young doctor. Those are the people who are telling us that we must pay attention to youths and give them, what? What do we give the youths? What are you giving the youths? They come back as

doctors. Hon. Member, not here, Ms. Jennifer Westford, harassed another medical doctor in the name of Vinita Ali. She was refused her leave to leave the country until I signed – she is my daughter - and pledged my transport to have security put in place. When she returned, the Hon. Member Ms. Westford refused to give me back my transport. That was how they treated the youngsters and they are all youths, not as myself. They are the real youths.

**Mr. Speaker:** You have seven minutes remaining, Hon. Member.

**Mr. C. Persaud:** That would bring me to a change in my topic now, 10<sup>th</sup> January, 2007. I quote, Sir, from the *Hansard* of that particular year.

“2007 was a challenging year for the Guyanese people. In economic terms, the rising cost of living has placed havoc...”

That should be wreak havoc

“...on the lives of the Guyanese people. The primary reason for the spiralling cost of living was the imposition of the excessive 16% VAT”.

I now go on to V-A-T. The difficulty the Opposition Members have is looking at the number six and seeing that half of a dozen means the same thing. When we spoke of reducing the VAT effectively, the VAT still sits at 16%. If more non VAT-able items are added to the basket of non VAT-able items, when the cashier will be cashing out for the persons buying those items the VAT will obviously be reduced. That seems to be beyond the mathematical comprehension of my friends. They must have been to school in Mr. Shaik Baksh time when automatic promotion was given.

I will look at something that has concerned everybody and that has been mentioned by almost every speaker before me. I am sure others after me will so do. The pension increase, again, we cannot see mathematically what the difference is, so I will help my learned friends on the other side. I hate to see people struggling, knowing that I can do something than not doing anything.

The pensioners were receiving \$13,125 per month, that has now moved to \$17,000. I do not know if they got that. The increase therefore is \$3,875 per month. **[Mr. G. Persaud:** What

about the electricity and water?] We will get to that. The electricity and water subsidies - we will call them both subsidies for the sake of simplicity - ...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have three minutes left.

**Mr. C. Persaud:** ...that subsidy amounted to, let us just round it off, \$30,000. The amount of money will be got from the \$3,875 will give an excess of \$16,500 per year. Over the years that will exceed the \$30,000 that was given as a subsidy, which by the way, only went to a few, about 7,000 out of the 40,000 pensioners. It is because the pensioner has to be a homeowner or owns a meter before that subsidy was given. What happens to the people who do not have electricity? [*Interruption from Opposition Members.*]

I have a problem with another word here. The word is “maiden”. Some of my friends have not had dealings with maidens in a long time, so they do not know what the meaning is. It means that they should shut up when somebody is talking in a maiden speech.

The effective of the increase in the pension is the net spending which benefits every pensioner, not just those who have meters in their names.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have one minute to wrap up.

**Mr. C. Persaud:** While we are still on it, I would like to ask a question before I conclude, since the moneys, which were allocated as subsidies for the 40,000-plus pensioners, were used up and only 7,000 received it. The question now is: Where is the rest of the money?

I wish to commend this budget and commend my friend, colleague and Minister of Finance, the Hon. Mr. Winston Jordan, on a budget that encompasses all.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

8.42 p.m.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members, this is the 92<sup>nd</sup> day of the 100 days of the new Government. [**An Hon. Member:** Already?] Yes, already. Time has flown. They seemed to be having problems getting used to the fact that they are the Government now. The honeymoon is almost over my dear friends. Ninety two days and your cloven hoof is starting to

be exposed! Promises that you made to implement in your first 100 days, the majority have not been implemented because the budget is your main tool of implementing services and promises that you have made to the people. Most of the big ticket items have not been implemented, for example, the 20% salary increases or the Value Added Tax (VAT) reduction. You have reduced some items, and I will come to those later, but you have not reduced VAT.

When we look at the Budget Presentation and all the volumes there are some rather interesting things. But one of the key components for Guyana as a nation is building trust and confidence. In this Budget Presentation, the words and language used are the most politically loaded, divisive language in any budget document that has been brought to this House. In a situation of which ... *[Interruption]* Gentlemen and ladies of the other side, seriously, you only got 4,526 votes, that was all that made it through, when the predictions were that there would be a pyrrhic victory. There were talks about a pyrrhic victory, 62% and 82% and all sorts of things. And, what did you deliver? You delivered a hairbreadth of a difference of 4,526 votes. So you can pump up your chests and your shoulders, and all that, it was 4,526. That was all you got.

Let me tell you all something, if you go to the Guyana National Stadium, when those singers come in from the Caribbean, like Buju Banton, you will get more than 4,500 at the Guyana National Stadium. That is all this Government got; that is all it is holding on to life for. We are saying the Government got it, but we are taking this Government to the courts in an elections petition because we know that it did not deserve that. The Government did not get it. *[Interruption]*

If I were and if I may be ... Oh sorry Mr. Speaker.

*Speaker hits gavel on desk.*

**Ms. Teixeira:** Are you protecting me?     **[An Hon. Member:** No, he is saying you are a loser.]  
Am I a loser?

**Mr. Speaker:** Do you need protection from me?

**Ms. Teixeira:** I beg your pardon, Sir?

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I doubt that you need protection, least of all from me. However, I would suggest that you speak directly to the Chair.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Thank you, Sir. I will seek your indulgence all the time. As I was saying, the budget document, if I were in the Colleagues position, with all these Vice-Presidents, Ministers and all these paraphernalia created at a huge cost to the people of this country, if I were in your position, with a hairbreadth of 4,526 votes, I would have seriously looked at issues of building trust and confidence of social cohesion. This Government has put one of the most incohesive persons to manage social cohesion in this country. She is my friend and Colleague, we fight all the time, but Minister of Social Cohesion you have to manage and you have to work with people. You cannot do like in this Parliament, put down your foot and say Mr. Jagdeo cannot speak. You cannot do that.

This Budget talks about inclusion, transparency, accountability and good governance. The Budget document says all those things. In fact, on page 4, there is an admission by the Hon. Minister Jordan:

“Although nearly half of those who voted in the recent General and Regional Elections, did not vote for us, we view this not as a rejection, but as an opportunity to forge accountable and inclusive governance - something that was lacking in the previous regime”.

All these hifaluting words but what is the proof in the pudding?

This document that has come before us includes programmes taken from the PPP - where key transformative programmes were knocked out. It has brought in what I call touch-up things and there are some very wild things that are supposed to be “creative”.

In what brain does someone conceptualise that he/she will have regional flags? Seriously, you are balkanising this country; you are balkanising Guyana into 10 regions. The next thing this Government will want to do is to put a flag for New York and one for from Toronto. Comrades, social cohesion, building trust and confidence is about finding ways of bringing people on board and not marginalising them, not leaving or alienating them.



Seven of the 10 regions of this country were won by the People's Progressive Party/Civic. I am warning you, Local Government Elections are coming and we will beat this Government again at the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) and the Municipal Councils (MCs) because we are a people's party.

Of course, the speakers before me have said that. In Region 8, what kind of indecency was that? We are a country that is an emerging democratic nation. One region was lost by one vote and there was no recount, when people hear about that overseas they cannot believe it!

In the last Parliament, we had witnessed the combined two Opposition parties (APNU/AFC) doing everything possible to stymie and control the Executive in the Parliament. In this Eleventh Parliament we are now seeing the stealthy shadows, the stealthy movement, towards muzzling the PPP MPs and taking control of this Parliament. I warned this Legislature then that the three arms of the State are the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary.

We spoke about this all the time in the Tenth Parliament, that the checks and balances go between the three arms of the State and that what they were doing in the Tenth Parliament was wrong, and what they are attempting to do in this Parliament is also wrong. Ladies and gentlemen, when one reads the budget document, he/she will see, for example, the language: "We are going to provide 1500 jobs in the tourist industry... by 2020".

This is 2015. The people do not want to know about 1500 jobs by 2020. We are talking about how much jobs this Government is producing in 2015, 2016, 2017. The Government is talking about producing 500 jobs by 2020. Is this Government not ashamed of itself? While at the same time it is taking away 4,000 jobs.

By the way, Hon. Member, Minister of Finance, in 1978, the then Government had what was called re-deployment and retrenchment, where Permanent Secretaries (PSs) and people had to go and work at the Hope Estate to get coconut, butter and stuff like that. That was the largest lay-off of workers in this country between 1978 and now. And now, under the same party because this is all PNC, it is the same party that has lost thousands of jobs in less than 100 days.

We will see this National Assembly, today, cut the time to examine the Estimates from seven days to three days. This is because the Government does not want to let the public know that it

has cut hundreds of millions of dollars from regions that supported the PPP and is also giving it to the regions that it won, which are three regions. The Government does not want the public to know that.

It does not want the public to know that the all *mamagi* and talk about the police and the law enforcement; the dogs and the police and the cameras; and everything else.

When the budget is looked at for the Guyana Police Force, their budget has gone down. Instead, there has been a \$1 billion increase for the Guyana Defence Force (GDF). The moneys for the Guyana Prison Service, the Guyana Police Force and the Guyana Fire Service have been reduced. The civilian law enforcement agencies have been reduced. So Mr. Ramjattan, Vice-President, you have my sympathy because you have been made to fetch a basket with plenty holes. You do not have the money.

Mr. Seelall Persaud, the Commissioner of Police, said that he is hoping that the budget will have a lot of money for transportation. Well unfortunately, Mr. Persaud appears not to have looked at the budget figures that have been produced in this Parliament because the numbers have gone down for vehicles for the Guyana Police Force.

What has this Government been doing? It has cut the money for the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. The Hon. Bishop Edghill, who spoke before me, made an excellent presentation on the issue of the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. The problem for this Government across there is that, unless it works on these transformative projects, such as the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, it is holding back the moving forward of this country.

If the Government had not blocked the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project in 2013 and 2014, we would have been closer to being less dependent on fossil fuel and the unpredictability of the prices of fossil fuel in the world. Do you realise that, as of today, the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project only had another year to be finished building? And yet the Government has said that it wants a green economy, but how can it have a green economy when we are still dependent on fossil fuels; when the majority of foreign currency and earnings will go to fossil fuels.

The speakers before me on our side have made it clear. This is all *inaudible...*, *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*. This document does not have anything to do with a green economy.

The Government has said that it did not like the One Laptop per Family project; it did not want the one laptop, but 51,214 families received laptops - single parents, poor people, people in the coastal areas, in the city of Georgetown and so forth, out of the 90,000. Of the 9,000, the Government is now talking about distributing those to teachers. Those laptops were ordered before, since last year. The Government is talking about accountability and transparency; it will have to check to see how many of the teachers in this country already have received the laptops under the One Laptop Per Family project.

They have cut the Solar Home Systems Development Programme where 13,170 homes in Amerindian areas were lit up and more systems were ordered and waiting to be installed.

There was no mention of the University of Guyana's (UG) Budget. When the Government goes to the entities, it appears that after all the promises of UG getting all these big sets of money, one can go look for him/herself, it is less than what it was before under the PPP/C Government.

8.57 p.m.

The Government is talking and making promises that are empty and which it cannot maintain. What has the Government done? What are the highlights of this Government since it has taken over? They renamed ministries and doubled the number of ministers. Those are their biggest achievements; those were their main achievements in 92 days. The Government has doubled the number of ministers and ministries and it has renamed many of them that the poor population out there do not know what the Ministry of Citzenships means; what is the Ministry of Social Protection; or which one of the ministries to go to, if they want Ministry of Labour, do they go to the Ministry of Social Protection and so forth.

What else has the Government done? The Government has taken the Community Development Council's (CDC) programme, where they are 300 Community Development Councils and groups across this country, and now renamed it to something like the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurship Development, whatever that is.

The Government has taken the Youth Entrepreneurial Assistant Programme, where 1900 to 2000 young people were employed, and is now calling it another fancy name. It had baptised it two days ago, calling it hinterland job something. All this Government is doing is baptising over and over again. It is recycling.

I want to say something on University of Guyana and it is for my friend the Minister Dr. Rupert Roopnarine. Dr. Opadeyi, the Vice-Chancellor, was chosen by a democratic process in 2012 by a number of us who are sitting in this room. We are a part of the Council, including the Hon. Minister. The Vice-Chancellor has been told to walk. A Vice-Chancellor of this country, who was democratically selected by the Council and a subcommittee of the council; a man who is considered in the region a global expert, a regional expert; a man who is a young man because he does not have a lot of grey hairs; and a man who had to, maybe to turn that University around, make enemies. There is a way in which that University is run and was run before.

If one wants to know the special audits, my friend across the room knows the special audits that were held at UG and what was going on and how we have been able to reduce the debt of the University of Guyana. Now you are telling that man that his contract ends in February and he should take his leave, because you do not want him there after October. Do you know why? I am not going to be on the Council because it has been expired, but I am watching to see what democratic process this Government will use to hire the next person. I have already seen the manipulation going on or there now is another 50 shades of grey coming in from overseas who will take the job. I want to see what democratic process is used. [*Interruption*]

On the issue of statutory bodies - the Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge, who is a Vice-President, brought a Bill recently to place a number of agencies under the Third Schedule, under Article 22 (a) of the Constitution. This we have said is unconstitutional. However, the Rights Commissions that were in the Third Schedule since 2003, and were treated independently as statutory bodies, have been placed under the Ministries of Social Cohesion and Social Protection. Only the Ethnic Relations Commission's (ERC) budget is reflected in section 5 of the budget as a separate statutory body. The other Rights Commissions had not been segregated as statutory bodies, where their budgets could be seen. They have been put under ministries and that is not allowed. These Commissions are constitutional, they are independent, they do not fall under anybody's dictate and they do not fall under the interference of any Minister, member or in fact anybody.

On the issue of women in political making decision bodies, in 2014, Guyana, in the Tenth Parliament ranked 32 in 142 parliaments. After the 2015 Elections, we had drop to about 30. Therefore, we also expect that there will be drop in our ranking for women in Cabinet, which was 19<sup>th</sup> in the world by 2013. Now, with only three members in Cabinet, that ranking will drop.

The World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index ranked Guyana overall at 64 of 142 countries, with Guyana ranking number one, the highest, in the world for females in primary, secondary and tertiary education - the highest. And, if Members doubt me they can go on the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap website, in the Guyana profile they would find it. These figures will all come tumbling down. I do not have to repeat some of the writers in the press and the views expressed on Facebook pages about the absence of women on boards, in Cabinet and even in the front row, where there are only two women. The fact that 50% of women were not in Government; 50 % of the voters in this country are female. [*Interruption*]

The fact that we have made achievements and successes as women in this country, in comparison to the entire Western Hemisphere, we must be proud. To see this slipping backwards and to see this retrograde movement, is very disconcerting. The fact that 50% of the population's votes in this country are female, it is even more disturbing. We look across the other side and we see that this is a time when the APNU/AFC said, "It is time". They said it was time for youths and time for women. But, this is the time, according to APNU/AFC, for the 50 shades of grey and the older and middle class men and the Queen College (QC) men of this country, who somehow got left out along the way. This is the era of talk down Government and big Government. This is what we are entering.

Uneasy is the head that wears the crown in this APNU/AFC coalition. I will just give, as a light moment, that there are 26 Ministers in Government. This House and the Members on that side, when they were on this side, made a big deal about the salaries for the Presidential Advisors that were Mr. Odinga Lumumba and myself. However, does this House realise there are two Ministers doing my job, costing four times more than what I cost? So lean and clean!! Is this Government saving money? Let us go to the estimates; let us have the seven days and we will find out if two Ministers equals to one Gail Teixeira. It is costing plenty more money and there are repeats all over the place. It takes three Ministers to do the portfolio of the Hon. Member

Pauline Sukhai, when she was Minister, costing four times of what it cost to have a Minister there.

As for the Ministry that seriously confuses everybody, the Ministry of Citizenship, what the devil is that? Look at the *Official Gazette*, all it says is that the Minister of Citizenship will deal with the General Registrar Office (GRO), which deals with birth, deaths and marriages. That always used to be under the Minister of Home Affairs. I was a Minister of Home Affairs and the GRO came under me, but now there will be an entire Ministry to deal with Mrs. McDonald. I do not understand. This is about big Government, top down approach.

The State Boards and extravagance - certainly, the new Government, as I said, believes in the philosophy of big Government. There are advisors galore in the Office of the President and for each Minister. Commissions of inquiries everywhere, task forces everywhere, some are tripping over each other and some are duplicating each other's work. My poor friend Dr. Rupert Roopnarine, the Hon. Member, has the National Commemoration Commission looking at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the Hon. Member, Minister Henry, has another committee task force dealing with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Then there is the APNU group in New York that took over the General Consulate's Office in New York is running an APNU 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary committee. I mean seriously, what madness is going on in this place?

With all these commissions of inquiries, task force, committees, steering committees and reviews costing a fortune, they could not find the money to complete the most historic and important Commission of Inquiry, probably in this country's history, which was the one on Dr. Walter Rodney. Shameful! We will support all sorts of commissions of inquiries. We are willing to support a commission of inquiry into the crime wave of 2002 to 2008. Let me bring out what happened during that period. People like Mr. Felix and others will have to go before that Commission!

*Speaker hits the gavel on desk.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I believe that there is extra energy around, but I will ask you to contain it until we finish the speeches.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Thank you Mr. Speaker for trying to keep them under control.

**Mr. Speaker:** I would remind the speaker to address the Chair.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Yes Sir, thank you. The *Guyana Chronicle Newspaper* printed a letter from the Justice for Walter Rodney Committee that expressed its profound disappointment. The Committee appealed to the Government to let the Commission conclude its work because there were critical evidence that had to be brought. As I said, it was to find the truth. What was it going to cost, \$20 million \$30 million or \$40 million more? The Government is spending that on the Presidential Guard Service and the increase in the number of guards it has around the place - \$50 million more for Presidential Guard Services. All in the Parliament's corridors, we are meeting up with men in black jackets and gold neckties, with things in their ears, walking around and behind us all the time. This has never happen in this Parliament before. Who or what is this Government afraid of?

We will live to regret, as a people, that the Walter Rodney Commission Inquiry did not conclude its work. For not only us who lived through that era, but the next generations because there will always be that doubt of who was behind it and what was happening. By the Hon. Attorney General refusing and recommending to Cabinet that the Commission of Inquiry stop its work, supported by, as I understand, other Ministers and so on, this Government will regret it. But all of us, as Guyanese, will regret it too.

In the first 100-days, the Government has been on a roll, retributions, myopia, vengeance, and marginalisation. It has talked with fork tongues, including that the ...*[Inaudible]* has become a catch word for party hacks.

**Mr. Speaker:** The Hon. Member has seven minutes remaining.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Thank you Sir. Look at the photographs of the Government's workshops and conferences and they tell a story all by themselves. The Government has marginalised 200,000 odd people and more.

It is the first time that some of us have said that we feel like strangers in our own land, where our navel string was buried. We begin to feel like strangers in our own land because we do not seem to belong here; only those who had voted for the APNU/AFC seem to belong in this country. The coalition was the one that said it is your time.

We are watching the erosion of human rights and we are watching the freedom and association. Does this House know that when the Hon. Member Ms. Selman was being hassled, heckled and so on, she made it very clear, and I was very proud of her as a Guyanese woman, in that she said "...my right to choose my political party and I have chosen my political party".

*9.12 p.m.*

In Canada, there was a big case, many years ago, about public servants running as candidates for political parties at the local government level and so on. When it went to the Canadian High Court it became a constitutional case in which the Canadian courts ruled that public servants could not be denied the right to choose a political party nor be able to run as candidates for those parties. Yet, in this Government, the fact is that if you are PPP or you look a certain way, there is no space for you in the Government. Then they say that our people were on the List of Candidates, so they could not be this or that in the public service, but then the Government has taken people who were on their list and put them into high positions, such as regional executive officers (REOs), chief executive officers (CEOs) and in all sorts of positions.

This Government is not being fair; they are being discriminatory. If they do not like the word ethnic cleansing, if it smells like that and it looks like that, then it is. The Government has to live with that perception because that is what is going on.

I appeal to the members in the new Government who, I believe, believe in democracy. There are some Members on this side, who I have known for a very long time, who believe in democracy. I call on them to stand up for the democratic gains and let us move this country into greater heights of development in democracy and not to let us slide back because we are sliding back. It has only been 92 days and the slide has begun. It started in this Parliament; it started outside with the firing of people; it started with the cutting of things.

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

**Ms. Teixeira:** Yes. As I have said, on the issue of job creation and wealth creation, this budget offers nothing. It has no comprehensive proposals for job creations and wealth creation. In fact, it has done the opposite. Not only has this Government fired people, it has also made it difficult for the private sector to work. From the time it got into office it has stopped contractors from



working. Do you how many people have been laid off during the period of the end of May, 2015 to now because contracts were not starting over? There were thousands of people who lost their jobs. This had nothing to do with public service and who went and vote for the PPP. These were contractors who went through a process, they were hired, they were working on roads, bridges and culverts and schools and they were told to stop. Up to now, they have not started back.

The reason why I am raising this too is because the Census of 2012 pointed out that the construction sector of this country was able to contribute, for example... [Mrs. Hughes: But we did not get all of that...*inaudible*.] Mrs. Hughes it was on the website. If you look at the Bureau of Statistics – Census, you will find the preliminary findings, which I am referring to, so do not... [*Inaudible*]... me. On the website it says that the building stock increased by 16.9% by the 2012 Census. All 10 regions recorded significant increases in their building stocks. The national average by a factor of two, the regions with the exceptional building and growth rates in the building stocks were Regions 3, 7 and 9. So, when the Government stops all these things from happening....

There are a number of things but I would not have the opportunity to speak and shadow the Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member you have one minute to wrap up.

**Ms. Teixeira:** The feasibility study for the road from Brazil to Guyana was put over in the budget document as if it was now being put over, but in fact, this had been done, it was completed. The pre-feasibility study was completed and the consortium is now moving on to the feasibility study.

For the Corentyne River Bridge, we had an agreement with Suriname on this project and as requested, we gave our no-objection to the project for the Chinese to have it financed. It would be good if the Government could indicate their position on this, given that they approached the border matters on this. There does not seem to be anything on this matter in the budget.

Again, employment, transportation links, building and stimulus, and building the economy and so forth.

Shared diplomatic and consular missions - this was something that Guyana and Dr. Jagan had talked about since the 1990s, in the CARICOM area and at the consular and foreign community relationships; this issue of co-sharing of diplomatic and consular missions with CARICOM countries is moving forward and this was something Guyana had promoted, even up to recently.

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

**Mr. Carrington:** Thank you Mr. Speaker. Good night Mr. Speaker, Hon. Prime Minister, Ministers of Government, fellow MPs, Opposition representatives and fellow Guyanese. Thank you all for the opportunity of contributing to this 2015 Budget Debate.

This budget was prepared by the Hon. Mr. Jordan, the same Jordan who prepared the PPP budgets over all the years my brothers and sisters. This Jordan who they condemn today, they used to praise years ago. I must say that I love this budget. This budget gives public servants \$10,000 a month or \$120,000 a year more my brother and sisters. That will give them two months rations at \$60,000 a month. It is better than nothing or better than the 5% that the PPP used to give when they were in Government.

The APNU/AFC Government has presented its first budget, through our Minister of Finance, the Hon. Winston D. Jordan; a budget which I fully support. This budget will create *A Fresh Approach to the Good life to a Green Economy*. It will also help to establish inclusionary democracy by the creation of financial independence for local democratic organs.

The total budget for local governance is \$30.5 billion of which \$228 million is for the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, which has already been spent by the PPP Government in the first four months and 11 days of this year. Mr. Speaker, \$4.7 billion will be spent by the Ministry of Communities and \$25.5 billion for the 10 Regional Democratic Councils. The Budget of 2015 for local development has increased by \$3.8 billion, which is more than the previous year. I want to say that the regional budget was not cut. One region had a little problem, but I think it was in Region 9, but all the others nine regions' budgets were increased. So when the Hon. Gail Teixeira said that the regions budgets were cut, it was untrue, Mr. Speaker, the books are right in front of you.

The increases in the regional and local government budgets mean that more money will be available for spending to help in the development of local governance. Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that by the end of this year the green beauty of Georgetown and other local government areas will be restored to the beauty we did not see for the past 22 years. Mr. Speaker, you can already see the beauty and the cleanliness of Georgetown. The people came out in their hundreds and thousands to ensure that the city was cleaned. They have faith in the APNU/AFC Government.

This APNU/AFC budget is intended to help in the decentralisation of the power of this State by providing more finance for the Local Government Authority. In so doing, we see it as very important that our Government hold Local Government Elections on the first Monday, in December, 2015 in accordance with the law; an election that PPP Government never wanted, due to senseless fear of the decentralisation of the powers of the State. They do not want to give power to the Local Government Authority that is why they are sitting on that side of the House.

The Minister of Communities will have \$4,248,481,000, after the approval of this budget, to spend on capital expenditure. In the local government area, this money will be well spent. Grants will be given to the local government authorities to help in the development of their areas and for job creation by A Learn to Earn Development Programme, which is in the making.

The APNU/AFC Government will never walk in the footsteps of the previous Government when it comes to local governance. If we do that, we will fail the people like the PPP did. Remember they dissolved the municipality and NDC. They never held Local Government Elections in 17 years. They also deprived the Local Government Authorities the right to do valuation for new properties and existing ones to garner for revenues for development work.

Look at the conditions of our Kitty Market, Stabroek Market, City Hall and all our local government buildings. They are all in need of repairs and upgrading. Who are these people that condemn this budget?

I am not in a campaign mood, the campaign is finish. The APNU/AFC Government will regularise and standardise vendors. They are very important people that we see around there. We shop at them every day, vendors have a right to work and a right to earn and live and the Council has a right to collect revenues for services and developmental works.

Because of the failures in the local government system, the Councils across the country are losing billions of dollars. They could have earned and repaired their own buildings. They would not have to come to us for subventions if proper systems were in place; they *bruk up* the systems.

At just \$20 to \$50 a square foot, vendors could bring in approximately \$2 billion a year. I spoke to many vendors and they said to me, they did not mind paying to the City Council \$300 to \$500, some of them even said \$1,000, to vend. At present, my brothers and sisters, Hon. Ministers and Mr. Speaker, they are paying moneys to people who go on the road to collect it from them. I do not want to mention who they are paying it to. They are not paying it to Mr. Green.

The APNU/AFC Government will ensure that our youth in the local government area learn to earn by learning a skill; establishing small businesses; and creating self-employed jobs for themselves, family, friends and individuals.

*9.27 p.m.*

The Local Government Authority now has the power to apply for grants for any training or development project in the area.

Guyana is full of raw materials but the previous People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government has failed, over the years, to educate the people of Guyana to utilise such raw materials for value-added products.

Many furniture factories, garment factories and other small manufacturing businesses have closed due to the lack of skilled persons with productive mindset coming out of school or, maybe, it is the education system which had failed them.

The crafters of the education system in the PPP/C Government never looked at the availability of our raw materials and used it to design an education policy to encourage the thinking of value-added production. We also have a problem with high interest rates on loans plus compound interest on available finance. Something needs to be done about that soon.

Hon. Minister Ronald Bulkan, the provider... the local democratic organ will have this Parliament put laws and systems in place for the Local Government Authority to earn the money

which is needed to sustain itself before the 2016 budget so that it can pay staff and councillors better and provide services.

Our Government will establish the six Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) areas on the highways so that they can benefit from the fiscal transfer of funds and the areas can be then regularised, giving the people ownership of their lands, which was long overdue by the PPP/C Government.

The highways were designated since 1990 for six NDC. Twenty-two years have passed and the Government never made an attempt. My village, Yarowkabra on the Soesdyke/Linden Highway, saw the blunt of infrastructure discrimination. There is no all-weather roads, no primary school, although we were promised these by the former President Jagdeo during the 2006 election campaign. Other villages on the Soesdyke/Linden Highway also feel the blunt of the lack of infrastructural development.

This year, I have already talked to the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, and I will be talking to the Minister of Communities and we will see that the Soesdyke/Linden Highway gets some all-weather roads. Our people must be moved to higher ground. We need to stop taking farm lands and making house lots. We need to use those lands at the back of South Ruimveldt for farming, for agriculture, planting legumes – black-eyed, red peas, *et cetera*.

Jobs must be created for the people in Region 4. Region 4 has a big problem with approximately 400, 000 inhabitants with not much jobs created over the 20 years. This Government must find a way to create jobs for our people. Our people must be educated to work, to utilise our raw materials and to make money. Our Government will encourage families to take up residence on the higher grounds. The Soesdyke/Linden Highway will be developed and jobs will be created. I will follow the vision of President David Granger. He will give the guidance for a good life in a green economy, a guidance that will remove the mindset of dishonesty, racism and uncaring behaviours.

I support this Budget. I support our President and I support our Government. I hope good sense prevails by the end of this Budget and the PPP supports it. [*Applause*]

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today. I will now ask the Hon. First Vice-President and Prime Minister to move the motion.

**Mr. Nagamootoo:** I now move that this Assembly be adjourned until tomorrow, Friday, 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2015.

**Mr. Speaker:** This Assembly stands adjourned until Friday, 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2015 at 1.00 p.m.

*Adjourned accordingly at 9.33 p.m.*