

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

11TH Sitting

Friday, 21ST August, 2015

The Assembly convened at 1.07 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Report was laid:

Annual Report of the Guyana Police Force for the year 2011. [Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

MOTION

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2015

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

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

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2015 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 2015-08-10.;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

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

[Minister of Finance]

Mr. Lumumba: Mr. Speaker, I must first congratulate you on your acceptance of this honourable position. I also anticipate that you will be fair and of political neutrality.

We are here, today, under the clouds of distrust. I had anticipated that we would have started this session with an understanding that we will move this country forward and there would be an absence of discrimination and doubts, and there would be some reasoning on both sides of this House so that we will find common ground to work together.

I am very disappointed in how our Amerindian brothers and sisters were treated. I am further disappointed at the potential threat to our democracy. I do not have a problem with military personnel being in the high offices because some of the military personnel are my friends.

[An Hon. Member: Is it me you are talking about?] I have more than one military friend; it

is not you alone so do not praise yourself. I do not have a problem with that because we are all close to each other's cell phone. My concern is that the Government decided that, even though we are almost 50/50 in this Parliament, it will form an advisory committee on constitutional reform without including the Opposition. It is a potential threat to democracy; it sounds like Burundi all over again.

This National Assembly will become battle weary because of the one-seat separation and, from time to time, Mr. Speaker, both sides may believe that you have not made the right ruling but this should not trouble you. As an East Coast man, you should be accustomed to turbulence.

On the same positive note, I want to welcome the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Jordan, to this National Assembly. It is always good to sit with a former student of the Opposition Leader, the Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo.

I want to inform my Colleagues on the other side that my presence on this occasion must coincide with the need for this Assembly to work as one, especially since some of us are friends on both sides. We must use this relationship to find common ground so that, at the end of these sessions, the Guyanese people and the world can see a more mature Guyana.

I must, once again, congratulate the Minister and Hon. Member, who has attempted to lay the foundation for a better Guyana, but I am sure that he ought to recognise that he stands between two extremes. One extreme is when the nation had a brittle economy and when it was fostered with abnormally high interest rates being the norm, a nation that lacked potable water, citizens that felt the wrath of dictatorship in a then 'police state', zero tolerance and zero production in agriculture, a collapsed bauxite industry, no proper roads, a backward educational system but deemed a fair state and a Government that distributed 30 house lots in 15 years. It is that extreme that the Hon. Winston Jordan knew before the entrance of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C).

The other extreme he now knows is a nation with a striving housing development sector, dozens of spanking housing schemes from Diamond to Tuschen and Eccles to Amelias Ward. The Hon. Minister has seen, with his own eyes, the delivery of potable water to 90% of our citizens, including our Amerindian brothers and sisters. The Minister of Finance has seen the improvement in infrastructure in the villages and towns in Guyana. The Hon. Minister has

witnessed the positive annual growth rate of Guyana. Even when the Hon. Member wears his dark sunglasses, he can see the development such as the East Bank Highway, the Berbice Bridge, dozens of new schools, health centres and hospitals, various shopping malls, including the Beepat Centre at Liliendaal, Movie Towne in Turkeyen, Marriott Hotel, road rehabilitation from Parika to Vreed-en-Hoop, Guyana Goldfields Inc. and dozens more like the Sheriff Street rehabilitation project, the Leonora all-weather track and the National Stadium; these are things that have been done.

I speak of the dark days under Minister Carl Greenidge, my Friend, and he should not feel bad about this because some of the best people have administered dark days. The great days of progress we now enjoy because of the mentor of Minister Jordan, the one who was given an opportunity to stand before us today, and that is no other than the Opposition Leader.

When one hears about a national budget, one anticipates a document that represents a road map that moves a nation from point A to point B. I have tremendous respect for Mr. Jordan and he knows that. This Budget is not his choice and so I must come to his defence; I have to. This Budget is not his choice; he has more capacity than this. I want to believe that this Budget was written by the Hon. Minister, Mr. Sharma, and I will tell you why. It lacks creativity and any major initiative. It is a recipe for broken promises to the nation. It cheapens public servants, blindfolds those who use the Berbice Bridge and this Budget is a bookkeeper's manual; in many ways, it is cut and paste.

Where are the new ideas? Every single item is a reduction of or addition to PPP/C's proposed budget. A 'C' grade business student in Economics at Queens College could have found five initiatives to put in this country's budget. Reducing the Berbice Bridge toll by \$300 cannot save this economy; it is a cheap gimmick. Closing clubs at 2.00 a.m. cannot help this economy. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, you have to defend me. I do not want to be crude. I am humbly begging you for your protection, Mr. Speaker. Giving \$5,000 more for school uniforms cannot help this economy. What about initiatives in electricity, security, rice, sugar and our diplomatic relations with Venezuela? This Budget is a cheap attempt of forensic analysis of what the Guyana public deserves.

I want to make it clear, with no disrespect to the Minister of Finance, I believe that if the Minister was given time and independence, he would have prepared a more appropriate budget.

Let me start with the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC). The GGMC must be allowed to expand its potential. It needs to identify areas with economic potential like the *[inaudible]* Rupununi for semi-precious stones and to set up industries to cut and polish the stones. GGMC needs to start looking at potential exploitation of *[inaudible]*, feldspar, *et cetera*.

We need to do more for small miners, such as establish a credit union and commercial banks to work with them in times of difficulties, where they can borrow money at reasonable interest rates. This Government's Budget is silent on these issues. Several areas in this country need more roads so that there can be better access to new mineral property and gold mining areas. Again, the Budget is silent on this.

We need to open reserved state lands - Eping, Paris Hall, Five Star, *et cetera* - so that we can create more opportunities for miners and expand.

Accidents can only be reduced if more technical people are involved in the process. GGMC must create a stark training programme for all levels of miners so that they can be more acquainted with these issues.

This area requires funding from the Government and, again, the Budget does not address these issues. In general, we need to rework our miner rules and regulations so that reclamation activities of mining areas can go into effect.

Small Miners

Small miners must provide a bond and a reasonable plan so that the area can be reclaimed.

1.22 p.m.

They must also provide a basic mining plan that satisfies their health and safety procedures, in particular those who work in pits. Small miners working in landlord properties must have broader protection. Minister Simona Broomes - to her credit - has spoken about this for a number of years: too many times small miners find gold and diamond in the "big man" or the landlord's property and, the next morning, are thrown off. We need to protect them. We need to have

legislation to protect small miners. [Ms. Ally: What else do you need?] I do not need you.

Medium-scale and large-scale miners

Government must implement stronger regulations in respect to these owners. No lease must be granted unless there is a preliminary reclamation and mining permit. The bond must be able to implement the reclamation activities of the mining area. Government should limit the amount of land owned by persons, companies and partnerships, and must have a system that encourages transparency and competition so that new blood can enter the industry. Government, at this point of time, should have a floating fee or a floating licence fee which allows Cabinet to make recommendations, through the appropriate Minister, when the gold prices stumble onto the world market.

This Government is very shallow on commitment to transparency and diversification of the wealth of the nation. It is the same thing; the big gets bigger and the small gets smaller.

Forestry

Contrary to the wild reports from A Partnership for National Unity / Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), the Forestry Sector is one of our most productive agencies. There are 54 forest stations countrywide. In 2000, there was an implementation, nationally, of countrywide barcodes. Total allocated state forest - 55% - is allocated in local ownership under three categories: small forest concession - 23%; community management - 6%; and large forest concession - 26%. The majority is allocated to local ownership; the remaining 45% is foreign ownership or management.

Areas under local ownership

There are 500,000 hectares under community ownership and management. In Region 10 alone, total records of State forest allocation is 325,000 hectares, which is composed of 62 concessions, in a part of formal structure, used by what is called a Friendly Society Act.

Foreign companies have added to the development of this sector and we cannot continue to demonise foreign companies and yet want them to invest. I agree; when they step over the border

or over the line, they must be pulled in and dealt with. But we cannot continue to demonise foreign companies, in particular Chinese companies. These companies are owned by the Government of China. We cannot politically demonise them then run to the back door and ask for loans and grants. We have to be careful. I agree that they must respect our rules and regulations but that can happen without demonising them. [Mr. Bulkan: There must be a level playing field.] I agree; I do not have a problem.

To date, there are five main foreign operating companies within this sector. Barama Company Limited: The Barama Company Limited, to date, has built and maintained close to 3,500 kilometres (km) of roads at a cost of US\$37 million. That is a foreign company. Vitarium: Vitarium, to date, has built and maintained 433 km of road to an approximate value of US\$2 million. Baishanlin International Forest Development Inc.: The APNU/AFC hates it so much. It has maintained 500 km of roads to the total value of US\$8 million. Demerara Timbers Limited: maintained 1,300 km of roads at a value of \$14 million.

These companies have also contributed to education and social services, health care, mining and agriculture activities, eco-tourism and other forest activities.

I am asking the Opposition and the Government to work closely to continue the good work of our Forestry Commission. Do not interfere with the management. It has done an excellent job. I am not saying that, if you find management in a compromising position, management should not be changed or removed. Just do not remove them for removal's sake. That is all I am saying.

Bauxite

The People's National Congress (PNC), under the late President Linden Forbes Burnham, had Linden on its knees by means of police brutality, retrenchment and union busting. The PPP/C saved the day by means of subsidies for the industry. Member of Parliament Mr. Neendkumar has addressed the issue of bauxite in Region 10 and in general. He also spoke of the potential growth in other areas of the country. However, I would like to point out that bauxite, in Guyana, is also like the transportation system in New York. Linden, Kwakwani and the communities in Region 6 are like sugar.

I find it interesting that the Executive President, Mr. Granger, dispatched an economic tsar, named Clive Thomas, to the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) so that the group could wave a magic wand and dispense of the subsidy that holds the community together. I ask, what about a group going to Linden so that the subsidy to Region 10 can be dispensed?

The APNU/AFC collaboration likes to talk about GuySuCo's subsidy, so let us have a look at the Region 10 subsidy. In particular, I want the left ear of the Hon. Vice-President, Khemraj Ramjattan, to be wide open. Let the walls have ears. Kwakwani: 2005-2014 - \$1.7 billion in subsidies, water and electricity; Ituni: \$128 million; Linden: \$20 billion. Should we assume that Linden, Ituni and Kwakwani have the God given right to get subsidy and GuySuCo and sugar and the remaining communities should be put to pasture? I say this, in passing: the Government needs to be careful and this has to be of interest to the Prime Minister and Mr. Ramjattan. These gentlemen must not take political office at any cost, even if it means the death of Region 6.

What is good for the goose is good for the gander. If Region 10, which is Afro-Guyanese, can get subsidy, so must GuySuCo and sugar, which is basically Indo-Guyanese, and so must Regions 8 and 9, which are predominantly Amerindian communities.

Petroleum and gas

Because of aggressive and sensible marketable oil and gas resources by the PPP/C Government, Guyana finally has borne fruit after years of Sharma announcing and pronouncing that a search resulted in coconut oil by Dr. Dookie, kerosene oil by late President Forbes Burnham and dozens of wild rumours.

Exxon Mobil, under the PPP/C Administration, finally announced that it has found the oil basin, with evidence that Guyana might be on the verge of a billion dollar oil and gas industry. We have been very practical in matters of exploration and have included several oil companies in the process of oil and gas.

We believe in nation building. It is our hope and anticipation that the new Government will process and manage this new industry with the level of efficiency that is required. I indicated, in my thesis in 1975, that petroleum is the only single resource that can provide the amount of

revenue and can drive the economy of Guyana, a country with a small population, but a brutal infrastructural network, in particular areas where our minerals are located.

GuySuCo

Most countries have financial commitment to a particular entity. In the United States, it is public transportation. In Guyana, we have privatised public transportation because it was a burden to the State. In the great United States of America, public transportation is subsidised by the State and Federal Government.

There is a nexus between public transportation in the United States and economies of the private sector, in particular the private sector in Manhattan. Just imagine employment in America, in particular Brooklyn or Queens, if the rail system collapses because of the absence of State and Federal subsidies. Imagine being trapped, coming to a halt, because of the absence of Federal subsidies; imagine the employment impact in a particular state; imagine the negative consequences of growth and development of New York. Think about the link between unemployment and underdevelopment in Brooklyn, in the general Tri-State area.

The sugar industry in Guyana is like the New York transportation system. Only a narrow thinker will talk about GuySuCo in the context of the Skeldon Sugar Factory alone. Sugar represents dozens of communities, thousands of residents, thousands of children. The present sugar industry is a product of colonisation and low world prices and, to some degree, I confess, inept management.

Dr. Clive Thomas is not the answer to GuySuCo's issues. Even the deaf knows that he is anti-GuySuCo, just like anti-sugar. Therefore, even though his input might be sound, he should not have been appointed as chairman. I know and the National Assembly knows that, if Dr. Thomas and his team decide tomorrow and recommend closing GuySuCo, His Excellency, Mr. David Granger, in the same breath, must put an end to the electricity subsidy of Region 10. It has to go hand in hand; it cannot be one-sided.

Dr. Henry Jeffrey, in one of his articles, suggested that the Granger regime needs to be careful so as not to be tarnished with a racist slant. You cannot, on one hand, put your foot down on GuySuCo and sugar and pretend the electricity subsidy in Linden must be left alone. I know that

the Hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Moses Nagamootoo, and the Hon. Vice-President, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, under no condition, will agree to the closing down of the sugar industry.

Let us not bury our heads in the sand. Sugar is a socio-economic lifeline of thousands of Indo-Guyanese and electricity subsidy is a socio-economic lifeline of thousands of Afro-Guyanese in Linden. So let Dr. Thomas enjoy the ride. Our only option is to find the methodology, maybe magical, to get the European Union to increase the price of sugar so we can bring some profitability to the Caribbean.

GuySuCo needs proper management and a continuous practical subsidy like the New York subway system.

Small businesses or set aside programmes

The PPP/C regime has a record of establishing hundreds of small businesses, especially those owned by Afro-Guyanese, rural Indian women and Amerindians. I want to commend the Hon. Minister, Mr. Gaskin, for his thinking and his desire to deal with the issue of economic parity in Guyana. He has identified, wisely, a minimum of 20% budgetary allocation as a means to bridge the gap between the rich and poor.

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

Mr. Lumumba: That is more than adequate, Sir. I think it is a good start but this issue requires several support mechanisms, such as business and technical support. The PPP/C had a road map that showed the way forward. First of all, there must be a commission, which comprises Members of Parliament and the private sector. There must be some type of registration system to accommodate all potential participants.

The Ministry and the Government must be honest enough to say to the public that there are concerns about the gap between the rich and the poor, and this step forward is the way of ensuring that Afro-Guyanese, rural East Indian women and Amerindians can participate in the fundamental economic policies of this country. They are humans too. They have a right to big houses. They have a right to fancy vehicles. They have a right to send their children to Paris, France. They have a right to bird watch, like Hon. Roopnarine. They have a right to all these nice

things. They have a right to buy a Porsche, like Hon. Minister Greenidge. All of them have these rights but we must provide the access to them. You must not be the only ones to have this access and lock it off.

1.37 p.m.

There is a problem in Guyana. The big 'guys' want all of the bread, even the slices. We must change this culture. Both sides of the House have an obligation to change this culture, or the future of this country would be as a volcano.

The proposed activity by the Hon. Minister Gaskin cannot work in isolation. There must be technical advisers, training programmes, rental of equipment pool and a strong and honest administrator. The success or failure of this programme would be based on access to financing. The Minister of Finance must leverage the money that is in the banks. These banks must not only sit on the country's \$50 billion. There must be a portion of the \$50 billion set aside so that when 'small people' want to borrow to do their small business they could have access. I am not saying that they must get the money without collateral. I am saying, though, that there should be some system which must be put in place so that the 'small people', such as Dr. Roopnarine and I, could have access to this money.

The children of Sophia and Buxton, graduates from the University of Guyana (UG), the children of Lethem, Enmore, Bush Lot, Leonora, Leguan, Bartica and Anna Regina, and the women of our country must be given the opportunity to own a bank or a major construction company. In the United States of America there is what is called the Small Business Administration (SBA) [*inaudible*] programme. The Minister must send his staff to Washington, D.C. to sit and understand how that programme works and how that programme transforms thousands of people from the ghetto and make them creative and good business persons.

Our young people may be interested in rearing pigs and poultry. [Hon. **Members (Government):** Goats.] Not goats; it is sheep. [Mr. **Patterson:** Are you discriminating against goats?] I am discriminating against goats. However, they are not going to get the support in their villages if they want to do these things in their villages. I am suggesting to the Minister that there is, what is called, industrial estate.

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

Mr. Lumumba: I urge the Hon. Member to look at the possibility of industrial estates in some of those villages, with tax waivers and duty-free concessions for companies that want to generate substantial employment. Any other solution would be a fantasy. The days of young people lining up for menial jobs are over.

Finally, our young people would not be *gangstered* into joining the National Service in any sort and in any manner.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Minister of State [Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon]: I rise to make my contribution to this budget debate and to commend its passage through this honourable House.

The Hon. Minister of Finance Mr. Winston Jordan must be complimented for so quickly grasping the essential elements of an A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) vision and producing a budget which sets out clearly the administration's vision for the next five years.

Many have commented on the length of Mr. Jordan's presentation, but we believe that the time was necessary to lay the foundation for what will happen in the next five years – what will happen in 2016, what will happen in 2017, what will happen in 2018, 2019 and 2020. *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy* is, indeed, fresh.

In the last budget debate, under the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) administration, in 2014, I was over on that side and the then Minister of Finance was over on this side and I said to the then Hon. Minister of Finance Dr. Ashni Singh that the budget he produced was uninspiring, that he was tired and he needed to take a rest. It is good to see that Dr. Singh has heeded my advice and taken that rest.

A fresh approach was, indeed, needed, one which puts the Guyanese people at the centre of all national development, not just a selective few, but the bulk of our people who we have to move out of the clutches of poverty. Some of the Members of the Opposition seem to be afraid of greening the economy. They are afraid that they are seeing Granger behind every green. Hon.

Member Madam Chandarpal, this greening of Guyana was always there. It is in our national anthem. If you check the third stanza of our anthem, it states:

“Green land of Guyana...”

“...To you will we give,

Our homage, our service, each day that we live;”

The speakers on the Opposition side would wish to convey the impression that Guyana suddenly got bad after the 16th May, 2015. Is this the case? Hon. Member Mr. Rohee thinks that crime suddenly appeared. Any aspect of crime is contempt for the law and contempt for the people of Guyana. After the people voted to elect the Members of the National Assembly, the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) took its own sweet time to come to the National Assembly, missing out on important work on behalf of the people of this country, whilst still drawing the salaries. Why do you not give up salaries? Give it up. Why are you drawing the salaries?

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 40, the Hon. Member is making a misrepresentation. Nobody on this side of the House has received a cent from the Parliament Office as of this moment, Sir. I ask that the Member withdraws it.

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: Do you deny it?

Hon. Members (Opposition): Withdraw, withdraw [*chanting*].

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, perhaps you should rephrase it. Say what, if you do know, the correct issue is. If not, perhaps you should leave it for someone else to deal with.

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: Mr. Speaker, I will leave it for someone to deal with.

Mr. Speaker: Then, you should withdraw the statement that you made, Sir.

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: In the circumstance, Mr. Speaker, I withdraw the statement. I do hope that when the time comes to pay you would refuse it - say that you do not want it.

The PPP went before the electorate of this country with presidential and prime ministerial candidates. Suddenly, the process was hijacked and a Leader of the Opposition was foisted on the people of Guyana who was neither the presidential nor the prime ministerial candidate.

Contempt number two. The Opposition here has come to the National Assembly, according to Hon. Member Mr. Rohee, firing on all four cylinders. [Mr. Rohee: I said on all cylinders.] I am corrected. It is all cylinders. It might be one or two cylinders, but there is no firing. What does that mean for the people of Guyana?

Let us go back a bit to the time when the Hon. Leader of the Opposition demitted office as President of this country and we will see what it is meant by firing on all cylinders. Where are we going? At the end of the former President's term of office, under an article captioned, "Guyanese President leaves a tattered Legacy", the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA) in its publication dated 26th January, 2011, had this to say:

"Jagdeo could only receive the lowest of marks from any independent evaluation, through his tolerance of crime, racism and dismal social progress. President Jagdeo has turned in a fifth-rate performance as president of one of the poorest countries in the hemisphere."

It goes on to state:

"Jagdeo will go down in history as a man who did almost nothing for his nation while in office."

Further, it goes on to state:

"On balance, Jagdeo has failed during his presidency to advance the freedom and fairness of Guyanese public life...Increased economic growth is futile if it does not translate into a greater sense of prosperity within the entirety of the society."

1.52 p.m.

It is the "entirety of the society" – not only their friend and favourite.

“Jagdeo’s two-term presidency fell woefully short on that point. Social needs remain unmet due to inadequate spending on education and a lack of effort to improve the quality of health care.”

Mr. Rohee: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 40.

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

Mr. Rohee: I wish to make a point of information and clarification with your permission, Sir. The letter to which the Hon. Member Mr. Harmon is purporting to read from the COHA, which is based in Washington, appeared on its website. I personally responded to that letter, to Mr. Larry Birns.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have made the point you wish to make.

Mr. Rohee: And the letter was withdrawn.

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: Prove it; bring your evidence.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please proceed.

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: The intervening period of 2011 to May 2015 has seen a continuation of the policies which give President Bharrat Jagdeo a fail rate. We understand why there has to be a “fresh approach”. As the Minister of State in the Ministry of the Presidency, I had the privilege of co-chairing the transition committee between the PPP/C administration and the fresh, clean APNU/AFC administration. I therefore, from day one, had the opportunity to view the debris which had been left after a 23-year hurricane called the PPP/C administration. Only audits and commissions of inquiry could truly seek to comprehend what had passed for a government, especially in the last 13 years - disregard for the rule of law, questionable financial transactions, abuse of state assets, and they seek to justify what the Hon. Member Mr. Clement James Rohee is afraid of. He is afraid of these inquiries; he is afraid of these audits. What is he afraid of? Government has set up an asset recovery unit and they will follow the trail.

One matter which stands like a bone in my throat is something which does not require an audit, something that did not require a commission of inquiry, but something that just required a phone call, a visit to the Deeds Registry and a visit the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission. This is

what, by my inquiry, I have found. It is that the PPP/C administration, while in Government, spent millions of dollars renovating what was known initially as Red House. The name was changed eventually to the Cheddi Jagan Research Centre, a very pristine property in the centre of Georgetown. This was state property until 2012. It was so until such time when the PPP/C established a company called the Cheddi Jagan Research Inc., which basically, if the names of the persons, who are the directors, are looked at, really it looks like the Central Executive of the PPP. [Hon Member (Government): Call the names.] Is it to call the name? [Mr. Bulkan: The nation wants to know.] The nation needs to know. The Directors - Geoffrey Da Silva, Janet Jagan, Nadira Jagan Brancier, Donald Ramotar, Derek Jagan, James Rose, Michael Khan, Deon Fries, Kellawan Lall, Navindra Chandarpal, Mohamed Sattaour, Hydar Ally, and the Secretary, Narayen Ramkarran. This property is now leased to this company for 99 years – state assets. Do you know what they are paying for it? It is \$1,000 a month. [Interruption] That is not all. [Mr. Ali: What you did not say was the Hon. Member Moses Nagamootoo did the document.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, kindly allow the speaker to continue.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: That does not make it right, Hon. Member. [Interruption] That is not all. Having transferred the property into the name of this company, the employees of that entity continue to be paid by the state. [Mr. Rohee: Knock them off.] It is to knock them off. This is the level of contempt we talk about. [Mr. Neendkumar: It is the father of the nation we are talking about.] You took a prime property in Georgetown and you pay \$1,000 a month for it. Not even a shack you would pay that amount for. This is not all. We will use the rest for the State Asset Recovery Unit to deal with because there are so many.

I am Minister responsible for the Public Service Ministry which is now the Public Service Department of the Ministry of the Presidency. It is public knowledge what is happening there or what has been happening there. Our responsibility, as a Government, is to take this nation forward. Let us look forward to see where we are going. I will leave the following of the trail of money in Abu Dhabi, in New York and all over the world to the State Asset Recovery Unit and at the appropriate time it will decide what to do.

Today, I would wish to look forward. There are many other things to talk about, but today particularly I would like to speak to two aspects of the work of the Ministry of the Presidency. Mr. Speaker, as you know, in the previous administration, there was no such Ministry. There was no Ministry of the Presidency. The Head of the Presidential Secretariat handled most of the matters as they related to the President. Now, in this administration, we believe that transparency is necessary so that whatever the President does you can question me about it in here. Yes, that is transparency. You do not have to ask anybody else. [Ms. Manickchand: The President has not ...[inaudible]... once one in three month] You were in it all the time; you were always in it. Do not let me be diverted by what we call battlefield noises.

I would say that an area of importance in this nation has to do with the way in which we treat our human resource. Next year we would be celebrating 50 years as an independent nation. A few days ago Singapore celebrated 50 years as an independent nation. We almost came to be independent states together. We had the bulk of the resources; we had large land space, and where we are now is not half of the way to where Singapore is. It has 718 square kilometres of land space while we have so much. The difference, which moved Singapore from a Third World to a First World country, was the fact that it paid attention to its human resource; the fact that it had laws and those laws were followed; the fact that it had a powerful public service that was uncorrupted, that did not take bribes. That is how a nation is moved from one state to the next. When it is decided that all of the processes must be transparent.

We can go back to Lee Kuan Yew and see the book he has written on moving from a Third World to First World status. We will get all the lessons there. We have our Lee Kuan Yew here in Guyana, and the Lee Kuan Yews, seen here, are on this side of the bench. We understand the necessity for having a very strong public service. We understand that public service is not about service to ourselves; it is about service to the public and that the public is the master. When we took office we recognised these are things that have to be done: We have to make the public service strong; we have to reform the public service so that it reflects the nation's vision.

2.07 p.m.

It reflects what it is we want to do as a nation... [Mr. G. Persaud: You cannot do it through ethnic cleansing.] Mr. Ganga, please relax yourself - without contracts. You, do not open your mouth.

Immediately, on the assumption of office, the President spoke to all of the Permanent Secretaries and heads of departments and said to them that he was looking for a professional public service. It does not matter to him what the person political persuasion is; what the person racial position is; what the person religious persuasion is. It is once that person is prepared to work, honestly, and the person is prepared to act in the interest of the Guyanese people, and that person is loyal to the Government. That is what we said.

Immediately after that we went to the Public Service Ministry, and of the departments of it, and made that very clear to the workers there, that they are in public service and the public is not their servants. It is that they have to act in a manner that is consistent with good order and discipline.

The public service is now undergoing change, now going through a reformation. It is "a fresh approach" that Mr. Jordan, in his budget speech, spoke about, reforming the public service. What it means is that it will bring fresh, trained persons will be brought from the bottom and they will be pushed up. All of those who are not as honest as they ought to be will be pushed up by talent and by persons who are trained.

The plan is to pass the public service recruits or public service cadets through a programme of six months training at what is known as the Public Service Staff College. What that is going to do is that, at the staff college, the public service cadets will be trained about what is needed for a new Guyana. They will know the difference between Maida and Mahdia; they will know the geography of this country; they will understand the civics of this country; they will understand what it is to do business in Guyana. We will believe that after that period of training the cadets will leave the school and they will go for an attachment in the various industries. That is it. Listen and learn.

Once that is done, the cadets will then enter into the public service as an intake, not now and then. They will come as an intake, so after six months there will be a fresh intake. We believe

over a period of five years, we are going to have between 300 and 500 trained public servants who can enter the service.

Consistent with that, on-going alongside it, is the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry (COI) into the salaries and conditions and service of public servants. This Commission of Inquiry would allow for persons, who are in the public service, now to be able to take memoranda to the commission and for it to deliberate on them. It will allow for citizens, including Mr. Rohee, to take submissions to it. It will allow for all sorts of persons who feel that they have problems on salaries moving from one band to the next and the movement in-between bands. Persons who are not qualified and they are holding positions higher than persons who are qualified and sitting lower. All of these things will happen.

This is what we are going to do; we are going to modernise the public service. We are going to make public service a respectable service that when a foreign investor comes to this country and he meets the police officer, he meets a fire officer, he meets a revenue authority officer, he meets an officer from the Guyana Forestry Commission, he knows what he is going to get. He would not have to pass a bribe to get service.

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

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: It is important that we understand that when we are looking at public service reform we are talking about reform coming from the bottom going up. Later on, we will speak about the other issues as they relate to those persons who are now in the service that will require further training. We will deal with that at another stage. That is one issue.

The second issue I would like to address is the issue of Information Communications Technology (ICT) because we believe that is an important feature in the development of this country. We have given lip service to ICT in the past and so what we have are mega projects that do not link or connect to one another. There is a cable running from Georgetown to Lethem that is not connected to anything else; there is a programme called One Laptop per Family, that is not connected to the cable; there is a programme in which you have the internet poles running from Berbice on to the Essequibo that is being finished since 2014 but the Government could have not activated it. We have these pieces of things all over the place that we need to put together and in

this budget, the Hon. Minister of Finance has allocated the resources to make sure that it happens.

The children of this nation will get the quality of education... **[Mr. Rohee:** Levi told me that he misinformed you]. This is why you had the man doing nonsense when he was working with you. Government paid him a whole lot of money and you have him fetching water.

The overarching goal of the Government information communications programme will be as follows:

- i. To improve the delivery of public services using ICT.
- ii. To provide a consistent and innovative educational tool utilising multiple formats and knowledge sharing systems.
- iii. We will reduce the digital inequality and remove barriers to information access.
- iv. We will provide access to ICTs in on served and underserved communities throughout Guyana.
- v. We will create the platform for inter-operability and collaboration among Ministries and Government agencies.

It is well known that even here in the National Assembly the bandwidth, speed that we get here, to access the internet is slow. If four or five Members of Parliament try to log on at the same time, they will have to wait almost forever to get on. We have the capacity, presently in Guyana, to change that but because we never had the national will to do it, it was left to the wild and fancies of persons whose interest might not have been that of serving the national interest. In the last Parliament, the Tenth Parliament, I raised the question of the competence of the person who was given this project and the Hon. Minister of Finance...

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

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: ...lambasted me about it because he said that I was scaring away young people but now we see what has happened.

I have a contract here for that cable from Lethem to Georgetown, in which we spent US\$32 million on and it cannot work up to now. What did we do after we were finished with that is that we contracted it out to a company called Dax Engineering. A contract that had no consideration whatsoever, all benefits went to the company. It tells the company that it could have that thing for 25 years and add another 15 years if it had wanted and if it had problems the Government was going to bail it out. It states to the company that it could have taken duty-free concessions on SUVs, pickups, and all of that, and every three years it could have repeated it. What is this? This is what we are talking about. We have decided to consult with the contract... [Mr. Rohee: Publish the contract]. Do you want it to be published? I shall give it to the press when I am finished, so that it will be published. The conditions that will be seen is that it was a total rip-off on the people of this country. This we will change. We will operationalise the cables; we will deal with the cable as it runs from Georgetown to Linden; we will fix that piece and the piece from Linden to Lethem; we will have some advice on it as to what we will do. Fortunately the honourable gentleman Mr. Fizul Mohammed - I think that is his name - came and we discussed the matter, and, in a very amicable manner, he said to us, "I am going to give it back to you. Do not have a fight." [Mr. Rohee: Really.] Yes, he said that, "I am going to give it back to you." This was what has happened. We have taken back possession of the cable. The cable belongs to the people of Guyana and we, as their representatives here in Government, will make sure it stays that way.

We know that ICT is a very important factor in our lives and in this regard we have had conversations. In fact, we are about to go into contract with the Government of India through its representatives here in Guyana for the provision of a Centre of Excellence for the ICT. [Mr. Ali: I was there when it was signed.] My colleague is saying that he was there when it was signed. Well, this is probably like the World Cup contract, the 20/20 contract, you were there when it was signed. I have not seen a signed document because I have met with Indian High Commissioner yesterday and he has asked that we try to fast-track it because it is very important. I do not know what you signed.

We have already identified a venue where this is going to take place. We are of the understanding that the Indian High Commissioner and the India Government are prepared to provide the additional resources. They are going to send people down here very shortly and we

expect that by September - we are not waiting any longer than - we are going to start this project. We are going to start it because it is important. I want to say basically to the Indian High Commission and Indian Government a heartfelt thank you, on behalf of the young people of this country.

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

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Mr. Speaker, I feel as if the clock is running so fast. When my friend was rambling it seems as if the clock had stopped. Now that I am educating the nation, I am educating the other side, the clock is running away. I believe that this clock has to be audited.

I would like to say that it has been an honoured and a privilege to speak on this budget and that the Hon. Minister Mr. Winston Jordan and his team have done a commendable job. I believe that with the measures that he has outlined, Guyana will move, even though we have just about a few months before the end of 2015. We, on this side, have resolved to ensure that the provisions which the Hon. Minister has made that we be able to act swiftly and get those things done on behalf of the people of this country.

With that, I would commend the budget for its consideration and passage to this honourable House.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

2.22 p.m.

Mr. Seeraj: Mr. Speaker, as colleagues on this side of the House and also the Leader of the Opposition, I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate you, Sir, on being the Chair of our proceedings. Your baptism has not been an easy one but note the more heat, the more tempered will be the steel. I do look forward to serving under your guidance, Sir, at least in the near future.

Following the elections of 28th November, 2011, Guyana and Guyanese ventured out into unchartered waters. For the first time our country was being governed by a minority Government. There were a lot of uncertainties; there were expectations and hopes. I recalled clearly that His Excellency President Donald Ramotar, when he addressed the National Assembly, clearly pleaded for the co-operation of the legislative arm of Government, in helping

the executive to manage our country. He pleaded for co-operation on all sides. He had a genuine expectation that things would have worked out well. That the then Opposition, the APNU and AFC, would have co-operated with the executive to execute programmes that would have been to the benefit of all our people. Unfortunately, those expectations were short-lived.

We entered into a situation where the doctrine of separation of power, the legislative, the judiciary and the executive started to get mixed up. The legislative wanted to be the executive arm of Government. Those things led to what happened and, of course, the May 11th elections, 2015. A lot of people had expectations. Mr. Speaker, political parties had expectations too, including the AFC. [Ms. Wade: Including you.] I had a lot of expectations too, Mr. Speaker. What had happened some of those expectations also transpired even into agreements. The Cummingsburg Accord comes readily to mind where the expectations of the APNU/AFC were transformed into an accord, which sought to - between parties that were not too comfortable with one another - to document how it is that they would operate. That is why they needed this arrangement, so as to keep the different partners in-line.

Unfortunately, the First Vice-President and Prime Minister, Hon. Mr. Nagamootoo, will be the first one to say that there are some aspects of the Cummingsburg Accord that were thrown out of the window. The Prime Minister, Sir, had high expectations of sharing the Cabinet, had high expectations to have the portfolio of agriculture under his purview. He was very disappointed because 'Mighty Joe' would not have any of that. The Hon. Prime Minister, Sir, instead of chairing the Cabinet, I think he ended up chairing the National Communications Network (NCN) and the Government Information Agency (GINA), and all of that. That is something that someone said Kwame McCoy was doing. The Hon. Prime Minister is still chairing some agencies.

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: It is with some reluctance that I arise on a Point of Order, under Order 41. I think a Member of Parliament ought not to utter words or say things that are demeaning to other Members of Parliament. What he is trying to do is to purportedly speak for the Hon. Prime Minister, and not speak for himself. He has precluded under the Standing Order, saying things that would constitute any insulting... [Ms. Teixeira: You are thin skinned?] I am very thick skinned. I do uphold the Standing Order and this House shall be governed by the Standing Order. Of course, not only am I thick skinned, Sir, but

I can say this as much that I do not mind being a cat because it is necessary to deal with those rats over there who tried to steal from me.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Speaker, I rise under the same Standing Order that the Prime Minister rose on and I am offended that he is calling us over here rats. That is demeaning and it must be withdrawn because he cannot be bringing order to the House and imputing motive to people over here. I refuse to be called a rat.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, Standing Order 41 (4) reads as follows:

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

This Standing Order has been in existence even before the present sitting. I suspect that Members are very aware of it. If they are not, I commend it for their consideration and acting accordingly. Please proceed, Mr. Seeraj.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I welcome your guidance as always. I have been a very disciplined Member of this House, Sir, I can assure you. I will not seek to give you any trouble whatsoever.

I think the Hon. Vice President Carl Barrington Greenidge had some expectations also, based on his previous experiences. I do not think that there was the confidence reposed in him to handle the Ministry of Finance. I do know that he has a lot of expertise in the area of foreign affairs. I hope in the future that he can become better at handling matters of diplomacy, especially, economic diplomacy, as it relates to our current affairs with Venezuela. To speak in an off-handed manner such as to go to Caribbean Community (CARICOM), when referring to our neighbour, I do not think that was very diplomatic. It could have very well ended up in us being the worst of all. Sir, I know you are an expert in this area, and I suppose all of us in matters of this nature will seek to get some guidance from you, from time to time. I commend that to the Government.

I also know that the Hon. Vice-President Mr. Allcock also had a lot of expectations. He is a Vice-President. Mr. Allcock, Sir, congratulations on being elevated to that position of Vice-President. I do hope that the Leader of the House, the Hon. Prime Minister, will see that you

have a vote next time. He must be the first Vice-President in this National Assembly without a vote. I hope that can be corrected.

There have been a lot of expectations. We, on this side of the House, also expect things to get better as we go along. Having had a look at the budget we are not too confident. The budget itself could have been a very good one if there was less politics in it, less politicization of an otherwise good document. Good in the sense that it is built on what was left by the PPP/C. I think the Hon. Member Mr. Winston DaCosta Jordan got carried away with the wave of politicization that was gripping the country at the time he was looking at compiling his speech. An otherwise good document, I would even go to say excellent document, Sir, was marred by the politicization by a person who I knew to be a technocrat. He tried his best and he over tried, in bringing politics into his budget speech. That is why, Sir, I can tell you, without fear of contradiction, that the level political rhetoric in the document really spoilt it. I hope if the Minister is fortunate to present another document of this nature, in the National Assembly, that he will concentrate more on being a technocrat and dealing with the technical aspects of the budget.

The language sometimes is very good, but we have to deal with the reality. We have to juxtapose the language on what is being said with the reality that the Guyanese people are experiencing. That therein lies the proof is in the eating of the pudding. We have to compare the language that is used in the budget, as to the reality that we are facing.

When Hon. Member Jennifer Wade spoke, she spoke a bit about the reality that farmers are facing hardship. That is not mentioned in the document. The Hon. Member even went on to say that Mr. Seeraj would know what she was talking about. I think she was saying loudly that the Hon. Finance Minister Mr. Winston Jordan is probably not *au fait* with some of the plight that the farmers are going through. I welcome that comment because I am a farmer. As a matter of fact, after I finished high school and I sought to travel overseas for further study, my passport number - 1988 I think it was - 531728, Hon. Member Mr. Felix, could check that, had my profession listed as a farmer. There are some out there who would want to say that Mr. Seeraj is not qualified to be representative of the rice farmers and the rice farming community. Some may go as so far to say that a farmer should not sit in this House. I am telling you, Sir, I am proud that my profession, as listed in that document, stated clearly "Farmer". I am proud of that, and I

am proud that I can stand in this House and say proudly that was my first official designation - passport number 531728, Hon. Member Mr. Felix.

The Hon. Member Jennifer Wade spoke about high price of fuel, high price of fertiliser and seed paddy. All of those things are affecting farmers. The Hon. Member spoke about the picketing in front of the Public Buildings, last year by farmers. There were indeed some people picketing out there. I did some research and I saw in a newspaper article – I think it was 28th June, the *Guyana Times* - where mention was made about one of the persons picketing there. In that article, one of the members of the picketing team was accused by the AFC of misappropriation of funds for the picketing. They were paid to come down here to picket and then, based on the article in the newspaper, it was said that the member of the picketing team draw down on the AFC and then on the APNU. The member was charged by the AFC, under the Constitution of the AFC, for misappropriation and was tried by whatever committee it has and was told to refund. Those farmers did not come here willingly, Sir. They were paid to come and they were paid by an activist of the AFC.

Whenever the Rice Producers' Association (RPA) mounts a picketing exercise farmers would come willingly. Sometimes I would call on them to come and they would say that they are not able to do it, but I do not go out of my way to pay them to come to do all those things. Whilst that is welcomed, Sir, we have to see how it is that these things play out.

2.37 p.m.

I know that the President, His Excellency David Granger, when he addressed the Rice Industry Conference at the Arthur Chung Convention Centre, said and let me get this right, I do not want to quote the President wrongfully, he said clearly, among other things:

“What is good for rice is good for Guyana”.

At this time there is no need for confrontation or demonstration. There is a need for economic diplomacy. I think that the now Chairman of the Guyana Sugar Corporation's (GuySuCo) Board, Professor Clive Thomas, also spoke about the need for economic diplomacy and made statements like “monkey on our backs”, I do not even know if words of those kind are in the diplomatic jargon. Sir, you would know much more on these matters. If we are talking about

economic diplomacy, and the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs can advise me, “monkey on our backs”, I do not think, finds a place in diplomatic jargons. At this point in time, I do not think those things are helpful to our situation. His Excellency also spoke about the Government not wanting to become a banker and not wanting to bail out the industry. So these are words that we need to examine in detail as relates to ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I will draw to your attention Standing Order (SO) 41(7):

“The President’s name shall not be used to influence the Assembly”.

Mr. Seeraj: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I attended that forum and I was just quoting from my notes, some of the comments made by His Excellency. I, in no way, sought in any way what so ever, I will not do it to the post, no matter who is occupying that position; I will never at any time try to bring disrespect in anyway whatsoever to that Office. I can assure you of that.

I have had the fortune of meeting President Mr. Nicola Maduro on two occasions. I have also met the former late President Hugo Chavez. I was privileged to do so and had a little discourse.

[**Mr. Nagamootoo:** *Inaudible.*] I was at the Pegasus Hotel, Hon. Prime Minister. He came to Guyana and I was privileged to meet His Excellency, the late President Hugo Chavez.

At the National Rice Industry Conference, the Hon. Minister Noel Holder was present, and I know of this gentleman’s connection in the agricultural sector and I have no doubt that he will do well at the Ministry of Agriculture. I would also like to bring attention to some of the things that Hon. Minister Holder said at that Conference. Among other things, he said:

“I would wish to believe that all stakeholders will foster a renewed partnership after leaving this Conference today”

I pledged the support of the Rice Producers Association (RPA) at that forum and made a number of statements and requests. I spoke also about the utterances, as it relates to the mid-term to long-term plan. I said those things were not of importance right now. What we needed to deal with was the payments for farmers and the prices that they are getting. What will we do with the stocks that we have currently on our hands? The next crop’s harvesting will commence in another two weeks. What are we going to do with that crop? The Conference needed to address

these pressing questions, not to talk about rice flour and down the line. We can talk about those things when we have done away with these pressing current issues.

The Hon. Minister also said that the rice industry is at present the most important agricultural industry in Guyana. I agree totally with that. It contributes approximately 61% of agriculture Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 21.3% of export earnings.

The Hon. Minister of Agriculture had the following to say about the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB):

“The Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB) has delivered tangible and very concrete results on the ground in the last five years. The GRDB has distributed 153,301 bags of paddy, that is, seed paddy. It has supported and established 347 Farmers Field Schools, resulting in improved capability of 9,430 farmers, conducted 46 farmer-exchange visits, where 7,452 farmers participated. It has carried out 328 soil tests for farmers to determine land suitability and nutrition management, provided Government assistance to farmers in the form of seed paddy and fertilizers.”

I would agree with all of those and I wish to add that the GRDB, over the last 20 years, has also brought out 15 new varieties, one of them which can be classified as an aromatic line. It is called Maria’s Delight for marketing purposes, but its scientific name is GRDB 13. I wish to also add that the extension service of the Guyana Rice Development Board is second to none in this part of the world. I also wish to add that every time the industry faces any kind of crisis, the GRDB has always been responsive to the plight of farmers, millers, exporters, and other stakeholders in the industry.

I commend the Hon. Minister of Agriculture for his remarks at the Conference and before I leave this part of the proceedings, I wish to quote him lastly to say:

“The GRDB’s Six-point practice recommendation is a move we can all safely say is key to improved rice yields. Farmers who have experimented with the planting methods have more than doubled their yields from 20 to 22 bags to 50 to 80 bags per acre”.

I mention these things so that we can have an appreciation of how the Guyana Rice Development Board performed over the last two decades.

Mr. Speaker, I want to bring your attention to a *Kaieteur Newspaper* article of 25th June, 2015 and I wish to quote from this article. The disclosures were made yesterday by Minister of State, Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon. He said that:

“The Industry has been badly mismanaged”

That obviously being communication between the Minister of State, Joseph Harmon and the Ministry of Agriculture, whether it was in the form of the Hon. Minister of Agriculture or the Permanent Secretary. The Official was speaking about the empty PetroCaribe Fund which the new Government said that it met when it came to power last month. Minister Harmon said:

“GRDB was complicit or responsible for rice farmers and millers participating in a multi-billion dollar rice-for-oil arrangement with neighbouring Venezuela not being paid in recent times”.

There is absolutely no link between the responsibility of the PetroCaribe Fund and the Guyana Rice Development Board. We cannot seek to blame an entity for something that happened somewhere else. It is reckless and irresponsible behaviour for us to go publicly and speak to these matters to achieve a narrow political end, which is to deal with the management of the GRDB on grounds that are not sound and cannot in anyway stand up to any form of scrutiny.

The GRDB should have known that the Fund was being misused. The GRDB has no responsibility, authority or jurisdiction over the PetroCaribe Fund. Four farmers, including the gentleman who was charged with misappropriation, came to see the Minister of State from Region 2. There are over 2600 farmers in Region 2. The four gentlemen who came are activists of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) and the Hon. Lt. Col. (Ret.) Harmon, Minister of State, sought to justify it. He sought to use mismanagement as an excuse to carry out the request of those four gentlemen who said that they were representing 2600 others and called for the Head of the GRDB, Mr. Jagnarine Singh. If they wanted to fire the man, they should have fired him, but do not try to hoodwink the general public by saying that the gentleman was responsible for mismanagement; something that did not fall under his purview.

I think that this was done deliberately to tell farmers that the fact that they were not getting paid resided with the GRDB and the RPA, as justifying the restructuring that evolved into the resignation of the gentleman. It is cheap politics to do that.

The PetroCaribe Fund, to the best of my knowledge, would have accumulated over its course, just under US\$700 million. Information is not readily available; it is tougher than extracting teeth and not even the Hon. Dr. Jagan, could have helped me in this matter. But, I think it would have been somewhere in the vicinity of \$686 million or \$690 million. The PetroCaribe Fund arrangement started in 2005 and rice was not even a part of it. If the Hon. Minister had done some research he would have known this and would have sought to deal with the PetroCribbe Fund with the appropriate agency. Of that amount, rice would have accounted for US\$593 million or a little bit more, although rice became a part of it in 2009. So rice got the bulk of it. Moneys that were used from the account were used even before rice became a part of it, when the former President Bharrat Jagdeo would have met with President Chavez over ...

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

Mr. Seeraj: Sir, I hope that the clock was stopped when there were some interruptions. Sometimes under pressure, we miss some of these little things. The PetroCaribe Fund arrangement, the misrepresentation of the PetroCaribe Fund arrangement and seeking to lay blame to justify a political move are wrong and should not be encouraged.

On 25th June, 2015: “In addition to Mr. Jagnarine Singh, Government also intends to no longer want Mr. Dharamkumar Seeraj, General Secretary of the Guyana Rice Producers Association, who is a Member of the GRDB Board of Directors”. Sir, if you do not want me you do not want me; that is your prerogative.

I brought the attention to the fact that I am well qualified to be where I am by stating clearly that I have a history, I have a background and I have worked unbrokenly with the GRPA since 1989. Some of the senior citizens over there would have been about middle aged in those days. I do not have a difficulty with that, but I have a difficulty when we will talk about the rule of law and respect for the rule of law. It is mentioned even in the Budget. When we do not practice what we preach, that is when we have a disconnect with what is happening.

2.52 p.m.

Sir, I wish to bring to your attention the Drainage and Irrigation Act No. 10 of 2004. In this Act, under part (ii) that deals with the establishment, organisation, duties and coordination of this entity, as part of the composition of the Board of Director it is stated here at 7(2) (D):

“Two directors to be nominated by the Rice Producers Association”

I must say that the Hon. Minister of Agriculture made efforts to contact me. We spoke on some matters and this came into. He said, Mr. Seeraj, by statute, you are to make representation and provide me with nominations for two members of the Association to sit on the Board of the National drainage and Irrigation Council (NDIA) and on the Board of the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB). The Guyana Rice Development Board Act No. 15 of 1994, also states clearly in the part that deals with the composition, functions, *et cetera*, of the board, it states under item 4:

“Provided that they shall be three Members representing the Guyana Rice Producers Association...”

I dispatched letters to this effect and I must say that we have not had a response. I think that the Hon. Minister of Agriculture tried his best, but it would appear that the powers that be were not inclined to go favourably with his representation.

I have had some good experiences. The Hope Relief Canal - I remember clearly, again, I shared the pleasure of the company of the Hon. Minister on 13th June, when the entire East Coast, Georgetown and Mahaicony Creek would have come under threat from the intense rainfall. The Hon. Minister Jordon spoke about it in his budget presentation. It could have been devastating. I was proud to be there when the Hon. Minister sought to activate the doors that released the water into the Atlantic Ocean. That saved millions in crops and livestock and it saved lives. I think that we should applaud the effective operation of the Hope Relief Canal.

As we stand to debate our 2015 Budget, there were a number of points that were made by the Government. The Hon. Ramjattan spoke about his strategy to deal with law enforcement and in his famous speech about getting more horses and dogs to help in this campaign. He probably did not hear the Hon. Jennifer Wade, when she said the criminals are coming *rat-tat-tat-tat*, they are

not coming *pow pow*. Mr. Speaker, when one is faced with that kind of fire power, as the Hon. Felix would tell you that one has to retaliate with superior qualities of fire power, not two *bow-wows* and a *hippy-ti-hop* down the road. One needs to do better than that.

The Minister, in trying to justify his claim, spoke about the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). The Royal Canadian Mounted Police was established way back in the 19th century. At that time they had to be mounted on horses. The Parliament of Canada, in 1873, established what was called a Central Police Force and sent 115 recruits to Manitoba and they became known as the North West Mounted Police. On the 1st February, 1920 the North West Mounted Police became known as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. They maintained that name because they are proud of it and they are proud of their record. It is not because they are still riding horses. They do that for ceremonial purposes over there.

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

Mr. Seeraj: I thank you very much Mr. Speaker. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police go about tackling crime now in state of the art vehicles, flashing lights, bullet proof vest, and hypo weapons. They do not track down criminal with horses and tracker dogs. As the Hon. Member mentioned, it is probably for those street dwellers who practice unhygienic behaviour around the city that we might need the dogs to track them down. Even the Clerk is faced with a lot of problems with some of these street dwellers sitting around here and messing-up around the place. Sir, when one is talking about tackling crime, he or she has to be up-to-date with what he or she is talking about. [Mr. Ramjattan: ... we are getting body armour and vests...] You have to get some armour for those horses.

I think that the Minister of Finance made some allocations for crime fighting, which did not have anything to do with making provisions for horses and dogs. The Hon. Member is adding to the circus when the General Secretary, Clement Rohee, sought to heckle him. He said that he was going to add a couple of goats. I do not know if he was targeting the General Secretary in anyway – adding to the horses and the dogs.

Here is what the Minister of Finance had to say about fighting crime, at page 20, paragraph 4.15:

“With respect to the security sector, Mr. Speaker, it will be readily appreciated that the law-enforcement officer of the 21st century uses mobile computers over telecommunication networks to access a wide array of information to inform operations.”

No provision was made here for horses and dogs. We might have to end up with some *cang-galang* rice-eaters. We are not getting any quality stuff.

“...we must therefore equip our security services with the tools and technologies to operate effectively in this modern dispensation...”

Not to go back to the establishment of the RCMP back in the 19th century. This budget is talking about the 21st century and we have to be serious about our job. If the Minister of Public Security is not capable, he should seek advice. I think that advice could found in the form of the former Commission of Police, the Hon. Winston Felix.

One would have thought that in the consultative process between the APNU and the AFC he or she would have been given positions that go along with the position one’s competence. The Hon. Minister Mr. Ramjattan would have spent most of his working life, working as lawyer representing those accused of criminal activities, and probably representing criminals...

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

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much Sir. One would have thought that, in dealing with competence, here is a Minister now who has to go after criminals and who in a life before was representing those accused of crimes. One would have thought that the Hon. Winston Felix who was responsible for going after criminals would have been given that. The Minister of Public Security expected the entire Ministry of Home Affairs. Obviously he got the bad part of it.

I do not want to intrude too much on your indulgence, but I want to say that this document is long on politics and short on economics. When I look at some of the numbers I remember a remark that was made to me by a gentleman who was the Chief Scientist at the Burma Rice Research Station. The Hon. Minister Holder would know of this gentleman. The Chief Scientist, Leroy Small, an agronomist by profession, we were looking at the budget of the Rice Research Station and he said: “Mr. Seeraj these statistics look like a bikini”. So I said: “Sir, I do not really understand you. What do you mean by that? How can you compare statistics

to a bikini?" He said, "Mr. Seeraj, when you are looking at these statistics they reveal the obvious and conceal the essential". That was how he equated it. When I looked at these numbers that quote came to my mind ready.

The other day I was taking my children home from lessons and I pointed out to a batch mate of my daughter, on the road near to Camp Ayangana, one of these new cars that came with the three wheels. My daughter's friend Angelica, and I would not say her last name because I think her father is working with the Government and I would not want the Government to knock the man off just because his daughter is classmates with my daughter, when I pointed out this three wheel car to the children sitting in my car, Angelica said, "Mr. Seeraj that is so wrong, three wheels and look at all these four wheels". The budget presentation appears to be a three wheel car in a four wheel lane because of the politics in it and I would not commend it. Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Holder]: Mr. Speaker, as I rise to make my contribution to the debate on Budget 2015, under the theme: *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*, we are already seeing a fresh start under which our people stand to benefit. For this, I join with the rest of my Colleagues in congratulating the Hon. Minister of Finance for a budget well received.

The 2015 Budget Estimates provide another solid platform to further Guyana's economic and social development and sets a stage for growth in the country's economy, despite Guyana only recording a 3.8 economic growth in 2014. The 2015 Budget Estimates are presented at a time when we have clear choices in front of us. The truth is that our mandate is to protect and promote the interest of our people and our county and to promote and accelerate national development, not sometimes, but every time.

I have no quarrels with those who think that we could have done better because indeed, we intend to do better. However, let me point out clearly that this Government will not stop until the lives of our people are safe guarded and protected. We will not overcome those challenges facing us until we confront and overcome the challenge of togetherness itself. It is the prior challenge.

To propel the sector forward, we will be promoting the green economy, from an agricultural stand point. We will be investing in a green economy that has the potential to enhance food

security, reduce poverty, improve nutrition and health, and create rural jobs, while reducing pressure on the environment, including greenhouse gasses (GHG).

Farming practices and technologies that are instrumental in greening agriculture, include restoring and enhancing soil fertility, crop rotations, improving water use efficiency, reducing chemical, pesticide and herbicide use and reducing food spoilage and lost by expanding the post-harvest storage and processing facilities.

At the National Agriculture Research and Extension Institute (NAREI) a number of initiatives are being pursued. In this regard, crop rotation is being promoted as a management tool, especially with the use of leguminous crops – bora, red pea, *et cetera*, to enhance soil nutrition, especially nitrogen. The use of inocula in bean production reduces and illuminates the use of nitrogenous fertilisers. The use of vermicompost is also being promoted for on-farm use.

3.07 p.m.

Year-round production of fruits and vegetables is being promoted through the use of shaded cultivation, in combination with drip irrigation systems which improve water-use efficiency. Mulching is also used to reduce weed populations in lieu of herbicides.

The promotion of integrated pest-management practices is also an integral part of the work programme, where pesticides will be used as a last resort. Successful interventions include the use of pheromones to control the sweet potato weevil and lures for the control of diamond back moth in cabbages and traps for fruit flies.

The use of solar dryers is also on the agenda for the drying of peppers, spices and other condiments. This technology is also being employed for the drying of fish.

Major emphasis will also be placed on hinterland agricultural development — our new frontier.

The rice industry is at present the most important agricultural industry in Guyana. Indeed, it is now ahead of sugar, in terms of foreign exchange earnings. Rice is the largest user of agricultural lands, over 90,000 hectares being currently double cropped, and absorbs and influences more of the working population than any other industry in Guyana.

The industry supports at least 10% of Guyana's population directly, and many more indirectly. It is the major source of income and employment in rural areas. In addition, the industry contributes approximately 61% of agricultural GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and 21.3% of export earnings. On top of all this, it is the main staple of the population, with per capita consumption estimated at being around 50 kg.

More than 40,000 people directly depend on the rice industry for their livelihoods. In terms of food security, rice has helped to secure Guyana's status as a food-secured country. Over the years, rice has excelled in its production, moving from 298,000 metric tonnes in 2007 to 635,000 metric tonnes in 2014. This represents a 113% increase in production. We intend to further accelerate production and productivity with an emphasis on reducing cost of production and we intend to further accelerate production and productivity with an emphasis on reducing the cost of production.

The industry has some major challenges that this Government needs to address: Drying and storage; marketing- which plays a key role in the survival of the industry; compliance by millers; improving varieties to enhance productivity; good agricultural practices; energy efficient management at rice mills; and value-added production.

We must also look at investments. Indeed, when we talk about development, the real story of development remains investment in our own people; people who live and work in this beautiful country. As such, the implementation of a rice marketing plan, improving productivity, improving operational efficiency in rice mills and the development of value-added products for which markets exist, would be pursued. Despite these challenges the industry produced a record 360, 000 metric tonnes in the spring crop of 2015, whilst 336,000 metric tonnes were exported. We would continue to explore markets for our rice.

The Sugar Sector - we can all attest to the state of the sugar industry. It is not the first time that sugar is in distress. But, GuySuCo will recover and 2015 will mark a turning point in the performance of GuySuCo. We have made major changes in management and have also identified the members of the new Board of Directors, which took control from 1st July, 2015.

It is not an understatement to say that the Skeldon Estate has not function to expectations. However, we are of the view that, with the completion of the work of the

Commission of Inquiry, recommendations made will enable us to address some of the pressing issues affecting the industry. We will continue to build the sugar industry to continue its role as a lead industry in our country and we will work with the sugar workers to ensure that their industry continues to provide employment and economic and social gains for our people and our country.

The perilous state of the sugar industry must not be underestimated. It is not business as usual and a major restructuring of the industry is an essential prerequisite for its survival. We await the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry. The Guyana Sugar Corporation anticipates the production of 146,000 tonnes for the current crop which would take production for the year to just over 227,000 tonnes. Despite some setbacks, occasioned by inclement weather, the Corporation is focusing all its efforts to achieve this target.

All estates have commenced operation and the initial yields have been encouraging. Worker turnout has been improving and this trend, if maintained, augurs well for the remainder of the crop. Major challenges remain at the Skeldon and the East Demerara Estates where there is the greatest concentration on mechanisation.

The recently held National Cane Farmers' Conference highlighted the problems with marketing our sugar, as well as the quality of canes delivered to the sugar factories. The need for a review of the National Cane Farming Committee Act (1965) was evident and steps will be initiated soon to commence this process. Also arising from the conference, was the need for a closer working relationship between the cane farmers and the estates to more thoroughly deal with issues which confront farmers. Work is proceeding in all these areas.

A new Board of Directors for GuySuCo has been constituted, which includes representation from both the cane farmers and the sugar union. However, Mr. Speaker, I regret to inform you of the Opposition's decision not to have a representative on the Board.

I will not stand here and paint a picture that we have it all under control because the industry has a rough and rugged road ahead, and its future shape would not be known until later in the year. It is incumbent upon all stakeholders; however, to seriously support the efforts to keep the industry alive and it can only be kept alive if it becomes sustainably viable. Notwithstanding, the Government will be investing over \$12 billion in the industry in 2015, but agriculture is more than sugar and rice

We are a food secured country. We produce much of the food we need. However, Guyana needs to organise its non-traditional sectors to perform similar to that of the rice industry. We have always spoken about the reestablishment of an Agricultural and Industrial Development Bank. This is something that we are seriously considering.

The changing dynamics of a globalised economy, shrinking natural resources and ever changing climate weather, demand for greater agriculture production and intensification, are factors for the future growth of the sector. That is why research is such an important area, as well as technology and innovation. Therefore, over the next five years, we will place greater attention on the intensive production of high valued agricultural commodities. Diversification towards these high value commodities will result in higher incomes. Attention will be given to post-harvest handling and agro-processing and value-added technologies.

Further, we will advance the ongoing agriculture diversification programme with the full implementation of the Food and Nutrition Security Strategy, provide much needed added support to small farmers, promote large-scale investments in agriculture, expand the production of targeted crops and livestock, and improve extension services, marine regulations, and incentives for value-added agriculture.

Cost effectiveness in production and post-harvest management with the latest adaptable technology is necessary. Proper storage, packaging, handling and transportation must be effective for the agricultural thrust to be realised. Agro-processing facilities for agronomic produce will be located in the proximity of points of production to promote off-farm income. Agricultural cooperatives must play a critical role, if this is to be realised.

Technology is one of the main drivers of improving competitiveness. Technological advancement of the sector will be crucial in improving soil mapping methods, the means of attracting investors to inland areas and the means of developing regions away from the coastland. We will work to develop our savannahs. We will establish successful models in both the intermediate and Rupununi savannahs that investors/farmers should adopt. The production of corn and soya beans in the savannahs areas will be intensified. Guyana currently imports 60,000 tonnes of corn and 30,000 tonnes of soya bean meal, as such, these commodities will be utilised as sources of the animal feed.

The Ministry of Agriculture will not approach diversification narrowly. We will be developing the non-sugar/non-rice agriculture in a commodity value chain approach.

Additionally, we will work towards:

- The development of a coconut sector roadmap to improve the contribution of the coconut industry to incomes, livelihoods, rural development and the economic development.
- The expansion of the cultivation of fruits and vegetables and roots and tubers. Targeted crops will include pepper, cassava, sweet potato, plantains, pineapples, avocado, soursop, citrus, cherries & passion fruit to satisfy the local demand and for processing and evidentially export.
- Supporting the development of the agro-processing industry in Guyana. The production of juices, concentrates, purees, dehydrated products, chips and vegetable mixes will all be promoted. Through the New Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC), agro-processors and prospective agro-processors will be encouraged to develop new, innovative and diversified products.
- Pursuing the development of a spices industry in Guyana. Currently, Guyana imports in excess of US\$2 million on commodities such as turmeric and black pepper. The aim is to become self-sufficient initially for these commodities. Additionally, emphasis will be placed on commodities such as cilantro, beet, parsley, *et cetera*, to satisfy local demand.
- The reduction in the importation of specialty crops such as sweet peppers, cauliflower, broccoli, sweet corn and carrots is also on the cards. Local production would enhance the livelihoods of farmers.
- There being the production of disease free planting material. Targeted crops include plantains and pineapples.
- The protection of Guyana's agricultural resources from exotic pest introductions and eradication of quarantine pests - carambola fruit fly, red palm mite & papaya and pink mealy bugs.
- There being the establishment of a farmers' database to quantify acreages and crops under cultivation in order to obtain reliable information for local consumption and quantities available for export and value addition.

- The compilation of crop production statistics on, a quarterly and annual basis to determine levels and trends of production this will also be instituted.

In terms of marketing, the New Guyana Marketing Corporation is the agency of the Ministry of Agriculture that provides marketing services to stakeholders in the non-traditional agricultural sector. However, much focus has been on fresh fruits & vegetables and processed agricultural products. The marketing of marine fish and aquaculture will also be incorporated, whilst the Guyana Livestock Development Authority will assume a more proactive approach in the marketing of livestock commodities.

Through the New GMC, the Guyana Shop will be expanded nationally, regionally and internationally. In expanding the Guyana shop, private-public partnerships will be fostered at all levels. This is where collaborations will be done between the Guyana Marketing Corporation and owners of retail and wholesale outlets, to have local products shelved and promoted. By availing local products nationally, regionally and internationally, for example, in Toronto, London, New York and Miami, consumers will have easy access to Guyanese products.

In addition, market research will be conducted regionally and internationally to determine the market opportunities and requirements for local commodities. Improved business ethics will be advocated by encouraging contractual arrangements between buyers and sellers. In order to increase exports among small investors, bulk shipments will be promoted and coordinated. The facilitation and lobbying with air and sea freight service providers to provide adequate cargo space at competitive rates, will be aggressively pursued.

With regards to drainage and irrigation, Guyana is the land of many waters and water is a main resource in agriculture.

3.22 p.m.

At the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA) and the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary Agricultural Development Authority (MMA/ADA), we attach great importance to water planning, development and management. As part of the work plan, they carry out dredging in communities, rehabilitated and constructed drainage and irrigation infrastructure in Regions 2, 3, 4, 6 and 10 in the case of NDIA and in Region 5 in the case of MMA.

However, over the next five years, the mandate of the NDIA will be expanded to investigate and initiate the harnessing of irrigation water in the South-West Rupununi Savannahs as well as the management of water resources in the Intermediate Savannahs.

Guyana Livestock Development Authority (GLDA)

Guyana is self-sufficient in poultry meat and eggs, pork, beef and mutton. In fact, the industry's contribution in the form of import substitution is significant because of our self-sufficiency in the aforementioned commodities.

However, the performance of GLDA has been mixed since its establishment a few years ago. It is necessary for any organisation, at its inception, to have a reasonable idea of the resources available for its development to enable it to plan, project, and establish development coefficients and time frames thereto appertaining. However, the GLDA has yet to establish such a database, and there has been a drastic depletion of our cattle population, due to the excessive slaughtering of female animals and rustling. For Guyana to remain food secure, there is an urgent need to safeguard our female populations to allow for multiplication to take place. Because of this fact, we plan to buy a quantity of females locally and to import improved genetics. A census of our livestock resources to permit proper planning in this sector will be a matter of urgency under this Administration.

The GLDA will, therefore, focus on rebuilding the national herds of cattle, pigs and small ruminants. Work will continue on the development of duck egg hatchery infrastructure, hatchery building, incubator, hatcher and distribution of improved breeds of ducklings; provision of veterinary services at our recently completed Veterinary Services Laboratory; an artificial insemination service for cattle; and improved genetics of cattle, sheep, goat, pigs and ducks.

Fisheries

With respect to fisheries, we will purchase global positioning systems which will aid in the issuing of licences for fish pens and zoning of fishing areas. This will reduce the conflicts among fisherfolk and other users of the resources. The department will also be able to have a database of all fish pens, their locations and numbers on an electronic map.

The addition of inputs for processing plants in the duty free exemptions is very much welcome. This reduction in import duty and taxes on the essential inputs for the seafood processing industry will enhance the competitiveness of the industry, which is already facing many challenges. Additionally, the industry, as a whole, will benefit as it acquires the inputs at a reduced cost. Additionally, this exemption will boost aquaculture development as the importation of feed was taxed, and feed is approximately 70% of cost of production in the aquaculture sector.

Chemicals Management in Guyana and Beyond

The Pesticides and Toxic Chemicals Control Board, since its establishment in 2000, has undertaken a number of initiatives in keeping with the Pesticides and Toxic Chemicals Control Act 2000 and its associated Regulations 2004 towards the sound management of chemicals in Guyana in a life cycle approach. The Board has a comprehensive registration system which allows for the management of all pesticides and toxic chemicals imported for use in Guyana. This system also aids in the transboundary movement of chemicals through an inter-agency approach to chemicals management with the Customs and Trade Administration.

Guyana, as a party to two key multilateral environmental agreements, the Rotterdam and the Stockholm Conventions, has banned all chemicals listed under these Conventions. These chemicals are considered persistent and highly hazardous to human health and the environment. All chemicals that are imported for use in Guyana are then distributed through a monitored network of licensed vendors countrywide. In 2014, these vendors were trained, through the Board's education programme, so as to ensure that they possess the relevant knowledge to work with chemicals and are licensed on an annual basis.

In 2014, the Board continued its pesticides awareness programme in Secondary Schools. This programme has allowed for the establishment of Pesticide Awareness Corners in over 40 schools in various regions nationwide. The Board continued its training and awareness programme which targeted pesticide users in all regions countrywide, training them on the safe handling, use, storage and disposal of pesticides through the use of the World Health Organization's information on intentional pesticides poisonings. To date, a total of 14,231 farmers, farmworkers, housewives, youths and pesticide users have benefited from such training, along

with print material and personnel protective equipment (PPE). These training courses continue to date and are aimed at protecting human health and environment from the unintentional risks associated with pesticides use. They also encourage the development of proper practices by pesticide users.

To encourage proper storage practices among pesticide users, the Board launched an initiative which saw the distribution of 175 pesticides storage cabinets to pesticide users countrywide. In 2015, at the Regional Pesticides Board Meeting, Guyana was recognised as the leader in chemicals management within the Caribbean. This is a significant achievement mainly because of support from Government and the allocation of financial resources towards protecting human health and the environment and ensuring sound chemicals management. The Board is, therefore, developing a comprehensive pesticides manual which will be used in conjunction with importers and distributors to educate this very important group.

Guyana, currently one of only three countries with an effective certification programme for pest control operators, is now certifying these pesticide use professionals at the basic and intermediate proficiency levels. The Board will be continuing its public awareness initiatives to enlighten the general public on the benefits and risks associated with pesticide use. Training, annually, educates approximately 1,500 farmers and farmworkers, 150 pesticide vendors, 100 pest control officers, 100 customs officers and stakeholders from the pesticides input industry and the Guyana Police Force.

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

Mr. Holder: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will, therefore, need to truncate my speech. The Hydrometeorological Service will continue to provide meteorological information to the various airline operators and pilots, while promoting greater public understanding of local weather, climate and water resources. The Service will continue to maintain and strengthen the database management system in both meteorology and hydrology while, at the same time, fulfilling its mandate under the Water and Sewerage Act of 2002.

Presently, the country has only three qualified weather forecasters. In the coming months, Government will be taking steps to send at least five more persons for training in meteorology and hydrology to strengthen our forecasting and early warning capabilities.

In summary, the challenges of climate change impacts heavily on the nation's plans for the development of our agricultural sector. Bearing in mind our very recent experience of two major floods within a period of one month due to rainfall way beyond our designed drainage capacity, it is painfully and blatantly apparent that there is a need to rapidly commence shifting the nation's major economic activities away from our rather congested coastal strip, approximately 250 miles long and 30 miles in width, which accommodates more than 80% of our population.

While Guyana's agriculture is primarily concentrated on the coast, the potential for agricultural development in the hinterland regions is known. The Government of Guyana's 2015 Manifesto has indicated development of the hinterland as a priority, with implementation of policies for development of the Intermediate Savannahs as well as the Rupununi Savannahs. The Intermediate Savannahs have long been considered as the next frontier for agricultural development and several studies, conducted by a number of competent agricultural and related professionals, have indicated the vast untapped potential within the region, with corresponding challenges.

Over the next five years, the Government intends to establish or re-establish agricultural stations in each of the main eco-zones of Guyana - the Intermediate Savannahs, the Rupununi Savannahs, the North West District and in the Pakaraimas – with a view to demonstrating the agricultural potential of these areas.

The Government plans to emphasise crop diversification in its agricultural development plans. The commodities to be given prominence would be coconut, cassava, plantain, pineapple, pepper, corn and soybean. Specifically, there will be more organisation of its non-sugar, non-rice agriculture to formalise the commodity value chain in a similar manner to that of the rice industry model.

A complete soil mapping of the entire country, using satellite technology, will also be attempted within the next five years to provide both local and international investors in the sector with the required information regarding any chosen location's agricultural potential. The increased emphasis on large-scale private investment in farming in the Intermediate Savannahs and the Rupununi, along the lines of the Santa Fe model, will continue. This will increase exports to Brazil and CARICOM and help reduce the import of feed materials for the livestock industry.

With the implementation of these initiatives we would be pursuing, in 2015 and over the next five years, I have no doubt that the agricultural sector would continue to propel the Guyana economy to ensure that all stakeholders enjoy a good life.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I commend this Budget to this House for its approval. [*Applause*]

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members, I rise to add my voice to the Budget debate. Before doing so, Sir, allow me to extend my congratulations to you, as Speaker of this House. I trust that, through your leadership and guidance, we will see the strengthening of parliamentary democracy in Guyana.

Agriculture is one of the pillars of our economy and we have just heard from the Minister of Agriculture. I have had the opportunity to peruse a document that was produced by the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, *A National Strategy for Agriculture in Guyana 2013-2020*. According to this document, on page 11:

- “Today agriculture contributes almost 20% of our economy.
- Agriculture today also accounts for more than 33% of employment in our country.
- Almost 40% of Guyana’s export earnings come from agriculture.”

As we have heard from the Minister, a major part of those earnings come from sugar and rice, two pillars in agriculture.

Perhaps, with the exception of the first peoples of our country, most of our ancestors were brought here because of sugar, coffee or cotton. The records will show that, as early as the 14th May, 1637, the Dutch West India Company was exporting sap sugar from the Essequibo, which means that we were exporting sugar for at least 378 years and, from then to now, we have had our ups and downs in the sugar industry.

3.37 p.m.

We have emerged, from every challenge, stronger than before. I am confident that the issues confronting the industry today can be surmounted, but, to do so, we must work together.

The Minister of Finance said, on page 9 of his *Budget Speech*:

“The implications of this industry remaining an uncompetitive producer are frightening.”

Indeed, thousands of workers are afraid. On the estates, there are a lot of murmurs and rumours; people are uncertain about the Government’s policy and what the future holds for the industry. They know that a sugar commission was established. The workers and the stakeholders in this industry would like to be consulted. They are hopeful. They do not want to hear the bitter news of closure or privatisation; rather, they want the better news of sticking with a plan to turn around the sugar industry.

The Hon. Komal Chand has outlined a number of measures for the sugar industry. These are not just a wish list; it is a set of pragmatic measures to return the industry to profitability. I will urge that they be taken very seriously.

A few of us were born and raised on sugar estates. We understand what it is to be a sugar worker’s child. We understand what it is and the hardships that people on the sugar estates would have to go through. If the sugar workers were to lose their jobs, the social and economic dislocation that would happen in this country would be catastrophic.

There are some things worth fighting for. There are some sacrifices that we have to make and one of those sacrifices is that we must all work to save the sugar industry. Our commitment to protecting the industry must be absolute, on both sides of this House; let us send a clear and unambiguous statement that we will protect this sugar industry.

I now turn to an area which I am covering and that is health. We all would agree that a healthy population is a tremendous asset to our nation’s development. Over the years, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government has worked consistently to improve the well-being of our people. The latest strategy, Health Vision 2020, outlines the interventions that are necessary for a healthy nation. We note that APNU/AFC seems to have abandoned the vagueness of its Manifesto and has adopted Health Vision 2020.

Our list of accomplishments in the health sector are many, yet, despite our achievements in health, there are some who suffer from “do not acknowledge good or just attribute bad syndrome,” a form, I would say, of selective amnesia. They behave as if the PNC did not have a

past and that is something, perhaps, that we need to remind them of. So, to treat this condition of selective amnesia, I would like to prescribe a tablespoon of history.

In 1992, the World Bank issued a Report, *Guyana - from economic recovery to sustained growth* stated that, in 1991, we spent 1.9% of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on health. What did 1.9% of our GDP buy for us? With this expenditure, in this same Report, it is stated:

“Hospitals operate with most equipment not working, with no drugs to dispense, insufficient budgets for food, and the inability to carry out simple diagnostic tests, such as X-rays or blood tests.”

At the time, our public health system consisted of 115 health posts, 47 health centres, 16 district hospitals, four regional hospitals and a national referral hospital here, in Georgetown. There were also some specialised hospitals in geriatrics, psychiatry and leprosy, but, every one of these health facilities were in a state of disrepair.

Today, we are proud that the public health system now consists of 212 health posts, 127 health centres, 22 district hospitals, four diagnostic centres, five regional hospitals and a fully refurbished national referral hospital in Georgetown. And, had it not been for our myopia in this House and especially with Members who are sitting now on the Government’s side, we would have had a speciality hospital in this country. In short, we now have a sector that we have changed from 183 poorly maintained health institutions, under the PNC, to 373 better equipped facilities in this country, and we are proud of it.

Let us talk a little bit about the health manpower at the time. On page 88 of the said Report from the World Bank:

“Health Manpower. Manpower shortages are acute throughout the sector, and the MOH report for 1990 shows that close to 40% of the staff positions are vacant. Clearly, these shortages profoundly affect the quality of health care offered.”

In 2014, according to Minister Jordan’s Budget, in appendix 1, when we look at that table, we can see 13.3 physicians per 10,000 population. What does that mean? It is the first time, in the history of this country, that we have so many doctors operating in the public health system. In

the same appendix, there is also 30.5 nurses per 10,000 population. This, too, is at an all-time high. I note that in the APNU/AFC Manifesto, the Government would like to meet international standards. Well, I have some news for you. According to the World Health Organization, for health personnel in a health system, you must have a minimum of 25 health workers per 10,000 population. What is it now in Guyana? We, the people who were maintaining this health system, have, right now in Guyana, 46 workers per 10,000 population. That is progress.

We can talk about filariasis. When, in the 1990s, filariasis, in this country, was at an all-time high...maybe people do not know what filariasis is. It is commonly referred to as “big foot”. What did we do? In the 1990s, you could have seen a lot of people walking around with big foot, but we have changed that. [Mr. Greenidge: Which 1990s are you talking about?] The early 1990s when you were the Minister of Finance, when you did not provide enough money for the health sector. That was what it resulted in; it resulted in people’s health deteriorating, and you had a lot of people walking around with “big foot”.

Of the people who were tested, 16% of them were showing that they had filariasis. In 2007, we, in the PPP/C Government, ran a campaign using diethylcarbamazine (DEC) salt and, because of that, you would have seen a massive reduction of filariasis in this country. In fact, now, when you look at the annual reports of health, filariasis is something that does not show up. It is a very minor problem, and that is because we have dealt with the problem.

We can also talk about anaemia in pregnancy. Many of the women, when they were attending the health centres, were diagnosed with mild or moderate anaemia. And one of the things that we were able to do was work with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and we had a \$6 million basic nutrition programme in this country. What was it that we addressed? We were able to address this problem of anaemia in pregnancy. And what happened? We were able to reduce it, drastically. Before that, there were a lot of mothers having these problems when they went to the health centres. And what did that lead to? It led to babies having low birth rate and other complications. We have been able to reduce this, significantly.

We also, through this programme, have worked to reduce malnutrition. Today, you can go on the wards in the Georgetown Public Hospital or any hospital, for that matter, and you would see very little evidence of malnutrition present.

3.52 p.m.

We cannot say the same thing about what happened in the 90s. If one goes back to the report, one would see how many children were malnourished during that period.

This programme was so significant, and not only for Guyana. The Under Secretary of the *Treasury* for International Affairs, Mr. Timothy Geithner, had a special award ceremony for the heads of various banking institutions – the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and others. The IDB received an award from the Department of Treasury of the United States. Why did it get that award? It got it for the Basic Nutrition Program (BNP) in Guyana because of its impact on the people here.

We can also talk about vaccination. In the 90s, what was happening? There were children being immunised with about six vaccines. Now, there are more than 16 vaccines being given. That is progress. That is what is helping to reduce infant mortality in our country.

I am very happy that the Hon. Minister of Public Health has done a turnaround. I remember, when he sat on the Opposition benches, one of the things he said, when he was speaking, was that he seemed to be opposed to the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine. We could go back to the record of about two or three years ago when he made that speech. Just about two weeks ago, I saw him with the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) Representative in Guyana and he was talking about HPV and how the Government is going to expand the programme. I am happy that he came around because this is essential to prevent cervical cancer in Guyana.

There are many things that we can talk about in this sector. These achievements did not happen because of wishful thinking. We can look at Appendix 1 of the Minister of Finance's Budget and we would see how the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government had consistently increased the allocations for health. Using his numbers, the PPP/C Government spent 6.8% of the budget on health in 2010 and by 2014, we were spending 9.9%.

The Minister of Finance also proclaimed on page 38 of the Budget Speech that his Government would invest significantly in the health of our people to realise a successful implementation of Health Vision 2020. I wonder how significant this investment is, when as a percentage of the

budget, it moved from 9.9% to 10.5%, a mere 0.5%. I guess that this is the difference between rhetoric and reality. Then, again, the Minister of Finance stated, on the same page:

“Emphasis will be placed on reducing health inequalities, expanding of primary health care, arresting non-communicable diseases (NCDs), eliminating maternal and infant mortality and providing universal coverage.”

These are beautiful words, but without funding, they are nothing more than politically correct platitudes. Is it not ironic that the budget in which the Minister of Finance speaks of expanding primary health, he has contracted the budget for the primary health care programme by more than \$81 million, as compared to 2014? It is also instructive and, perhaps, reminiscent of a movie I saw many years ago called, *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*.

This is because when one looks at the capital budget for health for the regions, it has shrunk from \$620 million, in 2014, to \$552 million. Let us examine it. Of the 10 regions, seven of them got a decrease in their budget. The three remaining regions that showed increases in their capital budgets were Region 1, which got \$26 million, and that is good - it is more than it got in 2014; Region 8 got an increase of \$163 - it is more than it got in 2014; and then Region 6 got an increase of \$65 more than it got in 2014.

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

Dr. Anthony: So much for the rhetoric of expanding primary healthcare. The Minister of Finance also talks about arresting non-communicable diseases and I fully agree with him. If criminals cannot be arrested, at least, let chronic non-communicable diseases be arrested.

Indeed, one of Guyana’s biggest challenges is the burden of chronic non-communicable diseases. Of the top five causes of death, four of the chronic non-communicable diseases are there: coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes, HIV/AIDS and hypertension take the top five. The other five are: suicide, road and traffic accidents, influenza and pneumonia, liver disease, and violence. Many of these deaths are preventable.

The Hon. Member Dr. Cummings, in her presentation, spoke about mental health and, in particular, about the plans for suicide and this is commendable. But regarding the mortality

profile that I have outlined, more emphasis needs to be placed on the top four chronic non-communicable diseases. The mortality profile is the proverbial tip of the iceberg.

When one looks at the morbidity profile, one sees how many thousands of persons are afflicted. What is the Budget's prescription? It is the restructuring of the Presidential Commission on Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases. This will not arrest the problem of chronic non-communicable disease in Guyana. We need tangible actions to prevent people from getting sick and to make sick people better. To this end, I want to recommend to the Hon. Minister of Health that each diabetic patient be given a glucometer and a year supply of testing strips. For those hypertensive patients, I would recommend that he give them a blood pressure apparatus and that they are taught how to use these two instruments because these simple interventions can lead to better clinical management of these diseases.

Measures to reduce road accidents and violence in our society must also be looked at. A substantial number of these deaths can be attributed to alcohol. I crave the attention of the Hon. Minister of Public Security. The WHO statistics have shown that Guyanese have one of the higher rates of alcohol injection per capita. Guyanese are drinking 7.3 litres of pure alcohol per capita for persons 15 years and above. This is quite unacceptable because the collateral damage that it does to a person's health and the societal costs are extraordinary. You need, Mr. Minister, to develop programmes to reduce this. We need preventative programmes. We need treatment programmes for those suffering from this addiction. I do not think that a 2.00 a.m. curfew is going to help us with this problem. We need to get out there and educate people.

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

Dr. Anthony: However, I am not optimistic that much would be accomplished. This is why: the allocation for Regional and Clinical Services has shrunk from \$5.9 billion, 2014, to \$4.1 billion; the allocation for Disease Control has shrunk from \$1 billion to \$337 million; the allocation for Rehabilitation Services has shrunk from \$256 million to \$206 million; the allocation for Standards and Technical Services has been reduced from \$524 million to \$408 million; the allocation for Health Sciences Education has reduced from \$484 million to \$317 million.

I am sorry for the Minister of Public Health because I do not know what he is going to do with this Budget. It is a mismatch between the rhetoric that is in the Budget and the moneys the Government has been allocated.

The Minister of Finance spoke about eliminating, not reducing, maternal and infant mortality. It is a lofty idea but no country in the world has been able to accomplish that. I am hopeful that he would be able to do it because he has it in the budget.

4.07 p.m.

What is the reality? Just two days ago, Ms. Carol Bollers died, on 10th June, 2015, and when we checked over the last three months there were three maternal deaths. It is not something that we are happy about. This is something we all have to work to reduce, because to do that we have to put more money in the maternal unit. While I am happy that we are going to finish off the maternal ward at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, that alone is not going to be sufficient to reduce maternal mortality in this country. We have to do a sector wide investment to make sure that we can deal with this problem.

One of the things I would like to touch on, because it is very troubling to me, is an attitude I have seen in this Eleventh Parliament. Yesterday, what did we witness? We saw a motion being presented, and what happened? We have reduced the time when we are able to ask questions on the Estimates of Expenditure from a maximum of seven days to three days. Is this good for democracy? When the Hon. Members on that side were on the campaign trail, what did they go to the people and say? They were talking about national unity and what they can do and will do to foster and create an enabling environment for national unity. As soon as they have the opportunity to be in Government they have subverted and undermined the principles on which we can build this unity.

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

Dr. Anthony: Look at what has happened. The Forty-Ninth Independence celebration of our country was hijacked with party colours. All of a sudden a state event became a green and yellow event. Is this the way we will build national unity in this country? Look at what they have done to the state boards.

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

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Speaker, in that one minute I want to say this: When the Hon. Minister of State Mr. Joseph Harmon spoke, he spoke about the Red House. It is good that he said it, but I also want to say something. We did not come to the National Assembly and say that the Burnham family had got 22 acres of prime leased land. Later on, the now Leader of the Opposition, when he was President, gave them five acres of freehold. We can disparage our Presidents...

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

Hon. Members, this appears to be a good time to take the suspension. We will meet again in one hour. It will be ten minutes after 5 o'clock.

Sitting suspended at 4.10 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 5.39 p.m.

Minister of Governance [Mr. Trotman]: I rise to make my contribution to this the first budget of the Eleventh Parliament. I do so with a great sense of pride and privilege, privilege that I have been asked to serve, again, and pride that I have been asked to do so with this fine composition of men and women arrayed in Government.

Having sat in what I consider to be the most privileged seat in the House, next to the Minister of Finance, I say I have found this budget to be outstanding, full of hope and promise, and one which I have no hesitation, whatsoever, not only in defending but in prosecuting to the hilt.

Before going into a few areas, over which I have some responsibility, permit me please to respond to a few matters raised by Hon. Member Anthony about one hour ago. I am disappointed. I have known Hon Member Dr. Anthony for a number of years. I have been a Member of this House, I realised this afternoon, for 18 years, but that does not compare to the time spent by Hon. Member Anna Ally, longest serving Member; Ms. Teixeira, Hon. Prime Minister and Mr. Ramjattan. Less than a dozen of us have had more than a decade here – and Mrs. Sukhai my apologies, I recognise her. This is not the Hon. Member Dr. Anthony that I know. He spent 75% of his time in 1970s, 1980s and 1990s and the other 25% giving

prescriptions to this Government, forgetting or believing that the people are not aware that he was once the Minister of Health himself. [Ms. Teixeira: He was never the Minister of Health.] Very well, but he was a medical doctor I meant to say, very close to the health sector, and that all those prescriptions he gave this afternoon he should have given to his predecessor. Also, I find it amazing that a person, whom I know to be capable of much better, would stand here and speak about morbidity rates as if it is this Government that has caused deaths at the hospital, as if it is this Government that has given the hospital the reputation it had prior to 11th May, 2015. I know he is capable of better and I know he will do better on another occasion.

As I move, I come to the question of muzzling, which Ms. Teixeira seems to be very fond of, forgetting that I have been in this House for 18 years, forgetting that I once served as Speaker of this National Assembly, and remembering, as I do now, that for all the years that I was here, except for three when I sat in the south, we also had the Estimates of Expenditure considered in three days. It is not true to say that anyone is being muzzled. The Opposition in the majority in the Tenth Parliament had to move a motion, in the name of the Hon. Member Greenidge and seconded by the Hon. Member Ramjattan, to force the Government to move beyond the three days. That is the history and that is record that must be spoken in this House.

Mr. Speaker, I present to you the Minutes of the report of the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply of 5th March, 2008, quite amazing. It states first schedule, first day; it states second day then it states third day. There is no fourth, fifth, sixth or seventh day in these Estimates of Expenditure. For 20 years, save and except the years 2011 through to 2014, the Opposition had three days only to consider the Estimates of Expenditure. Never before until such time that a majority was used to change, as I said, a motion in the name of Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge did it go to six or seven days. [Interruption from Members of the Opposition] You may say whatever you want. I stand here and you sit there in the Opposition.

Moving on, we have also heard for the last five days about cleansings, removals and flushing, but there is no government in the world, be it Moscow or Washington, London or New Delhi, Kingston or Bridgetown, and even Georgetown, that does not move people when it takes over. It is a must. If any Member of this House, or the public, wishes he or she may peruse past editions of *The Guyana Review*. *The Guyana Review* in the 1980s used to have a section at the back of the

latest list of persons who were flushed out and thrown out. That was well known. We reject this notion that to touch anyone is to cleanse or to flush. It is a standard feature in any change, in any capital, in the worst or in the best of them.

I believe it is my duty to speak. I heard reference made to the list of national awardees. When this Government came into office there was a pile, about five or six inches high, of people who had been waiting for years and had been rejected. It is only that list that was picked up and put into effect. That list of the persons, who received national awards, was the list that we found and we ensured that they received.

I am still dealing with inaccuracies. There has been a lot of talk - I know my learned friend, the Hon. Dr. Roopnarine, may deal with this some more - about the Because We Care programme. I know I have been chided for making statements about the programme not being targeted. There are benefits to being in Government, and one of them is that we discover records. Here are the minutes of a meeting of Cabinet Sub-Committee on Education held on 7th February, 2015, this year, members were Dr. Roger Luncheon, convenor, Hon. Priya Manickchand, Minister of Education, Ms. Delma Nedd and someone whom I am not familiar with, Mr. Kheed Matbudhu. [Mr. Ali: The man is working right at OP.] I do not know him personally.

5.47p.m.

“3.0. Education Cash Grant. It was envisaged that Because We Care cash grant will not be possible this year of 2015...”, yet we are accused of discontinuing a programme that they admitted would not be possible in this year.

The last is this blame about us copying. Mr. Speaker, you cannot suck cane and blow whistle at the same time. It is either we have copied your good budget or we have created and fashioned a bad budget. Make up your minds, Members. No Government, again, can assume office and simply ignore projects that are on-going. It will lead to a total collapse not of Government but of state. It is not wise. It is foolhardily for us to just assume Government and take everything and just throw it out. That makes absolutely no sense especially when the budget is being presented in August and not January, which is just about four months to go before the year ends. As of next year, our vision will be deepened and developed further.

The privilege and honour is mind to rise in support of this Budget 2015 under the theme, *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*. There are some fundamental truths that we must face. The first is that elections were keenly contested and they are now over. There is a Government and there is an Opposition. Nothing pleases me more to see that our colleagues have joined us in the House, for democracy may stand on its rightful pillars. If I may be permitted, on a personal note, it pleases me to see the Hon. Member Mr. Jagdeo seated as Leader of the Opposition. That is where I believe he ought to be.

Throughout this entire campaign, post campaign and the post elections era, there are two endearing images that remain indelibly etched into my mind. One is the Hon. Member taking up his seat in the Opposition benches and the other is seeing him about 3.00 a.m., one rainy morning, on or about the 13th May, 2015, I believe it was, holding a press conference, but was sweating profusely. I could not have had understood, the rain was pouring, the place was cold, but there was sweat from all over. I would never ever forget that sight.

Moving on with the fundamental truths, one side has to win under our construct and one side has to lose. Unfortunately that is the construct that we have chosen. I personally do not like it but it is a construct that we work under. As I considered what is before us, I remember the words, “MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN”, words brought from the Book of Daniel, Chapter 5, when no one could ascertain what they meant. They were etched by a hand. What those words mean is that God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. You have being weighed on the scales and found wanting. Your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and the Persians. Translated into 2015, your kingdom has been handed over to the APNU/AFC.

As I move into the fundamental truths, the vehicle for delivery of elections needs our help and support, and that vehicle is the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM). I think we are all now satisfied that GECOM needs strengthening and reform. We have been saying it for 23 years but now, all of a sudden, they have seen the light. Thank God Almighty they have seen the light.

I am sure they will join with is in ensuring that we have electoral laws and that GECOM is reformed and strengthened. I believe that we are even happier than they are that an elections petition has been filed. I have sat here and heard words such as *de facto* which, we lawyers

know, means that you do not have legal authority, yet they swear in on a Constitution using holy books and come to say that this is a *de facto* regime. Having been very close to the centre of the campaign, we welcome an election petition because I know that the margin of victory was way beyond the 4, 000 plus votes that we were supposed to have had. We would like the petition to proceed so that the truth and justice may be finally and definitively be served. We accept those results with a heavy hearts but in the meantime we fore-drawn.

However, another fundamental truth is that 202,694 votes won by the PPP/Civic is not an insignificant amount and cannot equate to zero. We are determined to recognise that fact, even though that privilege was not extended to us. We recognised that it has a formidable constituency, notwithstanding the total shut out of the Opposition over the last 23 years.

Guyana and its governance is not the preserve of any one or even of any six political parties. Power and authority belong to the people and we are just the custodians and the stewards of that power. We have heard much about our Fiftieth Anniversary of independence which is next year. Over the last 49 years we can sing, as that illustrious singer once said, “we have looked at life from both sides now.” We have therefore a question to ask of ourselves and to answer: Do we want to continue into our 51st year the same way we have been for the last 50?

Next year we are going to celebrate our jubilee year. The biblical book of Leviticus describes this as a year when...:

“Then shall thou cause the triumph of jubilee to sound. In the Day of Atonement shall you make the trumpet sound throughout all your land and you shall hollow the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof. It shall be a jubilee unto you and you shall return every man unto his possession.”

Next year, beginning from January and culminating of the 26th May, 2016, and under the stewardship of the excellent Dr. Rupert Roopnarine, we intend to sound that trumpet and celebrate our golden jubilee, not on our own, but with the support, involvement and cooperation of the parliamentary Opposition.

We will restore symbols, buildings, brighten and clean, and present a fresh clean and green Guyana to the world. Can we do it?

Hon. Members (Government): Yes. We can.

It is time for a paradigm shift, time for mature and patriotic leadership, time for courageous and decisive leadership. We need a new way, guided by mature and humble leaders, not leadership that spews racist boil or displays arrogance. We need a leadership that is prepared to acknowledge that mistakes have been made, many mistakes, in fact, over the last 49 years. To say overall that in the grand scheme of things, the people of Guyana, both here and overseas, whether they be in Corriverton or Aishalton, Buxton or Kangaruma Village, Cloonbrook or Brooklyn, Richmond Hill or Silver Springs, Maryland, they deserve a better life. Can we do it?

Hon. Members (Government): Yes. We can.

Ours is a coalition of six parties banded together to give the people of Guyana a better life, a good life, an excellent life. The question the people of Guyana asked is whether the PPP/C is prepared to join us and become the seventh party, to frustrate our work or to cooperate so that we can make this country better. The door is opened and the hand is outstretched. We need a paradigm shift. The time is now to rebuild; it is time. It is time for something new. We understand the quality of governance is fundamental to ensuring a good life for all and this is why this budget is rightly entitled - I quote it again because we are proud of its title - "*A fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy.*"

The preamble of our Constitution enjoins to afford a system of governance that promotes consorted effort and a broad based participation in national decision making, in order to develop a viable economy and a harmonious community based on democratic values, social justice, fundamental human rights and the rule of law and to demonstrate our commitment to protect our natural environment and endowment. We intend to be true to the ideals of that preamble. I quote from the United Nations (UN) environmental programme which defines that:

“A green economy is one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities”.

His Excellency the President has committed to the people of Bartica, Essequibo, to have it become a town in 2016. This Government, under his watchful guidance, intends to make it the first green town in this “Green land of Guyana.” The Presidential Adviser on Environment, Rear

Admiral Gary Best, will soon present a report on how this is to be achieved and in due course, when it is practicable to do so, we will share it with the nation.

In keeping with our intent to bring that better life, we believe that charity starts at home. To that extent, we have prepared and are ready to ratify a code of conduct by which we all will be bound on this side of the House. The question is whether on that side they are prepared to be bound by any rules at all. This is our code of conduct which has been finalised, drawing from all the best practices displayed around the world. This is our commitment.

Ms. Teixeira knows that governance includes matters such as the Integrity Commission. I should say that a report on its rehabilitation, to ensure that it is strong and credible, is shortly to be presented by Mr. E. Lance Carberry, who knows of these matters and is a good friend of Ms. Teixeira. She smiles in happy anticipation of that report, I see. That report is due soon and we intend to strengthen the Office of the Ombudsman. In fact, we were pleased that after many years the Hon. Attorney General, at that time, of the Tenth Parliament, brought it back and so we will continue that work by strengthening in.

We have committed, and by we, I mean both sides, to a Public Procurement Commission. It is time. We therefore invite the Opposition to name its nominees because we are ready with our nominees. We invite it, in the national interest, to name its Members to the Public Procurement Commission. I am sure now that the shoes are on the other foot, they will see the virtue of having a Public Procurement Commission, so that there is transparency in competitiveness in our procurement processes.

Apart from that there are the Rights Commissions as they commonly are banded and known, the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC), the Woman and Gender Equality Commission, the Rights of the Child Commission and the Indigenous Peoples' Commission. We will make these stronger. I signalled to my friend and brother to the left that soon we will be moving to make them autonomous and take them out of the bosom of the Ministry of Finance, so that they can come perhaps under the Office of the Parliament to be in charge of their own budgets, to work out their own work programmes, to carry out investigations independently. In the Tenth Parliament we had actually prepared a draft Bill to that effect and so we intend to proceed with that.

In due course, we will be also restoring the Public Service Appellate Tribunal and I know that work is on-going to find suitable, qualified and competent persons to occupy the benches of that tribunal. We have started the process of constitutional reform. I heard my friend Mr. Lumumba lamenting earlier this afternoon about the manner of this process. Mr. Speaker, allow me to say that constitutional reform has not started; constitutional reform cannot in this country take place without the PPP, without the people of Guyana and the civil society organisations. All that has happened was that a committee to advise His Excellency the Prime Minister was conveyed, so that he may say to the Government this is what we propose to do and may we now take this to the people of Guyana and, of course, also to the Opposition.

6.02 p.m.

We will not at all, none of us, attempt to start the process without consultation and involvement, meaningfully with the Opposition.

Restore symbols of state and repair the image of a broken state: As we go around Guyana, Government guest houses and facilities are in a terrible state of disrepair and one gets the sense that state has collapsed. We are going to repair and restore those.

Just to mention, because the menu is very long, we intend, since 1999, to ensure that geographic Members of Parliament on that side of the House and on this side of the House are properly taken care of, both in terms of remuneration, facilities where they have offices in which their constituents may visit them. They will have a stipend to take care of internet, travel, postage and where necessary, either or both at their disposal if they have to make riverine trips or vehicles to move about, so that they may service their constituents. We do not intend at all to exclude anyone.

I turn very quickly to natural resources, but I prefer to use the term, preferred by that of His Excellency, the national patrimony. Whether it be the air that we breathe, the water that we drink, the gold that is mined, the bauxite that is uncovered or the oil which is to flow, it is a part of our national patrimony. Each one of us has the same and equal right to enjoy the benefits thereof.

Just to say, as we have heard before, as we know, the outlook for gold this year has not been fantastic. World market prices have trumpeted from their 2012 high to today, around the US\$1,200 per ounce levels. However, the experts are optimistic that this will not prevail for much longer and within the next six or so months there is likely to be a rebound. Just as gold is underperforming, so is bauxite. The world's demand for bauxite has slowed primarily because China's growth has slowed, and Guyana's output has also slowed commensurately. That is unfortunate, but it is something that the Minister of Social Protection has entered into and I have as well, to the best of our abilities.

I have mentioned oil and gas. There is an oversupply on the world's market of both oil and gas. It is perplexing because with all that is happening around the world, conflicts, disparities in economies, and so forth, traditionally, expectedly, oil and gold are normally or traditionally higher than they are now. It is predicted that the glut would persist into next year despite growing demand for the commodity due to collapse in prices.

In terms of forestry, I would say that we continue to monitor the industry. There is a pervasive sense of inequities. There is a pervasive sense of lawlessness or disregard for the laws and that is something we must address. I, however, wish to support the Hon. Member Mr. Lumumba, that the same rule must apply to the local person as it will to the foreigner. The foreigner should not enjoy more or better concessions or rates than the local logger and the local logger must not enjoy better rates than the foreigner. We are, even as I speak, cutting less than our nationally acceptable rate. We are below our rate but the pervasive sense out there is that we are not regulating it properly. This is something we will be addressing in the months ahead.

On the mining side, it is troubling. Gold prices have plummeted and so people have been relinquishing their claims and concessions. We have also been hearing, as I would have mentioned elsewhere, and often, that there are these attendance social ills. I speak of prostitution, trafficking in persons, drugs, guns, crimes and, in one location, there is a multiplicity of suicides, young girls and children taking their own lives. This is something that we will be addressing in the short to medium term.

We have also asked for the Commissioner of Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC), and the commission, to provide adequate lands for small miners, so that they may have the

ability to work and not be at the mercy of landlords all the time. Similarly, the environmental bond that the miner pays to disturb the land, the pristine forest, is just \$100,000. That is going to change. GGMC has been directed to review and to propose new rate, because when one traverses the land or flies over it one is appalled at what one sees. One hundred thousand dollars, US\$500, cannot restore the degradation. We are going to adjust that and have an aggressive reclamation programme.

I cannot depart from mining, particularly of gold and diamond mining, without mentioning the reason spades of accidents in the mines.

Mr. Speaker: You have ten minutes more, Hon. Member.

Mr. Trotman: I am most grateful for that time. Thank you.

It is most distressing to us even if one life is lost. I have lamented and remarked to colleagues that if ten miners had died in a mine in Peru, in Siberia, in the outback of Canada, or elsewhere, it would have been on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) news or on Cable News Network (CNN). It would have made the news. We lost ten lives in one day and it did not seem to affect our consciousness. We have commissioned a report to enquire why these accidents are repeating themselves so often and what can we do to correct them. I am pleased to say that that report has been submitted to His Excellency the President and, again, after he would have considered it, and Cabinet has considered it, we will be releasing it to the public. It is not to look so much at who did what and why, but to see how we can look ahead to ensure that it does not happen again.

In the time that I have left, I wish only to say that we will be strengthening the different departments that come under the Department of Natural Resources. It includes the Guyana Gold Board. Again, it is no secret that smuggling of gold is rampant and so with the assistance of both local and foreign agencies we will be moving to curb it. Like crime, it can never be brought to zero but with good initiatives we can put a dent in the trade and ensure that the country gets greater revenues. In so far as the Wildlife Division is concerned, we will be bringing to this House, in the latter part of September, a Wildlife Import and Export Bill, which must be passed before a Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Conference, early in 2016. The draft has been recalled by the Wildlife Management

Authority. It felt that it was a weak draft that was presented in the first place. It has asked me to review it and it was reported to me by the Head of that Division yesterday that the consultant has since gone through it and she is now satisfied with the new draft.

In so far as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is concerned, we are moving with the blessings and consent of the Minister of Finance, to both restructure that entity so that it can ensure compliance and enforcement of our environmental laws. Hopefully we will provide a new building for it to be housed in. These are some of the matters that are going to be dealt with next year and somewhat later this year.

The Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission is another place where the cleansing light has to be shown. We have discovered that rates are \$100 per acre annually and yet most people are in default. The Commission has been asked to present a proposal for raising those rates because we must be able to recover more than we are.

The Protected Areas Commission includes the Three Parks Initiative, the National Park Commission and the zoo where I visited this morning. Did I see Mr. Dharamlall? Were you there this morning? I have got a bit old and my eyes are not what they used to be, but I could swear that I saw the Hon. Member Mr. Dharamlall was hugging up a spider monkey. It could have been. I did not want to disturb what appeared to be a very intimate moment. I choose to move on but you are welcomed to the zoo and bring your family on the next occasion.

We will be working on restoring the zoo because we expect thousands of visitors for our Fiftieth Anniversary celebrations. We intend to take over the D'Urban Park and make it a place where the elderly and youth can go and sit. We will be lighting it and making it a proper green space for residents of South Georgetown. The Kaieteur National Park will be getting a new lodge, where people can go and spend the night and that is courtesy of the Government of Germany. We appreciate that.

I come now, hurriedly, to the end and to say this: Inclusive democracy has to be the bedrock upon which the Twenty-first Century Guyana must rest. The World Bank's statistics, as quoted by my learned friend behind, tells us that 89% of our skilled labour and graduates live and work in a developed country. The converse of that tells us that 11% with some skills are trying to hold the country together, take care of health, infrastructure, security and other needs such as

education. It is just not possible for 11% of us to do so, especially if we are fighting each other and another set is preparing to leave. As I have said before, we must have a paradigm shift.

Democracy is not an event; it is a process. These initiatives are going to take time and a require co-operation to be successfully implemented. We have delayed for too long and we have procrastinated, sometimes even being cowardly and unimaginative, in the way we have managed the affairs of state, failing to take the bull by the horns firmly to move our country ahead.

I wish, Mr. Speaker, with your permission, to just wave a piece of old stained paper with notes of a meeting held with His Excellency the President Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo on Friday 10th November, 2006, in which some of us gathered in a room. Some of us would have included Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira, then Head of Presidential Secretariat Dr. Luncheon, Mr. Everall Franklin, now deceased, Mr. Robert Corbin, the then Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan and myself. That meeting was called for the precise purpose to identify ten areas for us to work together in in which I would like to list. We, in fact, came up with 14.

- i. Have formal meetings with Cabinet and Opposition – that is 2006
- ii. Increase the pay for Ministers and Parliamentarians –2006
- iii. Have the early appointments of Commissions and Committees
- iv. Let there be joint representations on overseas delegations to travel

There will be a United Nations Framework Conference on Climate Change in Paris. I am going to go to Cabinet - I say it now - to ask that a Member of the Opposition attends that conference because it is a part of the national patrimony. We are all stewards of that patrimony.

- v. To look at community needs
- vi. Jointly attack HIV/AIDS and health issues
- vii. Take joint action to restore the image of politicians
- viii. Address the issue of the politicization of REO's
- ix. Improve the resource allocations to the Opposition

That is number nine.

- x. Look at constitutional reform
- xi. Strengthen our Integrity Commission
- xii. Establish a Procurement Commission
- xiii. Have local government reform
- xiv. Appoint the Chancellor and Chief Justice substantively.

That is 2006, almost nine years ago.

I come to the end by saying that the decision is ours to make next year. Oil is coming, let us prepare and become adept of what is going to be bequeathed and placed into our hands.

6.17 p.m.

Other countries have a Heritage Savings Fund - Alberta has such a Fund and Norway has a Government Pension Fund Global, a strange name. Some say it is a sovereign wealth fund. But the time has come for us to prepare by salting or putting away a meaningful and substantial percentage of everything earned from gold, diamond, forest, bauxite and oil for future generation.

Proverbs 12:15 tells us, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice”. So I say, let us take the advice of Norway and others. Norway began its Fund in the 1990’s and that Fund has reached, as of Monday of this week, US\$1.1 trillion, just by putting away a percentage of earnings. We are going to take the best advice and avoid the so-called Dutch Disease, which means that after two or three decades we would have nothing to show. We do not want to wake up and hear people speak about the Guyana disease, where like in some countries that have some of the vastest resources and reservoirs of oil a roll of toilet paper is more expensive than a jar of caviar. We do not want to be like such a country.

I end, perhaps on a personal note with your permission, by quoting a verse of the Bible that became a foundation for me when I came under a severe test of faith last year. That verse Mr.

Speaker, I have read many times, but on this one day, it spoke to me. That was when I came under attack. That verse is Romans 12:12 says:

“I will be rejoicing in hope, I will be patient in tribulation and I will be continuing instant in prayer.”

So I say to us all, let us be joyful in the hope of a better Guyana; let us be patient that our tribulations would pass away as they always do, if we remain faithful. I implore us all to continue praying for our nation, for our people and of course, ourselves.

In the end, I quote one of my favourite songs, Diana Ross’ *If we hold on together*. Some words say:

“If we hold onto together I know our dreams will never die. Dreams see us though to forever”.

May God bless us all. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Ms. Manickchand: May it please you Mr. Speaker. Sir, I wish to begin by offering you my warmest congratulations on your election to this Chair. I look forwarding to serving in this House under your guidance. I look forward to enjoying the wisdom and the measured attitude that your Honour is known for in other circles. I look forward too, to not having rash decisions that will be withdrawn under public pressure, vain decisions and sexist decisions. Congratulations Sir.

I also wish to offer my warmest congratulations to Mr. Winston Jordan who presented his first budget in this honourable House. I did not know this Hon. Gentleman and so I was not sure what to expect. I believe that I can say that Mr. Jordan has single-handedly, by himself, done a magnificent job of leading his team, all of his members, in singing the praise of the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) and the policies of the PPP, by outlining them in his Budget document. So Sir, I thank you for acknowledging that there is continuity in any state and we say you are welcome for the thanks you gave to us for leaving you programmes that can take you and your new Government forward.

I wish to also congratulate, its gone silent, I have not heard many people doing it and I hope that now I am doing this they would not get fired, but the budget team that prepared this document, they are here sitting in this House. The Hon. Minister of Finance is ably assisted by a young lady, Sonia Roopnauth, his Director of Budget, and a team who come here and sit silently and support him and by supporting him, support every Guyanese for the goodness that will come out of this Budget, whatever those may be. I wish to thank you sincerely for the work that you have put in. I do recall last year when you were denigrated by no lesser person than the now Hon. Minister of State and told some very nasty things. We on this side will never devalue your work and so we thank you very much.

I would be lying if I did not say that we miss Dr. Ashni Singh. He was eloquent, his content was amazing and his delivery was beyond excellence. Mr. Jordan started and finished the presentation and I congratulate him for that, but Ashni Singh is missed in this honourable House.

I wish I could stand here and say that the people of Guyana have spoken, so that I could offer my congratulations to that side, and that we, over on this side, could have registered that voice and that we would work harder, but we cannot say that. We cannot say that because there was such a foul up at the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) that this country still does not know who should form the Executive Arm of Government and that is a fact. I wish I could stand here, even in the face of what we believe was a rigging of the Elections, in what the majority of Guyana believes is a doubtful result. That could have been cleared by a very simple recount that would have allowed us to proceed in the trust and unity that we wanted to proceed in. I wished I could have said that, but I cannot. Time will change that. I really do want to support the new Government, they are there. However they got there, they are there.

I would like to support this new Government. I would like to see this Government do well because I am living here, my family are living here and I want to enjoy the benefits of a good Guyana, but I am worried. I am worried by some first signs in the very early days of this Government - 26 Ministers, five Vice-Presidents, dozens of Advisors and dozens of Presidential Advisors. It worries me even more that with 26 Ministers, we could not find it, within ourselves, to name some of the prominent women who have held this party together to prominent positions in this Government. Ms. Amna Ally had shadowed the Ministry of Education very effectively for

a number of her parliamentary years and she was passed over. Mrs. Volda Lawrence has done an amazing job with being the shadow Minister of Finance.

Mr. Speaker hits gavel on desk.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, let us try to assist the debate by hearing what the other speaker is saying. Thank you. Please continue.

Ms. Manickchand: Thank you, Sir. Mr. Ramjattan may have had too much so we can excuse him in the break. In fact Sir, we should have a ban against alcohol in the Lounge.

Mrs. Volda Lawrence, Hon. Member, had led this side of the House doing an amazing job as the shadow Minister of Finance and as the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). Who was appointed as the Ministers of Finance? We have this Hon. Gentleman and the Hon. Mr. Jaipaul Sharma. **[Mr. Ramjattan:** Did you want to select the Ministers?] No, I do not want to select your Ministers. But this is where we have a problem, where women's stand in this country is not a matter for one party. It is not a matter for Mr. Ramjattan. All of us have a duty to ensure that women are given the rightful places that they belong to. They should not be stifled. They must not be stifled. I have serious concerns.

We have seen as another early sign of extravagance, the big birthday bash and the big Inauguration, yet I will tell you later on that they cannot fix the Oxburg Primary School for \$9 million. The frequent flying with all the frequent flyers and the large delegations, can our country afford this? I would love to support this Government, I would like to see it do well, but I have difficulties with whether it can when we have these issues.

The dismissal of a civil servant, simply because he used an expletive to describe a Minister, he did not say it to the Minister. The dismissal of that person was simply because he said the "bleeping Minister". It is frightening. Off with his head - dangerous signs for a new Government.

Mr. Speaker, a constitutional reform commission or a steering committee or whatever you will call it, being set up, ignoring completely the People's Progressive Party Civic, the Parliamentary Opposition, that the Government will need if they are going to change the Constitution in any way, simply because they will need a 2/3 majority. The setting up of a Commission of Inquiry on Education and as far as the reports go in the newspaper, work has begun. There was no invitation

to the only Opposition Party to say, “Do you have any experts that you would like to offer?” Are we trying to do what is best for Guyana? If it is that we are trying to do what is best for Guyana, then all must be included. We cannot speak of inclusive governance and leave 201,000 - 205,000 persons and their elected representatives out of that process.

These are some of the things that have frightened me. I said to you Sir that I would like to support this Government, but I am worried about whether they will do good for us. The rounding up of persons we are told are victims of trafficking, and then they are criminally charged and deported from this country.

Mr. Speaker hits gavel on desk.

The changing of decades of convention that happened in this House, where the Leader of the Opposition is the penultimate speaker to whatever order has been given. Now Cde. Bharrat Jagdeo is not going to be allowed to be the penultimate speaker, simply so that he could be muzzled. This is a worrying sign from a 90-day old Government.

On the heels of having to wait four to five days for the announcement of the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) results and on the heels of President Granger not having ever faced the press one single day or for one single hour for all the time he has been in Office, now comes this thing where the Government is attempting to cut the number of days that have been enjoyed by the people of this country for the last three years, at least, if we are to believe the speaker who went before me, to three days. We cannot speak of good governance; we cannot speak of transparency; we cannot speak of wanting to be accountable; if this Government wants to shut down the ability of the people of Guyana to ask the Government questions through us.

Here is the thing; if it is true that, for years ago it was three days, and I am being told by the Chief Whip on this side who was just recognised for her many years in Parliament, that it was by agreement in the Business Sub-Committee and not by a motion. But if that is true, for the last three years the people of Guyana have enjoyed, through their representatives, the ability to question and scrutinise the Government – six and seven days. If the new Government brought that motion three years, why is the Government trying to shut down the same people it told can rely on it for transparency in this 2015 year. Shame on you!

6.32 p.m.

Defended by no less a person than the Minister of Governance - terrible governance; brought by no less a person than the Prime Minister of this country and the first of I do not know how many Vice-Presidents. Shame on the Government!

I will wrap up this fear and concern I have about the behaviour of this new Government and I cannot do it better than how Leon Rockliff, Attorney at Law, did, in a letter that he published on Tuesday 18th August, 2015, entitled “Public comment is due from Harmon and the AG on the illegal appointment of the Registrar of Lands”. Here is what he said:

“We are subject to the pangs of confusion, uncertainty, disaffection, and of course, distrust. It need not be so”.

And I repeat it need not be so. Get off this triumphant pedestal of being we won and you would have to take whatever because it is not us. The “you have to take whatever” you are speaking the majority of Guyanese people. It is a matter of grave concern for me. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker hits gavel on desk.

Sir, I learnt an old adage a long time ago about empty vessels making a lot of noise, so I understand it.

Mr. Speaker: It would be helpful if you address the Chair.

Ms. Manickchand: I am, but thank you Sir, I will continue. In the sector of education, I think that it would be unfair to the persons who have spent their lives working in education. Not me, I stayed there for three years. The persons who spent their lives working in the education sector and there are a couple of them here - Hon. Dawn Hastings-Williams; Hon. Amna Ally, a retired head teacher; Hon. Africo Selman; and the Hon. Member who is a teacher from Silver City. We have people who have spent their lives in the education sector and when the new Administration walks around wringing their hands that this system is in disrepair and nothing good is happening or has happened, it is essentially saying to all those people who gave their lives to education, “Your life amounted to nought. You gave nothing”. That is what the Government is saying to all of those workers. The thing about education is that, in this and any other country, there will

always be room for improvement academically, infrastructurally, training wise, reform in terms of what are the needs of a country and if we are going the right way. There is always going to be need for improvement. It would be dishonest and it is actually demoralising to all those, many of who voted for the Government, who gave their lives and service to education to claim now that the entire system is in disrepair.

Let us talk about where we are in education today. Where are we in education? Access - more than 85% of nursery age children can access an education. That is the highest in the Commonwealth Caribbean. Our little Guyana has achieved that Millennium Development Goal (MDG) that says every primary school child must be able to access a primary education.

Where are we on secondary education access? We are close to 100% and we have left programmes that should be implemented that would see us, before five years once the goodly Minister of Finance gives the money, taking us to 100% access in secondary education.

Where are we with trained teacher? We moved from a place where we used to have 30% of our teachers trained to having now more than 72% of our teachers trained. More than 72% of the public school teachers in this country are trained teachers. That is where we are.

Where are we with the number of school drop-outs? We have recorded the lowest numbers of children dropping out of our education system, which was never before in the history of this country. In the last two years, we have retained more than 2,000 children in the system, most of those being boys. So we have the lowest school drop-out rates than we have ever enjoyed in the history of our nation.

Where are we on expenditure? We have moved from a place where 5% of our National Budget used to be allocated to education. Sir, I am not talking about a nominal value, I am talking about a percentage of the budget. Five per cent used to be allocated to education, to the Hon. Minister of Finance coming now to boast that 14.9% of the budget is allocated to education. Although I am contesting that because that was not what was allocated to education with the mixture of Youth, Sport and Culture in that new Ministry.

We enjoy the only television channel in the Caribbean that is dedicated to learning. We have put an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure in place that sees every secondary school and 40% of the primary schools having computer labs.

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

Ms. Manickchand: Thank you Sir. What have we received from these investments? I just want to briefly summarise that. I am saying that we are at a good place, where improvements can be made, but we need a champion for education. We do not need people wringing their hands about everything being in disrepair. There are things that can be done.

Where have these good investment brought us? They have brought us to a place where we can boast year after year of great results. Results might not be the only way one can measure success or measure the benefits of investments, but it is certainly one way. We had a top student Cherai Solomon... By the way Sir, I heard a lot of comments. That top student, and in fact 25 out of the first 100 students of the National Grade Six Assessment (NGSA), was taught by our Ms. Africo Selman. Everybody in this House should give her a hand. We are proud of our teachers and we should say thank you to them. *[Interruption]* Sir, is it possible at all that I could get my time back?

From 2006 to 2014, except for 2010, our Guyana has top this Caribbean every single year at the Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate (CSEC) exams. That is where the investments have brought us. Sir, do you want me to tell you something? Guyana has been topping. A student in Trinidad wrote 22 subjects the other day, and I saw an article that said that the girl was super girl and everyone was praising her. She did not get 22 grade ones, but she did well, she passed them all. Trinidad was celebrating her. Our Administration and I say that very loosely, the Executive Arm of Government said that, the syllabus must have been weakened to allow the students to write so many subjects; that we should not allow our children to write so many subjects because they would not be rounded. Sir, let me tell you about some of these kids. The girl who top this year with 20 grade ones is a professional dancer and speaks another language. She got 20 grade ones. Ashley Anthony, who is Dr. Frank Anthony's daughter, is 16 years old with 17 grade one. She wrote a book at age 11. She speaks two other languages. She is a cycling star and she swims. These children are capable. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker hits gavel on desk.

There was young man who got 19 grade ones and one grade two. When asked why he chose to write 20 subjects, he said that we should not limit ourselves. So, this is my call to the Hon. Ministers, we have been excluded from your Commission of Inquiry, please, tread carefully before you limit all our students. All of them do not write 20 subjects. Most of our students write eight to 10 subjects.

We want to talk average pass. I need to move on to Region 5, but let me help Mr. Barrington, my honourable friend over there. Santa Rosa Secondary School in Region 1, tucked away where half of these Government people do not know, 62.6% of the entire population passed; Anna Regina Secondary School 79.72%; West Demerara Secondary School 86.52%; Soesdyke Secondary School 63%; Bygeval Secondary School 70%. That is what we have been doing.

This year the honourable Minister of Finance has mentioned specifically mathematics and English and us trying to do better. We started a pilot project a few years ago and that pilot project has shown us results. We have moved from 29% in 2012, to 45% in mathematics in 2015; the highest that this nation has ever received. In fact, I would be happy to offer to any Member of the Opposition, to give me their year and I would tell them what their year did in Math. When I wrote CXC in 1992, 8% of our population had passed English. We have moved that now to 49%. Tell me when you wrote. Actually Sir, I cannot do that because they are not of the age where records were being kept. We would need younger people on that side for me to be able to do that.

I call on the Minister of Education and the Government of Guyana, to roll out this programme. It was a pilot programme and it is a successful. Roll it out nationally and the Government will see results in it. I call on the Minister to lay the Education Bill. I do not want to do it, but if he does not, I will lay the Bill as a Private Bill. The problem with that is, if I do not withdraw it and it does not get passed in the House, we cannot bring one back and that would be bad for Guyana. Lay the Education Bill, finish up your inquiry and let us have a five-year strategic plan. Include us in your Commission of Inquiry. It may not be me. We have had five-year plans from 1993, when the World Bank said the system was in such disrepair, one of the main reasons being that there was never a five-year plan.

I am also a geographic representative for Region 5. Region 5 is lucky from the Government side. It enjoys the service of a woman who I know gives her life to the service of people in her party. It was unfortunate that with 26 Ministers, she has not been made a Minister; my honest view - Ms. Jennifer Wade. Region 5, as she said, has not... [*Interruption*] This is a very worrying thing to think that the ability or the defining of gender affairs in our county belongs to any one party. It is a frighten thing.

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

Ms. Manickchand: Thank you Sir. Region 5 is the largest agricultural region in Guyana. It is the largest cattle raring region in Guyana. It is a region that has many rice farmers. In fact, many of the persons depend on rice and the rice industry to give them their living. We have a lot of crash crop farmers. I call on the Government. It was this Government, when in Opposition, that said that the country was bankrupt and badly run. Yet, they offered \$9,000 per bag of paddy. I call on this Government to give the \$9,000 for every single bag of paddy or pack up and go home because it would have failed the people it promised not less than four months ago.

I am also very concerned because when I look at what was proposed to the Ministry of Finance and what was slashed from that budget, I am worried.

6.47 p.m.

I am very happy to see that the tarmac at central Mahaicony is going to be done, but I am worried about why the timber bridge at Champagne was slashed; I am worried about why the reinforced concrete sideling dam at Bush lot will be slashed; I am worried about why the Bellamy canal at Donde Novar is not going to be done. I am sure that the Hon. Member Ms. Wade shares these worries. I am worried about why the Novar School will not be rehabilitated for the \$12 million that they need. I am worried about why the sanitary block at Novar Secondary School is not going to be fixed for \$4.8 million. Yet, a Minister in this Government wants to be paid \$1.7 million. In fact, I believed that the case was just made out. I think that whole document from 2006 that the Hon. Member Trotman just read was to say to this nation that we were.....

Mr. Trotman: Mr. Chairman, on a point of order. It was February, 2015.

Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Trotman came here and read a document to us, where he said he went to the meeting with the Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo. I think the entire reason for reading that document was to talk about the salary increase that they had spoken about for Ministers since then. He was making a case for them to get a bigger salary. I think that is the reason he read that.
[Interruption]

I wish to speak. I forgot completely about the cash grant. Mr. Trotman read something just now which he said was a Cabinet Decision. I am disputing that that is a Cabinet Decision. The People's Progressive Party in Government never made a decision to cease the cash grant. The People Progressive Party Civic put in its manifesto that we were going to continue the *Because We Care* cash grant. The Government has removed it from this Budget and they have given...
[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker hits gavel on desk.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please take your seat. Hon. Members let us try to conclude our work without so much crosstalk. And I will I use the words "advisedly incitement". Please continue.

Ms. Manickchand: I am so advised, Sir. The addition of \$500 on every school uniform voucher I welcome, I am happy for it, but it is \$83 million. There were \$2 billion set aside for parents and children last year. This addition is only going to be \$83 million. These children are robbed \$1.9 billion. I am still opened to seeing that the Government has put this \$1.9 billion into something else in education; into something else for the parents of these children. I am concerned about some of these issues. I will say, without hesitation, that every measure in this Budget; every provision in this budget under every line that will benefit the people of this country, is welcomed and will be supported by me. Every measure in this budget that is going to benefit the people of Guyana will be welcomed and is going to be supported by me.

My complaint about this Budget is what was left out. Two billion dollars at \$10,000 per parent - left out of the Budget. Old age pension subsidies for lights and water - left out of the budget. Those are my concerns.

I wish to say to this honourable House that I commit myself, and I believed that I speak for everyone on this side of the House, to continued service of the people of this country, wherever they are, whoever they voted for, wherever they live and whatever colour they are. We commit ourselves to serving them and we believe that we can do that effectively here, once we are not muzzled and once the democracy that has been built up in this Parliament over many years by both sides, is sustained and developed even more. I thank you Sir. [*Applause*]

Ministry of Education [Dr. Roopnarine]: Mr. Speaker, I wish first of all to join with Colleagues on both sides of the House in congratulating you on your elevation to the position of Speaker and from your rulings this afternoon and your valiant attempts to restore order where order had been broken down, I can see that we can anticipate a very alert and wise term from you.

Mr. Speaker and Hon. Colleagues, it is for me, once again, a distinct privilege to have the opportunity to contribute to a budget debate this time to the first of our Eleventh Parliament. Having, like many of us who, today, who came from the earlier funeral service of Mrs. Christobel Hughes, I add my voice to the chorus of sympathy and condolences extended to our sister Mrs. Catherine Hughes, brothers Nigel and Stuart Hughes and the entire family. I wish to say to Mrs. Hughes that we thank you for being here among us for all the long trying hours, which is a demonstration of your commitment to the people of Guyana, even at this personally trying time. That spirit of commitment is one that I hope will inspired us all as we engage albeit from our different stand points and with our different emphasises, with the budget proposals brought for our consideration by the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winton Jordan, in his debut budget presentation of last week.

Before I go any further, please allow me to assure my Friend and Colleague, the Hon. Priya Manickchand, whose presentations to this Assembly I have always enjoyed for their fluency and sharpness, but I wish to assure the Hon. Priya Manickchand that, the first words I uttered, when I entered the Ministry of Education, to my staff was that the way I wanted to proceed was that what works should be continued; what does not work should be fixed; and what is a disaster should be discarded. So I would like to assure you that the programmes you left behind that are showing progress and are succeeding, are going to be continued in the Ministry of Education.

I know that figures in budgetary allocations have a tendency to represent or sometimes misrepresent abstractions, particularly with regard to the delivery of social services, education in particular. Billions of dollars on infrastructure or in a particular programme are supposed to imply an inherent competence or wisdom by the mere mention of the size of the allocation. What we all too frequently do not have is a sufficiently coherent narrative, year to year of what these grand figures have actually resulted in.

There is always a danger that within all those dazzling figures, other figures and the realities they reflect tend to become obscured. Beyond the figures of, for example, \$33 billion and 15%, there is something greater that has too often been hidden. A narrative that illustrates that despite the much vaunted economic growth, there has been a parallel slump in human development indicators, issues like public health delivery, citizen security, employment, the suicide rate, human resource capacity and the state of the public education system.

My task today, is not to throw figures, hide facts nor do I see the need, tempting though it maybe, to heap more blame on the heads of the previous Administration. My Colleagues on this side have been more than eloquent, robust and incisive in that exercise. The greater concern of government is, in my view, to accurately assess where a country is, in terms of development and to come up with innovative and sustainable strategies to move the country forward for the benefit of all its citizens. If there is one thing that stood out for me in the Hon. Minister of Finance's presentation, it is the following, a statement which summarised the spirit of the expenditure:

“I have spent the last hours laying out our Government's Vision 2020. Its realization will see a citizenry that is better educated, healthier, financially and physically secure, socially cohesive, and environmentally responsible.”

It is within this context that in his speech the honourable Minister of Finance informed us that:

“An effective education system requires active collaboration among all sectors.”

Before anything else, I would like to say that conceptually beguiling though it is, the merger of the State agencies responsible for Education and for Culture, Youth and Sport, presents enormous administrative challenges. It is with good reason that the Hon. Nicolette Henry has been assigned to the Ministry of Education and has assumed responsibility for Culture, Youth

and Sport. As her presentation a few days ago revealed, Minister Henry has rapidly and creatively come to grips with the demands of this assignment.

The link between education youth development is inherent and needs no expansion, as indeed, may be the link between education and sport, especially in the nurturing and development of our young athletes. It also has the advantage, and in this I am a firm believer, of reinstating sports as a part of the school curriculum and a normal part of school activity. In this regard, I would like to see the rehabilitation of all the sport facilities in the schools - the sport grounds, the fields, the physical education facilities, the gyms and so on.

The rethinking of education and culture however, is one that is not only natural, but critical at this time. Integrating culture in education is internationally recognised in enhancing access in education and is a core strategy of the Global Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda. With that said, we believe that there is a natural dynamic between the work of the Ministry of Education and several other State agencies. Our intention will be to use our resources to establish stronger formal and informal linkages between these entities, as well as, corporate and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The next five years will see greater, more strategic functional cooperation and between education and the Ministries responsible for Public Health, Tourism, Business, Communities, Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, Social Protection and Social Cohesion.

7.02 p.m.

On page 35 of the Budget speech, this is what the Hon. Minister of Finance said:

“An effective education system requires active collaboration among all sectors. We will strengthen collaboration between the education, health and social protection agencies, which is vital for ensuring a holistic approach to early childhood development. We will strengthen the linkages among education delivery, labour administration and the private sector, so as to ensure that there is sensible, forward planning and seamless transitions between schooling and employment for our youth. Importantly, we will foster greater multi-stakeholder involvement with parents, teachers, the private sector, NGOs and others in the development of an improved education sector.”

One practical step we will be taking in this direction at the Ministry is to work towards reinstating and formalising an Intersectoral Agency Committee which would see the Permanent Secretaries of the Ministry of Education and other Ministries meeting periodically to share information and to strategise on related areas of service delivery.

I turn now to the issue of the Commission of Inquiry. Let me say, at once, that, in relation to other commissions that fall within my portfolio, namely the Commemoration Commission, I have written to the Leader of the Opposition, inviting him to name his representative to the Commemoration Commission. I remember the first Commemoration Commission on which I sat for the 150th Anniversary, which was chaired, at the time, by Mrs. Viola Burnham, who was the Minister of Education, and then later by Mr. Derrick Bernard. I sat on that Commission and I recalled its working groups. We were able, I think, as a national collective, to put together a very memorable 150th anniversary celebration. My hope is that this will be a national Commemoration Commission and will seek to exclude no one who can make a contribution to the commemoration. It would be unthinkable to have such a commemoration commission without representation from the Opposition in this House.

Before we create this road map for the future, we need to locate precisely where our journey is to begin. As a new political administration, we have had the opportunity to view, first hand, and acknowledge that what we perceived to be incompetence, in some cases, was, in reality, a reflection of very real technical limitations.

However, we have also come to recognise that there are critical systemic flaws in the education system, ones that have frankly been glossed over by successive education ministers to the point where we find ourselves at the cusp of a service delivery crisis in the sector. For example, despite commendable individual performances at exams from the National Grade Six Assessment (NGSA) to the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE), low and declining exam scores continue to typify the state of nursery to secondary education overall. At the tertiary level, the University of Guyana remains unequal to the challenges of human resource development with regards to both enrolment and curriculum. There have been anecdotal indicators of causation, including poor adherence to protocol, challenges in human resource capacity, inadequate learning environment infrastructure, and indirect social factors, poverty, of course, being a key example of the latter.

Parallel to declining performance in the public education system has been an ascending performance in private education. As a result, the Ministry, under the previous Administration, implemented several policy initiatives, the sum effect of which has not resulted in any consistent and meaningful improvement in core indicators. For example, the country saw a marginal decline in the already low mean scores in Mathematics, English, Social Studies and Science at the National Grade Six Assessment between 1996 and 2009 and, between 2005 and 2007, attendance rates at the primary level dropped six percentage points, from 79% to 73%.

Finally, diagnostic data for all 28 primary schools in Region 7 show that a tiny fraction of the cohort, in most cases as low as 0%, achieved mastery of the curriculum in grades one through six during 2014. This is not guesswork, not instinct, not anecdotal, but the result of, *inter alia*, an operational audit I commissioned a few weeks into assuming office. Coming out of the initial findings, I saw the need to put to Cabinet the proposal for a Commission of Inquiry into Education. Cabinet having approved the Commission, I expect that our offer to involve the Opposition, sincerely extended, will be accepted.

The Hon. Minister of Finance noted:

“We will be adopting an approach that is grounded in systems-based reforms, and evidence-based policy making, to achieve our sector’s goals.”

High on my agenda is the establishment of our National Advisory Council, a mechanism that has been unfortunately left to languish. Through the Council and other stakeholder consultation mechanisms, we intend to construct and implement an evidence-based strategy, one that has, at its basis, a strong monitoring and evaluation component that can guide us on both our successes and our failures.

We need all stakeholders, including former Ministers of Education, on board to advise on what we expect to be a Vision 2020 education policy based on the following core tenets: one, a broad, multi-phased strategy framework for national education reform and development; two, reconciliation with existing internal policy and operational strategy and external consultancy recommendations; three, contextualisation within the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Regional Education and Human Resource Development Strategy 2030 and any other relevant

multilateral strategies or policies; particular focus on the use of technology in education sector management and service delivery and particular focus on hinterland education reform.

My agenda on policy is simple: we hold meaningful consultations with experts and stakeholders in developing programmes; we initiate those programmes with an inherent monitoring and evaluation component and, in this regard, I want to say that I have begun a process of what we are calling ‘education groundings’. I have held one in the Essequibo and on the East Coast, Mahaicony, and it is my intention to go throughout the country. These groundings really have to do with assembling parents, teachers, students and community people. They have numbered between 70 and 100 people, where we discussed education and schools. My own feeling is that we have to place a great deal of focus on the Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) because the more the parents get involved in the education system, the better and stronger it will be.

Allow me to say also that PTAs seem to have become exclusively a female domain. Mothers go to PTA meetings; this we have to correct. Fathers have to begin to take serious and active interest in their children. We have a national PTA organisation and I am hoping that, once we can strengthen the PTAs throughout the country, get them fully engaged, then we can implement, at the national level, a secretariat to manage and monitor the various PTAs throughout the country.

Mr. Speaker, in his presentation, the Hon. Minister of Finance noted:

“...we need to determine how successful we have been in providing and expanding access to education for the most marginalized groups in the country. We will ensure that the system does not perpetuate inequalities by differential levels of access to certain groups, based on their geographical location and ability to take advantage of educational opportunities.”

We have had a great deal of controversy demonstrated inside and outside of this Assembly on decisions we have taken to review certain programmes, the Education Cash Grant in particular. My Colleague, Mr. Trotman, has spoken eloquently and clearly on this matter. What I want to say is that, in addition to raising the uniform voucher allowance, we are also widening the School Feeding Programme because, when I read a report, for instance, at New Campbellville Secondary, that there are about 50 students who regularly go to school hungry. We have to deal

with the School Feeding Programme not just in the Hinterland, but also on the Coast and in Georgetown, wherever children are going to school without pocket money.

Transportation: What I would like to see come back to Guyana - and this will require a great deal of conversation with my Colleague, the Minister of Finance - are large school buses. I would like to take our children out of those death traps that they are travelling in and I have asked, already, my Colleague, the Minister, to erect traffic bumps outside of all of the schools and he has readily agreed.

I wish to say that the funds would be diverted into increasing the uniform voucher assistance programme and widen the School Feeding Programme. We do not believe that any one solution can be applied to the challenges regarding access to education. We believe that we have to try enhancing reliable existing methods like expanding the warm meals and general School Feeding Programme, for example, and to come up with new methods of creating access to education.

Most importantly, we realise that taking advantage of accessible education is not the duty of the Government, but of the community and the home, as well, acting in partnerships for the good of our children. In this vein, as I have said, we intend to revamp and to energise our PTAs and school boards in all schools and to initiate the re-establishment of our Regional Education Committees. The more we can cooperate with homes, communities and local government organs to define priorities for education access, the more effective we believe our policy and the expenditure to support it will be. Certainly, we have to continue to enhance, indeed revolutionise, another component of education access - service delivery to the disabled. A few weeks ago, I was unable to directly participate but was asked to send my remarks to a graduation ceremony for students of the Ptolemy Reid Rehabilitation Centre's Technical/Vocational Programme. Our intention will be to work with stakeholders to develop, expand and further institutionalise such programmes across the country. Additionally, as we revisit the physical space of the school as an environment that is optimal for learning, we will work to ensure that as many of those spaces no longer serve as deterrents for the physically disabled.

Perhaps equally as important, our commitment to developing education related to disabilities will involve the education of our general population towards a more enlightened approach to persons with disabilities. Stigma and discrimination can be far more limiting to the equitable

development of those citizens than any physical barrier or a particular disability in itself and it is our duty to commit resources to transforming attitudes in this regard.

7.17 p.m.

I must say that few things have heartened me more than to hear of the 54% increase in the Minister of Finance's Budget proposal for the sweepers/cleaners who keep our schools clean.

There can, of course, be no effective access to education without looking at the supporting framework within the education system - the teachers in particular. The one laptop per teacher programme provides, as was indicated during the political campaign, what we believe is a more strategic integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in education than a One Laptop Per Family (OLPF) initiative that proved not only unwieldy and ill-conceived, but also fraught with corruption and wastage. It was the former Registrar of the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC), Dr. Didacus Jules, who expressed the opinion that we, in the Caribbean, are "teaching digital children in an analogue classroom".

By providing teachers with both equipment and training, we begin the process of transforming the learning space to become more adequately accessible to the minds of our young people.

Arts and Culture

What is required is a holistic approach to culture and the arts that includes the integration into the education system. This is an area that we have been particularly proactive about since assuming office, especially in the area of music. I have asked - and this is being communicated to all the schools when they open in September - that there should be singing in every single school across the country at the beginning of the day. I am reproducing that wonderful patriotic song, *Not a Blade of Grass*, which we will be teaching to the children across the country. Let them sing it. I hope they sing it at eight o'clock every morning and that persons hear it as far as Caracas.

As the administrative machinery for education and culture programmes merged, we intend to see closer collaboration between the Department of Culture, the Unit of Allied Arts and the National Centre for Education Research and Development (NCERD), in arming our children as well as our teachers with the technical capacity for development across a range of arts. In this spirit, this

August, we held a successful “music is fun” beginner course for children as well as a paralleled music literacy workshop for teachers as the beginning of the foundation for the reintegration of music education into the general curriculum.

We also intend, along with the technical components of our Arts Education Programme, to ensure that there is a cultural element to education as well, ranging from strong language courses to education on history, ethnicity and comparative religions. According to the United Nations Environmental, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) Report on the post 2015 dialogues on culture and development:

“Culture enhances access to education, but also ensures more locally relevant curricula, textbooks and teaching methods. Incorporating culture into education further ensures that the education system is adapted to contemporary needs and prepares people for life in a globalized and multicultural society.”

Even as we seek to modernise and redesign our curriculum and general pedagogy, we intend to do so on the basis of strong cultural roots, nurtured by the education system. Minister Jordan successfully reminded us that in today’s economy:

“...knowledge and intellectual property are drivers of economic value, alongside the traditional factors of production.”

Over the next year, beginning as early as September, a fitting month, dedicated, as it is, to the celebration of the cultural heritage of our Indigenous peoples, we will begin the groundwork for the crafting of a comprehensive cultural policy, one that specifies how we can sustainably identify and develop the definable components of our particular national culture, how we can mainstream that culture into our national development framework in keeping with both international developmental obligations, but particularly, our obligations to ourselves over the next 50 years of our independence to truly be more worthy of our heritage as a land of free peoples.

The National Music School is currently the venue for a public discussion entitled, *The Revolution of a Music Industry and Copyright*.

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

Dr. Roopnarine: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The discussion will feature veteran music producer Burchmore Simon, the Hon. Minister of Tourism, Catherine Hughes, and a perennial campaigner for copyright legislation, our own living legend, Eddie Grant. This is a small but concrete demonstration of our commitment to facilitating the conversations that will lead to the enactment of not merely updated copyright legislation, but an entire menu of legislative and other measures designed to greenhouse the creative economy that our artists, creative industry entrepreneurs and the society, at large, deserve.

I see no reason that we cannot have at least the legislative measures for an updated intellectual property regime within a year and I commit to spearheading this initiative in Government. We cannot afford to, as has happened for a decade and a half under the previous Administration, pay lip service to intellectual property, while neglecting it to the point of institutionalising intellectual property piracy.

One of the critical challenges of the education sector is laying the foundation for the development of human resources necessary to facilitate the growth of Guyana.

We have suffered a double crisis over the past decade or so: an exacerbation of an existing phenomenon in which we have failed to produce a workforce capable of resilience within the existing economy and the migration of our most qualified knowledge workers from our shores.

We have to be innovative, coming up with a strategy for human resource development that is tailored to our economy as it is, but also as it will be. At the 27th Meeting of the CARICOM Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) held recently in Georgetown, I recommitted this country to being a strong partner in creating the region's Educational and Human Resource Development Strategy 2030.

I recently held a meeting with the University of the West Indies (UWI) St. Augustine's Principal, Dr. Clement Sankat, a Berbician, by the way, with the view of developing a petroleum engineering education programme that would prepare us for the human resource challenge of managing our potential oil industry in the near future.

When we take all the various facets of our programme together, what we hope to have constructed is not merely an education strategy simply for the sake of saying we have one. The end goal of all this complexity is, ultimately, a very simply one: the education system must seek to produce, at a very basic level, the competent Guyanese citizen. When I say this, what I mean is that that citizen would have had the best possible access to the best possible education his or her country could afford, from the nursery to the tertiary level.

The competent citizen is going to emerge from a system governed by a youth empowerment policy that gives them a voice and role in shaping their destiny and that of their country from as young as is practicably possible. The competent citizen is the citizen who can be seamlessly integrated into the functional society, regardless of race, gender, geography or ability. The competent citizen is the citizen armed with education and human resource skills that are marketable or upgradeable, regionally and internationally. And, as important as any other trait, the competent citizen is the citizen who identifies as a citizen of this country, is aware of his or her rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and has the capacity to love his or her fellow citizens, and to dedicate his or her energies towards the happiness and prosperity of Guyana.

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

Dr. Roopnarine: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was relieved when our Colleagues from the Opposition eventually took up their seats in this National Assembly. Two years ago, I began my Budget debate speech with the following words:

“I wish to register my solidarity with those Members on both sides of the House who sincerely made the case for constructive engagement and togetherness not rhetorically and opportunistically, but sincerely.”

In several of my previous interventions in this Assembly, I have both initiated and encouraged calls for genuine dialogue, particularly as an obligation and not merely a prerogative of executive government to extend.

Today, as part of the Executive, I extend my hand to the Parliamentary Opposition in a gesture of genuine partnership. I reiterate the words I said, in 2012, when this Opposition was in the Executive:

“Working together is no longer a ritual gesture of condescension and hospitality to well behaved guests. Instead, it heralds a new political epoch and an opportunity for nurturing a new political culture.”

I congratulate my Friend, the Hon. Minister Jordan, and his team at the Ministry of Finance - and I have a good sense of how hard they work - for a Budget that will put Guyana on the road to a good life in a green economy.

In this Education Month, let us strive to become the education nation of which President Granger spoke in his address to the graduating class at the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) in 2012. President Granger exhorted the graduates. He described all the scientists that Guyana would need and he asked the question:

“Where will these scientists come from?”

He continued:

“These opportunities cannot be fully exploited and this country cannot be developed by chance or by conjecture. They cannot be achieved while a large part of the population is paralysed by poverty. They cannot be achieved by the ignorant or the illiterate. They cannot be achieved while so many primary school children cannot qualify to enter secondary school or when thousands of children drop out of our primary and secondary schools every year. They cannot be achieved while school leavers cannot find jobs. They can be achieved only by people with a first-class education. They can be achieved only by the creation of an education nation that brings all our people together in a knowledge society. They can be achieved only by combining our energies, integrating our communities, and working together for the common good, rather than pulling apart.”

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this is a good time for us to give ourselves our well-earned break. We will take a suspension for half of an hour. I will invite the Hon. Members, who are Members of the Business Sub-Committee, to join me in my Chamber. Thank you.

Sitting suspended at 7.31 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 8.36 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before we resume the debate, I take the opportunity to inform you that we have, in our midst, a former Minister of Finance, Hon. Saisnarine Kowlessar, and a former Member of Parliament, Hon. Dr. Joey Jagan. We want to say welcome and thank you for spending the time with us.

Minister of Public Health [Dr. Norton]: May it please you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make my contribution to the budget debate of 2015. The Hon. Minister of Finance, in his presentation, made reference to Vision 2020 as a reflection of our Government's confidence in our people to function with a one nation mindset and to build this great land of ours to the benefit of all of us. This new Government is not here to destroy, to condemn for the sake of doing so, to break down only to rebuild, or to show who run things in Guyana, as was said by one leader. We, of this Government, are not going to reinvent the wheel.

The *Health Vision 2020* is a strategy development document that was facilitated with the assistance, support and technical cooperation from many stakeholders, both local, including our present Directors of the Ministry of Public Health, and foreign, particularly with the consultants from the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO). This document was held high in the air by the Hon. Dr. Bheri Ramsaran, as if it were his personal property, when he made his presentation.

It is one of many such strategies of the Ministry of Public Health that this coalition is eager to put into full action mode, to get it up and running, and not only to have it on paper. This is exactly what was revealed by the staff members of this Ministry at the last three-day retreat two weekends ago.

We, in this coalition, are unwavering in our commitment to the vision of this strategy, that is, to place Guyanese among the healthiest in the Caribbean and in the Americas by the year 2020. The public health infrastructure and delivery system will, however, be remodelled with a fresh approach to focus on prevention and promotion of wellness of all of our people so as to achieve and maintain a good life in a green economy.

In our efforts to institutionalise the principle of good governance, we will use ICT to enhance accountability, transparency, and effectiveness, which was so lacking in the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) regime. This is particularly so since this Government is working on a project to incorporate the National Data Management Authority (NDMA) into its e-Governance operation. The review of the public service ICT would restore this to the Authority, which was non-operational for two decades, so that it can play a meaningful role in this Administration’s e-Governance initiative.

Representatives of the Oshi Center for Health and Social Policy of New York will be here in Guyana, from 10th to 19th October, 2015, to conduct an electronic medical record pilot study at three sites to be identified. As a result, the health sector will develop seamless provisions to healthcare services to citizens throughout the public sector, especially in the hinterland and Indigenous communities. There will be a strengthening of the health surveillance unit, data collection and laboratory services, particularly in the hinterland regions, especially since the hinterland is becoming a geographic engine of economic development.

We will also enhance our public health surveillance system in order to maintain and improve the evidence-based planning and decision-making to ensure value for money in the utilisation of our health resources. This will also increase our capability to detect and respond to emergent threats. We shall be able to avoid crisis situations such as that referred to by His Excellency the President of Guyana only recently in his booklet entitled, *Death in the North West*. In that booklet, the President mentioned the region’s large rivers being the source of drinking water:

“Herein lies the problem – when the water is polluted, children die, especially from gastroenteritis.”

At that time, in Port Kaituma, in just three months alone, the number of afflicted was 529, including deaths of three children. Similarly, not too long after, there was a similar outbreak in the Wai Wai community of Masakenari in Region 9. This will become something of the past, for we will put systems in place to avoid crisis situations of Guyanese becoming sick in large numbers in specific communities.

It is our commitment to provide accessible potable water and sanitation facilities, consistent with the guidance from the healthcare system, to the entire Guyanese nation. There shall no longer be

situations like that of the Patamona village of Kamana in Region 8. I was there only recently and it was found that the entire village was without access to potable water for a prolonged period of time. I doubt whether the past Minister of Health knows where that village is, much less to have visited it.

We shall be strengthening the delivery of primary healthcare service to promote greater integration of health services, in general, including environmental surveillance, to meet the needs of remote communities, in particular.

I refer to the speech of His Excellency the President, Brigadier (Ret'd) David Granger, in his Address to the National Assembly at the opening of the Eleventh Parliament.

“The primary health care system is failing women, children and the aged. The system was meant to promote equity and social justice. It should be seen as an initiative to make health services more accessible to the people.”

Equity in health is to ensure the absence of unfair and avoidable differences in healthcare delivery among population groups and individuals, and that is why this coalition will promote a renewed focus on primary healthcare. Most reports indicate that Guyana lags behind in life expectancy, which stands at 68.2% at birth, and ranks 166 among 210 countries. All of the English-speaking Caribbean is above 70 years at birth. Men in Guyana are only expected to live to 64 years. We have to do better than this.

We were informed of the success of the national nutritional programme, especially that which involved the use of sprinkles. I want to bring to the attention of this honourable House the situation as we found it in the then Ministry of Health when we took over. Of the stock of sprinkles on hand, which comes in packages called sachets, eight million were expired. The Ministry of Health wasted over US\$430,000. Some US\$475,000 was paid to the New GPC but items were yet to be received.

These sprinkles are divided into antenatal sprinkles, for the mothers, and infant sprinkles. In antenatal sprinkles, the quantity that was expired was just over three million at a cost of US\$190,000. In the infant sprinkles, the quantity that was expired was over five million with a value of about US\$248,000. This is what this honourable House should be made aware of.

In eye care delivery, for instance, of the entire Guyanese population, only 47.2% had eye screening done in 2014.

In dental care, only 31.9% of the Guyanese population had annual check-ups. This APNU/AFC Government will set out to correct these deficiencies with all of our energies. This is not surprising about dental care, particularly when one reads the 2014 report of the principal dental surgeon, in which he was clamouring for new additional equipment, including portable dental chairs and dental units for outreach and school programmes in all of the regions of this country. Dental equipment, instruments and materials across the country are old and failing. Some need to be replaced, thrown away, while others require constant repairs. This is so whether one was in Charity in the Pomeroon or Skeldon in the Corentyne, Fort Wellington Hospital in Region 5, Port Kaituma in Region 1 or Aishalton in Region 9. I have been there; I looked at it and that is what I found.

Only recently, the sterilisation room at the Cheddi Jagan Dental Centre was found to be in dire need of repair, and the ventilation in some departments renders them most uncomfortable to work. This Government is in the process of changing all of the conditions, all being in a state of neglect for years under the PPP/C.

It is most unfortunate that, with all of the deficiencies in dental healthcare and with only 31% of Guyanese having had access to annual dental check-ups, the past Government found no problem in spending \$2.1 million of the public money on the dental work of one of its past Ministers. As a means of justifying this, the former Minister claimed, according to the newspaper, that this new Government has gone berserk. If this new Government has gone berserk because it exposed this unconscionable act, then so be it.

The APNU/AFC Government is committed to improved health information, intelligence and research in the health sector. This can only be possible with an effective data gathering system, but the data must be collected, verified, interpreted and managed in order for it to be utilised. At the management information unit of data collection at the Ministry of Public Health, from a staff of 17, we found, when we got there, two persons working. We will correct this as early as possible. It is for this reason that Dr. Morris Edwards, Director of Disease Control in the Ministry, during a presentation of the *10-year Cancer Surveillance Report* declared that, in

Guyana, we can become data rich but information poor, and that planning without information is guesswork.

8.51 p.m.

At all times, data converted into information should be made accessible to stakeholders so this can eliminate misconception and wrong information, and can show variations according to geographical, socio-economic and cultural populations in Guyana. Example: of patients with chronic non-communicable disease in the rural areas, only 78% had access to have their blood pressure taken. I heard the Hon. Minister speaking about giving glucometers to all diabetic patients. Fifty-seven per cent of the population had access to a random blood sugar test being done. Of those who required the glycosylated haemoglobin test or the HbA1c, only 19% had access to it. This we, from the APNU/AFC, are setting out to correct.

The accuracy of provision of data should always be at its maximum, less we find ourselves as with the situation of malaria. In 2013, there were roughly 31,000 cases reported. In 2014, that was drastically reduced to 12,000 cases. This has caused stakeholders, especially the international donor agency, to question the accuracy of these figures, especially since the Vector Control Unit had not changed its strategy and seemed not to be able to explain the large reduction of cases when called upon to do so.

This coalition is extremely preoccupied and worried about Guyana's unacceptable, high maternal, infant and child mortality rate. This grave situation is not only a priority concern of the Ministry of Public Health, but it is a national concern to the APNU/AFC Government. The global classification system by the World Health Organization (WHO), in a just completed report, Guyana is the only CARICOM country, including Haiti, that shows no progress. The Report tracked trends in global maternal mortality rate for the period 1990 to 2013. The rate in Guyana rose from 210 deaths in 1990 to 250 in 2013. The target was to reduce maternal mortality to below 80 per 100,000 live births, which is less than 11 deaths a year. It is unbelievable that persons want to blame this new APNU/AFC Government for the state of health in this country. Already, we have eight maternal deaths for this year. Somewhere along the line, I am getting the impression that people are blaming us for this. That might be so because, among other things, only 37 % of complicated pregnancies received appropriate care during pregnancy.

In Guyana, we need 700 midwives but we only have 78. We have to do better than this and we are prepared to do so.

In the case of infant and child mortality, the situation is even worse. The goal was to reduce infant mortality to less than 14 per 1,000 live births but, instead of 14, that stands at 23.1. Child mortality rate under five years of age was supposed to be 16 but stands at 24.2 for 2014. Actually, the result of a multi-indicator cluster survey shows that, in Guyana, the probability of dying within the first month of life is 22.9 per 1,000 live births. Between birth and first birthday, it is 31.8. If you think that is bad, consider that between birth and fifth birthday the probability of your child dying here in Guyana – anyone of use – is 39.2.

Just to give you some hard but accurate data for 2014 under the PPP/C regime... I just took the months at random. The neonatal deaths at the Georgetown Public Hospital alone were the following: during the month of June, 25 babies died; in July, 30 babies died; in August, 44 babies died; in September, 33 babies died; in October, 35 babies died. Let me stop because the trend continues. That probably is some form of cleansing – I do not know what it is – our country of babies.

This is the irony of it: some are promoting the speciality hospital as though this was the magic wand to solve all the problems of our mothers and babies dying. In the majority of cases, our infants die from sepsis, which is infection. This speciality hospital happens to be one of the so-called transformational projects of the past regime that had to be abandoned due to poor conceptualisation in the first place. No consultation with local medical fraternity or other stakeholders was done while information about this project seemed to be top secret to the PPP/C. We were asked by the Minister to seek information online. What was more shocking, however, about this whole project was the tendering and awarding of contract for the project to the Surendra Engineering Incorporated. About the track record and performance of this company here in Guyana, I go no further, only to say that one cannot help remembering that famous quote from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 4, when Marcellus says:

“Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.”

Something was rotten in the state of Guyana with regards to the Surendra Engineering Inc. and the speciality hospitality. One cannot sit on a television programme spewing coprophagous

political propaganda and wishing one will get it right. One has to be on the ground working, according to the Hon. Mr. Rohee, on all cylinders, while being able to respond in a decent and appropriate manner befitting of your position when the public asks questions about the sad state of affairs of the deaths of our mothers and babies.

This battle was never going to be easy and it never will. I listened carefully when the past Hon. Minister said that now we need two Ministers to do the job that he alone was doing, forgetting completely about the past Hon. Dr. Ramsammy and what he did then with him. I am saying that it is not an easy job and I am not, in any way, disappointed. As a matter of fact, I am gratified by the fact that we have two Ministers in the Ministry of Public Health because this matter we have to get right. For us, the APNU/AFC, losing this battle is not an option.

We heard loud talks about family planning and birth control, yet only 34.1% of our womenfolk had access to contraceptives and 28% being those of unmet needs. What it means is that womenfolk between the ages of 15 and 39 years that need contraceptive had no access to it.

The Ministry of Public Health will ensure that we improve the access of Guyanese population to medication and medical supplies. Situations where one company, for over a decade, enjoyed over 80% of the monopoly of supplying pharmaceuticals and medical supplies to Georgetown Public Hospital Corporations (GPHC) and the Ministry have become a thing of the past. This company had a contract from the PPP/C Government to receive 100% payment upfront before delivery. **[An Hon. Member: Say that again.]** The company had 100% payment upfront, before delivery. On more than one occasion, the company received moneys for medication it never supplied, according to the Auditor General's Report, yet they continued with the monopoly. Gone are such days. We will be doing everything possible to put an end to the hundreds of millions of dollars of poor Guyanese taxpayers' money that was wasted away in the form of expired drugs due principally to short shelf life. We have 18 companies recommended by the Guyana Pharmaceutical Association, all lined up to participate in the now open tendering process and competitive bidding process.

Mr. Speaker, just to let you know, of patients who are in need of basic but important medication like antipyretic for fever, in this country, only 30.8% had access. Of those patients who need oral

rehydration solution that is so necessary in cases of vomiting, diarrhoea and fever, only 28.9% had access. This is totally unacceptable.

In this country, health promotion and health education are estimated to reach only about 75% of the population.

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

Dr. Norton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We ran into these problems in the health sector because of the lack of oversight of responsibilities. For some reason, the National Health Policy Committee was not meeting for more than two years. That Committee was supposed to be chaired by the Minister himself. As the necrobiotic saying goes, the fish rots from the head downwards. We shall put back this Committee, immediately, into operation so that we can bring, before this honourable House some of the legislation pending since 1934, like the Health Promotion Protection Bill or, since 1954, the Nurses and Midwives Bill to replace the Nurses and Midwives Ordinance.

My Colleague, the Minister within the Ministry of Public Health, spoke, at length, about the situation of mental health and I will go no further except to explain that it was fictitious for the past regime to claim that the proposed Medical Health Unit was in place. As important as this Unit is to curbing the high rate of suicide in this country, it was non-functional. We already have it in place and it is up and running. Soon it will get its own centre.

This Government will be advancing research to find new ways and modalities for health financing. This is especially so since the time for an in-depth evaluation for cost recovery might be necessary. Virtually, little or no studies have been done on this topic but lots of dogmatic armchair assertions and speculations have been applied.

9.06 p.m.

We have signed agreements for public/private partnership with many different companies. Of those companies, what is important to point out is the memorandum of understanding that was signed between the Georgetown Public Hospital Cooperation (GPHC), the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Caribbean Heart Institute (CHI).

In 2010, the past regime brought a supplementary appropriation to this Hon. House for a sum of \$2.1 billion to buy hybrid catheterisation laboratory equipment from the General Electric Co. This equipment came into this country and was left for months on the floor of the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. We found that there was a contract signed for the establishment of an operating room with wards and the setting up of the local for this CAT lab, as it is called. The first sum was for \$31 million. Subsequently, it rose to \$80 million. The last report of 16th February of this year showed that it came up to \$112 million. This centre is incomplete at the moment and no work is taking place. When one of the partners volunteered to investigate, evaluate and recommend the way forward, what we found was, in order to have this lab functioning at least by 31st November, of this year, we needed to pay a balance to the contractor of \$17 million, replace the damaged batteries for \$5 million, transformer for appropriate voltage - \$7 million, contingency - \$3 million, bringing it to a total of \$32 million. Any delay in the purchasing of this equipment would result in a delay in phase one of the project, which really is only for the installation. We can only know if this equipment is functioning after the installation.

It is with great distress and disappointment that after spending so much of Guyanese taxpayers' moneys, we are no better off than when the CHI had just started. We would also investigate the relationship that exist among the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, the Ministry of Health, the Low Vision Unit, the Cancer Institute and the dialysis centres in Guyana because we must evaluate whether or not it is profitable for us to continue to spend millions of dollars on patients to the Private Dialysis Centre or that we should establish or extend our own at the Georgetown Public Hospital.

While the Baby Heart Foundation is saving the lives of children, consideration should also be given to the financing of other services such as the Neonatology Intensive Care Units in regional hospitals that might prevent the deaths of much more babies, than at present is being saved by the Baby Heart operation.

The Minister in his budget presentation said:

“We will frontally address the dearth of specialist in our health care system, by expanding the postgraduate programme here in Guyana, sourcing specialist training abroad and importing specialist skills to support local capacity”.

Even though our local postgraduate programme is doing well, we still need specialists in the areas of pathology, radiology, psychiatry, oncology, physical medicine, neonatology and geriatrics medicine, just to name a few. I take this opportunity to publicly say to my hard working and long serving colleagues, like Dr. Doobay, the internist at the GPHC, the Pathologist Dr. Singh, Dr. Walcott, Dr. Brighmohan and Dr. Harry, the Psychologist, just to mention a few, that this Government will consider national awards of a very high order for all of them.

Once again, I will repeat for emphasise, the need to review the eligibility of our service bonded doctors to apply for postgraduate programmes. I beg to differ with the past Minister who feels that these doctors, who have a five-year contract bond, should serve them out before they embark or be allowed to do postgraduate programmes.

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

Dr. Norton: We have got to understand that these doctors, when they are in the postgraduate programme, are offering to the nation the same work that is delivered by a Government Medical Officer (GMO), not in postgraduate training, but of course, these postgraduates who are training in doctorates, trained with greater accountability and supervision, as they progress upwards in the training programmes, increasing knowledge and skills.

I would prefer to follow some of the recommendations that:

- I. Enrollment in local postgraduate programmes to be counted as meeting service for undergraduate training.
- II. Students or doctors should be eligible for enrollment in the postgraduate programmes as soon as they meet the one year post-internship.
- III. We should reduce the bonds for postgraduate training to a maximum of only three years.

This coalition is committed to implementing a system in which health education should be taught at a restructured university level, with high quality staff, proper infrastructure, adequate facilities, including modernised library and information technology. We are also committed to making nursing once more an attractive and well paid profession.

While we need 1700 registered nurses, we have only 600. In my first meeting with the nurses at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, I had 50 valid complaints in the first hour, mostly about inadequate working conditions and job dissatisfaction.

We, in this Government, vow to do all that is necessary to better the working conditions of our nurses, giving them more benefits and incentives, thus making them a happy workforce. Plans are already a-foot to have a day care centre at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, a canteen facility of the highest quantity and already the gym is in full function. I do agree with the past Minister, and would assure him that, yes, we will also train and retain a wide range of health care professionals for the public health system, lab techs, radiographers, phlebotomists, patient care assistants, community health workers, dental technicians, *et cetera*.

This is where, we from the APNU/AFC, will invite... sorry I wanted to say the People's Progressive Party's (PPP's) Community Support Officers (CSOs), but I know they do not belong to you. We will invite members who were CSOs to join in and to be exposed to real training, to get real jobs, so that they can work for real salaries and become a real man and a real woman.

I just want to clear up one thing before I close. It was good to say that the honourable doctor saw myself and the Head of Pan American Health Organisation/ World Health Organisation (PAHO/WHO) because at this time, I was negotiating for the vaccine that he mentioned, that he said I was against. It is not that I was against the vaccine. Guyana has done well, and I am saying so openly, in the vaccination programme. What I am saying, is the manner in which it was introduced into the population. I will tell you that this is a vaccine that is given to 11 years old girls. Think about it, your 11 years old daughter, when there is on the internet and all the media, so many negative things written about it. When women folks in Georgetown petitioned, begging the Minister to come and let them discuss this, to tell them about the good things and he refused. Then what happens? Where are they going to try out this vaccine? In East La Penitence. I want you to remember that when I did oppose, and I brought it up in Parliament, I know that people did not feel comfortable with what I was saying, but that was how I felt.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member you have three minutes more.

Dr. Norton: I will wrap up now by saying that, when I considered what took place that time with the introduction of the vaccine and where it was introduced, I could not have taken the idea of

the syphilis experiment which took place in the United States of America - the Tuskegee Experiment.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to close by referring to what was said that the health of a nation is the wealth of a nation and we from the APNU/AFC are certainly believers of this. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs [Mr. Greenidge]: I thank you very much Mr. Speaker. I rise to offer my contribution to this debate, on a most important policy document, a political statement, the Budget 2015.

Mr. Speaker, may I first of all congratulate you on your preferment. We know how imperturbable you are and we know that with that, together with your school style, will help you take us through both turbulence and calm waters that lie ahead of us.

Let me not fail to also add my sentiments to those of my Colleagues, Dr. Roopnarine, who eloquently offered some just now to the family and relatives of Mr and Mrs. Hughes on the tragic and premature loss of the charming Mrs. Christobel Hughes.

Thirdly, I take the floor to say it is a pleasure to participate in this exercise and I commend the Minister of Finance, Mr. Jordan, and his team for their sterling work in preparing this most important budget.

The 11th May, 2015, Elections, the swearing of a new President and his Cabinet brought an end to an era of wanton Executive lawlessness and pervasive corruption, perpetuated under the cloak and smoke screen of 28 years of dictatorship. The feasts or mantra is to fool the populist, here they go into accepting all kinds of executive excesses on grounds that the People's National Congress (PNC) was a dictatorship.

It never built housing schemes - we heard that; it never built highways; if it was not for the PPP we would have never seen any sea defences or ferries. In fact, of 2/3 of the infrastructure of Guyana, whether it be Linden, Corentyne or whatever highways, sea defences were constructed under the PNC regime. I do not care what you think, but that is a fact. Mr. Speaker, you are faced by a set of men, a set of persons who do not want to hear the truth.

If ever the PPP finds itself having to rehabilitate infrastructure, they attack the PNC. In fact, maintenance and rehabilitation are the responsibilities of all states - all governments. It has to be done by all eventually. Black Bush Polder was built in the PPP times, was rehabilitated in the; PNC times; Tapakuma, the second major drainage and irrigation scheme was rehabilitated under the PNC. So when... [Mr. Damon: Tell us what the cost is?] What do you know about cost?

9.21 p.m.

We never completed it and we were waiting five years after, as with Skeldon. Talk about Skeldon. This is all a part of a cynical process of rewriting our history to justify executive excesses. [Mr. Ali: Who is doing that?] I will come to him just now, since he is asking.

During these recently concluded elections the PPP tried assiduously to frighten the electorate with all kinds of relevant and apocryphal stories about the budget - it would be severe; there would be seizure of assets, and there would be a flight of foreign exchange, runaway inflation, in short bedlam, and not to mention Mr. Greenidge. Let me remind you, Mr. Speaker, that our colleagues, made reference earlier yesterday to the exchange rates. It is true that the Guyana dollar was devalued, but let me also remind them, which they also failed to mention, that the exchange rate in 1991 stood at \$115 – US\$1.00. Today, it is \$212, which is a 95 point decline. When they are talking about arithmetic, exchange rates, they can look at it. [Mr. Ali: We know it is floating rate.] Floating rate. They cannot talk, Mr. Speaker.

The public has realised, in looking at this budget, the fears that PPP tried to sow amongst it has proved to be unjustified. The quality and composition of the budget were as a shock to the other side. The public, who believed the PPP, was disappointed and pleasantly surprised to view this budget. In viewing the budget, the PPP now has to find itself creating and throwing confusion among the public. Listen to them. The PPP alleged that the budget is mainly “fluff.” The Members on the other side, Mr. Rohee, sometimes... [Mr. Rohee: Honourable Members.] Are they? Thank you. They alleged that the budget was mainly “fluff”. It was useless; it was discriminatory. Yet others are asserted that it was incoherent; it was short on vision. It is this very budget which Members on the other side also described as almost excellent, even if it is too political. I am not generalising, I am referring to a specific intervention. A budget is supposed to

be a political statement and that is why I started off by mentioning that. A budget is a political statement. That is not a criticism of a budget, to say that it is a political statement. Let us get that straight.

However, on that same side there were people who said that the budget was written by the PPP - plagiarised, stolen. The self-styled pontiff, Bishop Edghill, yesterday described it as a continuation of the PPP's plans and projects, microwaved by the APNU and therefore it cannot be fresh. It is the same party but with two different messages. You are confused my friends, badly confused. Or it is as what the calypsonian says, "*yuh hear lie, that is lie*". Mr. Speaker, with your permission, I will take up the invitation to sing it afterwards. In the meantime, I can make available to my colleagues *The Book of Lies*, by Mary Horlock. They might find that more enticing for the moment.

Over the last four days, there has been much talks, on the other side, about the destruction of jobs, discrimination, ethnic cleansing. Let me say one thing about that PPP charge. The Members have adverted to the case of 2,000 Amerindian youths, who have not been employed since April. My colleagues have dealt with that and I am not going there again. What I want to say to you though is that whether you call them Community Support Officers (CSOs) or anything else and whatever their ethnicity or nationality, they have no claim on taxpayers' money to carry out PPP's propaganda work. The Members cannot hide behind their ethnicity and come and accuse us of ethnic discrimination on grounds that... [Mr. Rohee: Where is the evidence?] That is the evidence that you were putting out yesterday.

Many of them found themselves on... Some of them came to see me at my home to complain and to say that they were told that if they refused to carry out the entire exercise, when they were brought to town,... [Mrs. Campbell-Sukhai: That is a lie.] What is a lie? I have not even made a statement yet. We are dealing with jokers. That retort is for another one. You used to say, "Give me proof of corruption." This is another story. It is wrong. It is inappropriate to use of public resources and no ethnicity has such an automatic claim on resources to finance political activities.

I note the frequency with which the PPP slips in to the defence of specific ethnic groups. Tell me you have never done that. I noticed the frequency with which the spokesmen on the other side

slipped in that group. When, in fact, at least one Member on the other side, on the Opposition benches, has been called before the courts for ethnically inflammable language. Look at the defenders of ethnic cleansing. **[Mr. Rohee:** That is a *sub judice* matter.] That was not *sub judice*. They are Members of the same party whose leader responded to the heckling of John Adams, a secondary schoolteacher of the indigenous stock, by calling him stupid. Just to make sure he understood, he said, “If Jagdeo was here he would have slapped you.” This threat was made good by the President’s security. I am quoting what he said. *[Interruption by the Opposition Members.]* You can ask him. If you do not know who he is, you can find out.

In 2011, a Member of this House, sitting across the aisle, took action against a commentator for accusing him of political racism. What is it we are looking at?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you should try to avoid references to matters which are still engaged in the courts.

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Speaker, I will avoid it, but I am pointing to a fact. I am not pronouncing on the case. I am simply saying that there are people who are throwing accusation.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, we must avoid that.

Mr. Greenidge: I am saying that Members, who are throwing accusations, have themselves being guilty of what I call the guineafowl theory. Do you know what the guineafowl’s characteristics are, Mr. Speaker? The guineafowl... **[Bishop Edghill:** You have passed the verdict. The case is on... *[inaudible]* You have passed the verdict.] Give me a break. There is no guineafowl case before the courts. Like you are dotish. *[Interruption]*.

Mr. Speaker, I am quite happy to withdraw the remark. The honourable pontiff is not dotish.

Bishop Edghill: I could be dotish.

Mr. Greenidge: I said that you are not dotish. Why are you fighting me?

Mr. Speaker, the friction between two farmers’ co-operatives in 1995, on the West Bank Demerara, gave rise to a very famous letter by Desmond Hoyte. Just to remind you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I must ask you to address the Chair.

Hon. Member (Opposition): And the budget.

Mr. Greenidge: My apologies Mr. Speaker. I will happily address you. It is a good job that some of my colleagues suddenly recognised that it is a budget that we are discussing. One of the issues around the budget discussion has to do with the misallocation of resources and the allegation of ethnic cleansing. That is what I am addressing. That is what you are speaking to and I am responding to it. I have a right to do that.

Mr. Speaker, the point is that President Hoyte, in looking at the PPP's financial budgetary, political and other policies, identified a whole set of characteristics, which carried the very feature of discrimination, and yes, racial and political discrimination, and otherwise. [Mr. Ali: Give me an example.] I have given you the example – 7th March, 1996. Those who live in glass houses should not throw stones. My colleagues are very vulnerable in that regard. We have, as I said, the guineafowl theory.

To close, I will remind them that they were two United Nations Commission reports on the PPP administration. The reports were not nice, okay. [*Interruption from the Opposition Members.*] You do not agree with me. Let me quote to you what they stated.

Mr. Doudou Diene, the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, concluded, "...every level of Guyanese society." This is under the PPP. This is a description of PPP's administration. I am reading you nothing about Trinidad, Mr. Speaker. I am reading you a passage that states:

"every level of Guyanese society..."

What does that have to do with Trinidad?

"...is permeated by a profound, moral, emotional and political fatigue arising out of the individual and collective impact of ethnic polarisation."

This side is accusing somebody else of doing the very things that it has been demonstrated to have done.

For those who have forgotten, let me remind you also, Mr. Speaker, that 2,000 may be a large number of people to have lost their jobs, but 3,000 is even larger, and that is what happened in

1993, when the PPP came to office. Between 1993 and 1995, there were 20,000 people laid off from the public service. Those who do not know must go and read, page 13, the “Guyana Experience of Economic Reform”, under the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF)... [Mr. Nandlall: Ask Mr. Nagamootoo, he was in Government in 1993.] You do not know what you are saying. We have a situation in which we utterly reject the allegations of the other side because they are there vices, not ours.

Let me turn now to the issue of foreign policy. Initially, of course, I would just like to emphasise the importance of foreign policy on development and on development itself on foreign policy. As it is known, foreign policies are especially important, in terms of stability and a country's security. Initially, Guyana's international relations were oriented towards our English speaking world and guided by a lot of ideological principles.

9.36 p.m.

That was around the time of independence and post-independence and there was, of course, the issue of political non-alignment, support for progressive causes worldwide, promotion of economic unity in the English speaking Caribbean, opposition to apartheid, which the PPP claims, but was never actively involved in, and the protection of Guyana's territorial integrity.

Guyana's Foreign Policy, now, I believe, has to be refashioned around the fundamental principles of the rule of law, universality and non-alignment, as well as, solidarity and responsibility. These basic principles are independent of the events that are going on around us in the international arena. We have aimed to restore the rule of law as an integral part of everyday life in Guyana because what one does domestically has a relationship to what happens internationally and how one is regarded. Guyana cannot be talking the rule of law, *vis-à-vis*, its neighbours or bi-lateral partners and practicing lawlessness domestically. We are keen to conduct our international relations within the strictures of international law. I will come back to this in a while.

For the moment let me say that, in that framework, for small and geographically insignificant states, such as ours, it is in that framework that we can find our protection. Otherwise we are into the law of the jungle, where bigger territories are able to bully others into acquiescing to something that they want us to do.

We are also striving for universality, meaning that Guyana is seeking to foster good relations with all nations. We want to be a good neighbour to all of our neighbours. We propose to have an open approach to the world. A well-developed network of relations is, of course, essential, if Guyana is to be able to safeguard its interests. Guyana will have to work with other states and provide consistent positions as it examines the issues as they evolve internationally. We would also have to extend our support, advice and votes to other countries as they are faced with issues and challenges. Consistency in our international policies is very important. To that end, we with the assistance of the resources provided under the Budget, will devote additional time and efforts to the rebuilding of our relationships, our image and our credibility within the international community.

We will seek to strengthen our cherish relations with traditional partners and seek to cultivate and develop new strategic partnerships. With the old partnerships, we are not going to be able to defend our interests internationally. As I say, the international arena is an evolving one. It is all change out there.

The umbilical connection between the countries of Asia and Africa is undeniable; my Colleague spoke to this already, as is the ancient heritage so many of us share. We are moving to develop mutually beneficial partnerships in the field of trade, culture and human development. Within the wider Caribbean region, we will devote our energies to making the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) work for our economic benefits, as well as the benefits of Caribbean brothers and sisters. These partnerships advance mutual economic benefits and they further enhance the relationships between our respective people.

Mr. Speaker, you will know of course that, in recent years, the PPP regime that preceded us, moved to deepen relations in the framework of the wider Latin-American integration framework - Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), MERCUSOR, the Economic Community for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and so forth. Naturally, we have realised that size imposes major constraints on countries the size of ours in the Caribbean and in order to overcome the question of size, one has to really pursue, in an assiduous and meaningful manner, the question of regional integration. We share too many common interests to allow these to be overlooked. Regional integration on the basis of what I call concentric circle, will be the basic pillar of our international relations.

We firmly believe that the path to greater prosperity for this country lies in deeper integration within the region, as well as, with the rest of the world. We believe that in moving forward on this front, particular emphasis will need to be placed on a more strategic approach to our participation in various regional and sub-regional mechanisms.

I pointed out in the past that we have performed outstandingly, as regards these international fora in the past. Our diplomats have made, as you know, a mark for themselves in the international arena. We have been critical to the formation of many of these groups even outside of CARICOM. The most prominent and perhaps well-known of these being the African Caribbean Pacific (ACP) Group of States and the Lome Convention which was spawned under the Georgetown Agreement, right here in 1975.

Over the last 23 years however, we managed a process of politicisation of recruitment; politicisation of the Diplomatic Corps, with recruitment not based on merit; the displacement of experienced Ambassadors and senior staff; and a number of other most undesirably, if not odious, practices. It is to this therefore, that we have to pay particular attention in order to restore our capacity to represent our interest internationally.

One thing I would like to make mention to, yesterday one of our Colleagues made reference to the border controversy and cited his close relationship with President Chavez and that he had met President Maduro and so forth. All of that is very commendable, but what I would like to say, it is naïve to believe that international diplomacy can be based upon the personalisation of issues. One has to really recognise that personal interests and friendships are in many ways, whilst they may be an advantage in helping to understand, they can actually be a distraction and actually create more difficulties for ourselves. We have seen that in our relationships with Venezuela in particular, on many occasions, even as the warming of relationships seems to be growing more intense, they are followed by actions that we have had no choice but to regard as aggressive. So one has to be sensible about this and recognise that countries have no permanent friends, they have permanent interests.

We have to be looking after our national interest however much we are feted by heads of state, ambassadors and ministers elsewhere. Do not confuse after lunch with diplomatic *demarche*. This is what I want to say.

The Prime Minister was justifiable in sense yesterday, when he heard our Friend, the Hon. Member Mr. Seeraj repeat President Maduro's comments - his criticisms of the Head of State of Guyana. Where are we? Would we hear that in the Venezuelan Assembly? No, we would not hear it. In fact, many of the Latin American countries, without taking the time to look at the issues surrounding the border, have taken a position, based upon what I might call cultural ties, irrespective of the facts. That is what we have to deal with. I want to urge our Colleagues on the other side, the work that they have done in this regard is useful, they have arrived at the same position as we have in relation to Venezuela, for example and it is unfortunate that some of the pronouncements are seeking to create divisions in a manner that are unhelpful.

In the few weeks since we have been in Office, we have already seen some odd trends. [Ms. Teixeira: Ninety three days.] A month is made up of weeks my friend, just in case you did not know that. We have noticed a sudden rise in visa applications. At the same time, there are alerts from countries, particularly in South Asia, about the movement of what they might regard as suspicious persons, potential terrorists and so forth. The very Members of the Opposition, who were at such pains to immediately suggest that the deportation of some Bangladeshi and Indian passengers, who arrived without both visas and return tickets, was somehow discriminatory, the visas are mandatory if the law requires a visa. If one arrives in the United Kingdom, Holland or anyway else without a visa, he or she may find his or herself in jail, if the authorities do not put him or her back on the plane. We should not be arguing amongst ourselves over things just to make ...They had no visas on arrival. [Interruption] [Hon. Member of the Opposition: We have a policy like that.] On the condition that they have a return ticket, did you see any return tickets? They had no return tickets, do not make up stories.

Somehow the PPP deportation of six Namibians in 1992, soon after they took Office, Namibians running from a South African regime that was illegally ruling Namibia, was acceptable. It is true. If you do not know, keep quiet. Guyana has no particular capacity, notwithstanding the Hon. Member, Mr. Rohee, in or out of office - notwithstanding them being in or out of Office - to really deal with terrorism on the scale that we see elsewhere. We see new dimensions in terrorism. Thailand is a new location for terrorism, never before experienced.

The Budget makes provision for additional skills and the replacement and the recall of political ambassadors, as well as officers, senior and otherwise, who have been posted abroad for

unconscionable periods of time, sometimes 14, 18 or 23 years, for example. These are periods far too long to be functional. If we take ambassadors and we send them abroad for so long, then there is no rotation, especially within a small diplomatic corps. I am not explaining that I removing them, I am explaining the logic and the formula associated with manning the diplomatic service. If you find it so uncomfortable you should not have had a ridiculous policy.

[Mr. Nandlall: You are in the Parliament 30 years now, why do you not move out?] Why did you take so long to move out Rajput? How long was it that he was employed? **[Mr.**

Nandlall: Is that your response?] Yes, that is my response. Let me hear yours.

As I said in Washington in June, in addition to improving Guyana's international standing, our foreign policy is intended to stimulate greater economic development and create conditions for increased remigration. We shall be structuring the work of the Ministry and give greater emphasis to economic analysis, as well as, emerging issues, such as climate change, national sovereignty and the like. We shall rationalise the work being done in these areas.

There has also been such enthusiastic support for the new Government from the diaspora that we have been looking at expanding and enlarging the work of the Diaspora Unit. The Government appreciates the contributions of the Guyana diaspora.

I would like to finally turn to the question of Venezuela. Members will recall that on 10th June, I briefed the Hon. House on the matter of the Venezuelan Decree 1787 of 26th May, 2015, the most aggressive action that has taken place, thus far, against Guyana, in furtherance of Venezuela's spurious claim to Guyana's territory. That Decree mandated the armed forces of Venezuela to enforce its provisions in territory that is unquestionably Guyana's. Not only did the coordinates encompass the maritime spaces in the coastal frontage of the Essequibo, but also those of the Demerara and Berbice.

The Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana strongly condemned the promulgation of the Decree because it was a flagrant violation of the relevant rules of International Law, including the fact that the land boundary between Guyana and Venezuela has been permanently and definitively established by Treaty and an Arbitral Award. The Government of Guyana embarked on a strenuous diplomatic campaign therefore, aimed at alerting the international community.

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

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Little boys can read. If you could not read it when you were a little boy then do not pronounce on it now when you have not read it subsequently.

9.51 p.m.

The relevant passage in the Geneva Agreement gives Venezuela no right to any land and the caveat in there is very specific. The agreement recognises that the issue between our two countries is:

“Seeking ‘satisfactory solutions for the practical settlement of the controversy between Venezuela and the United Kingdom, which has arisen as the Venezuela contention that the Arbitral Award of 1899... is null and void’.”

What it seeks to do or what it recognises and seeks to resolve is not the border controversy, but the contention that the award is null and void. Guyana has approached the Secretary General of the United Nations (UN), as you would know, to act in accordance with the obligations we posed in him, by the agreement, and to choose another means of settlement as stipulated in Article 33 in the UN Charter.

It is our firm belief that Guyana land boundaries are as internationally defined, and that our maritime boundaries are delineated in accordance with precepts of international law. We are confident that international law will bear us out whatever positions individual countries may take in relation to maritime spaces. It is clear that only one state may pose serenity over the maritime spaces relating to the same coast. In that regard, Hon. Members, I am pleased to inform you that Guyana has taken the purposeful and critical step of implementing the Maritime Zones Act by preparing the baselines that close the mouths of the rivers Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice and having these registered with the United Nations and published internationally, thereby safeguarding the rights and interests in waters that embrace the coast of Guyana.

The relations between Guyana and Suriname continue to improve markedly. I am happy to announce that Members of the Guyana Border Commission and Integral National Border Commission of Suriname have met four times and fruitful discussions and plans are afoot for a

fifth meeting in Georgetown. In that framework, with the Joint Border Commission, the parties are exchanging and examining historical documents that could assist the Commission in arriving at a consensus.

Mr. Speaker: You have three minutes more.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you Mr. Speaker. The last point I want to make has to do with the reaction of our Colleagues to this border issue. It has been reported that the General Secretary of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) has commented to the effect that the PPP would have practise proper diplomacy; the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) is mishandling and starts off with the example of the CONVIASA Airline, which is a complete fabrication. I was in a process of negotiations with the Ambassador and the people in Caracas, involving the Minister of Public Infrastructure in a bid to facilitate the CONVIASA Airline. So, to suggest that somehow, actions taken against the CONVIASA Airline were in retaliation for something, rather than dealing with their failure to make their deposit, is unfortunate and it could have been corrected. It is these kinds of, perhaps, unnecessary lapses between us that I think pose a threat to the effectiveness with which we can carry out our dealing with this controversy. One newspaper editorial, dealing with the matter in Guyana, said, "If there was a less testy relationship between the two political parties we would have been in a better position to deal with the national interest".

Since my time is almost at an end, I want to urge my Colleagues to bear in mind that there were a number of inaccuracies and indefensible assertions made in that press conference and subsequently. I would urge them to join us within this House, in the egis of a joint body to look at the matter so that we can show a solid front. The separate party position... [*Interruption*] We can do it on a number of things, but I am speaking to one point, at this point in time.

Let me just say something about future. In terms of the future, the prospects for 2015 and 2016, we will take every possible step available to try to protect our interest, to secure our territorial integrity, whilst at the same time fostering closer relationships with our neighbours and working within the framework that is provided, the framework provided in the Venezuela case specifically the Geneva Agreement. The Geneva Agreement says nothing about any maritime zone. As regard the maritime zones, contrary to the assertion on the other side that the maritime

zone is one that needs to be negotiated by [inaudible]. The Convention of the Law of the Sea is very clear. Mr. Speaker, you are an expert in this area. I first ran into this area whilst you were at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Exclusive Economic Zone has its own legal framework and we have laid our claim to that zone in accordance with the international rules. So, it is unfortunate that we would concede that right by saying that this is an issue to be now renegotiated or the boundaries to be negotiated by [inaudible]. There are ways of making sure that our Colleagues on the other side...

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

Mr. Greenidge: Yes, I am finish. I thank you very much for your patience and your support, Mr. Speaker and I thank my Colleagues for their attention. [Applause]

Mr. Moses: I wish to move the suspension of Standing Order 10(1) to permit this House to continue the general debate on the 2015 Budget, until all the persons on the list, agreed upon, have concluded their speeches.

Question put and agreed to.

Motion carried.

Leader of the Opposition [Mr. Jagdeo]: I had intended to start my presentation differently. I wanted to say to the Hon. Minister of Finance that, having worked for 15 years under the People's Progressive Party Government, he was not removed from the Ministry of Finance. He had held, in that Ministry, some very important positions. I expected a better budget from you, Mr. Jordon.

Our dear Vice-President started his debate presentation, his speech in the House, by claiming that we, on this side of the House, were attempting to rewrite history. He used to support this argument, a set of facts, according to the dear Vice-President. May I inform the House that, our dear Vice-President Mr. Greenidge has it very wrong. He said that, the People's Progressive Party reduced employment in the public service by 3000 in 1993. In 1985, I think that was the time when the current Vice-President, Mr. Greenidge, became Minister of Finance, the employment in the public service was 28,686 persons. In 1991, it dropped to 18,361 persons, a

10,000 reduction and that was the last budget presentation of Mr. Greenidge. I am not making this up. There was a 10,000 reduction in the public service between 1985 and 1991. You have decimated the public sector.

Not only was the public sector decimated, in terms of numbers, but they were pauperised because when the exchange rate moved from - and I do not remember what it was in 1985, I think it was \$4 to US\$1, but I may accept that it was \$10 to US\$1. If it was \$4.5 to US\$1, it moved in six years, from \$4.5 to US\$1, to \$115 to US\$1 by 1991. That was your figure, Mr. Greenidge, because you said it was \$115 and it moved to \$210 and \$212, which is 95% depreciation. Just imagine I have not even calculated what the percentage of depreciation would have been if it was \$4 to US\$1 and it moved to \$115 to US\$1. It runs into thousands of percentage points in six years.

He is very proud to talk about how the exchange rate depreciated under the People's Progressive Party. May I show the House this book here? These are the Estimates from 1992. In these Estimates, in the Budget of 1992, we had a fiscal deficit budget that was over 50% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The Hon. Member Winston Jordon has come to this House, after we have just handed him a good economy, with a deficit of 2.9% of GDP, verses 50% of GDP. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I must ask you to address the Chair.

Mr. Jagdeo: With this sort of deficit, to finance that deficit, every two years we were doubling the debt of the country. The deficit has to be finance from somewhere and it can come from revenue, grants or loans. The Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge left us with a fiscal deficit that was 50% of GDP. More so, he left us with a debt repayment that was 124% of revenue. He said that we wanted to rewrite history. He started off by talking about his tenure... *[Interruption]* You are backing down now.

To the young Member of Parliament (MP) from Linden, when you speak about the youth being left with a debt burden and that they have to pay back this debt burden, just imagine that to service that deficit, it took almost 100% of revenue, when we got into office. Today, it is less than 5% of revenue.

10.06 p.m.

You left a bankrupt country. Today, we have the most vibrant economy in the entire region.

[*Interruption*] **[An Hon. Member:** What about the ERP?] The Economic Recovery Programme (ERP)? Ask Mr Nagamootoo about the ERP.

The Hon. Member Carl Greenidge, spoke about corruption and that era too -we all know. I had not, honestly, intended to go back to that era, but today, since our dear Vice-President took us back there, may we speak a bit about the Guyana Telephone and Telegraph Company (GT&T); may we speak about the Lord Weaver Brook deal... [*Interruption*] **[Mr. Greenidge:**

...read my book.] Mr. Speaker, I do not want to address him directly, so I will address you. We had a series of privatisations conducted at the time when the People's National Congress (PNC) was in office. None of those entities had an independent valuation done. They were privatised by different entities in Government – the Public Cooperation Secretariat, the Ministry of Finance was part of some of the privatisations; State Planning Secretariat privatised others; and the Office of President privatised some other entities. The reason we believe that there was no valuation and secondly, that they were privatised by different entities, was to share the spoils at that time because there were no transparent system of privatising entities. How did the People's Progressive Party remedy this? From the time we assumed office we halted all the privatisation. We contracted the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to develop, working with us, a white paper. That white paper was tabled in the Parliament and debated. We then set up a technical unit - the Privatisation Unit - that would report to a board that had three members from the private sector, the Labour Movement and the Consumers Affairs. Only after they had considered every privatised entity, then it would go to the Cabinet for approval. Until today, that system still holds in place. That is transparency for you. [*Interruption*]

Further to that, I hear a lot about public procurement. When the PNC left office, under the tenure of our Hon. Vice-President Carl Greenidge, we did not have a Procurement Act. We procured goods and services from the private sector based on four pages of regulations in the 1950s and another three pages from the 1920s and some ST circulars. There was no Act in place that had the force of law. In 2004, we passed a comprehensive Procurement Act that gave the right of appeal to contractors. We removed the Cabinet from the consideration of contracts and approving contracts. Cabinet had to give only its no-objection. The no-objection says if the

Cabinet does not agreed to a tender it has to state the reason why, it cannot change the bid, it sends it back to the central Tender Board. That is the change. That was transparency for you Hon. Member Carl Greenidge.

Hon. Members the legacy of Mr. Carl Greenidge, the Hon. Member, was 10 years without audited accounts. Today, the Hon. Member prohibited... *[Interruption]*

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member... **[Mr. Jagdeo:** Do not get hot under the collar, I am just starting] ...enjoys fabricating events. Let me just say to you, first of all, GT&T was valued by...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member what is it you are...

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Speaker, I am calling to ask the speaker to refrain from misrepresenting the facts. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Please proceed.

Mr. Jagdeo: Mr. Speaker, am I misrepresenting the facts when the former Auditor General, a close friend of APNU, said that he was prohibited by the Minister of Finance, at that time, Mr. Anand Goolsarran, from auditing the privatisation proceeds?

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Speaker, It is not true. The letter is in the public domain. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: If I would suggest, you should probably try to avoid the hearsay, he said that I said and he told me so.

Mr. Jagdeo: Mr. Speaker, it is not hearsay. If it is in the public domain, it is not hearsay. I do not have it here, but I can get a copy and bring it to your office. So much for records... *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, we should try to avoid that. The speaker is not part of the debate, so he would not want to receive documents of proof.

Mr. Jagdeo: Okay, thank you Mr. Speaker. Is it also not true that the entire revenue from gold proceeds that were exported at that time, all of our gold, went to a private account in Canada, managed by a private individual that the Office of the President at that time had access to, rather

than being paid into the Consolidated Fund? Is that not true too? The inflation rate in 1991 was triple digits. We have had single digit inflation. We had a net international reserve of \$17 million; today, it stands at \$635 million. That is the difference. If you want to talk or rewrite history here, do not think that we are going to be just sitting here passively and not respond to you, Hon. Vice President.

May we speak a bit more about foreign policy and I do not want to get caught up in just responding to former Minister of Finance. But, I was intrigued by his statement that a Member on our side should not have criticised President Granger and I agree with that, absolutely. We must, in this country, protect our Presidents from unfair criticisms by anyone, but when a United States Ambassador criticises our President, saying that he did not know what he was doing; saying he was misleading the people, we responded. At the last 4th July, 2015 activity, we were laughed at by the Prime Minister. We were told that there will be no more feral blasts. Well, there will be feral blasts and there should be feral blasts from both sides of the House, if anyone dares to disrespect our President. We did not have the feral blast because the Ambassador had spoken about Local Government Elections. It was because of his criticisms, personally, of our President. That was why we responded, “What is good for the goose should be good for the gander”.

I was also intrigued by the Hon. Carl Greenidge saying that, since they had assumed office they had seen an increase in visa applications because of terrorism. Is he saying that the terrorists feel that they can get comfort in Guyana today? Is this what he is telling the House, that the terrorists feel that there is a new Government who they can be comfortable with?

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with bilateral relations here, I do not want it to be said that I said... In relation to visas, I was speaking to Bangladesh and India. I just would like the speaker to quote me correctly.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member it is good if you say what you said. That would be good.

Mr. Greenidge: I am saying that we had been advised by Governments in the region of the movement of potentials terrorists. That is what I said. I did not say anything about those specific persons.

Mr. Jagdeo: It is late at night, so I will forgive the Hon. Member for not remembering what he said. We on this side of the House agree that our borders are sacred and that we all have to, unequivocally, defend those borders, regardless of the circumstances. We cannot be ambiguous about this issue.

But I want to caution our Vice-President who has responsibility for foreign affairs, that the unilateral root to border policy often creates unintended problems. Let us examine a couple of past experiences. In this House, a former Minister Mr. Fred Wills said, “There is no doubt about it the high watermark on our side of the Corentyne River is the border.” We have now been stuck with that problem. We said and have always argued that when a Minister of the Government says that in the House, and that would seem to have been the accepted policy for a long time, it was a nightmare for us to return to what we did. We were accused to be revisionists. I was personally accused of being a revisionist, when I said it is either the midpoint in the river Thalweg or we would have to have full use of rights.

On the same border issue, the agreement by Mr. Burnham and Mr. Sydney in 1970 used one word that has been misused by Suriname, conveniently. It spoke about the demilitarisation of the Upper Corentyne. They have interpreted that to mean that since we agreed to demilitarise the area, somehow we were accepting their claim to the New River Triangle. They have misused that in Suriname and elsewhere. A single word made a huge difference.

Then again, on the maritime boundary, we had in the 1970s, and earlier the 1980s issued, through the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC), several mining and prospecting leases and several wells were drilled by the Royal Dutch Company, the Shell Company and some others. Suriname never protested, we had awarded drilling permits all the way to 34 degrees east of through north. Then our Lands and Surveys Department developed some maps that were further west of the areas where we had been giving licenses to and Suriname had not protested.

10.21 p.m.

So when we came to that issue, of dealing with it, it compromises our arguments under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea because our own maps were claiming the midpoint or equidistance when our historical claims were further east of the equidistant point. So that created problems for us and it compromised our negotiations, even at the bilateral level,

because every time I argued for 34, they pulled out our own maps and said, “Here is what your Government entities have produced, so it is wrong to claim that.” We support and believe that the Geneva agreement is being misused. But because we allow a few words to go in there that can create ambiguity, the opposing party will jump on every such instance to enhance its claim. Therefore, I urge the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Minister to be very careful about this issue.

Our commitment to defending our border should never be questioned. It was in 1999 that I attended the first Heads of Government meeting just after becoming President, and, if you check the Communiqué of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting - I checked the years prior to 1999 - that was the first time that the Venezuela border conflict was put there. I lobbied several African leaders and others to get them to support the inclusion, in the Communiqué, of the Commonwealth solidarity on the Venezuela border controversy. And we got them to further establish a ministerial group to examine developments in relation to that border.

In 2011, you would see that a report was done by the Ministerial Group to the Heads of Government, commenting on our claim to the extended continental shelf.

We believe in multilateralism. We believe in this approach that small countries’ interests are best served by being part of multilateral engagements, but that does not preclude good bilateral relations, and this is where we have a problem, Hon. Vice President. You never refuse, in diplomacy, the opportunity to talk. You cannot say, “Go talk to CARICOM.” The fact would remain that Venezuela will always be our neighbour. Even if it is not an economic sanction, how is it that we can allow \$200,000 worth of grant not being put up by an airline to blind us to the fact that we had received, on the other side of the balance sheet, over \$750 million in soft loans from Venezuela and that Venezuela has a huge rice market?

You have to separate, like I did with the President of Suriname; we sat and we said that we would put the border issue aside, not that we are compromising our positions on them but we are bringing functional cooperation to the fore. So attitudes are very important. You cannot refuse to talk. You cannot shout across the borders at each other. You have to talk to each other.

Venezuela has been a good friend of ours in the area of functional cooperation. It claimed our borders and we believe that it claimed our land, which we believe is unjust. And right here, in

Guyana, after speaking to President Chavez and giving him the documents coming out of the *Central Intelligence Agency* (CIA) and others from the 1960s, he went straight to another meeting and claimed, publically, that the claim by Venezuela to our border in 1962 was an imperialist invention and plot.

We have to talk to people. We have to get back that rice deal. Every year, the Venezuelans said, “We are not going to buy the rice.” And, every year, we went because of good relations and got it extended. It is in their interests, too, because they are getting prepaid. The loans that they are making to the rest of the Caribbean get repaid over 17 years and 25 years. In our case, they get it almost immediately. If you look at the time value of money, it benefits them. But what do we do?

We also get a premium of \$300 more on the price of rice, which benefits us too. The rice farmers alone have received, in that premium, above world market price, over \$40 billion in six years, because the total rice export to Venezuela was \$560 odd million. We have to secure that. We have to get the PetroCaribe Agreement extended because it provides a facility for us that allows us to engage in trade financing. I was very disappointed that the Minister of Finance brought in PetroCaribe proceeds into the Budget. So when the nation thought that \$23 billion would be given to rice farmers to buy their rice, it was just a paper transaction reflecting what had been done in the past but now brought on the books to create the impression that something new was being done for the rice industry. Not a single thing has been done for the rice industry in this Budget, contrary to the APNU/AFC promises on the campaign trail that it would pay higher prices for rice - \$6,000 and \$9,000 per bag of paddy. You need to look at this.

I was very disappointed...maybe I should not say that because one cannot say things about the President. But it was reported that the President said that it is a private industry and, therefore, do not look for too much from the Government. If that is accurate, the industry cannot look forward to any help from the Government and this is going to be very sad. We should be happy that we are producing close to 700,000 tons of rice now, up from a paltry amount in the past, and people talk about crises in the industry. Who responds to lack of support by greater production? It is a market signal; they knew that there were more markets - a sympathetic Government – and they knew that their money would be spent on drainage and irrigation. They knew that we would go

out and seek markets for them. Therefore, they responded by producing. Should we not encourage this?

It has now grown to the biggest foreign currency earner or one of the biggest foreign currency earners for the country, and so it has implications for the entire macroeconomy. This should be done; we should support the rice industry not because the rice farmers voted mainly for the People's Progressive Party/Civic, but because their production is good for Guyana.

I saw the call of the private sector and let us, on both sides, not delude ourselves when we sit in this House. We have been talking to people, as I am sure you have been doing. If you talk to the people on Regent Street, they would tell you that few people are going into their stores. They were selling \$400,000 per day in the past and now they are selling \$30,000, sometimes \$100,000. The circulation of money in the system has gone down. **[Mr. Jordan: That was since last year.]** We will come to when. Whether it is last year or this year, you have an obligation to deal with it. People are losing their jobs in the private sector. I do not want to call the names of the private companies but they are laying people off. If you go to the wharf and speak to the Stevedores...because of less demand in the system, there is a decline in retail trade, less imports and they are getting less work. The contractors had to lay off a lot of people; this is the real world out there.

As you claim, the economy has slowed down. What happens in the rest of the world when the economy slows down? What happens when the economy starts going into crisis? They do anti-cyclical measures and so... **[Mr. Jordan: ...[inaudible]]** I hear the Minister of Finance saying Government spending but the Minister of Finance needs to know that the equation is that gross domestic product is equal to private consumption, private investment, Government spending and net exports. So, assuming that he presents a budget to this House that is the same like last year – not that it is similar... **[Mr. Jordan: It is not the same.]** The difference is \$2 billion. It is the same. What has this Budget done to stimulate the three other variables in this equation - private consumption, private investment and exports? He has done absolutely nothing.

This Budget and the Minister of Finance operate on the flawed assumption that the Minister can tackle the economy by dealing only with one element of the equation; it is a fallacy in the world

[Interruption] the Minister of Finance is quarrelling, Mr. Speaker. He will have a chance to speak. I know that I am getting under his skin because he presented a flawed budget and his Colleagues need to know that too. I was just saying that when the world economy goes into crisis, countries do either one of three things: increase the Government spending, increase money supply or a combination of both. The Minister has not done any such incentive on the Keynesian side and then he is talking about withdrawing Government money held in private accounts. He is shrinking the money supply. This is not anti-cyclical; it is pro-cyclical, and you are going to drive the economy into greater problems. It is a flawed economic... *[Interruption]*

If the Ministers feel as strongly as they did yesterday that all of this money is illegal, they should transfer the money today. It is easy; it can be done with a single stroke of the pen. And if they do not do it, it means that the same reason they attributed... **[An Hon. Member:** You want to thief it.] Exactly. The reason was that we were keeping it outside to thief. Then they are keeping the money outside of the Budget to thief it.

I have heard the Minister speak about ‘voodoo economics’... *[Interruption]*

10.36 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please resume your seat. Let us try to keep the language parliamentary at least. Certain words being hurled across do not show respect for this noble House. *[Interruption]* Hon. Members, I ask you not to anticipate the Speaker. What I am asking Members to do is to control their responses and their reactions to the speakers. Thank you. Please proceed.

Mr. Jagdeo: Mr. Speaker, this is very important because, if we do not get the right framework, the Budget will be a lacklustre budget. It is underwhelming. That is what I said. It does not respond to the concerns of the people out there. It does not focus on those who are losing their jobs. It does not focus on creating wealth. What it does is focuses on redistribution and even that the Hon. Minister has wrong. As my Colleagues have pointed out, he gives with one hand and takes with the other. I noticed that, in the Budget, he did not say the cost of removal of the subsidy for the National Insurance Scheme (NIS); he did not put a cost to that nor did he put a cost to the withdrawal of the subsidy to pensioners. If we want to move this country forward, we

have to have a budget that responds to the needs of the people. With this Budget, in two years to three years, the economy will be flat-lined.

Already, the demand for housing...and you talk to the real estate agents if you do not believe me; they cannot sell a single house because people are anticipating a drop in the value of homes. Have them speak to the people who are selling motor vehicles and they would tell you that the sales are drying up. People are holding on to the spending now, the money that they have, because they are not getting the right signals from this Government. That is why I said that it is a crisis of confidence. It is because the Minister, in his Budget, has not tackled the key issues. He has them philosophically wrong. He has not dealt with the key issues in any great detail.

He talks about remission level - \$55 billion of remissions for friends and family. He did not tell us what revenue to GDP ratio he wants to target and, if you remove all these remissions, then Banks DIH Ltd. would stop getting some of its concessions; all the manufacturers will not get their concessions; people who are importing vehicles, re-migrants, *et cetera*, will stop getting their concessions. [Mr. Jordan: Quote the relevant [inaudible] remove their concessions.] Do you want me to quote it, Mr. Jordan?

Mr. Speaker, I am addressing you. The implication is that the Minister, in the Budget, spoke about remissions being too high, that they are given to friends and family of the PPP. Under remissions, all of these things fall, as the Hon. Carl Greenidge would know. The Minister is not saying if he is proposing a tax increase. If you remove remissions for the private sector, it is an effective tax increase. That is why I asked him what revenue to GDP ratio he is targeting. He has not said so in the Budget. The Budget is vague and often vacuous. It does not have any measures to address the concerns of people out there.

He spoke about a good life, and I was wondering where this good life came from. Then I looked at the PPP/C Manifesto. Page 6 has “creating a good life for people”. They even had to plagiarise this. This is our Manifesto, which it came from. We issued our Manifesto before we had to nudge theirs out of them. It was a good life.

The Hon. Minister of Finance spoke about a green economy, but there is not a single green initiative in the Budget and I have not heard any Member, on the other side, speak about the Low

Carbon Development Strategy or whatever else they will call it. But on the project that has the potential of decarbonising 95% of our energy sector, he has come to this House and said that it is criminal to go forward with it. What he is implying is that the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Norwegians, Sithe Global, which is a subsidiary of Blackstone - and the Hon. Catherine Hughes was the public relations officer for that forum and Mr. Nigel Hughes was the company secretary for that firm... The Minister is saying that all these people are corrupt: the Norwegians, the IDB, the Government of Guyana, Blackstone - one of the biggest companies in the world - and China Railway Construction Company Limited all got together in a corrupt act to perpetuate this project on the country.

What are their facts? He also claims that the IDB has withdrawn support or somehow thinks the project is too risky. Well, this is news to me because here I have a mandate letter signed by the IDB in January of this year; the Vice-President of the Bank signed this with the developer to raise \$150 million for this project. Regardless of all of this, let us go through the project economics because they have misled the public.

I was travelling, before I came back to Guyana, when I was a private citizen and I saw, in the parliamentary debate, some Members outdoing each other to say what the loan to Guyana would be if we proceed with this project. So, it ranges from \$750 million to \$2.1 billion, with every Tom, Dick and Harry putting in a number in between.

There is no loan, except that which the Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan, mentioned in this House. It is not \$750 million; the loan to the project will be \$40 million from the IDB. The cost of the road is either \$35 million or \$45 million and \$80 million comes from a grant from Norway; it is not the taxpayers' money. But what do we get from all of this? We are not taking the reserves of \$65 million. It is a liability cost (LC); it is not going to disappear; it is going to still be ours.

So, let us look at these numbers. What are we getting in exchange for spending \$40 million of our own money, or assuming it is all our money - \$165 million? We are getting the largest private sector investment in the history of Guyana. Under project economics, this will not be a project owned by the Government of Guyana; they will sell power to us. The Minister said that they will sell power to us at \$130 million per annum for 20 years. The figure is not true because, in the IDB mandate letter, it puts a cap at a \$100 million; so, \$2 billion over 20 years.

The Minister created the impression that we are getting nothing for \$2 billion. We are getting 1,050 gigawatt hours per annum. Now, assuming we were generating this, what would be the alternative? And, if the Minister of Finance leaves this House without responding to this, that would be a criminal act. You need to tell this country what the alternative is if we are to generate power ourselves. The alternative, in 2012 and 2013, if you look at the fuel prices, would be \$5.5 billion over 20 years, a difference of \$3.5 billion that we will save this country. And, after 20 years, the cost of power comes down from about \$0.10 per kilowatt hour to \$0.02 per kilowatt hour. It is criminal not to go forward with the project.

The next thing, though, is if we ignore all of the project economics...remember, we are not spending money; we are just buying power. Assuming that the project goes forward, do you know the flow through the economy, the growth in GDP that this will bring? It will be \$700 odd million. We are using \$165 million to catalyse a huge investment.

More than everything else, the Hon. Vice-President, Carl Greenidge, should listen to this carefully. This Amaila Falls Hydropower Project is the ultimate act of expression of sovereignty. We have the IDB comprising of almost all the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean participating in this deal. We have China participating in this deal. We have Norway participating in this deal. We had an American investor, one of the biggest companies in the world, and this Project would have been built in the Essequibo. What is more than an act of sovereignty? Even Venezuela sits at the IDB and did not object to it. It was the ultimate expression of sovereignty, but they killed it. They killed it because it started under us. Then the alternative was to start discussing some project with the Brazilians.

Let me tell you the history of that, Mr. Speaker. When President Lula da Silva and I opened the Takatu Bridge, Donald Ramotar was with me and President Dilma was with President Lula da Silva, and he said, "Can we do something together under energy?" And I said, "We would examine that but, of course, it had to be feasible, beneficial to Guyana, socially acceptable and environmentally acceptable to our people." So, he sent his Minister of Energy, along with a representative from the Development Bank of Brazil and some contractors. We had a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and the discussion started. So, the Minister cleverly slipped that in there as though it is new. You are ignoring Amaila because we have developed

this Project. Let me tell you something: if we miss this opportunity, we will take another 20 years to get hydropower. Remember the failed project that started. The Hon. Member, Carl Greenidge, would know that we paid back about US\$300 million of debt.

10.51 p.m.

It was part of the debt profile in the past. We did not get a kilowatt of electricity. If we miss this opportunity, the people of this country will never forgive us. It is part of a green economy. I urge the Minister not to come and respond with fluff again. He should respond in specific terms.

I would like the Minister to respond to the issue, since there have been major protestations on the part of my Colleagues on the other side of increase in salaries for Ministers. They said that it never happened; they were not even considering it. I perfectly understand if that is true. Would the Minister of Finance or the Hon. Prime Minister give us the assurance that Ministers are not going to get an increase above that of public servants in their five years in office? Would he give us that assurance here tonight in the House? I would like to get that assurance from him. If he does not, then there is something sinister afoot.

I did some rough calculations. The Hon. Prime Minister is going to cost the country about \$90 million dollars a year. After five years, he is going to cost the country half of a billion dollars. The Hon. Vice-President, Mr. Ramjattan, and other Vice-Presidents would cost the country about \$60 million a year.

I served this country for 18 years, 12 of them as President. My pension is akin to what the others get, frankly speaking. For three months, the Prime Minister has served the country and his pension, if he retires today, would be close to mine; I think it would be bigger than mine. Guess what is his portfolio? I had to manage the entire country as President. He has a portfolio that Mr. Kwame McCoy, from our side, had. There must be some justice in this world.

The key issue is trust. Do people trust the new Government? The Hon. Member, Carl Greenidge, knows about credit ratings and he knows about when Guyana was deemed un-creditworthy and loans were not given to the country. Let us look at the creditworthiness of the new Government. The Cummingsburg Accord states:

“The Prime Minister shall have responsibility for domestic affairs, chairing the Cabinet, recommending ministerial appointments and providing the organisational structures of ministries for approval of the President, appointing heads of agencies and non-constitutional commissions, and domestic security.”

I do not need to tell you what the reality is. [Mr. Ramjattan: What is the reality?] The reality is that we have a Prime Minister, today, who has a lot of security, but his portfolio is the National Communications Network (NCN), the Government Information Agency (GINA), and the Guyana National Newspapers Limited (GNNL). If this Government cannot be faithful to its partner in Government, how is it going to fulfil the promises to the people of our country?

Even the Hon. Member, Mr. Trotman, has been fired from the position of Speaker, because there is a better Speaker now, and he has been given a junior portfolio in the Ministry of the Presidency. The Hon. Ramjattan has been given one-third of a Ministry. If the Government cannot be faithful to its partners, how can it be faithful and true to the word that it gave to the people? It is a huge problem of credibility that this Government has.

This Government is notorious for backpedalling and for changing its mind. When we pointed out that the increases in this Budget for public servants were paltry, the Hon. Member, Mr. Harmon, said that the wages are temporary. We are waiting for the final payment to the public servants, since the Hon. Member Joseph Harmon said that the increases given in this Budget are temporary. I want to urge Mr. Patrick Yarde from the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) to go over to the Ministry of Finance and ask, “Since the Minister in the Ministry of the Presidency said that these are temporary increases, when is there going to be final wage increases?”

Secondly, they have backpedalled again. After firing the 1,952 Amerindians... Mr. Trotman, you were justifying firing people. You did not mean those people. The Hon. Member, Mr. Trotman, sought to justify firing of people. Is he justifying the firing of these 1,952 persons? Is it not the biggest act of discrimination? It is 3% of the population; it is \$720 million out of the village economies. It can decimate people’s lives. The Members of the Government sit in offices and they do not understand the plight of those people.

Notorious again for backpedalling: after naming boards and, recognising that they got criticised for naming the boards, they are now backpedalling and saying that the composition of the boards will change.

Regarding the members to agree on the terms of reference for the constitutional commission, they have now backpedalled and said that they would include others.

Regarding the Airport Expansion Project of the Cheddi Jagan International Airport, they were against it; then they were for it; then they were against it; and now, suddenly, they are for it again.

They backpedalled on the issue of bankruptcy. I heard the Hon. Minister of Finance say that he did not put that in his Budget. The Government has been claiming that the country is bankrupt. Let me tell you this: when something like that is said, do not underestimate what it means to the rest of the world. If investors hear that a country is bankrupt, the sophisticated investors start thinking that the Government would raise taxes. The insurance companies start pushing the premium up because they say that the country is risky; the political risk insurance goes up. Interest rates go up. One little statement of that nature could make a huge difference. This country is not bankrupt by any stretch of the imagination, as I had demonstrated in the past. If it is bankrupt now, then it must have been hell in 1992. **[Mr. Jordan: Your time is up.]** You are begging.

I heard the Hon. Member, Mr. Gaskin, say that reputable investors will want to come into Guyana if the framework is changed. Is he saying that ExxonMobil is not reputable? It came before this new Government came into office. Is he saying that CGX Energy Inc. is not reputable? Is he saying that Guyana Goldfields Inc. is not reputable? There are several others that are here now, which are investing, and that will be creating jobs that the Minister was so proud to announce.

We passed a law in 2003 – the Fiscal Enactments (Amendment) Act – and we sought to remove ministerial presence from processing duty free concessions. The channel was the Guyana Office for Investment (Go-Invest), the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA), and it went to the Minister of Finance only in circumstances when tax holidays had to be given. What this has been replaced

with is, for the first time, a politician who has been reinserted into the system. The Hon. Minister Gaskin now chairs the Go-Invest Board.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you what happens. Now, persons have to send their applications to Go-Invest and Go-Invest, chaired by the Minister, will examine the applications and then make the recommendations to GRA for duty-free concessions. In the past, it was a technical body and then it was processed by another technical body in GRA. The Minister now will decide who gets concessions and who do not when investors send their proposals to him. And they talk about transparency. It is shameful. It is a reinsertion of the politician. This is a recipe for corruption.

This Government has a fetish for new, bright, shiny things – cars, guards, building new arches, and 10 flags. Hon. Member Greenidge, please do not allow them to introduce a flag for Essequibo, Region 2, and other regions that are in the Essequibo. Please do not allow them to do that because that is where the undermining of the unity of a symbol that we all respect would begin. It is one flag; it is one anthem. That is it. Do not do that. We already hear talk about identification cards being issued to our people. You can only reinforce it by doing this.

I heard presentations about us getting together to plan the 50th anniversary and, at that time, there would be introspection on where we are going and how we would bring people together. We do not need to wait until next year. That has to be done now. You are not bringing people together. You are dividing them. This nation is being divided right down the middle.

11.06 p.m.

The Hon. Member, Carl Greenidge, mentioned my court case. I am extremely proud of what I said. This case is subject to private lawsuits. At the end of the speech that I made there, one statement was omitted. It was the statement where I said that had this happened in the PPP we would have kicked the person out. That is a matter that is before the courts. I am going to be justified because my record is clear.

To the young Member of Parliament, the Hon. Member from Linden, in the 1990s when I took the staff of the Ministry of Finance - I do not think Mr. Jordon went there; he did not want to go - we walked at nights through places such as West Watooka. We went into Victory Valley and built bridges. We sat with the community and worked on a development plan. We got a grant

from the European Union (EU) for the Linden Economic Advancement Programme (LEAP) and the Linden Enterprise Network (LEN). When I walked through those areas in the 1990s, where Amelia's ward, a bright shining area, is now there was bauxite lands. Block 22 was also barren land. Now, there are thriving schemes there.

There was an old shabby hospital and there is a spanking new hospital now.

We got an investor for the bauxite industry and right now a water treatment plant is being implemented. We fixed the roads. In Burnham Drive it was impassable and the people asked us to fix it and we did it too. I have worked on the ground with people from Linden, not sit in offices here. Our track record is a clear one.

The now Government has used the excuse that, in the past when we were in Government, we controlled the Central Government and it only controlled the region. Now, the Government controls both. So, in three or five years' time, if the petition succeeds, we will see you in Linden. Then, you will have to account to the people because you control both the Central Government and the region.

The Government spoke about Angoy's Avenue. When I went in there and we sought to fix the road, the Mayor said that it was executive lawlessness. This was because I sought to discuss the issue with people and fix the roads. That is the kind of thing we did in the past. I do not have to worry too much. We will be back on the campaign trail soon. In 38 months, we are going to be back on the campaign trail and we are coming back for power because we know that the Government is going to fail. We know that, with this sort of Budget, the Government cannot succeed. It will flat line the economy. This Government is not focused on people. It is focused on itself.

If the Minister of Finance wanted to present a budget that had an element of stimulus...Let us look at the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). He proposes to reduce the deficit from 5% to 2.9%. The budgeted figure was 4.9% in 2014. Assuming that he said that the 2014 budgeted figure should be used, that would have given him close to \$12 billion, without it being inflationary, because that was the monetary framework in which the budget was crafted, and it looked at the monetary variable. It would have given him \$12 billion more to spend without compromising the country's macro-economic figures, just going back to that deficit. He could have spent the \$1.6

billion on our school children. He could have given another 15% on the wages bill, which would have cost \$6 billion. Had he decided to go with the original framework, he could have given the public servants another 15% on wages and salaries on top of what they got, and it would only have cost \$6 billion of the \$12 billion that was available to him. That would have increased private consumption. Do you remember that equation $GDP = c+i+g+nx$? The 'c' component would have gone up; people would have spent more. The Government could have stimulated the economy; it did not do that. The Government could have spent more on police equipment. It could have done a number of things without compromising the framework.

We have seen a budget that has nothing to do with people, one that has nothing to do with jobs, and one that has nothing to do with public servants - the people who supported the Government. I think that the Hon. Members on that side were shocked when they saw the measures. I think that none of the Cabinet, and more so the junior ministers, never knew what was in the Budget outside of a framework. They never saw the measures. They were shocked in here when it was read to them. They are forced to defend things that many of them do not believe in. Let me say that the Government spoke about 40% unemployment. I looked at the last budget that the Hon Member Carl Greenidge presented. It had 751,000 people living in Guyana and it had GDP of about \$300 million. So, the per capita GDP was about \$280. Now, it has moved to \$3,700 from \$280. This is per capita. If the Government is saying that 40% of our people are unemployed, it means that the productivity of labour has gone up tenfold. The Government is saying that less employed people are creating more wealth. So, it is saying something fantastic. It is either it is true that the productivity of labour has gone up tenfold or the figures are wrong. And I believe the figures are wrong because today on per capita basis you are *[inaudible]*.

I hope that the promises to the Amerindian people are kept. I hope that the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) does not disappear off of the map because it seems, from the debate, as though it has disappeared. This is money that we have earned as a country. I saw the Hon. Minister of Finance wrongly classifying it as financing. It should be classified as revenue. This is money earned. Money earned is classified as revenue.

This was to catalyse big investment. It was to create a whole new range of industries that are low carbon in nature. The money was supposed to help to complete the demarcation exercise. It was supposed to help transform some 165 village economies. It was supposed to computerise those

villages in the interior. It was supposed to set up a biodiversity centre for international studies so that a new type of export that would create jobs could be generated. This is the framework. Two of the Hon. Members on the other side - Hon. Member Sydney Allicock and Hon. Member George Norton – sat through a lot of those meetings, extensive discussions and consultations that we had. We have earned close to \$250 million. I know that the Hon. Member Ramjattan did not want it released. He wrote the Norwegians several times. Now, you are in Government and we will support the money flowing to this country because it will be coming to make changes to people's lives right here in Guyana. But we have seen nothing about that.

Regarding the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) project that we hear so much about, it is true that the cable to Brazil project failed. The project failed because the cable was not placed properly. The project cost \$8 million. The cable got broken in several places because of the faulty laying of the cable. It is very different from the \$32 million project we had with *[inaudible]*. This was supposed to build, along the coast, a fibre backbone from Crabwood Creek all the way to the Pomeroon and up to Linden and into Brazil. It was one backbone that would have allowed us to do e-governance. We were already working on software for several modules. Regarding e-security, the same closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras that the Hon. Member Ramjattan was talking about, could have run on that backbone, connect all the police stations so that there could have been real time accounting, and connect the hospital so there could have been e-medicine. We would have connected the Ministry of Agriculture and we would have connected the entire government.

The second part of the project, and most importantly for me, was for free public Wi-Fi across Guyana to give homes up to 250k of bandwidth. The cable from Brazil should have brought in bandwidth at \$500 per megawatt, which is significantly lower and would have lowered the government cost. I have not been dealing with this project for a while but I would ask you to please reconsider the intent. That is why we said that there should be one laptop per family. It was so that 100,000 poor families suddenly could connect to free Wi-Fi. And when the Government is connected, there would be a leap in terms of digital connectivity.

The Hon. Member mentioned that one of the four or five strategic orientations of the Budget to be achieved in 2020 is a knowledge-based economy. A knowledge-based economy can only run on modern platforms. The key platform has to be the ICT platform that connects people and that

creates new jobs, as a sector itself, such those at Qualfon and Teleperformance. It is also about it being used to create productivity in other areas to connect people and make sure that we are all computer literate – the entire country. This is the quantum leap that we need as a country. We do not need a tinkering around the edges.

Giving 9,000 teachers the computers - although I am happy for them - that came for the Amerindians is not a strategy. We must also give to the other people.

Digicel had asked for permission to bring in a cable; we need 10 cables. Several new cables are needed. Even the *[inaudible]* arrangement, regarding which I heard about big corruption, I sought to get some briefing on it and they told me that the cable is broken. We had asked Digicel to do a study to see if it could have taken over the cable and if it could have given us a few strands on that same cable, so that we could have brought in the bandwidth for Government, and it would have gone to a centre.

11.21 p.m.

The problem is that they said that it was too costly. Digicel did an assessment and said it was too costly. So, without any further cost to the Government of Guyana, this company was going to fix the cable, give us 12 strands and that would have been enough for our bandwidth. It did not matter whether or not they got a lot of concessions because the cost of fixing the cable is about \$15 million and is money that the Government would not have had to pay. That is the explanation.

In the haste to make us look corrupt... we have heard this. By the way, regarding the audits, maybe I should come to audits; we hope that when we raise the appropriate questions in this House we will get the answers. We believe that to single source audits, running into hundreds of millions of dollars without any public tender process, is a hugely corrupt act on the part of the Government.

The Audit Act of Guyana states:

“(1) The Auditor General shall be the external auditor of the public accounts”.

It further states at subsection (2) that, without prejudice to subsection (1), the Government may contract international agencies.

Subsection (3) states:

“The Minister responsible for Finance may request the Public Accounts Committee to cause an additional audit...”

Subsection (4) deals with internal audits.

I have now heard that the Government is not calling it forensic audit anymore; it is calling it internal audit, just to get past the legal issue of undermining our institution - the Audit Office of Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, this is a travesty. We want an audit of the PetroCaribe resources. Let us work together to develop the terms of reference (TOR) and let a Forensic Auditor be brought in.

We want to support the Government of Guyana in an inquiry about all of the extrajudicial deaths which have been taking place in our country since Independence. If we want to build goodwill, we could we start by reversing this travesty to the Walter Rodney Commission of Inquiry Could we start by doing this?

The Government’s Manifesto states several things. The Opposition would support impartial investigations into the use of funds under the PetroCaribe agreement, the Lotto fund, the Skeldon Sugar Factory, the Enmore Sugar Packaging Plant, the Marriot Hotel, the contract for the international airport expansion project, the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, and the Surgical Speciality Hospital. We are pledging here, tonight, to support any impartial review into those projects.

We want a Commission of Inquiry (COI) into all election-related violence. We have demonstrated to this country a fresh approach. Although the difference in our votes, that is, what was published by the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM), is less than 5,000, you all did not see people on this side asking people to burn the city, you all did not see them going and beat people up. You all did not see any of that. That is a fresh approach.

In 1997, 2001, 2006, but more so in 1997 and 2001, when the difference was over 20,000 votes, the now Government refused to accept the results. They put this country through trauma; burned the city. There had to be a “Herdmanston Accord”.

I want the people of this country to imagine that if the shoe been on the other foot – there was a difference of 5000 votes and the now Government was on the losing side – do people want to bet that there would have been problems in the city and the burning of buildings around the city?

Mr. Speaker, we have demonstrated a fresh approach to maturity of this country. We have filed our petition and we will fight them. We are not here to defend only the interest of the 200,000 people who voted for us. We will defend their interest vigorously whether they are sugar workers, or rice farmers, or bauxite workers or Amerindians. But we have an obligation to all the people of this country. Trust me that we will support the other side. We do not believe in profiting off of the misery of people.

The Government cut [*inaudible*] or 90 billion dollars from it in three years and it is talking about the slowing down of the economy.

We are not going to cut projects for the sake of cutting them; we will not oppose for the sake of opposition. If an initiative is good, we will support it; if it brings benefits to our people, whether they are in bauxite, sugar, rice, retail trade or on wharf, or are public servants, we will support it. But trust me that we are going to hold you to account on those projects that are anti-national.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to vigorously defend the people of this country. So, I urge my Colleagues on the other side to ensure that this obsession with new things...they should quickly focus on tackling the people’s problems. We hope that the Government is not going to, as was announced by the Ministry of Finance, block the students, who owe moneys to the Student Loans Agency, when they wish to travel.

I hope that the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan would not give lectures to our young people about where they should go and how they should spend their money. That is none of the Government’s business. That is none of its business.

We hope that instructions would not be given to constitutional bodies and when they refuse to carry out the instructions, they are subjected to a barrage of criticism. We hope that does not happen.

We hope that there will be a serious attempt to address the crime situation. We were told before the elections that this Government had all of the plans, that it had all of the security experts, that it would do a better job than the PPP, and that it was just waiting to implement it.

To my surprise, after the situation escalated... and as we are on this point, I wish to express condolences to all those people, including the family from Corentyne that had one person brutally shot in her head. My condolences go out to those people in Berbice who are going through a trauma now. We should all be sorry and do something about it. It is no time to play politics. It is no time for incompetence when our people are bleeding.

We had a well thought out plan. The Hon. Member Felix knows about this. We had a well thought out succession plan. I had directed that 49 Cadet Officers, who were trained by the Army, go into the Guyana Police Force.

The cats, dogs and horses approach will not work, a Minister who walks around and tells people that if they do not do certain things they will be shut down, *et cetera*. Too many people are suffering. We are prepared to work with the Government to ensure that a properly conceived and implemented plan is pursued.

To my surprise, after making all of these claims to the electorate, the President had to hurriedly convene a meeting to discuss the crime situation because the Minister is not delivering.

There are a number of questions that I want to ask the Hon. Member Jordan. I want to ask him: how come after promising the reduction in Value Added Tax (VAT)...and we heard some fancy economics from one Member of Parliament who spoke about the effective rate, *et cetera*. Well, this year, there is a \$2 billion increase in the VAT collection over the last year. After years of promise by the Minister and A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) to reduce the VAT rate, the collection has gone up by \$2 billion dollars. The Government has taken \$2 billion dollars more out of the people's pocket after it promised to reduce the rate.

The Members on this side of the House want to work with the Government. I have made that clear. We want to work with the Government, but we are no pushover. Not because we are in Opposition, the Government should think it would get a free reign in this country.

We will be watching the Members on the other side carefully. This Budget cannot move the private sector forward and it does not change the circumstances in the country. It will never deliver the good life that the Minister spoke about.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for listening. I just want to say one thing and that is that I made a statement that I and the people on this side will never allow the Members on the Government side to make us victims.

We are never going to allow them to take away from us rights that have been earned through sweat and blood in this country. We are never going to allow you to change, willy-nilly, parliamentary traditions.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the time given to me. I thank you for the extra time too. It was your decision because the Government side was trying to contain me to one hour.

When I sat in this Parliament as Minister of Finance, Mr. Hoyte spoke for over two hours, and we on the other side supported three extension of time for him because we were not afraid of what he had to say. He had a duty towards the people of the country as opposition leader.

I had to confront with three speakers before me and two speakers after me, when the tradition has been the penultimate speaker is the Leader of the Opposition. So for us here, tonight, the debate for the People's Progressive Party in this National Assembly has just ended. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Opposition withdrew from the Chamber.

11.36 p.m.

Hon. Members (Government): Shame [chanting].

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will continue with the debate. The next speaker is the Hon. Moses Nagamootoo.

Mr. Nagamootoo: I had wanted to make my first speech to a budget debate, as Prime Minister, in a rather different fashion. I had wanted to sing the national anthem and I would have dared the ‘Maduro’ lovers’ over there to stand up with me and sing the national anthem in respect and in love of our country. I would not do so anymore because they would not allow anyone to question their patriotism. It is enough to say that nothing disappointed me this evening. Mr. ‘Joey’ Jagan, who is a Member of this Parliament, only son of Cheddi Jagan, and an authentic Jagan, who is here with us tonight, had written an article entitled “Coolie Bully” and tonight we have seen the bluster, the pomposity, the arrogance and, above all, the love of power. It was the usual *buse down*, cuss down mode from the Hon. Member Bharrat Jagdeo.

Outside of that, he tried to, in a very bigoted way, to lecture this House and to lecture to a man, the Hon. Minister of Finance Mr. Jordan, who wrote his speeches for many years and to lecture someone like me, Moses Nagamootoo, who was writing his speeches when he was President. He wanted to lecture us, Your Honour, about faithfulness. I am not going to talk about people’s conjugal affairs, but it is not so long, three days short of 100 days that he divorced the ‘Civic’. They came here as the PPP. Where are Mr. Hinds and the running mate of the then presidential candidate, Mrs Harper? They did not find it convenient to bring her into this House. Their Members would wish to lecture us that we do not have adequate women representation here. Their *prima donna*, who was the representative of women, and who shared the same platform with those who had been abused,... She had claimed to be defender of abuse against women. While not recognising the reality that on this side of the House, we have 11 women and the champions of women on that side, 32 Members, one-third has commanded by law is just above ten and not 11 as we have on this side. There is a fairer representation in keeping with the law on this side. I supposed that if they had not divorced and had not been unfaithful to their prime ministerial candidate and she was here, they might have created a balance. They have created an imbalance.

I was amused because the Hon. Member Mr. Rohee, when he stood up here, and he is the General Secretary of the PPP, said that he would be firing on all four cylinders but honestly, I just saw some smoke. I thought his car exhaust was on fire. I looked back to the Hon. Member Minister Felix, and I had wanted him to summon the water cannon. The Leader of the Opposition, who had come with mission to *buse* and cuss down, he was on fire, yes because he

realised that the message he gave here tonight, the harangue, the inconsequential speech that he may call it, had failed to fall on fertile ears during the just concluded elections campaign. No one would imagine that the presenter of that arrogant presentation and the display of crass pomposity had just suffered a massive defeat in an election. What did he say? The results fell short by 5,000. The fact is that he is in the Opposition and we are in the Government. The fact is he is the Leader of the Opposition and I am the Prime Minister of Guyana. It is an incontestable truth that we won the elections twice, not once.

First time was in 2011, when we won more seats than the PPP/C but it took the Government. We won the elections but we lost the Government. They had 32 seats and we had 33 seats on that side, but because of the present constitutional arrangement, it was conceivable that a minority could masquerade as a majority. Then we won the 2015 Elections, convincingly by the same number, 33 seats, on this side, and we have taken our rightful place as the tribunes of the Guyanese people, with their permission, their votes, to be on this side as the Government.

Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira, she spoke about the 4,000. You could have seen this state of disbelief; this state of being as *Alice in Wonderland*; that you had just won by a little, a *cuun*. It is if you can learn to spell that. Sir, it is not the size of the fruit that is important, it is the truth, and the truth of the matter is we won the elections. It is not the size of the fact, not the size of the truth. I believe that that is the first difficulty we are facing in this House: that there is an Opposition that wants to masquerade as Government because it has not adapted to reality, that it is defeated and almost vanquished as Government. Whether he says that he will come back to power in 30 months or 30 years, the result will still be the same when you go out there.

It is unbelievable that someone who came, using the budget as a cover..., because I watched, he took half of hour, before he mentioned the word “budget.” I also listened to him for one hour and 40 minutes. I am grateful to you, Your Honour, that you had not interrupted him. You allowed him to speak, to bawl, to shout, to holler, to scream, to threaten and he fell with his own rate. Like a spent shell, he could not go any further.

He lectured, all of us, on security. Well, Sir, I believe that old people would say, “show me your friends and I will tell you who you are.” We know that they talked very seriously about the crime situation. It is that Leader of the Opposition, when he was the President, who wanted to

bring an American here by the name of Bernard Kerik. Mr. Bernard Kerik is in jail. We know that there was someone named Roger Khan, who claimed that he was fighting crime for the then Government. We know that Mr. Khan is now in...

Hon. Members (Government): Jail.

Mr. Nagamootoo: We know there were friends who came here ostensibly to help in other ways. Mr. Sonny Ramdeo, he is in...

Hon. Members (Government): Jail.

Mr. Nagamootoo: There is another man. They were talking about fetching gold out of the country in the past. We are talking about people fetching millions of US dollars in jets that has been harboured at the Timehri International Airport. He is also in...

Hon. Members (Government): Jail.

Mr. Nagamootoo: We know their other friends, such as Mr. Ed Ahmad, and he is on his way to...

Hon. Members (Government): Jail.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Why are we being lectured about crime in Guyana when all the learned Member has to show in crime fighting is an association with a number of people who are in...?

Hon. Members (Government): Jail.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Sir, I will not try to deal with all the areas. My good friend Minister Jordan will address those other areas that he had spoken to. Except to say, that one thing bleeds my heart, which is, that everyone has been watching at the front cover of the budget speech, *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*, but the Members have not been looking at the back. At the back cover, for a purpose, is placed our beautiful Guyana, the unadulterated map showing all of our beautiful Guyana. Though the budget speech, on pages 3 and 45, makes reference to the spurious claim of Venezuela to our territory, not a single Member from those benches, except when the Hon. Member Bharrat Jagdeo came, mentioned a single word in support of Guyana's sovereignty.

11.51 p.m.

It saddens me that those who claim to love this country could come here and criticise our Government and our President for saying that this is an unjust claim, for saying that there is no legality to the claim, for saying that we refuse to talk, when the record is clear that we have said that we want bilateral talks with the Government of Venezuela on matters of mutual interests, but we would not talk about the border issue because the border issue has been settled by treaty since 1899, and it has been deemed final under treaty.

If those who claim our territory wish to question the validity of that treaty, they must go to a court of law to reverse it, but we are not discussing it because it does not exist as a claim. It is a controversy which they have raised.

I was surprised, dismayed, and shocked that the Ark patriot of Guyana, who claims to be the Leader of the Opposition, whilst saying with one side of the mouth that we will not surrender on our border issue, he proceeded to lecture us on whether or not we had made the right demarcation of our border with Suriname. It was an amazing re-entry into the past. He then lectured us by saying that we have not had talks or agreed to talks with the leaders of Venezuela. I would have expected him to say, unequivocally, in this House, the highest people's forum in the land, that the PPP condemns the Venezuelan aggression against Guyana's territory. I would have expected nothing less.

The economic aggression, the threat to make our citizens Venezuelan citizens, and the intimidation of investors are all acts of aggression. Therefore, I believe that it is very specious for him to come in this House to let it appear as if we are at fault, or as if our diplomacy is flawed, at a time of grave danger for our country.

I want to say that when I first went to that side of the House with the Alliance For Change (AFC), I sat with six other Colleagues, and I had said that the six and myself were the magnificent seven. There are six parties on this side of the House and the PPP on that side. I was hoping that we could have become the new magnificent seven in this House. But it does not seem as though we could attain that type and that level of cohesion and unity because all that we are finding is negativity, a sledge hammer approach, condemnation, and no indication that they could ever cooperate with anything that is done in the interest of the Guyanese people.

I want to turn to something that has also caused me concern. That is, apart from being ambivalent and dubious on our right to our territorial integrity, there was the destabilisation of our country – a scandalous destabilisation with an allegation that this Government is practising ethnic cleansing. It is something that is very painful and I will say it as well as I, as Moses Nagamootoo, can say it. Knowing the history, as Dr. Walter Rodney had written it about how Europe underdeveloped Africa, I am sick and tired of hearing people of European ancestry blaming Black people for everything. That is what it amounts to. It is an assault on Afro-Guyanese. He is held out to be the *jumbie*, the demon; it was said that there was ethnic cleansing in Guyana and it only means that Africans were getting rid of people of other races.

For me, that is odious. For me, that is trying to turn history on its head or throwing history into the septic tank. Those who know about ethnic cleansing would refer to the holocaust in Germany where six billion people were exterminated, or they would refer to Rwanda, or they would refer to Campuchia (former Cambodia) as it relates to genocide and extermination systematically of one set of people by another set of people.

No evidence could be produced in Guyana by those who make that claim, except to advertise to the world that Guyana is a country of grave human rights violation that requires international probing, at a time when our country faces an enemy that is claiming 3/8's of our territory. The Opposition is wounding the soul of Guyana; it is destroying the ethnic fabric of our country; it is setting our people apart. It has always been said that division in the face of the enemy is cowardly and treacherous. Nothing else could explain the charge of ethnic cleansing in this House and to having it placed in the record.

I want to say this: my Confidential Secretary is the Confidential Secretary whom I inherited from the former Prime Minister, Mr. Samuel Hinds. She is Indian. The two other Secretaries whom I inherited from the former Prime Minister, Samuel Hinds, were not dismissed; they are also Indians. The former cook and maid of the former President, Donald Ramotar, is now an office worker in my Office. The former cook came to my Office and we did not turn her out. She works there. She is Indian. The Permanent Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister was the Permanent Secretary in Office of the President. He has been and he remains a Member of the Central Committee of the PPP. He is Indian and he was the Chairman of the Progressive Youth Organisation (PYO). Not only is he serving as the Permanent Secretary of the Prime Minister, he

is serving, also, as the Permanent Secretary in the Office of the President. He was a candidate of the PPP in the last Elections. As far as I am aware, all of the confidential secretaries in the Office of the President, who served President Jagdeo and President Ramotar, are still working in the Office of the President.

I can give other examples, but those are just to show how mischievous, malicious and wicked this charge of ethnic cleansing is. When they tried last year to fool the sugar workers, one member of the PPP/C had said that the then Opposition, A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), was denying a subsidy to the sugar industry and it amounted to ethnic cleansing of sugar workers, meaning a Black dominated party practising ethnic cleansing against Indo-Guyanese sugar workers, when they knew for sure that we never opposed any subsidy to the sugar industry.

We voted for subsidy in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014. In 2015, we again voted for subsidy as a bailout to rescue the sugar industry because we believed in the livelihood of sugar workers. We believe that the sugar industry needs assistance. To this moment, \$57 billion has been poured into the sugar industry and this Government has said that the sugar industry is too big to fail. Where is the ethnic cleansing? It was those who were charging ethnic cleansing who went ahead and squandered \$47 billion on the Skeldon Sugar Factory, which is a white elephant. They came here, and the architect of the contract, the bad corrupt contract, is here standing as a defender of the sugar industry. It is no wonder that the sugar workers saw through the ruse and they voted solidly to reject that party and its leader at the last elections, in spite of the strong, and what was described to me, though it is un-parliamentary, *apan jaat* politics, meaning vote for one's own race politics. That is what they revived in this country to turn one section of the Guyanese people against other sections.

It is not only that. Those who cried crocodile tears for sugar workers did not tell us that on the eve of the elections they had bankrupted the sugar industry and they had not left any money to pay sugar workers for the week after the elections. That betrayal is criminal.

I, therefore, wish to place on the record my condemnation of this politics of intimidation, this politics of ethnic and racial incitement, and this politics of national treachery, which we have seen *rearing its ugly head* in our beloved land. When they came, the answer was given, but they

had to repeat the lie, like *gobelian* campaigners, that there was ethnic cleansing of 2000 Amerindian youths, when we presented the evidence here in this Parliament that those youths were severed from their recruitment at the end of April, 2015 by a Cabinet Paper, which was signed by Dr. Roger Luncheon, the former Head of the Presidential Secretariat, of a meeting that was held in March. The previous Administration allocated no money to pay the \$30,000 stipend that they had promised the Amerindian youths, but they brought them down to the city here to picket and to incite against the then Opposition parties and to do political party propaganda. They used them, abused them and refused them. The Amerindian youths must know that. There was no plan to keep them beyond the elections.

We have now corrected that. President Granger has announced a scheme. The Hinterland youths do not need dole; they do not need handouts. They are not mendicants. The stipend will be restored to all those young people in Hinterland areas who register to do training programmes. We want to provide them with sustainable livelihoods and lifetime skills. While they are being trained like teachers at the Cyril's Potter College of Education (CPCE) and other training institutions, they will have a stipend. That is why this Government consciously decided to restore the Subvention to the Critchlow Labour College (CLC) so that the poor urban kids can have an opportunity to be trained outside of the formal educational system.

12.06 a.m.

I want to say that our Parliament has not met for nine continuous months before we came here. Our Parliament had not had the opportunity to have a budget for 2015. The former Government was spending money willy-nilly. Dipping their dirty hands into the *tilly* without coming to the Parliament with any appropriation measures, for Parliament to guarantee the appropriations of sums of money.

The former Government violated the Constitution when it refused to seek approval for expenditures. It was for that reason, the violation of the Constitution, that now we have a historical development when we tabled a motion of no-confidence in this House against a runaway juggernaut that was violating the rights of the people. Their response to that was to shut the Parliament down. It was that which had triggered the fresh elections. But I am saying this, we had not met for nine months and therefore, there was some reason why this Budget was brought.

It was actually rolled over to cover all the expenditure that went on in the first 8 months, for which money had been utilised and authorised, I suppose, by the former Government and we had planned for moneys for the four months. It is a limited Budget; it is a constitutional Budget, fulfilling the behest to the Constitution, that 90 days after the election there must be a budget. Therefore, to come here and pretend as if this 2015 Budget is the APNU/AFC budget, from the 1st January, is an act of deception.

To say now that we were trying to muzzle them; we heard them speak *extensio* and no one muzzled them. They wanted the Estimates to be considered in seven days, when there is no guarantee in the Standing Orders for that to happen. It was only to do filibustering and to frustrate us because their intention was to leave the House. They are finish. They are gone. They probably will be history because they do not want to be here when their expenditure - well in any case they will not interrogate themselves over their illegal expenditures. They know that in the interest of saving parliamentary time, that we said three days would be enough. They now commit us to work all day from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. We conceded and compromise to allow that to happen, even though we had passed a motion because we are reasonable people. We are a good Government, committed to the principles of consultation and compromise. They realise that we gave in and they have nothing to crow about in the public, that we are violating parliamentary norms and democracy. So they have walked out. Like the nursery rhymes says: "Little Bo Peep has lost her sheep". It ends and they will come home and bring their tails behind them.

I want to now turn to my Ministry, which is the Office of the Prime Minister. I want to say that with my consent and agitation, the budget was cut from the billion it was to just over \$300 million. That is what offends them that I had decided to commit myself to an old guru, Cheddi Jagan, who had told us that we could be lean and clean. We do not need big bureaucracies. We can run ministries if we work hard and we can run them efficiently.

On the other side, they see terror because I have now decided to professionalise the public information service, to bring in new modules for public information. Where journalists, working in the public media, must be required to exhibit only one quality and that is professionalism, while recognising the fact that they are serving the Government of the day and not a party's interest; not a partisan agenda; or not a propaganda role. I felt that in this period of reorganising the public broadcast, radio, newspaper, and media that we did not quit a lot of money. But we

will reorganise and also rework the spectrum for television and radio licenses. We will re-examine, and where necessary, reverse the illegal granting of television and radio licenses to the relatives, cronies and friends of the one who stood up here and tried to lecture to us.

The attempt to attack me, to minimise me and to shrink me would not succeed. Mr. Nagamootoo has been here for 53 years and I have never gotten weary as yet, as the song say, and they will not wear me down. I want to tell you that the character of this Government has been defined, not by the words of defilement from someone who had defiled his own political legacy, but by being true to the promises we make to people. The mighty one might not be true to promises. We all know that, but we are.

We had promised, in this manifesto, in the last election that we will deliver on 21 points. Today, it is with great honour and privilege that I quickly report to this National Assembly that we are all people of integrity and honour; we all have kept our promises; and we all kept faith with the Guyanese people.

We said in promise no. 1, that we will reduce, within 100-days - we still have three more days to go, we are not at the finishing line yet, we have days to spare - the Berbice River Bridge toll. Well, I am happy to report to this House and to this Nation that that was done. Although former Minister Benn is on record as saying that is cannot and will not happen. Effective from 1st September, 2015, tolls for passenger cars and buses will be reduced by 13.6% from \$2,200 to \$1,900 and there will be a 10% reduction for all other categories of vehicles – promise kept.

Promise no. 2, significant salary increase for Government workers - done. The basic minimum wage increased as of 1st July, by 26.4%, from \$39,450 to \$50,000. All other public servants are set to receive a 5% increase, plus a \$5,000 a month top up. Although this is only a start, the salary increases have been hailed and welcomed by workers and the labour movement. In addition, hourly rates for long neglected school sweepers and cleaners have been adjusted upwards and I am told by 15%.

Promise no. 3, measures to ease the impact of Value Added Tax (VAT) - done. The phased reduction of VAT is delayed, pending reports on the tax reform committee. Our Government seeks to plug tax loop holes in exemptions and concessions, totalling \$55 billion last year alone to friends and cronies of the former regime. That is why we have to take a cautious approach.

Until we plug those loop holes, we will have another approach to VAT. So, we have exempted from VAT, more essential foods and basic consumer items that would save consumers a total of \$680 million. This decreases the impact of VAT on poor working people.

Promise no. 4- significant increase in old age pensions - done. All old age pensioners will receive a 30% increase, from \$13,125 to \$17,000, monthly. Public disability benefits will increase by 10% from \$5,900 to \$6,500, as we have to provide care to our differently able brothers and sisters.

Promise no. 5- reduction of the former presidents pension and benefits - it is three of them- done. A new law was passed in this National Assembly which shrunk the benefits attached to pensions of former presidents to prevent abuse of State funds. No more must a former president get an uncap number of vehicles, guards, maids, gardeners, trips overseas - with or without spouses, electricity, telephone, water, and duty free concessions. I am saying this too; no more should a former president be entitled to 14AK, assault rifles. They talk about the number of guards and we have seen them around here, the former Prime Minister had 18 guards.

I may say this while I am on my feet that this Prime Minister was not getting more salary than the Hon. Member Anil Nandlall, the former Attorney General. His salary was higher than that of the Prime Minister and his salary was tax free. All I asked for was for \$100 more on the Prime Minister's salary. I am a lawyer, and if the Attorney General could have a tax free – I did not demand tax free, not 100%. So what people heard, the allegation trying to throw aspersion on this side of the House, it was a total untruth, that we were trying perk our salaries. I did not say “lie” Sir - untruth. He is a stranger to the truth.

Promise no. 6, establishment of passport and birth certificates licensing offices in Berbice, Essequibo, and Linden - being done. Weekly distribution of passports has been regularised with centres operating in Corriverton, New Amsterdam, Parika, Anna Regina, Bartica, and Lethem. Work is in progress on birth certificates and licensing offices. I see my good friend Joey smiling because he has been agitating for this, to treat rural people more kindly and to deliver services, where there live, rather than them spending large sum of moneys to traffic to Georgetown.

Promise no. 7- return of television station to Lindeners - done. A television channel was guaranteed for region 10 and technical arrangements are being finalised to have Linden operate its own television.

12.21 p.m.

Promise no. 8 – the waiver of duty on fuels, tools and small scale mining equipment - done. Eligible gold miners will be exempted from the payment of custom duties on fuel, matting , All-Terrain Vehicles (ATV), jack hammer drills, flex hoses, expanding metals, pump, pump housing, impellers, shaft, and engines.

In addition, we heard during the Budget Presentation, the Hon. Minister of Finance announced an exemption of custom duties on fishing boats, spare parts, fishing equipment and supplies for use in seafood processing and aquaculture industry. In addition, the Minister announced, we did not promise this, but we announced it, a removal of Custom Duties and Excise Tax on motor vehicles and ATVs to be brought by Toshaos, in approved Amerindian communities.

In addition, it was announced that eligible ranks at the discipline services will qualify for exemption of excise taxes on their purchase of motor vehicles. So not only will they be able to ride horses, they will now be entitled to buy their own motor vehicles. In addition, as we saw from yesterday, the price at the pump for dieseline and gasoline has been reduced with immediate effect.

Promise no. 9, early holding of Local Government Elections – done. That promise has been kept. All legislative reforms have been completed for the early holding of Local Government Elections. These elections, which were not held since 1994, will be held by 7th December, 2015.

Promise no. 11, Establishment of the Public Procurement Commission - this is being done. As we all know, the APNU/AFC is ready and we are hoping now that the Opposition has ended their stillborn boycott of this National Assembly, that they will come into the House and they will propose their names of persons to serve on the Public Procurement Commission and that we could have it speedily approved in this House by requisite 2/3 majority. This, of course, will eliminate the unfair practices in the procurement process and it will eliminate, also, the wholesale corruption and political interference in the granting of contracts.

I said promise no. 11 before, but maybe I am going to have to pass on the numbering. That one was probably promise 10. The establishment of a National Cane Workers and Cane Farmer Conference - this was done. The first historical conference was held on 14th August, 2015, at the Arthur Chung Convention Centre. The action points the conference had considered were, the establishment of an agricultural bank to offer financial assistance at affordable rates to cane farmers; to regularise punt rates across estates; and regularise payments parameters for cane farmers, which varies from estate to estate. A road map for greater participation in a private sector driven sugar industry was considered. Cane farmers are resolved to rescue the sugar industry and I said already that this Government has thrown in its weight to help the recovery of the sugar industry. We cannot anticipate what form the recovery will take, but we need all hands on deck and we do not rule out participation from other investment sectors, as well as diversification in the sugar industry.

Promise no. 12, the establishment of a National Rice Farmer and Ricer Miller Conference – done. The first ever National Rice Conference was held in July, 2015, at the Arthur Chung Conference Centre. Participants outlined strategies to face challenges in the rice industry. So we have heard from the other side, but they are mystified as to where we will find \$23 billion in payments to rice farmers. But that promise was made and that promise will be kept. We want to tell rice farmers that though the former Government had raided the PetroCaribe Fund, that would require another debate, we have now come forward and have held a conference and resolved among rice farmers that we will help solve some of the major problems in the industry. One of the measures is that the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB) will work along with rice research institutes internationally to build capacity, which will result in the use of improved varieties and increased yields throughout the industry; two, the building of capacity of extension officers, through the transfer of research methodologies and practices, to aid in the improvement of agronomic practices across the industry; three, the sourcing of new markets, along with the move to new valued added products, consider the establishment of an agricultural bank, which will serve cane farmers, as well as rice farmers. In the meantime, as I said, we are going to fulfil our promise to ensure that farmers are paid.

Promise no. 13, investigation into corruption - being done. The Government has commissioned several forensic audits to uncover revenue leakages and corrupt practices at State entities and has

established a State Asset Recovery Unit to retrieve vehicles, land and other assets that were illegally transferred to officials and their friends. The hunt is still on - I was hoping that they were going to be here to hear this - to retrieve \$600 million, which was transferred from one Ministry, headed by a former central committee member of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) to another central committee member of the PPP who hold Government offices. There is a serious investigation into the transfer of \$600 million in cash, withdrawn by warrants from the Bank of Guyana. This will, of course, be something that will stun Guyana, when it is uncovered. The Government is also considering drafting of a comprehensive anti-corruption law

Promise no. 14, establishment of task forces on crime fighting and security, and on road safety - being done. The National Security Committee has been reactivated and holds weekly meetings, headed by the President himself to assess the state of public security. A plan on crime fighting and security is being implemented to provide an increase in mobile patrol in rural and interior areas. Come 1st September, 2015, the police, under the amnesty, will target illegal firearms in possession of unlicensed holders. At the same time, to further combat piracy, our fishermen, there will be both aviation and maritime patrols increases. In mining areas, more ATVs and boats will be deployed for use by police ranks.

We were told in Parliament, this week, by Vice-President and Minister of Public Security, Khemraj Ramjattan, that the draft plan on crime and security had been submitted to him and consultations are being concluded to set up a task force on road safety.

Promise no. 15, National Conference of Women - will be done very shortly, this coming week in fact. To advocate for and support implementation of a national policy for gender equality, this policy aims at creating a legal and other framework, where females and males can enjoy their full human rights, free of discrimination.

Promise no. 16, to establish a Code of Conduct for Parliamentarians, Ministers and others, holding high positions in Government/public offices - done. Minister of Governance - to be announced and shown in the Parliament, the document that is the code for all Ministers and Parliamentarians on this side and hopefully we will be able to rope in - you have to rope them in literally, they would not come voluntarily - into a new code of service that will emphasise zero tolerance of public officials indulging in acts of misconduct.

Promise no. 17, a National Youth Council and Youth Policy - being done, almost done. I can report that the first draft of the Nation Youth Policy has been completed and the National Youth Council will be convened shortly.

Promise no. 18, Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Resources Conference - in progress, I think it is done. The Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Resource Conference is currently ongoing at the Arthur Chung Convention Centre. And here is a bit of breaking news: When the Toshaos came to Georgetown, our friends who are the lovers of the Amerindian people, kidnapped them, sequestered them and took them away to the Red House. Sir, as you know, they said that I had something to do with a document that leased the Red House for 99 years to a company comprising of the top cronies of the PPP. I have never been identified with that project. I left the PPP in 2011, that document was concentrated in 2012, so they are trying to use me as a fig leaf for their improper and illegal conduct or trying to hijack a trust and put it in the name of a few cronies, but more of that later Sir. The Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Resources Conference is currently ongoing at the Arthur Chung Convention Centre. President Granger has proposed a 10-point plan for the consideration of the National Toshaos Councils, which focuses on eradicating poverty in the Indigenous communities and a hinterland educational support programme, under which meals, uniforms, school books and transportation will provide for school children in Amerindian areas. Under the new hinterland employment and youth service, recruits who had formerly served as community support officers (CSOs), could join training programmes, for which stipends will be available for the duration of the training.

Promise no. 19, liberalisation of the Telecommunication and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector - being done. Negotiations are advanced to clear the way for the tabling in the National Assembly of a reformed Telecommunication Act to end the monopoly in this vital sector. Our Government had placed emphasis on ICT and has announced plans to establish a centre of excellence information technology. Using ICT, our Government hopes to revolutionise the delivery of services to our people. In preparation for ICT innovations, our Government has announced a One Laptop Per Teacher (OLPT) and hopes to distribute 9609 laptop valued at \$1.7 billion to educational and learning institutions nationwide.

Promise no. 20, adoption of a long term sustainable economic development plan to arise the vast potentials of this country - being done. The Government has established a task force on

economic planning, which will outline a vision for the national development strategy, a competitive investment environment and a green economy. This task force is headed by renowned world economist, Professor Clive Thomas.

Promise no. 21, implementation of an amended Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Act - well that is finally done and it has been assented to. I must say here that this legislation was badly needed. They had been pussyfooting on this issue, while a lot of propaganda was been made. But the former Government had an opportunity, if it wanted, to fight corruption it should have or could have agreed to the establishment of a Public Procurement Commission. While Guyana is like a ship, one could give it the biggest sail, which is the Anti-Money Laundering legislation, but the procurement is the hole at the bottom of the ship and if one does not cork the whole of corruption in contract, the ship will go down. The two go together. Therefore, we have pleaded with the Government to support the establishment of a Public Procurement Commission, they did not and that explains why there had been some delays, but at long last we have the law.

The Minister of Governance has made mention of the Constitution Reform Commission, so I will not delay this National Assembly any further to say that, even though that was not featured as one of our 100-day promises, we still realise that it was hot and topical platform issue during the last elections. So we have set the stage to trigger, by a way of steering committee, headed by the renowned attorney at law Nigel Hughes. A steering committee that will give us the guidelines and the module of what is required for constitutional change, a comprehensive, perhaps definitive constitutional change, that will be subject to one to wide consultation and inclusion of all stakeholders, including the Opposition.

I want to now close, having said that we have delivered on our promises. We must also know that the deliverance of these promises did not come from lack of hard work, dedication and us here, this Government, working in tandem as a team and this teamwork has seen us in unity, forging forward before the 100-days, so that it will characterise the nature of this Government, that this Government is true to its promise; this Government has kept its pledge to its people; and this Government will remain true to its promises and we will be here in the next five years to deliver on all of the expectations for which the people voted us into this National Assembly.

12.36 a.m.

With these words, Sir, I want to congratulate the Hon. Winston Jordan, Minister of Finance, and his team at the Ministry of Finance for piloting this Budget and for bringing to this Parliament measures that will ameliorate problems – not solve all problems but will lessen problems confronting our people. In these final four months of this year, we hope that we can deliver everything that is stated in the Budget, as far as we could. If not, some will roll over to next year.

The dilemma the Colleagues on the other side face is that they could not have come here to say that we copied their Budget and vote against it. So they are in a situation of crisis, a situation defining themselves, whether they are with this Budget or against this Budget. It is because of their political ambivalence and the confusion of their ranks that they decided to walk out. But we will stay here and we will pass this Budget to make the Guyanese people a little happier so that they can enjoy this new and good life in a green economy. Thank you very much.
[Applause]

Mr. Jordan (replying): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I proceed, I want to extend my condolences to Hon. Member Catherine Hughes and her family on their recent bereavement.

Although they are not here, I want to extend a warm welcome to the 32 Members of the Opposition whose entrance, though delayed, is nevertheless welcomed. I know many of them and I would hope that the collegial relationship that we have will act as a spring from which genuine cooperation would uncoil. We may be on opposite sides of the divide but we do share the same aspirations for the good life, though in our case it is for all Guyanese.

I also want to thank my staff, publically, for their work and inputs into *Budget 2015*. They are largely a group of young individuals still honing their craft and perfecting their skills but what they lack in experience is compensated by their enthusiasm and their willingness to learn.

Mr. Speaker, I promise I would not be long. The hour is 12.40 a.m. After all, I have done my four hours already, and it seems like such a marathon speech, with detailed and lucid explanations, could not move 32 Members on the opposite side. At that stage, you would either throw up your hands and say you give up or you continue prodding along.

Before I get into my speech, I would just like to make two comments on Hon. Member Bharrat Jagdeo's rambling - long, unbelievable and nonsensical address, if you want to put it that way.

He initially said that he wanted to start by saying he expected a better budget from me. Well let me tell the Hon. Member, if he will recall, earlier this week, I met him by the food stand and I told him that I had already finished my rebuttal speech. He said, "Oh, and you did not hear from me?" And I told him, "I do not need to hear from you. I know what you are going to say, so my speech is already written." And, true to form, almost everything that he did say tonight I had my rebuttal ready for him. I know the individual and he has not changed. Indeed, this no change has become quite repetitive and sickening - this constant harping and throw back to 1992. We are 23 years on and every single debate in this House has something to do with 1992.

I may be a young Member of Parliament (MP) but I am an 'old head'. I used to be here very early in the 1980's and I stopped coming to debates because it is the same thing over and over - 1992, 50%, 100%, inflation was this and that; nothing spoken to the pressing issues of the day. I am sick of it and I would not respond to anything in reference to 1992.

Secondly, I heard some matters that were played out here by the Hon. Member, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo. We do not have the time to go through all of them. Maybe I will touch on some. Some of them I would not even bother with because he learnt at my hand. Sometimes, you can teach but you cannot necessarily make the person learn. [Mr. Bulkan: You can take a horse to the water but you cannot make it drink.] No horses; we had enough of the horses.

I spent a considerable amount of time listening to the speakers on the western side of the House and I have to admit that I was most disappointed at the sterility of the speeches - so much talk yet so little substance. But for a few nuggets here and there, the presentations by the Opposition were pedestrian and their positions on many of the issues fatuous. I am reminded of Karl Marx, whose critique of the study, the philosophy of poverty, was entitled, *The Poverty of Philosophy*.

A budget should match the priorities of a nation and the number one priority for this nation must be a plan for its development in an orderly and sustainable manner. With this Budget, we, the APNU/AFC Government, have taken the bold step in that direction. We have laid out a plan for the first of our many terms in Government. It is a plan that is encapsulated in Vision 2020, a plan

for confidence, a plan to use our oil wealth, a plan to safeguard our economy and, most important, a plan for human development.

Our people are caring and resilient. In good and bad times, they always seem to reflect the true Guyanese spirit of better must come. Perhaps, it is within that spirit that they awaited this Budget in anticipation and expectation. From the feedback garnered, from near and afar, on the radio, on television, in the printed press and on the internet, from the ordinary vendor in the market, the push cart music seller, the private sector and the civil society, the reaction from them has been decidedly positive and encouraging. They were impressed not only by the length and the lucidity of the delivery, but for the 'audacity of hope' it presented, for the vision of a good life for all Guyanese, for its emphasis on accountability and governance, for the pro-growth, pro-business and pro-poor measures. Some in the Opposition attributed this feat to wizardry. Others vested me with magical powers. I thank them for their observations, hopefully made in jest but hasten to assure that I neither dabble in the occult nor witchcraft. The craft in which I indulge is one that has engaged the attention of development theoreticians and practitioners through the years, that is how to satisfy the needs of the many with resources too few.

This is at the heart of planning and budgeting. I have been practising this craft for over 30 years. During that time, I have had the honour of preparing Budgets for all of the Administrations between 1981 and 2007, give or take a year or two when I was away for some reason. Interestingly, this period coincided with the reign of Hon. Member Bharrat Jagdeo. It was under his direct stewardship that four Budgets were produced between 1996 and 1999 and under his presidency that twelve Budgets were produced between 2000 and 2011. He is the only person, to date, to have found this Budget to be underwhelming. Ingratitude is the essence of vileness.

I want to say, though, that the Hon. Member should know a thing or two about underwhelming; it must be underwhelming to have started out as a lowly Commissar in the Ministry of Finance, in October, 1992, to have risen through the ranks to become Junior Minister, then Senior Minister, then the ultimate, Chief Public Servant, the longest serving President of the Republic of Guyana, only now to be relegated to Opposition Leader. That must be underwhelming. It must be underwhelming, too, for the Hon. Member, for it was under his stewardship as President of this nation that over 400 of our citizens were murdered; there was the rise in crime of all kinds;

Guyana became a narco-state; human trafficking, piracy, corruption, nepotism and lack of accountability existed. What an underwhelming performance, indeed!

This Budget is a visionary budget that has fired the imagination of our people. It is a clear vision of a worthwhile future that stretches well beyond what we have in this country today. The theme of this Budget is *A Fresh start to a Good Life in a Green Economy*. It is a theme that emphasises the casting aside of the inherited and discredited systems that bred nepotism, corruption and discrimination, unaccountability and opaqueness. This stripping, scraping and under-bushing is necessary. It will be a dereliction of duty of the current Government, newly in power, not to undertake this exercise. In any system review, there would be changes. It is, therefore, ironic but far from amusing, that speaker after speaker of the Opposition benches could shout “witch-hunting”.

The Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira, talked about retribution and marginalisation. The Hon. Member, Zulfikar Mustapha, even brought odium to this House when, without a shred of evidence, he waxed balefully about ethnic cleansing being practised by this Government. How disingenuous can one get?

Mr. Speaker, it will take me many days to enumerate the numerous instances of ethnic cleansing, marginalisation, discrimination and witch-hunting practised by the former regime, from the infamous degutting of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1992 by an Hon. Member who was present in this House, to the inexplicable utterings of a well-known and wily wordsmith, who, in 2011, nonchalantly asserted that there were no African Guyanese fit enough to be appointed as Ambassadors. It is outrageous and shameful that, in a modern Guyana, such a position could be fronted by the party of Cheddi Jagan.

12.51 p.m.

What about the victimisation and witch-hunting meted out to many Members of the then State Planning Secretariat by an Hon. Member of this House: people like Montouthe, Bholan Boodhoo, Shaw and so many others at the State Planning Secretariat who were summarily dismissed. These were ordinary public servants just doing their jobs. They fought for years to get redress. When they finally won, their victory was short-lived. The then Government appealed the decision to a lower court. Many of them died before victory was won in the Appeal Court -

victims of the vindictiveness of the Government and the sloth of the judicial system. Not a penny was paid to their surviving relatives - how heart-rending, how shameful. And, in the years of finance, that I know about, and the economy, I can tell you that between 1992 and 2015, the PPP/C practised discrimination and nepotism in their placement of persons in the international institutions and, this is a situation that is very dear to me. I have talked to everybody that knows about this matter, so it is not any news. I am sorry for calling names and so on. I do not intend to denigrate the people. But it started from since 1992, when they came in. Deochand Narine was sent to the World Bank. Raymond Ally, son of Asgar Ally, was sent to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Ganga Ramdas was sent to the IMF. Rajendra Rampersaud was sent to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Maxim Ally, nephew of Asgar Ally, was sent to the IDB. Lisaveta Ramotar, daughter of President Ramotar, was sent to the World Bank, Gobin Ganga was sent to the World Bank, Asgar Ally, former Minister of Finance, was sent to the IMF, and Zulfikar Ally, Hydar Ally's son, was sent to the IDB. I need to say no more. I do not intend to denigrate these people; I merely mention them to indicate the mindset of the former Government. Like the wily wordsmith's pronouncement to which I referred earlier, it seems as though no other Guyanese merited consideration for representation of his or her country at these prestigious multilateral institutions in nearly 23 years.

I say that those who scream ethnic cleansing, witch-hunting, *et cetera*, must make sure that their facts are correct and they should ensure that, like Caesar's wife, they are above suspicion; they must come with clean hands.

The electorate gave us a mandate to clean up the mess and give our country a fresh start, a chance to breathe, so the fresh approach is one that emphasises the rule of law, good governance and accountable Government. At the heart of our country's problem is that, for the last 23 years, in particular the last 15 years, there has been the lack of strong and effective leadership and appalling standards of governance at all levels. The unleashing of bad governance and the lack of accountability and transparency had become a norm. Good governance must no longer be seen merely as a cliché or catch phrase; its tenets and principles, which are logical, equitable and transparent, must be practised and employed for the progress and prosperity of our beloved nation.

This Budget outlines our vision for the first five years and it does so in a comprehensive fashion, in language that is easily understood. It is a plan for the future, lifting production and productivity, boosting investment in the economy, creating jobs, setting the stage for the good life - a life of renewed hope and confidence - of living in a country that is better managed, better equipped to withstand the vagaries of international shocks, creating wealth through permanent jobs, innovation and unleashing the entrepreneurial talents of Guyanese, creating comforts for the young and old, vulnerable and disabled, tackling climate change, building a green economy. The one thing with which I agree with Hon. Clement Rohee is that most people are looking for a simple life, not an ocean-front mansion that is powered by three public transformers, while the very energy provider cannot provide electricity to thousands of Guyanese; not an ocean front mansion that enjoys free potable water, while many Guyanese have to contend with no water or trickles from a standpipe. Guyanese, on average, indeed, crave a simple life, one that is good and in which they lead contented lives through income derived from hard, honest work.

I now wish to rebut a few issues that have made their rounds in the debates to date. The first has to do with this Budget having a plethora of PPP/C projects. Hon. Clement Rohee uttered words to the effect that, of the 34 projects under the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, almost 80% were in the PPP/C's Manifesto. In my Budget speech, I alluded to the wide consultations I had with various groups and individuals. One of the groups I met was the PPP/C. That organisation's team was led by none other than the Hon. Member, Clement Rohee. At the end of the consultations, the Hon. Member promised to get back to me with his organisation's suggestions. Within the hour, he sent me two documents purporting to be the PPP/C's input into the 2015 Budget. One was the APNU/AFC's 100-day agenda and, two, were extracts of the PPP/C's Manifesto.

[**An Hon. Member:** Was that it?] That was it. Let us, for argument sake, agree with the Hon. Member that almost 80% of the projects of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure is in the PPP/C's Manifesto. My question is, so what? What is he griping about? Did he not request that that be so? Did he not bring the Manifesto to me? [**An Hon. Member:** Yes.] So what is he griping about? [**Mr. Bulkan:** He is confused.] He is confused.

I believe, however, that there is a more fundamental issue at stake here and it has been referred to by the Prime Minister, the Minister of Governance and so on. It is whether a new Government, given three months within which to prepare the Budget, shall be that irresponsible to cut out all

the projects it inherited from its predecessor and substitute with its own projects. Would that be the action of a responsible Government? Should worthwhile projects be terminated or discontinued because they were not conceived by our Administration? This cannot be the action of a responsible Government. Could the Hon. Member say whether they discarded the projects of the PNC when they entered office in 1992? Well, I went back to when they came into office, so their first Budget would have been in 1993. It was not until 1996 that the first evidence of the PPP/C's projects started to appear in a Budget – 1996 - and they are abusing us... [Mr.

Bulkan: Three months.] ...three months, for a project that rolled over and started, anyhow, earlier in the year. There was spending going on up to May, when they left office. They are rowing with us. It was a *fait accompli*. The projects were already there from since January; spending was going on. And we are not knocking them for continuing with projects that they met in 1992; that is what Governments do. Governments do not terminate as soon as a new one comes in. There are taxpayers' moneys that are involved. There are loans that have been taken. You just do not terminate the loan. Primary health care, too...all those loans they came and they met. Essequibo Coast Road... Linden was not terminated but they reformulated. When you were to get a good solid road, they reformulated it with a reduced amount and the road is what we see today. It was probably the best built road in this country, but it is there, today, cheaply repaired and so on and it has to continue to be repaired. The long and short is that a government cannot just go and terminate projects because it does not like them. Some will definitely be terminated and we did. They complained that some projects are missing in Region 5, Region 6 and so on. How do they want it? On the one hand, they are saying we used their projects and, on the other hand, when we did not use them, they said that we terminated - cake and bake, oh my goodness!

Our Government is not an irresponsible Government. We subscribe to the principle of continuity in Government. Therefore, the Government will continue the implementation of *sageous* projects and programmes started under the previous Administration. We make no apologies for that. It is taxpayers' money that has already been sunk into these projects, but we will proceed in a systematic manner to prepare a comprehensive public sector investment programme, consistent with the good life in a green economy.

We will pursue projects that are consistent with our vision and will review ill-designed, ill-conceived projects, and that is what we did to the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project and the Specialty Hospital, just to name a few.

The Hon. Member, Nigel Dharamlall, remarked that energy was not mentioned in the Budget. I do not know which budget he was reading or if he actually read the Budget because, on pages 33 to 34, there is a whole section on energy. Hon. Members Irfaan Ally and Charles Ramson accused the Government of blocking the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project and, of course, tonight you heard the Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo accusing the Government of abandoning the Project. Let us read simple English Language and see if we understand whether we have abandoned this Project. It states, Mr. Speaker, quoting from page 33 of the Budget speech:

“This Government is well aware of the importance of clean, reliable and affordable energy for development and the improved welfare of our people. As such, we are prepared to explore every avenue to reduce the cost of energy – including examining the Amaila Falls Hydroelectric Project.”

Does that sound like we abandoned Amaila Falls? Then on page 34:

“Mr. Speaker, I should like to remind this House that the identification of Amaila Falls as a potential site for hydropower dates back some 40 years, and that this Government would welcome the diversification of our energy matrix to include clean, sustainable and affordable sources. However, it must make financial sense! We know now, that as configured currently, the cost of financing [Amaila] is too high, and that unless the price tag can be substantially lowered, we cannot proceed. In this opinion, we are strongly supported by the experts at the Inter-American Development Bank, who had considered the project to be too risky to attract the Bank's financing.”

Now, Hon. Member Jagdeo waved a document sometime earlier in January. We can tell you that the Cabinet Subcommittee on Energy met several times with the IDB. The last meeting that we met with them, we were so horrified at what we learnt. I was there. The Minister of Governance was there. The Minister of Public Infrastructure was there and Hon. Bulkan was there. We were so horrified. Finally, we learned exactly what took place. So, we asked the IDB to document

what they were telling us and this came to me on 14th August, 2015 from Mr. Gerard Johnson, the General Manager of the IDB, and he was the one in the meeting, together with the Resident Representative of the IDB, but he was the one who carried the meeting. In fact, he is constantly asking what my reaction to it is. I have not responded as yet. I wish to read this whole document but we do not have the whole night. I will read this part:

“Quarter III, 2013

Sithe Global announced its withdrawal from the Project and instructed the Bank [that is IDB] to cease all due diligence activities.”

Since Quarter III of 2013 this was supposed to be done.

“At this point, Project analysis stopped without being completed. As you know, this is a non-sovereign operation, so, once the private sponsor withdrew, there was no longer a project to be evaluated and, in accordance with standard procedure of the Bank, all technical work financed by them remain confidential. The Bank sent a formal communication to the Government of Guyana confirming that based on the work done prior to the withdrawal of Sithe Global the financial, fiscal, environmental, institutional and transparency risks were such that the project fell outside of the maximum risk threshold established by the Bank for non-*sovereign* operation, and it offered to support the Government in considering options.”

1.06 a.m.

It then went on to state all of the options that it was offering the Government. The long and short is that the Bank said, as presently conceived, it could not finance this project. It did help in trying to get the risks reduced and in trying to get the cost reduced. So far, it has not been successful.

The Minister of State met with two representatives from Norway last week. The Government was trying to reprogramme their programme and they were trying to tell us that it was specific to Amaila Falls Hydropower Project (AFHP). They said that we should try again to see if we could get either a new sponsor or some way of lowering the cost of the project to entice the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to rejoin. We asked them for help; they mentioned a name

or two; we do not know these names, but we told them that if they could put us in contact with the persons, we would be happy to talk to these people.

The long and short is that if the present developers are not budging, the project would never attract a cent from the IDB. We have to go and find sponsors who would help us with equity, in order to reduce the overall cost of the project. So, all of this hot air we are hearing about it being a transformational project and about us stopping the project...why would we stop a project if it is financially viable? That does not make any kind of sense. Why did the project not move under the previous Government? That is the question that should be asked.

The private sector and all of these people, who are pressing us as if we are just stopping a golden project, need to understand this. The Bank is open; they can talk to the representatives at the Bank; they do not have to wait on the Government. They could talk to the Bank, or if they have money and capital, they could come in and help to do it. But, as presently conceived, the Government cannot proceed with the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project.

What we would do is what we said in the Budget Speech. We said at paragraph 4.52:

“Over the next five years, we will adopt a more integrated approach to providing for our energy needs. We will examine all sources of energy - fossil fuels, wind, solar, bagasse and, of course, hydropower. We will commence feasibility studies for a large hydropower development in the Mazaruni region. This will be done in collaboration with Brazil. We will encourage independent power producers and suppliers to construct energy farms and sell energy to the national grid.”

We also talk about being interested in small hydropower sites. We have indicated in plain language that we cannot continue, but that with the IDB, we are looking at various options for clean and green energy. The IDB will be undertaking an expanded least-cost study for energy generation. We are also expecting to expedite the procurement arrangements with the Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL) Power Utility Upgrade Program. Even if hydropower was ready, as presently conceptualised, GPL cannot take on the power and redistribute it.

When people hear all of these fancy things being thrown out, as if experts are talking to them, they must go and find out exactly what it is. If this thing is so true, why is it not happening? We

could not stop Amaila Falls Hydropower Project in three months; the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project was already stopped since in 2013.

With respect to the specialty hospital, I do not think I even need to say anything anymore about it. Some US\$4 million of taxpayers' money has disappeared. It was given to a suspect contractor. The contractor was already suspect in projects that he did right here in Guyana – pumps that were not delivered and the Enmore Packaging Plant – and still the previous Administration fought for this man to get the contract again. When he disappeared with US\$4 million, we were asked to go after him to collect because there was a judgement in the court in Guyana. The man was in India and there was a judgement in the court in Guyana and we must go after him. That is what I heard the legal people telling us to do.

We asked for the US\$14 million that remained to be reprogrammed to three regional hospitals – West Demerara Regional Hospital (WDRH), Diamond Diagnostic Centre and the Bartica Hospital. We were told by the local High Commissioner that they are sympathetic to these projects and that we should develop a concept paper and submit a new proposal because under the line of credit arrangement the money was specific to the speciality hospital and it could not be reprogrammed to these hospitals. All of these things must be known.

I want you all to tell me which development plan document you all have ever seen marked 'speciality hospital.' This was the grandiose egoism of one man. He just ran up, thought about it, saw that some money was available and told someone to take it. It is just like at the back of the postal stamp.

Some \$130 million was taken from the Chinese to build an airport that had no design; it had no anything. If something sunk like sand, it was left and they went somewhere else. Meanwhile, money was being disbursed all over the place and no progress was being seen.

Check all of the projects that the former Administration did. Some US\$200 million was spent on a project at Skeldon. It is a white elephant.

A road that was just built – the East Bank Demerara four-lane highway... I am sorry for all of those people who live in Diamond and those places. They could tell you that this is a ridiculous road. When it rains, the water settles. It is already cracking up.

The previous Administration took \$46 million from the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) for the West Demerara Road. The project cost is nearly \$60 million. Some \$12 million still has to be found. The previous Administration took this money, knowing fully well the experience it had with the East Bank Demerara four-lane highway, when they took money and it took some two and a half to three years to just move utilities. There is the same problem now on the West Bank of Demerara. The money is there, commitment fees are being paid, interest is being paid on the money and not a penny has been spent as yet on a real value, which is the road.

Money would not be spent in a hurry because the utilities – the ones that are buried and the ones that are on top – have to be moved before work could be done on that road.

It is the same on the East Coast of Demerara. All of these so-called transformational projects are in trouble.

Credit has to be given to the Minister of Public Infrastructure. He is not Jesus but with the little that he has been given, he has made it stretch a long way.

For all of the transformational projects – one can get it and one would see – moneys were borrowed by this country and no value was seen for it. But it is this country that would pay the price soon in terms of the repayment of those loans. The loans would not generate the value added that it is supposed to give, but Guyana would have to start repaying. That is going to be the crisis; when our debt...

The Jubilee Debt Campaign has warned Guyana that it is sliding right back into debt. Of course, the present Government will be blamed for that. This Government has not borrowed a penny as yet, but it will be blamed when the debt crisis starts again. Guyana is going to slide right back into debt with all of borrowing that it has undertaken.

That is why this Government has to be prudent in everything that it does. We might be deemed to be overcautious, but, given what the country has experienced in 23 years and given what it has right now, it is best we err early on the side of caution and get a clear picture of what is in front of us before we move with full steam ahead.

Secondly, Hon. Member Clement Rohee referred to audits, investigations, probes, Commissions of Inquiry (COIs), and reviews that are being conducted by the Government, and he inferred that

the country will suffer from the collateral damage from these actions because experience shows that this type of activity slows down a country. I call this rarefied wisdom. What rarefied wisdom from a party that caused the slowdown in this economy through its machinations in proroguing and dissolving the Parliament. Its post-Elections antics are well known and reported on widely.

By now, it is well known that good governance and a stable political environment are crucial to attracting investment locally and overseas. In a country where Central Government is unable now and in the near future, unless the oil starts to flow, to generate and or mobilise enough savings to grow the economy, we will have to depend heavily on private investment – the engine and the designated driver of growth in the economy.

Yes, this Government is conducting the audits, the investigations, the reviews and the probes because we need to know what we have inherited, what has been hidden, and where it has been hidden – in whose pockets and in whose bank accounts it has been hidden. But it seems that our Friends on the other side are afraid of what would be discovered. The discoveries have already started. Over \$600 million disappeared between the Office of the President and the Public Service Ministry (PSM); managers and board members were paying themselves millions of taxpayers' moneys; another manager of the same debt-ridden agency, which normally requires a huge infusion of cash every year, was earning \$6 million per month; and free gas was being given to acolytes and fellow travellers of the PPP. The discoveries continue. I say to Members of the opposite side, be very afraid of these audits. The audits are here to stay; they will not be discontinued.

Let me put to rest the issue about the Auditor General. The Auditor General is the third person I met after being sworn in as Minister of Finance. I met with him along with another auditor, and I said to the Auditor General, "I know that you are the Auditor General; I know that you are responsible for audits. Would you object to the Government doing these forensic audits or would you want to do them? He told me to go ahead. He did not have the capacity". Let the Auditor General deny that. That is what he told me. I asked him if he was sure and he said that the Government can go ahead and contract the persons to do the audits. Then when the Government started to contract the auditors, there was a different story. As I said, we will not be moved from these audits; the audits will continue.

We are within our rights. Sole-sourcing has its critical moments when it can be used, once it is transparent. There are over 15 auditors doing the audits. It is not one or two auditors. I know that they are trying to get at Mr. Ram and Mr. Goolsarran, but there are over 15 auditors. It is diverse; they are of all ethnicities and of different forms. It is not what the previous Administration is trying to make it out to be at all.

The Budget has something for everyone. It is pro-business. The projected massive expenditure in the next four months, more than half of which will be spent on wages and related operating cost, will boost aggregate demand. The incentives given to the fishing and mining industries will boost investment, employment, output and exports, aiding in the recovery of the second half and resulting in positive growth that is comparable with last year's growth. This will be a grand achievement in just a few months by a caring Government.

Let me see if I understand the economics that the Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo was talking about. We have one of the lowest deficits to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ratios ever in the history of this country – 2.9%. I said that we should not crow over it because of the circumstances of this year, but it is a reality. For the 2.9%, it means that this Government has to spend over \$90 billion over the last four months of the year. Mr. Jagdeo went on television and radio and said that it is impossible because this Government will have to spend over \$180 million per day or week. He was arguing that the Government cannot spend the money. Tonight, you all heard it for yourselves. He said that the country could have gone to 4.9% of GDP, because they were going to 4.9%, and this would have given a higher amount to spend.

1.21 a.m.

Let us assume that this would have doubled and we would have had \$180 billion to spend in four months. Some \$90 billion cannot be spent in four months but you will be able to spend \$180 billion in four months? What kind of economics is that? Are these the kinds of people who used to run this economy? They ran it because I wrote all their budget speeches. Let them doubt it. They do not know economics. This is not the People's Friendship University.

This Budget is pro-poor. We must remove discrimination in all its forms and put the principle of sharing at the top of our agenda. No matter the size of the cake, we must ensure, nay guarantee,

that everyone stands to benefit, not as happened under our predecessor's regime, where the few, the propertied and the moneyed class, were superbly rewarded.

This Government, elected by the people of this beautiful country, has put a stop to this ugly, discriminatory practice of rewarding some and giving others, and not the masses. Cde. Cheddi Jagan would have disapproved of the naked discrimination against our senior citizens; against the divide created between coastal pensioners and hinterland pensioners; against rewarding those who already have - that is, those who own a house and those who do not. How could this shameful discrimination originate and be encouraged for so long in the party that Cde. Cheddi Jagan built, a man who was an indefatigable fighter for the poor and downtrodden? That is why we made a conscious effort to end the inequitable practice. All of our nearly 43,000 pensioners, regardless of their home-owning status or geographical location, will benefit from a 30-plus per cent increase in their pension.

Our Government might have been remiss in not engaging the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) in collective bargaining, but we were not insensitive to the plight of the public servants. This Government, in less than three months, provided the largest increase, 26.4%, to any category of worker since the GPSU fought and won significant increases in 1999. It is the largest increase since 1999, when they were given 26.6% and 30%. We deliberately weighted the wage increases in favour of those earning \$100,000 and below. These are the bulk of public servants. Some asked why we did not make the increase retroactive from 1st January. I do not understand why 1st January seems to be an immutable date. I noticed unions and then I saw these picking up. Suddenly, Mr. Patrick Yarde became their [the Opposition's] friend. There is nothing immutable about 1st January. While, indeed, through a collective bargaining approach, we should agree on the dates and the increases, *et cetera*, still, I am arguing that 1st January is not immutable. In any case, I have an example here. I give an employee 26% from 1st January; his/her salary is \$1,000; he/she gets \$260 from 1st July, so his/her salary has gone up to \$1,260. I give the same employee 13% from 1st January and his/her salary goes up by \$130, so his/her new salary is \$1,130. Which would he/she wants, \$1,130 from 1st January or \$1,260 from 1st July? Let us know because at the end of the day, the back pay is going to be the same thing. So do not let math and stats fool you. Some people take crank, as they say, like old cars; they crank up and run and so forth. So that takes care of that.

Our Government has committed that public servants will be returned to their rightful place of prominence in the public sector. We have immediately established a public service staff college to train new entrants to the public service. We have set up a commission of inquiry to examine the conditions of public servants. After being denied, GPSU has had the check-off system restored.

We recently reduced the prices of gasoline and diesel in line with the low acquisition cost. Here again, I must digress. People are saying well it is a measly 5% and 10%. The prices that obtain in the international market are not the prices facing the Guyana Oil Company (GUYOIL). The Guyana Oil Company is like a little boat that collects small quantities of fuel every month. Everybody knows when one buys small quantities, one does not get economies-of-scale; one does not get price reduction. Buying in markets that are so small, one does not get the prices offered in international markets. Very often, the prices offered in international markets are what one would call “spot prices”. If it is \$2 today, one buys right away or locks in long term contracts. We do not have that. Whatever declines we can make, it is essentially based on what acquisition cost is faced by GUYOIL. I think the increases that we gave are consistent with what profits GUYOIL can maintain within their operations.

We removed National Insurance Scheme (NIS) from the tax man’s net. A number of people seem either to have dismissed this measure or do not know what it means. Let me give a brief explanation. Suppose a person is earning \$60,000 per month. Currently, such an employee would pay income tax of \$3,000 because \$50,000 is the free pay and that means \$10,000 is their taxable amount. The tax rate is 30%, so 30% of \$10,000 is \$3,000. The person will pay \$3,000 in tax and take home \$57,000. With this measure of the NIS, the employee who pays NIS \$3,120 would now pay income tax of only \$2,064. So right away the employee has a saving of \$936 every month. Nine hundred and thirty six dollars is now going back into his pocket. Now, with the NIS removal from taxes, the employee only pays \$2,064. In a year, the employee ends up saving roughly \$12,000. The year of assessment is 2016. People are saying one will benefit from 2016. If the year of assessment is 2016, it means the year of income is 2015, so one is benefitting right now. The Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) has to put out a circular as to how one will enjoy the months he/she paid from January. I hope that is clarified. It is a significant benefit. It will result in excess of \$1 billion being lost to the Treasury. So it is not insignificant.

We began the first of a phased reduction of the Berbice Bridge toll. In this measure, I continue to be amused by the antics of the Opposition. Some have breathed a sigh of relief that we recognised that the bridge was private property. They were happy that we were in discussions with the owners to reduce the toll and not engaging in an arbitrary imposition. Some others criticise the measure as being too little. Yet, others thought we were merely taking money from one tax payer and giving it to another. I find the Comrades on the other side duplicitous. They are the ones who imposed the burdensome toll on the residents of East and West Berbice, in particular, and all the bridge users in general. They are the ones who bluntly refused to lower the toll, in spite of repeated pleas of Berbicians and others. Yet, they have the gall to criticise a measure designed to bring relief to people. Let me emphasise that this is the first of several phases to lower the toll to one that is reasonable. It is not the size of the reduction that is important it is the intent that matters. Given the available resources, we have been able to signal our intent to bring much needed relief to our people. In this, we are reminded of the words of George Washington:

“We must consult our means rather than our wishes.”

Over twenty-one poor people items have been removed from Value Added Tax (VAT) at a loss of nearly \$700 million to the Treasury. The Opposition seems preoccupied with the fact that we did not reduce the VAT rate, as outlined in our 100-day agenda. We have explained *ad nauseam* why such a move at this time was both reckless and irresponsible. In this, we are supported by none other than the former Minister of Finance, Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, a real holder of a doctorate, who, in his 2012 Budget Speech rebuttal, had this to say,

“Anybody who” ...objectively... “...abandons or cast aside the temptation of popular political appeal and objectively and seriously examines the Value Added Tax will soon discover that a reduction in the Value Added Tax will bring little or no benefit to the poor people of this country. In fact... the most vulnerable will benefit least from a cut in VAT and it is in fact the well-heeled that will benefit the most from a cut in VAT.”

There you go. We did not say we will not do it. All we said was, to do this we have to have a study. This is one of our major tax earning categories. We cannot just go cutting it and hoping that something is going to happen. We did not say we were not going to do it. It is just delayed.

Let us see what the studies will bring out. The good news is that I am now pleased to announce the formation of the Tax Review Committee. This Committee is chaired by Dr. Maurice Odle, an eminent economist, with the other members being Dr. Thomas Singh, lecturer at the University of Guyana; Mr. Christopher Ram, prominent accountant and lawyer; and Mr. Godfrey Statia, former Deputy Commissioner of Inland Revenue and former Deputy Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Guyana Telephone and Telegraph Company (GT&T). The Committee has already started work and will continuously work over the next four months to produce an interim report that will look at both the tax system and tax administration.

When these measures and their effects are analysed it can be concluded that we have put more money in the pockets of the ordinary man and woman than the other Government did in 23 years. This is only the start. We are on the road to the good life. We have a vision. Under the APNU/AFC Government, led by the astute Brigadier (Ret'd) David Arthur Granger and supported by Prime Minister Moses Verasammy Nagamootoo and the cast, we are on a mission to achieve that vision.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Minister of Finance. Hon. Members the presentation by the Hon. Minister of Finance has exhausted my list of speakers. We should congratulate ourselves that we have managed to conclude the debate on the Budget. I have just pointed out that we concluded the debate on Saturday. We have joined Friday and Saturday into one long effort, which has brought us to where we are now. I thank Hon. Members for their assistance and cooperation in this mammoth task.

Before we end our labours for this morning, I will ask that we consider and dispose of the report of the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply on the allocation of time for the consideration of the 2015 Estimates of Expenditure by the Committee of Supply. We will go into Committee of Supply for this purpose.

Assembly resolved into Committee of Supply.

1.36 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I wish to report that the Business Sub-committee of the Committee of Supply met yesterday, Friday, 21st August, and considered the allocation of time for the consideration of the 2015 Estimates and Expenditure in the Committee of Supply. The Sub-Committee passed a resolution on the matter. Copies of the Sub-Committee minutes, resolution and schedule have been circulated. Will the Hon. Minister of Finance, kindly move the necessary motion?

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Speaker, I now move:

“That this Committee doth agree with the Business Sub-Committee in the said resolution.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the Committee of Supply has been allocated three days for the consideration of the estimates. Consideration of the estimates will begin on the 24th August, 2015, at 9.30 a.m. and will be in accordance with the resolution of the sub-committee.

Assembly resumed

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) and 28(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:

- 9.30 a.m. 12.00 noon - Sitting
- 12.00 noon 1.00 p.m. - Suspension
- 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 given consent in accordance with Standing Order No. 30 (d) for the following motion to be proceeded with at this Sitting. Hon. First Vice-President and Prime Minister will move the following motion.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Mr. Speaker, I move the motion in my name that Standing Orders No. 10 (1) and (2) and 28(1) and (2) be suspended to enable the Assembly to sit during the following hours to complete the consideration of the Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure for the 2015 Budget within three days:

- 9.30 a.m. - 12.00 noon - Sitting
- 12.00 noon - 1.00 p.m. - Suspension
- 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

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member.

Question put and agreed to.

Motion carried

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today. I want to once again express my gratitude, for your assistance and cooperation in this part of our work. I look forward to the same cooperation and assistance for the completion of our treatment of the Estimates and Expenditure in this very way. Hon. First Vice- President and Prime Minister, will you move the adjournment?

Mr. Nagamootoo: Mr. Speaker, good morning. I wish to move that this House be adjourned until Monday, 24th of August, 2015, at 9.30 a.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 1.41 p.m.