

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

2ND Sitting

Thursday, 25TH June, 2015

The Assembly convened at 2.07 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Leave to Members

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, leave has been granted to Hon. Carl Greenidge for today's sitting.

Arrangements for the Broadcast of Sittings of the National Assembly

Mr. Speaker: I wish to inform Members that, by way of Resolution No. 24/2012, the Clerk of the National Assembly was directed to make arrangements for the broadcast of sittings of the National Assembly within the environs of the National Assembly. I am pleased to state that, with effect from this sitting, arrangements have been put in place to enable viewing by the public of all sittings of this Assembly. The broadcast to the public will be facilitated by a voice amplification system which was procured by the Parliament Office for this purpose.

Conduct and Responsibilities of the Speaker and the Members of the National Assembly

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I am pleased to welcome you all to the second sitting of the National Assembly of the Eleventh Parliament. You have, by your election of me as Speaker of this noble House, placed me in a position of high responsibility towards you in the discharge of the very important duties which rest upon me. I pray that my conduct of our

affairs in this House will serve to encourage and enable you to feel that I strive to maintain the highest traditions of dignity and decorum in our National Assembly while remaining obedient to our Standing Orders. I trust, too, that, as a consequence, Hon. Members will join me in this noble endeavour.

There is much work to be done in this Eleventh Parliament and we must remain steadfast in our efforts to accomplish those tasks. The public, which has sent us here and which looks to us to serve faithfully and well, now has an open window into our proceedings. Let us determine, by our treatment of matters, that we are committed to the efficient discharge of all matters and to respectful interactions among all Members.

I thank you, Hon. Members.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Report was laid:

1. The Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of Guyana on the Accounts of Ministries/Departments/Regions for the fiscal year ended 31st December, 2013.
[The Speaker of the National Assembly]

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The following Bills were introduced and read the first time:

CONSTITUTION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2015 - BILL No. 1/2015

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Third Schedule relating to Article 222A of the Constitution to provide financial autonomy to certain entities.” *[Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs]*

FORMER PRESIDENTS (BENEFITS AND OTHER FACILITIES) BILL 2015 - BILL No. 2/2015

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to provide certain benefits and other facilities for former Presidents.”
[Minister of Finance]

**FISCAL MANAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY (AMENDMENT) BILL 2015 -
BILL No. 3/2015**

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act.” *[Minister of Finance]*

**ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING AND COUNTERING THE FINANCING OF
TERRORISM (AMENDMENT) BILL 2015 - BILL No. 4/2015**

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Act.” *[Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs]*

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL 2015 - BILL No. 5/2015

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Local Government Act.” *[Minister of Communities]*

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT’S BUSINESS

MOTION

APPROVAL OF GOVERNMENT’S POLICY IN PRESIDENT’S ADDRESS

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly expresses its sincere thanks and appreciation to His Excellency the President, Brigadier David A. Granger, M.S.S., for his Address to the National Assembly which was made on the occasion of the Ceremonial Opening of the First Session of the Eleventh Parliament of Guyana on Wednesday, 10th June, 2015, and approves of the policy adumbrated therein.” *[First Vice-President and Prime Minister]*

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the motion to approve Government policies in the address of His Excellency the President,

Brigadier David A. Granger, and ask that this National Assembly expresses its sincere thanks and appreciation to His Excellency the President for his Address to the National Assembly, which was made on the occasion of the Ceremonial Opening of the First Session of the Eleventh Parliament of Guyana on Wednesday, 10th June, 2015, and to approve of the policy adumbrated therein.

I, first of all, would like to endorse Your Honour's exhortation made a while ago for good conduct within the Chamber of this National Assembly. Your Honour has said that the public has an open window to these proceedings and I wish to say that, because of that, we need, within these halls here, to show the Guyanese people that their mandate has not been misplaced; not only are we here to do their business, but we are here to do their business with good decorum, sobriety, respect for each other, and to do so with commitment to the purpose for which this Assembly has been established.

I have reviewed all the speeches since the Sixth Parliament and, invariably, all former Presidents, some late Presidents, have said exactly what Your Honour has said: that this is a deliberative forum and this forum is for the people's business. Therefore, it would redound to the benefit of the nation if in the deliberations that take place within the Parliament, we do so not only with respect for all sides and for all elected and non-elected Members of Parliament and technocratic Ministers, but we do so with a view to making what His Excellency President Granger has highlighted in his Address and has captured in this publication, a link between democracy and development.

Our Parliament is the quintessential image of our democracy and, because it is so, it has a high responsibility to ensure that all businesses here, as President Granger has exhorted, must be prosecuted without cowardice or malice.

2.22 p.m.

Therefore, in my first speech as Leader of Government's business in this House and as Prime Minister, I would like, because of the years I have spent in this Chamber, to say that I would expect nothing less from elected Members of this House, that they use this Parliament as a vehicle to promote democracy because there is a dialectical relationship between democracy and development. Development in layman's language simply means promotion of people's welfare – the common weal.

In that regard, I would like to refer to the Sixth Parliament, to the address that was given by His Excellency, the late President Cheddi Jagan, when he said these words. (I quote from his speech made on 17th December, 1992):

“In all our endeavours, Parliament, I repeat, will be central as the highest legislative authority in the land. At all times what must be uppermost on our agenda is the national interest. This is not the place for selfishness, petty games and vindictiveness.

To carry out effectively its functions, Parliament must be a truly deliberative body and with a strong Committee System. All major legislation coming before the Assembly must be thoroughly examined and there must be prior consultation with those whose interests are directly involved and affected.”

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that we both, today, would embrace the function of parliament as one that is inextricably linked to the people because without the people there can be no parliament. If the parliament is truly to be what it is, then it has to be a people’s parliament, and so, we have to take parliament to the street corners and we have to bring not the behaviour, but the deliberation of the street into the parliament.

Our President, David Granger, has, in his presentation before this House, however, moved beyond the exhortation to good behaviour and good conduct and the expectation of our people of their parliamentarians. President Granger for the first time, and I refer again to the addresses that were made in the Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Parliaments, outlined what all would have expected in a presidential, though ceremonial, address to the Parliament, what is called a legislative agenda.

Today, at this second sitting, we have started, literally, the ball rolling, with a legislative agenda that has been presented to the House, because the people who have placed us here want to know what will be legislated and how, what we legislated, would affect their lives. Before us, today, there was the first reading of a number of pieces of legislation, which when passed, would, in fact, affect and change the lives of our people. The Former Presidents (Benefits and Other Facilities) Bill which has been done with an aim to secure the integrity of public funds, that it is properly and judiciously spent and not lavished on those who have served in high positions of the presidency. There should be a cap placed on how much is considered to be enough. That, in fact, is good news for the people of the country at a time when we all have to be cutting the corners, trying to make ends meet and to be able to

secure the treasury from a lot of incursions, which is a very mild word, into it. Incursions might be termed “raiding of the treasury”. It is at a time that we need to show that we can bring to the National Assembly a piece of legislation that would show Guyanese that we are spending taxpayers’ money judiciously.

Also, there is the Constitutional (Amendment) Bill, which is designed to provide financial autonomy to a number of agencies, including the Parliament Office, the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM), the service commissions, as well as others. It is also a way of trying to bring into accountability the moneys that are voted, *en bloc* sums, to agencies so that they could spend them within their own needs and necessities, but it is to do so judiciously and responsibly.

The Fiscal Management and Accountability (Amendment) Bill, the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (Amendment) Bill, which the Hon. Attorney General has just presented, and the Local Government (Amendment) Bill have been assured as part and parcel of the hundred-day plan of this new Government in office. Already, as I have noticed, none of this has ever happened before. We have clearly brought to the Parliament not only legislation that has been promised, but a shared vision of where we want to take the legislative landscape beyond 2015 and into 2020. From time to time, we will be bringing before this honourable House those pieces of legislation that would affect other parts of life in Guyana and legislation to reform, primarily for the short term, taxation, which people have asked us to do.

Other speakers are going to address these matters in greater details, except I want to give a purview of the presidential address to this Parliament and to, perhaps, summarise the scope of the address. For me, in all my years in Parliament, this has been an address that is remarkable for its content and, I would say, it is exceptional in relation to the vision it has shared for Guyana. There have been forty areas, in my view, which have been earmarked for attention by this Assembly. His Excellency exhorted us to look at the issues of unemployment and microenterprise development; the issue of bringing legislation that would foster an inclusionary process and the issue of promulgating a social compact among the state, business, labour and cooperatives – the social partners of the society. It is that if we could all be harmonised into one mission to work for Guyana, it would be for the betterment of our country.

We were also exhorted, in His Excellency's presentation, to craft a national programme based on agenda, not a party programme, not a partisan programme, but a national programme that would address the needs and welfare of all of our people and this is the job of the entire National Assembly. If we can agree on a priority basis of how this ought to be done, then we all can claim that we are singing from one hymn sheet and we are repeating one chorus. As I said before, the speech is very broad in its scope and very far-reaching, so far-reaching that for the very first time I have encountered reference to it off the information superhighway. No longer must Guyana be content with being insular and isolated. No longer must we as politicians seek only after the parochial issues that would divide us – the issues that would cause rancour and bitterness and hate and division. We are, in fact, part and parcel of the human village. We are part and parcel of the global village and we have to now place our agenda on the information superhighway. That is perhaps...today, when Your Honour referred to these proceedings going beyond the walls of the Parliament. A mention has already been made of the proceedings being on webcast and it is also being seen around the world. We are being seen around the world; we are being monitored by the world, and I am sure that what we do here could impress upon the world that we deserve its sympathy and its support.

In this regard, as Prime Minister, I am charged with the remit of the public information sector and I want to take His Excellency's challenge and assure this nation that under this Government, under this administration, there will be full respect for the media; there will be full respect for the plural nature of the media, and no attempt would be made to curb anyone who pursues constitutional rights of freedom of expression, freedom to impart knowledge, information and entertainment, and the right of those entities to enjoy protection under the law. Of course, the information I speak about is information that has to be conveyed, purveyed, circulated and publicised in a responsible way, with a mind that it is done to help Guyana, and not to destroy Guyana, in a way that carries with it responsibility and the right of people to reply whenever they come under assault and attacks on their character and under threats, sometimes of victimisation or recrimination, if ordinary people dare to stand up for what they believe to be right and proper.

Today, Guyana is witnessing what appears to be a magical transformation of the public information landscape. It is amazing that there could be transformation in the *Guyana Chronicle*, which had hitherto being purveying all of the things that could divide and set us up against each other. A partisan propagandist rag has now become a bastion of public

information that is credible. **[Mr. Ramjattan: We have revolutionised it.]** As my learned friend has said, we have revolutionised this newspaper. Here, I would like to wish it well. As I said, this Government would not only promote professionalism in journalism and promote the ethics and high standards of journalism, but it would also protect journalists who practise the profession faithfully to their own standards, faithfully to their own ethics, and that they will see less and perhaps, ideally, no interference from this Minister as the Minister responsible for public information.

2.37 p.m.

In a sense the buck stops with me. If anyone were to interfere one would have expected it to come from this quarter, but I can assure you that this would be the job of the new board of directors that will be set up at the Guyana National Newspapers Limited (GNNL) and the National Communications Network (NCN). They would have new boards. I can assure that these boards would have professional representatives and people who are committed to some standard of business so that both the *Guyana Chronicle* newspapers and NCN, as public information media, must not only carry out the functions to inform, educate and entertain the people, but also must be accountable and viable. I have said elsewhere that under this administration if an entity is not viable then it may be pushed to the wall, and where the chip falls, it falls.

Also on this score of trying to reform our information network and communication facilities, we are expecting to see very shortly a complete shakeup of the Government Information Service (GINA) to do what it has been set up to do as a small professional body, to tell Guyana and the world what its Government is doing for the people, what its Ministers are doing, what its public officials are doing, what, in fact, should be placed in the public domain as information. If there is an informed populace, the informed populace would be able to make better choices and not made to fall prey to what we had seen not so long ago – the stigma of racism and the appeal to ethnicity, and all other side agendas that are not healthy for the forward movement of Guyana. When one sees the Government Information Agency it must not be an agency that would pay people to monitor calls of individuals, to sit and be paid to wiretap or to intercept Facebook messages, and do things that are not within the domain of public information, but are within the narrow confines of political vendetta, the narrow walls of the political agenda to harass person or persons who do not share the

opinions and views of those who are in leadership and those who are in Government. The Government Information Agency would no longer perform those functions.

We will make sure that all the advertisements placed by GINA into the larger media for publication and dissemination, which are paid for by entities, must not be sidelined to place propaganda advertisements for political parties. This is the reason why today I wish to inform the National Assembly, in talking to the issue of public information, that because of the poor performance of the Government Information Agency it has become like heavy lead pulling down NCN and the *Guyana Chronicle* newspapers because huge sums of money paid to the Government Information Agency to transmit to the television and the state newspaper have never been paid over. I say this because an investigation is under way. We believe that the huge sum of money, \$76 million owed to the *Guyana Chronicle* alone, is unacceptable. It is unacceptable that we should have such an abuse of booking out advertisements and not paying the money because probably a lot of those advertisements were done during the election time as propaganda material.

On this score, this Minister has asked that the situation in Linden be corrected. We hope expeditiously, when we would have restructured the broadcasting authority and reviewed the situation with Linden's application for television station licence, that the people of Linden would have their right restored to them for a television station. Many years ago Linden had its own television station and benefited from two channels. In another incarnation I had set up a people's committee to run the television station. I believe the time has come when we would return Linden's television station to the people so that they can have programmes they desire, programmes that serve their needs and their necessities. It is a job in progress. We are trying to repair the communication transmission system. We are trying to set this television transmitter and other facilities in a way to have high-class transmission to the Linden community.

I said before that we intend, within the scope and framework of His Excellency's address to the National Assembly, to pursue an important element of that address which is constitutional reform. Already we have one aspect of constitutional reform on the parliamentary agency which is to give autonomy to certain constitutional agencies. We need to broaden and deepen the constitutional reform process. Constitutional reform falls under my remit as Prime Minister and I intend, in the shortest possible time, to establish a consultative group of eminent persons, legal personalities, who would advise on a way forward and perhaps to craft

the terms of reference for a constitutional commission to be established to look not only into harmonising the powers of the executive and that of the legislature, but to be able to bring into effect a perfect model, if I may say, of the separation of powers among the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. A lot has been said about the abuse of power, executive lawlessness. I remember and can still hear the voice of my learned friend and colleague, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, talking about executive lawlessness; talking about *control freakism*. Only constitutional change can tame not only attitudes that will lead to executive lawlessness, but would tame the temptation for those in high office to abuse their power and authority, and for that we need to have constitutional reform.

As you saw recently, and may have taken judicial notice of, Your Honour, that much has been said as to whether the Prime Minister should chair the Cabinet and not the President. I wish to take the opportunity here, in this National Assembly, to say that the Constitution states who chairs the Cabinet. I readily acknowledge and bow to the prescription of the Constitution as exists – that the power and authority to chair the Cabinet resides with the President. Therefore I would not be bothered by this type of carping that appears in the public sometimes, I believe, to set the President and Prime Minister against each other and perhaps to set us peacefully apart, because I cannot see us warring over who chairs the Cabinet. I believe that we must not be detained by this, and it is perhaps a matter that should rightly be referred to a constitutional revision commission.

Sir, I want to turn to one last matter. I know there are many speakers after me. I had not intended to speak this long, but it is just to say that on the printed copy of His Excellency's address – not the booklet form - the full menu of measures, which would engage this Parliament, have been set out clearly, pellucidly. We wish, in these sittings, here to conclude on all these legislative matters before us.

I want to close on this note that in the President's address there was an exhortation, which I had referred to earlier, that states – this was His Excellency speaking, President Granger - and I quote:

“I pray, therefore, for the unity of the Guyanese people. I pray that this National Assembly will debate, deliberate and determine the matters that will be brought before you without cowardice or malice. I pray that the decisions will result in a good life for all Guyanese.”

I had referred to the words “cowardice or malice” earlier. I now wish to attribute those words to His Excellency President Granger. I wish in saying so to commend the speech for formal ratification by this National Assembly and for this National Assembly to approve of the policies adumbrated in the address by His Excellency President Granger.

I thank you very much. [*Applause*]

2.52 p.m.

Vice-President and Minister of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs [Mr. Allicock]: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to serve in this new Government. It is only fitting that, after more than two decades of decline, Guyana can now boast of having a visionary leader. In this regard, His Excellency President David Granger's articulation of Guyana's path of prosperity in his inaugural address to this Guyana's Eleventh Parliament is not only visionary, but also inspiring. I, therefore, offer my sincerest congratulations to His Excellency for laying out his vision for Guyana and, by extension, his expectations of those of us who are gathered here in this august Assembly as well as those of us who chose not to be here today. To those who have so chosen, you are missing out on a glorious opportunity to assist in tilling this most impressive task which ought to be undertaken collectively in Guyana's best interest. It is not too late to pick up your tools and join us in this noble task of repositioning and rebuilding this great nation of ours.

As we collectively join hands all across Guyana we are reminded by His Excellency of our diversity and of the richness therein. We are charged with a responsibility of *inter alia* committing to the resolve of "...making Guyana 'One Nation'." We are, as a people, therefore, steadfastly committed to the task of charting Guyana's destiny over these next five years and far beyond. We are committed to so do cognisant of the value of our history as a young nation. We are committed to the President's vision of using unity as the vehicle to solving our many and varied social and other difficulties. If the demons of crime, disease, ignorance and poverty are indeed to be defeated, then only the angel of unity can help us to accomplish this necessary goal.

Rebuilding our local democracy is essential. Depoliticising the management of Neighbourhood Democratic Councils and, in the case of my Ministry, the indigenous peoples’ villages must be our priority. The Ministry of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs is committed to the task of ensuring that party politics is removed from the management of the

affairs of our 187 villages. We pledge to root out the fears planted in the hearts and minds of our indigenous peoples by politicians of yesterday. We are committed to improving the capacity of our people to lead themselves.

In this regard, we have already embarked on the process of having village audits and elections. These will be accomplished by 22nd July 2015. Already villages are prepared for these activities which will position them for internal governance over the next three years.

Following elections, we will be having the National Toshios Conference. At that conference, we will commence discussions on the indigenous peoples' rights and resources. Already, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs is in the process of crafting a document on this subject which is intended to form the basis of the all-important conversation. We are, therefore, on target with respect to the President's first one hundred-day programme in this regard.

Extreme poverty can only be eliminated through sustained, committed and dedicated efforts. It is known that the indigenous peoples' population of the deep hinterland regions of Guyana are more vulnerable to the deleterious effects of the scourge of poverty than any other group in Guyana. For example, the community of Baramita sits on gold, yet the residents live in deplorable poverty. The challenges are many and vary from community leadership, communications and transportation to health and education, pure reliable water supply, affordable electricity and agricultural support. The cure for these difficulties has got to be a process designed to bring relief in a deliberate measurable and sustainable manner. To this end, there will be a number of interventions specific to sustainable economic development. Such projects will especially target women and young people. Women are our village economists, while the young people are the next generation of leaders.

There will be partnerships with several non-governmental and international organisations. These partnerships are intended to bring to villages benefits in the areas of sustainable utilisation and management of natural resources, conceptualisation and management of micro projects, skills training, life skills, sports, cultural and other social based activities as well as infrastructural improvement.

We intend to continue to develop and record the indigenous languages of our nine indigenous people. We will store for posterity the valuable historic, cultural records of the indigenous

peoples of Guyana. We intend to showcase our talented people both young and old. We intend to do so every day of the year.

Our programmes are being crafted to develop, preserve and promote our rich heritage and to marry it with the other rich cultural heritage of our other Guyanese brothers and sisters. We see our work, as a Ministry, as pivotal to the realisation of the vision of our President in making Guyana “One Nation”. We see our role as a positive force of uniting the coast with the hinterland.

Our Ministry remains firm of the view that if inequalities are to be something of the past, then urgent immediate attention will have to be paid to national awareness of the rights of indigenous peoples, not only at home here in Guyana, but globally as well. There will have to be improved access by indigenous people to the opportunities, facilities and rewards nationally available.

To this end, our Ministry intends to have a situation analysis completed. We wish to place in the public domain, a factual, impartial analysis of the state of affairs of our indigenous peoples as of now. Thereafter, we shall embark upon a set of strategic objectives; the accomplishment of which will chart the course for the elimination of inequalities as far as these affect either directly or indirectly, the indigenous people of Guyana.

We see ourselves facilitating the movement of indigenous people away from being dependent on handouts, towards self-reliance and economic independence. We see appropriate education as pivotal to this long term process. The Bina Hill Institute at Annai in Region 9 presents itself as an excellent project upon which to build. We see this institute as similar, in a sense, to the Critchlow Labour College.

With eco-tourism on the rise, every indigenous community is a potential tourist destination. We must, therefore, prepare for this eventuality which feeds into the concept of sustainable utilisation of our natural patrimony. We need tour guides, tour planners, caterers, interpreters, facility managers, logistics personnel, security and a whole list of skilled persons to enable the tourism based sustainable economic ventures to bloom. We must have Bina Hill type facilities in other regions. We have already identified Orealla in Region 6 as one such possible site. They will complement the technical training centres which will eventually be set up in each region.

The indigenous peoples of Guyana welcome the President's proposed establishment of a Sovereign Wealth Fund. The Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs views this initiative as a very responsible approach to the management of the revenues earned from our national patrimony. We must determine where such resources are best invested. I say "invested" because I believe that every cent of the state's resources should be placed towards the development of our people is an investment in our country's future.

I believe that after a careful analysis of our needs, as a nation, it will be well established that education, health care, public transportation, infrastructure, social security, access to information and environmental protection are important areas to which such investments should be directed. This fund allows us, as a nation, to avoid the pitfalls of *squandermania* and focus on ensuring that our citizens get the best out of every dollar of the state's resources. I pray that we start to produce oil in the largest quantities anticipated. This way, the Sovereign Wealth Fund will become a reality and will go on to benefit the people of Guyana aiding in the swift removal of poverty from our land.

The forest for us, indigenous peoples, represents life. For us, it is our kitchen, our medicine cabinet, our home, our bank and our sanctuary. For centuries, our ancestors lived from and cared for our forest. It is, therefore, for us, a source of tremendous delight that our President has recognised its value, and by extension, our efforts over the generations. This is made clear in his vision for a Green Guyana.

The challenges of climate change are enormous. The pressures of development, or the price of development, on countries such as ours could be devastating. Our journey towards sustainable management and use of our natural resources, and focus on the use of energy obtained from water, wind and the sun, as outlined by our President, is indeed the way forward. Our eyes must remain trained on our protected areas. We, therefore, offer our full support to these efforts. Our Ministry's support, in this regard, will be manifested in the programmes we undertake in the years ahead.

Four new towns: If there was any doubt about the President's deep interest in and commitment to the development of Guyana's hinterland, such doubts have been permanently erased. His Excellency has made it clear that there shall be four new towns in the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. Bartica, Mahdia, Mabaruma and Lethem are going to become towns. The necessary legislation will be brought before this House shortly. These hinterland communities each have a significant indigenous peoples' population. These communities

have not been benefiting from the attention, services, physical infrastructure, agricultural and other technical support in over the past two decades. Now, under the visionary leadership of President Granger, they will become towns with their own mayors and town councils. They will bring their own brand of local democratic governance to the fore. A new culture of accountable government by the people and for the people of those new towns which will emerge.

This is visionary leadership. This is through the involvement of the people in the management of their own affairs. This is empowerment in action. This is the new Guyana.

This essentially means that there will be better management, sustainable use and maintenance of public infrastructure, hinterland settlements, trails to indigenous communities, airstrips in these communities. Hinterland roads, rivers and air transports services will be improved. These interventions can only impact positively on the lives and livelihood of the indigenous peoples of Guyana's coast and hinterland. I can see, in the not too distant future, positive impact in the areas of social life, education, health care, agriculture, security and general economic development in our hinterland communities and, by extension, in the lives of our indigenous peoples.

This marks the beginning of a good life for all Guyanese. Let us, therefore, move forward resolutely together, for in the words of Guyana's first Executive President, "We have a Nation to build; a destiny to mould." I thank you very much. [*Applause*]

3.07 p.m.

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Holder]: In His Excellency the President's address to the nation, at the opening of the Eleventh Parliament, he stated that the, "...Government seeks first and foremost to eliminate extreme poverty", a task in which agriculture does, and will play, a very important part.

Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the fact that I was honoured in Rome, Italy, at the recent Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Global Conference, to receive on behalf of the President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, an award for Guyana, having achieved three years in advance the target set by the 1966 World Food Summit to reduce by 2015, at least by half, the number of people in this country suffering from undernourishment, the country is still faced with a number of critical factors affecting the future agricultural development efforts. Rising sea levels, increasing air and sea surface temperatures, and changing rainfall patterns

as well as degradation of coastal and marine eco-systems, are adding additional pressures to established sustainable agriculture in Guyana.

The Government plays an important role in transforming Guyana to realise economic and social security and reducing the incidence of poverty. As the Government, we are responsible for the establishing and maintaining an enabling environment within which investment can be attracted in ways which will increase the output and marketing of goods and services.

As the Minister of Agriculture, I declare, that agriculture under this new Government, will be a strong medium for moving Guyana forward and ensuring economic and social security by 2020.

The agricultural sector of Guyana continues to be an important contributor to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), employment generation, foreign exchange earnings and rural and hinterland development. Agriculture accounts for approximately 20% of Guyana's GDP, providing more than 33% direct employment, both at rural and urban levels. Almost 40% of Guyana's export earnings come from agriculture and an average of about 11% of the national budget is designated for agriculture. The significant contributions of agriculture are likely to persist as a major component of our economy in the decades to come.

This sector comprises five principal sub-sectors, namely rice, sugar, non-traditional crops – fruits, vegetables, roots & tubers, coconuts, herbs and spices - livestock and fisheries. The agriculture sector also provides Government services to the farmers in the form of drainage and irrigation, agriculture extension and research, marketing, hydro-meteorological services, pesticides and chemical services and technical capacity through education.

Agricultural production contributes to food security by making food more available and accessible. The traditional roles of agricultural production in generating incomes and reducing food prices have been important. Research has shown that agricultural growth has been found to be much more effective than general economic growth at reducing poverty for the poor. Over the period 2010–2013, there has been continuous growth in agriculture GDP, and a high agricultural contribution to GDP. This implies that Guyana is on the economic pathways that makes food more available and affordable for economic growth and poverty reduction. Approximately, 34.7% of total exports are agriculture exports, leaving out forest products.

In 2014, rice exports amounted to US\$249.5 million, that is 21.4% of total exports; sugar accounted for US\$88 million, that is 7.5%; shrimp and fish amounted to US\$62.1 million, that is 5.3%, and other crops, fruits & vegetables, accounted for US\$5.7 million, that is 0.5% of total exports. Agriculture is therefore central to the country's food security, supplying a diversity of plant and animal products for local consumption. In spite of its lead role, however, the sector is still largely characterised by the production and export of primary products, with extremely small valued added components.

The largest share of agriculture production is constituted by traditional crops, which represent 24.5% of agriculture GDP and 4.8% of total GDP. It is also the major source of income and employment for the rural population. Rice has shown considerable production increases with 2014 crop being 18.6% higher than 2013 at 635,238 tonnes. Sugar production has been below targets over the period but is expected to stabilise in the coming years. Other crops, livestock and fisheries production for the period, have also significantly increased.

The rice industry contributed about 5% of GDP in Guyana in 2013, and accounts for more than \$US240 million in export earnings. More than 40,000 people directly depend on the rice industry for livelihood, and the industry provides employment for more than 20,000 people. 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 298,125 metric tonnes in 2007 to 635,238 metric tonnes in 2014. This represents a 113% increase in production. However, there are many more challenges for this rising industry; we will continue to work on, securing stronger and wider markets for the rice industry; increasing productivity of paddy yield from the national average of four million tonnes per hectare to six million tonnes per hectare; improving the quality of rice at all stages — cleaning, drying and storage; promote Value Added Rice Production of rice products and upland Rice Cultivation. For the latter, the promotion of upland rice to commercial scale, beginning with the Moco Moco and Sante Fe rice projects in the Rupununi. This can be a component of the livestock industry for the production of poultry in Rupununi and reduce the imports from Brazil.

The Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) has recently been allocated \$3.8 billion. There has been a recent change in the management to the Interim Management Committee (IMC) which will oversee the work of the corporation for at least six months. These positive changes will place the operation of the 16,000-plus workers industry in a strong footing, as we move

forward. We have also recently appointed a Commission of Inquiry into the activities of GuySuCo, which will chart the way forward over the next five, ten and 15 years.

GuySuCo is fully owned by the Government of Guyana and currently contributes about 9.5% to the country's GDP. It is a major foreign exchange earner for the country. It plays a major role in the sugar communities around the plantations, providing sporting facilities, medical facilities and also contributes to the drainage of those communities.

The livestock industry contributed more than US\$58 million to Guyana's economy in 2012, contributing 15% to agriculture GDP and 3% overall GDP. Livestock plays a significant role in furthering Guyana's economic and social development. Guyana is “self-sufficient” in fresh meats, but not in milk. However, livestock production is still well below potential capacity.

The Guyana Livestock Development Authority (GLDA) delivers public services related to animal production, animal health, animal genetics, marketing, training and extension services, as well as regulatory services.

Several programmes under GLDA include:

- Protecting the gains of animal production and genetics through the provision of timely veterinary interventions and minimising the threat of disease from internal and external sources. Veterinary drugs and the importation of animals are also regulated under this programme.
- Infusing livestock and animal stock with new genetics to enable farmers to benefit from higher productivity, is another one of its roles. Techniques of artificial insemination and embryo transfer form part of GLDA regular strategies.

The Fisheries Department's mandate is to manage, regulate and promote the sustainable development of the nation's fishery resources.

This is achieved through:

- (i) Ensuring the observance of all legal and administrative requirements by all entities in the fisheries sector, specifically by-
 - (a) Registering, inspecting and issuing licence to fishing vessels, processing plants and exporters.

(b) Collaboration with the Guyana Association of Trawler Owners and Seafood Processors (GATSOP), regarding policy matters in the industrial fleet and on regulations such as the use of Turtle Excluder Devices (TED).

(ii) Conducting research, stock assessment and surveys, to obtain resource management information, to ensure the application of the appropriate technology for harvest and post-harvest activities and to develop and test culture systems. Research and Development is divided into three sub-units, namely; Statistics, Resource Assessment and Aquaculture, which includes inland fishery.

Marine production has continued to slowly increase over the last five years with production oscillating between 9,000 and 10,000 tonnes annually. Aquaculture production occupies about 3,000 hectares of aquaculture space around the country. This sector will continue to be given prominence by the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) in its diversification drive.

Mr. Speaker, Guyana is the land of many waters and water is a main resource in agriculture. 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. At the same time, rehabilitation and construction of sluices in communities and some major capital projects in the case of NDIA such as East Demerara Water Conservancy, additional Black Bush Polder drainage outlet at Bengal, additional Canals Polder drainage outlet at Patentia, development of 5,500 acres of land at Aurora and resuscitation of the Cunha Canal on the East Bank of the Demerara River.

Our hinterland agriculture programme will include:

- The growing of exotic crops — potatoes, onions, and garlic.
- Extension activities promoting technical services & good agriculture practices
 - Promotion of spices (turmeric, nutmeg, ginger, black pepper)
 - Apiculture
 - Ambulatory services – animal health to villages

- Promotion of aquaculture,
- Rice cultivation in the Rupununi

It will also involve:

- The provision of free drugs in emergencies
- Control of Acoushi ants
- Linking farmers to markets
- Scholarships for hinterland students based on needs
- Awareness training for the safe use of pesticides
- Technical support for community development programmes, and
- The establishment and monitoring of hydro-meteorological weather stations for the aquaculture, crops and livestock sectors and meteorological and aeronautical meteorological stations for the aviation sector.

The comprehensive development of Guyana's Intermediate and Rupununi Savannahs as the next frontiers for Guyana's agricultural development, will be high on our agenda.

The National Agricultural Research Extension Institute (NAREI) is responsible for spearheading agricultural research and extension activities for productivity enhancement and diversification of the non-traditional crop sector – fruits and vegetables, biofuel development, as well as, for plant quarantine services. NAREI's vision is to “ensure food security, prosperity and livelihoods for all, using technological innovations in agriculture.”

3.22 p.m.

NAREI is actively involved in adaptive research that focuses on improving crop production and productivity for enhanced food security and rural development. Emphasis is placed on crop diversification from high volume - low income crops to low volume - high income crops, such as spices and other cash crops; new vegetables, such as, cauliflower, broccoli, red cabbage and sweet peppers; managing biotic stresses, procurement and evaluation of exotic germplasm, such as black-eyed peas, corn and soya beans; biofuel crops, coconut and cassava revitalisation; and technology dissemination through its extension services. The

promotion of Climate Smart Agricultural Practices, inclusive of protected agricultural systems for year-round vegetable production, hydroponics and drip irrigation are also to be given prominence.

The Guyana School of Agriculture (GSA) addresses its technical capacity building in agriculture through the development of skills and capacities, as well as enhanced knowledge and information exchange. The GSA is involved in improvement among farmers and farmers' organisations; they contribute to agriculture research, education and training institutions, extension and advisory services institutions.

The programmes offered include:

- (A) Diploma in Agriculture
- (B) Diploma in Animal Health and Veterinary Public Health
- (C) Diploma in Livestock Production and Management
- (D) Certificate in Agriculture
- (E) Certificate in Forestry
- (F) Certificate in Fisheries Studies
- (G) Certificate in Agro Processing

A total of 164 new students were enrolled for the 2014/2015 academic year, which commenced on 16th September, 2014; 131 students at the Mon Repos campus and 33 students at the Essequibo campus. Of the number of continuing students, ten (10) are from sister CARICOM countries – Barbados, St. Kitts and St. Vincent.

The Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC) is charged with the responsibility of providing marketing services to stakeholders, farmers, agro-processors and exporters of renowned traditional agricultural sectors.

The corporation achieves its mandates through:

- (1) The Market Information Centre - which provides information on market opportunities linking buyers and sellers.
- (2) The Guyana Shop – a supermarket that promotes the sale and consumption of locally produced and manufactured non- traditional agricultural produce and products; and

(3) The Packaging Facilities - to prepare fresh exports, transport produce and provide cold storage facilities.

The Pesticides and Toxic Chemicals Control Board (PTCCB) was established for the management of pesticides and toxic chemicals in Guyana. The Board is tasked with the responsibilities for licensing, registration, training, inspection and enforcement, and executes these activities with the aim of ensuring sound chemical management in Guyana.

The Hydrometeorological Service is a department within the Ministry of Agriculture. The department's general responsibility is to monitor and evaluate Guyana's weather and water resources and to actively support the Government in disaster risk management and aeronautical, water, agricultural, engineering and other sectors for the socio-economic development of the country. It is the official provider of weather, water and climate information and related products and services for Guyana and the country's international stakeholders.

The Service's mission is to observe, archive and understand Guyana's weather and climate and provide meteorological, hydrological and oceanic services in support of Guyana's needs and national and international obligations. The services provided by the Hydrometeorological Service include:

- Weather conditions for aviation purposes;
- Weather conditions for use by farmers;
- Short, medium and long term weather forecasts;
- Archiving water and weather data, volume of water in the waterways, rainfall amounts, sunshine hours, *et cetera*; and
- Data for construction planning.

The Hydrometeorological Office provides the weather information through the operations of 14 Automatic Weather Stations, seven Meteorological Observatories or Synoptic Stations, 60 Water level Stations and 148 Rainfall Stations.

In 2015 onwards, the Ministry of Agriculture will intensify its efforts to diversify and modernise the sector, overcoming barriers which presently exist. We will continue to support the sugar industry, ensure stronger and wider markets for our commodities, enhance genetic

stock with improved varieties of crops and breeds of livestock, pursue food safety, improve access to more affordable and better agriculture input, improve availability and access to land, further enhanced drainage and irrigation systems and enhance weather-related disaster management to accelerate the economy forward.

Mr. Speaker, I do hope that this general overview of the activities of the Ministry of Agriculture was informative, has given an indication of where we are at present in our agricultural development efforts and gives some indication of the Ministry's plans for the future, which will be further developed in future submissions to the National Assembly. I thank you. *[Applause]*

Minister of Public Health [Dr. Norton]: If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my presentation in this honourable House and to seize this opportunity to congratulate my Colleagues, especially those who are here for the first time in this National Assembly for their achievement. His Excellency the President, Brigadier (Ret'd) David Arthur Granger, MSS, in his address to the National Assembly, made on the occasion of the Ceremonial Opening of the First Session of the Eleventh Parliament of Guyana on 10th June, articulated the following :

“Your Government will undertake to ensure equitable access of all Guyanese - whether they are from the coastland or from the hinterland or whether they are rich or poor - to good health care. The primary health care system is failing women, children and the aged. This 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”

Mr. Speaker, equitable access of all Guyanese to good health care is one of the most important, if not the most important, goal of the Ministry of Public Health and one that we will pursue most vigorously; that we can assure you. This is regardless of whether they live on the coastland or the hinterland. I say this because we will strive to attain the situation where the mother in the village of Aishalton should have access to the same quality of maternal health care as the mother in Georgetown or the mother in Mahaicony. We can say today, access to health care will be available to the aged - that is, in geriatrics and to the child, regardless of whether the child is from Georgetown, Baramita or Orealla.

While we recognise this as a very tall order, we are prepared to do all that is in our power to, at least, put a plan in place to achieve this, never forgetting that key phrase of good health

care - that is, quality health care. We would never encourage or support the effort for special sectors of our society or particular individuals to benefit from costly medical treatment that the rest of the Guyanese population do not have access to because of their financial status or their political affiliation. In order for you to get an idea of the health care system which exists in Guyana at the moment, I would like to just inform you of the five levels of health care:

- Level one - the National Referral Hospital - this is where we have and we should strive to have specialist doctors in every field;
- Level two - the Regional Hospital - this is where we have the specialist care in the four major specialties of obstetrics and gynaecology, paediatrics, general surgery and internal medicine;
- Level three - the District or Cottage Hospital - this is where we should have general medical officers;
- Level four - the Health Centres - this is where we have health visitors, midwives and nursing assistants; and
- Level five - the Health Post or having the Community Health Worker.

Even though it might be stipulated that at the health post we only have the community health workers because I have seen and experienced that these health posts do provide obstetric care in the delivery of babies. I would want to make everything possible to have at each one of these health posts, along with the community health worker, a midwife. I say this because in a little community like Karawab in the Upper Pomeroon, for instance, our midwife, on an average, delivers 25 babies annually and might have been doing so for some years now.

I know, as I have said before, it is a tall order, especially when we take into consideration that in Region 1, there are 52 health posts. It means that we have to do everything possible to have these midwives trained, like we have done with the community health workers and go back into these areas. In those health posts, what we find is that, it is easier to train a community health worker who has some years of experience working as a community health worker. We then send them to do the midwifery programme, while we get somebody else to fill that place of community health worker.

His Excellency the President in his address said that, "...the primary health care system is failing women, children and the aged". The primary health care system falls under Programme No. 3 of the Ministry of Public Health. This primary health care system is further subdivided into different sub-programmes. We have, for instance, the sub-programme of Food Policy, which includes nutrition surveillance and education. This we plan to place lots of emphasis on because it is found that, in Guyana, our eating habits are going in the wrong direction. We no longer tend to go for the foods that we produce here in Guyana, in terms of our vegetables, fresh fruits and provisions. We go for the imported food whether it is in canned form or not; likewise our excessive use of salt and sugar. We find that the non-communicable disease, while it is taking a toll on our population in so many forms, not only have we found that it hampers a healthy and productive life individually, but it affects the economy on a whole.

3.37 p.m.

We would like to concentrate on food policy, especially, in the area of breast-feeding education. Not only would we insist that there be a child friendly corner in every health centre, hospital or health post, but we will make every effort to lead by example, by trying to have a breast feeding corner in every one of our Ministries to start with. That is a personal undertaking I hope I can be successful in. In the health sector we promote breast-feeding for the first six months, yet our mothers are only given three months for maternity leave. That is a situation we would like to put on the table for discussion, evaluation, analysis and to come up with the right answer for our population, particularly for our mothers and babies.

Another sub-programme would be dental care in the primary health care programme. When one goes into these health centres in the regional hospitals they would see dental chairs that are not only old and antique, but some are obsolete and others are non-functional and they are there in the dental clinic of these hospitals or health centres. We will hope to have this remedied as completely as possible. If you go and visit the regional health hospitals, immediately the dentist can tell you where the chair would be placed if by any chance he/she happens to get one for that region. Of course, we will do everything in our power not to have something as scandalous as has happened recently, where the high cost or the large amount of money that was paid for an individual to enjoy dental care. It is our effort to make certain that whatever is available to one should be available to all.

We have to concentrate so much on adolescent health in our primary health care system, particularly on teenage pregnancy. It is so important. Adolescent health has not been given the importance that is needed. We must have adolescent friendly clinics and adolescent health education, particularly, at the level of the school, for teenage pregnancy immediately places that mother into the high risk bracket. What must be noted is that things are changing; lifestyles are changing; the reaction and development of the human being on the whole are changing. It is now accepted that it is not something out of the way or abnormal for a Guyanese female to reach the stage of puberty at the age of eight. It is for that reason we no longer refer to teenager because one can be a teenager even before the age of 13 years, becoming sexually matured - speaking physically that is. It was wanting to be labelled the second decade, but we are even before the second decade of life and we have to take that into consideration in our future plans and our educational programmes, particularly in the health sector. In the primary health care programme as well, this is now becoming established and we want to make it an integral and important part of our primary health care programme.

We talk about men's health because we know how many of times a relative of ours would only, by coincident, come up with the diagnosis of prostate cancer, just to mention one example. The Ministry of Public Health would like to move into that direction. Where, like we have been having campaigns and programmes dealing with maternal health and the treatment and programmes of cervical cancers, we should start concentrating on men's health with a similar favour.

We also have been neglecting our geriatric population in this country. We go to the outlying regions, in the regional hospital and the officials and workers there are asking that we provide geriatric care in those areas. It is time and we hope to take that under our wings and run with it so that we can no longer fail to address the health issues of our age.

In our primary health care, as the President did say, it is failing our women and children. The sub-programme that looks after that is Maternal and Child Health or Family Medicine. The Maternal and Child Health or Family Health is one of the programmes that focuses on the provision of health care and services to the entire family. This sub-programme has various objectives in keeping with the targets of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) adopted from the International World Health Organisation (WHO) standards and we refer particularly to the MDG Goal-4, which is to reduce the child mortality and Goal-5, which is to improve maternal health. These objectives of this programme aim for the reduction of maternal

mortality, children under five years old mortality, infant mortality, the reduction of mother to child transmission of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and to prevent or to achieve zero cases of vaccine preventable diseases.

That brings us to the sub-programme of immunisation. It is all well for us to say that we have 16 vaccines in this programme, but it is a different case when one visits the outlying regions, like Region 8, for instance. We have the little village of Kamana, where our Community Health Worker has to walk for two days, climbing mountains and going down into valleys, as in the Pakaraimas, in order to have access to vaccines so that her babies would be adequately immunised. It is not only for the walking of the vaccines, we find that sometimes villages are without vaccines because of broken solar panels or broken refrigerators, which we must make every effort to avoid, for it means nothing and it flies in the face of this equity that we set out to achieve; our access to quality health care for all.

We from the Ministry of Public Health will do everything to put this situation in order. We will try to provide transportation for the health workers and make certain that these transportations are budgeted here or provided for by the budget for the health sector. Quite unlike what is happening or what has happened in the past, we find that these Ministry of Health vehicles are being used for everything else other than health. We have got to make certain that what comes from the Ministry of Public Health remains in the execution of the health programmes.

While we will work to have healthy mothers and babies through preconception care, which is paying attention to the nutritional status and HIV status and immunisation, we will also provide the anti-natal care, clean and safe deliveries, the management of high risk pregnancies and post-natal care. I have mentioned this because, even though we have it in programmes and documents, we do have some bottle necks which we hope to get rid of.

In order for us to achieve those goals, we need to, for instance, have the ability of access to comprehensive emergency obstetric facilities, including the functionality of the National Referral System (NRS) for high risk and emergency cases. We have a difficulty in that. Many of times we have found in the past that mothers died because they had to be transported on All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) from one village to the nearest health facility, in Region 9, for instance. Or we would hear or read about patients or maternal deaths at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, with the report only saying that they had arrived too late.

3.52 p.m.

We must have, not only vehicles for ambulances that can run on the coast, but we have to ensure that we have water ambulances, particularly for the riverine areas. Bartica, for instance, I know for the longest while was crying out for a water ambulance. It is time that the Ministry of Public Health do everything possible to make certain that a water ambulance would be available, probably at hubs like Parika and Charity, so that we can avoid maternal complications that can lead to maternal deaths.

We must ensure that the regional hospitals are able to provide support services on a 24 hours basis, particularly in cases of obstetric complications. There is no reason why the West Demerara Regional Hospital operating theatre should be closed at 9 o' clock when it is just across from the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. We are prepared to put measures in place so that we can have a 24 hours service of the operating theatre.

In my past shadowing the Ministry of Health, I had always advocated here in Parliament of the necessity for specialist trained physicians. I will do everything to make certain that we not only have our obstetricians being trained or having our physicians trained as obstetricians, but we would want to do so in all of our departments, particularly those four major specialties.

We have a system in place in Guyana for postgraduate training, and to let you get an idea of how far we have gone, in no way saying that we are nearing the end, we have postgraduate training in surgery, orthopaedic and traumatology, anaesthesia, emergency medicine, paediatrics, obstetrics and gynaecology, internal medicines and infectious diseases. I will do everything possible to make certain that we get psychiatry on board in postgraduate training. That is already in the making. It was only yesterday I had a teleconference with interested parties who wanted to start the Family Medicine Programme in postgraduate training. We can only benefit from these postgraduate trainings, but there are some areas that we have to look at if we want to encourage our doctors to remain in our health system, providing that important service to our nation.

We have a large number of graduate doctors who came back from Cuba only recently and they would have contractual obligations to this Government, in most cases five years. They are expected to serve those five years before they can embark on any other postgraduate training. While one may have their arguments for that, I think it is something that we need to bring to the table. We must understand that when one is doing a postgraduate training, they

are actually working in these hospitals. They are providing the same services they would have as a general practitioner, only in this case, it would be much more supervised. In other words, there would be more checks and balances on the performances of these residents or those who are doing the postgraduate training. For that reason, quite unlike the postgraduate doctor who had left this country to go and do his postgraduate in another country, for example, Jamaica, the doctors who remain in Guyana, we have to consider them as providing a service, even though they are receiving training. As a result of that, that contractual obligation can be considered as being served, while they are doing the postgraduate training. I am saying that that is a system we need to put into consideration, based on the fact that these residencies are essentially an on the job training situation.

When we look at the history of postgraduate training or even general training at the tertiary level, we find that ever since we became independent we have always used contractual bonds, which we put in our passports, as one mechanism to retain trained personnel. Yet we continue to have high rates of migration, whether it is the nurses, teachers or doctors. That would suggest that method might not necessarily be the most effective.

We have found out that as a result of these postgraduate training, the average time of doctors remaining in the local system has gone up from one and half - two years to in excess of five years. These are some of the situations which we have to take into consideration and try to encourage our physicians to take up these postgraduate training locally, so that instead of serving this country for 30 years as a general practitioner he/she can serve the country for 25 years as a specialist physician. Certainly, we would have a higher quality of work and that will certainly impact on the health care that we have.

We have Cubans, Chinese and Indians working here in our country. I have been in this health system for a couple of decades and more. It is my conviction that we will only get the health care system in Guyana to where we want it to go, when we have Guyanese taking the mantle and running our health care system. I am pro-postgraduate. I would prefer for us to sit down at the table with, the Ministry of State and the Ministry of Finance and work something out to make our recently graduated doctors more competent in the areas by offering them postgraduate training.

I am not convinced of putting a general practitioner in a health centre for the sake of saying that we have a doctor in that area, as I have seen the physician sitting down at Baramita with nothing to do, having no patients to see or anyone to talk to. I do not think we are going on

the right track. I hope that we would address that and come up with a more effective system than we have in place at the moment.

Before I sit, I would just like to bring to the attention of this Parliament that sometimes we have the solution to our problems right here; we do not have to look elsewhere. I became convinced of that when I visited the district hospitals, health centres and even the health posts.

We cannot consider ourselves going forward when we are going to close an operating theatre in a regional hospital that had been functioning for years before. For that reason, we hope to have the Fort Wellington Hospital once again functioning. I do not think we are going forward when we reach a hub like Supenaam and see a health centre rotting away that had been functioning at one time and actually had deliveries done - that is now gone to rot. We would hope to bring back the Supenaam Health Centre functioning again.

For the longest while the operating theatre at the Skeldon Hospital has been reconstructed/renovated, but we cannot get that operating theatre functioning as yet. It will be my mission to make certain that the Skeldon Hospital gets a functioning theatre.

It is a scandal to see what takes place in the Suddie Hospital, a regional hospital; what is accepted as an operating theatre for works which have been paid for that is shabbily done. The concrete works are porous and can be perforated by any simple force or the slightest of the force.

We have gone to hospitals where we saw three-storey buildings, where when it rained the first floor is being filled with rainwater because the roof is leaking. The wards that are affected are the children's ward - the paediatric ward. The health centre in Skeldon had to be closed, they had to close down their children friendly corner because every time it rains it floods up and all the little toys, teddy bears, doll huts and so on, which they have for the children friendly corner, is destroyed. My point is, if those things were looked into, if those operating theatres were functioning at the Fort Wellington, Skeldon or Suddie Hospitals just think of how many lives we might have saved, especially since we do not have the best of the referral systems.

4.07 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I would hope that we would have enough time so that things can be put in place to give this nation a primary healthcare system that will not short-change our women folk, our children and our aged. We will ensure equitable access to all Guyanese, whether they live on the coast or in the hinterland regions or whether they are rich or poor, as Mr. Granger, the President, did say.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member for his presentation.

Hon. Members, it seems to me that this is a good time to take the suspension. The sitting is suspended for one hour.

Sitting suspended at 4.08 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 5.09 p.m.

Minister of Tourism [Mrs. Hughes]: Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members of this House, I rise with pride to congratulate our esteemed President, David Arthur Granger, on his vision and plans for a renewed Guyana, as articulated in his Address at the inaugural Opening of the Eleventh Parliament of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.

On this occasion, I would like to articulate our Government's vision for the new Ministry of Tourism. This new Administration has, for the first time in Guyana's history, established a dedicated Ministry of Tourism which now stands on its own. The emergence of this Ministry is testimony to our commitment to identifying new and emerging industries which must play a vital role in expanding and transforming the economic base of our country and in creating jobs.

Tourism continues to be one of the fastest growing industries worldwide, with over 1 billion international travellers in 2010 and an estimated 1.6 billion travellers by the year 2020. Tourism is the world's largest employer, generating, directly and indirectly, over 200 million jobs or some 10% of jobs globally.

Since 1990, ecotourism has been growing worldwide at a rate of 20% - 34% per year. In 2004, ecotourism and nature tourism, which Guyana is so aptly poised, naturally, to provide, was growing globally three times the national tourism figure. In fact, analysts predict a

growth in ecotourism resorts and hotels, a sector already growing worldwide by 20% in a year's time.

I am convinced, therefore, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Guyana is strategically placed to capitalise and grab a portion of this tourism market which sits like a sleeping giant waiting for us to explore and derive benefits from. This we can achieve working in partnership with the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA), international partners, the private sector organisations and other local and international stakeholders.

Ultimately, the tourism industry's viability in Guyana will be measured by our contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Currently, estimates of Guyana's tourism to GDP, as listed by external organisations, range from US\$64 million - US\$220 million annually or up to 8.8% of our GDP. Official government statistics estimates refer to an estimated annual contribution of anywhere from US\$171 million, \$34 billion or 7% of our GDP.

The World Travel and Tourism Council 2013 estimates of direct effects of travel and tourism in Guyana refer to an estimated annual contribution of US\$87.9 million or \$16 billion with wider effects in our economy valued at US\$220 million, \$44 billion or as high as 8.9% of GDP.

Regardless of the source, what is clear is that the potential of this industry to be a substantial earner of foreign exchange and the sector's ability to provide secure jobs to, especially, our unemployed young people with the requisite training is not an illusion. But, the opportunity to succeed must begin with a strong policy framework. We, in the Ministry of Tourism, have already started to develop and articulate a national tourism policy which will identify our niche markets and areas of strategic advantage, which includes our exotic biodiversity, our flora and fauna, pristine rainforest, vast rivers to explore, with exciting potential for water sport activities that any adventure traveller would love, and also with an unimaginable collection of incredible waterfalls that would really take your breath away. With sports, fishing, bird watching, heritage tourism and an even more exciting mix of all of these, Guyana's tourism potential is just waiting on us to make it happen.

To do this, there are some important things that must be done. Firstly, an international marketing plan must be implemented to spread, worldwide, the existence of destination Guyana and all she has to offer. In this area, the groundwork has already been done and, just last year, we started the rebranding of Guyana, *South America Undiscovered*, with a brand

new logo. Here it is hoped that the requisite funding will be allocated to fund this international marketing programme and I can reassure our Minister of Finance that I have a few creative ideas as to how and where the requisite funds will be found.

The provision of equal access to all in an array of areas is an important and underlying theme in our President's speech to this honourable House, recently. This is an important commitment this Government is making to the people of Guyana.

Within the tourism sector, we are making a similar commitment and have put on our Ministry's agenda a thorough re-examination of the current fiscal incentives granted to the sector. As many may know, for too long, this sector has had an uneven regime when it comes to the allocation of investment incentives to some and not others. At times, more incentives are applied to foreign-owned investors at the expense of our home-grown, local investors - it appears - and sometimes size works against one's ability to receive incentives and, in the long run, stifles development of the small. This, of course, is especially true in the past with the small hotel sector. This situation must be changed by providing a level playing field for all.

We are fortunate that, in Guyana, more than 70% of our tourism industry is locally owned and operated. We do not face the challenges of huge multinational companies exporting the earnings from our tourism product. We can say, with confidence, that most of what the industry earns each year stays right here, circulates and is reinvested in Guyana.

We hope, also, to advocate that tourism be treated as an export industry with specific tax incentives to give it the boost it so desperately needs. Again, I mention that, in several of our sister Caribbean Community (CARICOM) countries, the tourism sector is blessed with different Value Added Tax (VAT) rates which are substantially less than the national VAT rate. In the Bahamas, for example, the standard VAT rate is 15% but, for its tourism sector, it is 10%. In Barbados, the rate is 17.5% but a concessionary rate of 7.5% is applied to the tourism industry. Similarly, in Dominica, the rate is 15% but reduced to 10% for the tourism sector. I hope this will be seriously considered in the upcoming 2016 Budget.

Very soon, the Board of the Guyana Tourism Authority, which has not functioned for a few years, will be re-established. We will ensure that representatives from a range of stakeholders will be seen in the composition of the new Board.

The honourable President, David Granger, in his Address, spoke of ensuring that in the provision of equal opportunities for our hinterland areas, especially, that areas on the

hinterland and on the coast are not left out. We will ensure that the Rupununi and Region 9 tourism providers, who are breaking new grounds and winning accolades, especially in the area of the provision of community tourism, will have a place on the GTA board.

This sector will not be successful if we do not work on raising our standards as we provide service to our customers. Here I want to reiterate that each and every Guyanese is a potential customer and consumer of our own tourism product. I urge us all to start by treating each other with respect - in our stores, government offices and businesses everywhere.

To assist in this area, we are committed to establishing a hospitality training institute in association with the Ministry of Education and we are equally committed to ensuring that we do not reinvent the wheel but ensure that the Carnegie School of Home Economics will be included and upgraded.

Currently, Guyana gets approximately 205,000 visitors annually - that is the figure for 2014 - and we want to expand this but this is difficult with the negative publicity we continue to receive and the perception created that Guyana is a violent society. Here, I hope that our local media will assist with providing a better balance of the feel good success stories which are out there but which often do not get covered at a national level. Only when we create a better balance and, of course, with the hard work of the security sector can the situation change and, in turn, the perception of Guyana's tourism product would improve.

The need to expand airlift at a competitive price continues to hinder the industry and we must do more to change this. Equally, we must work out a mechanism so that more Guyanese, right here at home, are able to enjoy our tourism product. So, we will focus on product development and marketing, as I mentioned.

I compliment the current investors in this sector for staying the course and I encourage others, especially our Guyanese in the diaspora and other foreign investors, to walk with us as we prepare to expand. I thank all Guyanese for re-committing to restoring our beautiful city and their individual efforts to help clean up and restore national pride. We cannot have a successful tourism industry without this as a fundamental of our society.

5.24 p.m.

There is much work to be done. As one people, under one nation, with one destiny, I say, “Let us get together and brighter days are indeed ahead.” Can we do it? Yes, we can. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Minister of Education [Dr. Roopnarine]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Colleagues of the National Assembly, shortly after entering Office in the then Czechoslovakia in 1991, President Václav Havel summed up the state of the system of Government by saying:

“We are finding out that what looked like a neglected house a year ago is in fact a ruin.”

While things might not have collapsed to the point of complete ruin in Guyana’s public education system, we are far too close to it for comfort. Before I proceed, let me be clear that we are not in a situation where the system is suffering from a lack of capacity for planning or paucity of human resources at the administrative or student level. We have consistently had a series of well-crafted educational policies, constructed by qualified professionals and remarkable individual showings by individual students at examinations. Yet, our delivery of educational services remains unsustainable and uncompetitive.

Consider that, last year, a Guyanese student, Elisa Hamilton, scored the highest number of subjects in the entire region. Over 50% of her colleagues, that year, did not pass the basic subjects of Mathematics and English. We can note also that, in 2014, some 13,700 students took the Grade Six Assessment Examinations. Of this group, less than 0.2% or about 186 students scored high enough to qualify for entrance to the number one school. This has been the consistent narrative over the past five years, at least, and, while billions of dollars have been invested into public education infrastructure, we are still met with horror stories of schools that are lacking basic facilities, from lab equipment to furniture, and, in the most horrendous instances, toilet facilities.

As the President has stated at various times over the past year and as I have restated since taking up this portfolio, the baseline for future planning on education has to be significant reform of this educational system. Certain problems are clear cut as are their solutions. Our teachers - it must be said - are underpaid and undervalued so we need to pay our teachers more and value them more.

There is poor enforcement of existing rules and guidelines so we need to place more emphasis on accountability within the system. We have the lion's share of resources concentrated in schools and in other educational institutions in the capital and on the coast so we need to ensure that resources are equitably spread, including the establishment of technical and vocational institutes in hinterland communities.

There are other fundamental areas which are going to need meaningful transformation and I want to speak about a few of these today. I want to start with Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The use of Information Technology is one area that, it can be said, has utterly failed in terms of holistic, innovative policy. Between 2010 and 2014, we saw hundreds of millions of dollars being pumped into various ICT projects in the education system, added to the billions of dollars sunk into the Fibre Optic Cable Project as well as the One Laptop Per Family initiative. Yet, for all that expenditure, we have yet to come up with one, single effective ICT plan, either in isolation or as a component of a workable ICT or education strategy. Our first task, therefore, would be to establish precisely where we are in terms of the level of ICT incorporation into education delivery with respect to both infrastructure and curriculum. Simultaneously, we will examine best practices from developing countries, like several in the region, that are further along in integrating ICT into the classroom. When that is done, we can design a long-term policy that sees partnerships with the private sector, the donor communities and the Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) to craft the sort of learning environment that can equip our young people for full participation in the digital age.

I turn now to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). When it comes to the curriculum itself, the President has repeatedly stressed the need for us to focus on STEM. No country in the present era can sustainably develop and advance without making STEM the focal point of its education system. For us to modernise agriculture, we need STEM. For us to combat climate change, we need STEM. For us to take greater control of our extractive industries, we need STEM. Recently, a respected Guyanese academic and Co-Chairman of CGX Energy Incorporated, Dr. Suresh Narine, pointed out that we are not equipped to handle the human resource needs of what seems to be an inevitable oil industry, something that is reflective of our failure in STEM education.

Our task, therefore, in crafting a strategy, will be to start mapping our skills by examining existing industries as well as potential ones: hydropower, large-scale mechanised agriculture

and even computer programming services. We can then use that map to craft a sound STEM component of our overall education strategy, including a revisiting and streamlining of our existing Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) policy.

However, even as we acknowledge and recognise the centrality and importance of STEM subjects, we dare not be blind to the intrinsic, humanising value of the liberal arts, an area central to my formation. The mistake we dare not make is to see the liberal arts as somehow in contradistinction to STEM in the delivery of education. They are, in fact, complementary to our core mission. The motto of the Ministry of Education is: *Eliminating Illiteracy, Modernising Education, Strengthening Tolerance*. The role of literature in achieving the first goal is inestimable and I would argue that Poetry has as effective a role to play, in that regard, as Phonics.

On the second goal, as has been argued elsewhere, the liberal arts are especially needed in contextualising modernity and I would argue that it is especially so for developing countries like Guyana. We need to have students who are not only able to design a computer programme, but also able to craft that programme to assist in very specific challenges facing our own society.

In keeping with our third responsibility in the liberal arts, the humanities are the principal tools necessary for crafting an environment of tolerance in this divided society and to prepare us for integration into an increasingly interconnected global space.

With that said, an enhanced liberal arts education is an investment into Guyana's economic future as well as in as direct a manner as STEM. The creative industries constitute the most consistent area of economic growth in the Americas and we are behind in adequately preparing ourselves to take advantage of that growth.

According to an International Development Bank/Organization of American States (IDB/OAS)/British council study published last year:

“The contribution by creative industries to GDP varies widely across the region from just under 2% in Chile to more than 10% in Brazil and the United States. Growth rates in the sector are consistently higher than the average of the economy. The creative sector is also an important provider of employment in some countries between 5% and 11% of jobs in Canada, Colombia, Mexico and Trinidad and Tobago. Moreover,

the sector has a higher percentage of youth employment than the rest of the economy.”

The grand architecture that we will need to restructure and retool the society will, of course, not depend solely upon standard academic education, but also on the long neglected component of a truly rounded intellectual development, namely civics. Our task in this area is to come up with a curriculum that rises above mere Social Studies and communicates the critical nature of citizenship and its benefits as well as responsibilities.

I know that time does not permit me but I would like to speak briefly on new portfolios assigned to the Ministry of Education, that of culture, youth and sport. There have been questions and concerns about the possible subsuming of these three areas under the broad aegis of education and I do not believe that, in the face of it, these are unreasonable concerns. However, I wish to assure you, Mr. Speaker and my Colleagues, that rather than a dilution of these three areas, what we will have is a strengthening of each via alignment of the vast resources and reach of the education system.

Sport is already naturally aligned with the system, considering that school sports are the first proving grounds for our most talented athletes. The concerns of youth are inextricably linked with our educational system and it is through that system that we can provide, as I have touched upon, previously, the first inspiration and training for our emerging and future artists, writers and musicians. In all of this, the focus is naturally on the youth, an area that will also require special attention in the form of extra-curricular or extra-academic activities.

The role of the Ministry of Education under this Administration is going to necessarily be far more expansive than simply addressing Nursery to Tertiary concerns, as challenging as those will be. There will also be the challenge of fundamentally changing how Government operates so that we can work with our fellow state institutions in crafting a bold and innovative new pedagogy of development, of citizenship, of tolerance and of progress, one that connects to and resonates with all our people.

We have proven time and time again that we possess individuals within the society who are capable of excelling, despite the general conditions, and capable of rising above the tide of stagnating and worsening education delivery. What we need, instead, is a new wave of reforms in which all boats rise equally and provide an even higher point of departure for those who would excel. Excellence, Mr. Speaker, must be our goal. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Minister of Governance [Mr. Trotman]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make my contribution to the debate on the motion proposed by the Hon. First Vice-President and Prime Minister, the Hon. Moses Nagamootoo, as we gather to express our gratitude and thanks to His Excellency the President, Brigadier David Granger, on the presentation of his Address at the Ceremonial Opening of this Eleventh Parliament of Guyana and to adopt the policies adumbrated therein.

Mr. Speaker, it would be remiss of me if I were to enter into the debate before first congratulating you on your ascension to Office and to say, Sir, how extremely and personally proud I am to see you seated as you are. I do feel somewhat odd standing here but I know, Sir, that I could be in no better position as I have your watchful eyes watching over me. It is, Mr. Speaker, in some regards, a sense of *déjà vu* to have returned to the House having left as a Member of the Opposition, entered into the Chair in the South and now here on behalf of the Government of Guyana in the North.

5.39 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we are pleased that we can debate this motion not only to you, but to the good people of Guyana. It is unfortunate that the other party that should be seated here is not present but we know that, in time, good sense will prevail; we know that, in time, they will take up their seats and they will join us in developing Guyana. As was expressed during the tenure of the Tenth, Ninth, Eighth and Seventh Parliaments, in particular, those of us who have been here before, like my Colleagues, Dr. Roopnarine and even the Prime Minister, those of us who worked in the constitution reform process know that no one political party, no one political group, has all that it takes to develop this country; unless we join forces, we are not going to succeed. But, we will not wait on them to come; we will govern given what we have and we are quite capable of governing, so we proceed with the Government and the business of governing this nation.

On the 14th February, 2015, not so long ago, the genesis of this Eleventh Government was found. It was a seminal moment in the history of this nation because it was on that day that an accord, later referred to as the Cummingsburg Accord, was signed by the then Leader of A Partnership for National Unity (APNU), Brigadier Granger, now President of the Republic of Guyana, and the Leader of the Alliance For Change (AFC), Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, who is in the House, and witnessed by the General Secretaries of the respective parties, Mr. Harmon and Mr. Patterson, respectively. Out of that process, a national unity Government presents

itself before you. This Government represents six political parties. We have come the closest, I believe, in our 50 years since Independence, to truly realising that dream of one nation of one people with one destiny. Again, I reiterate that it is unfortunate that the other party, which should rightfully be here, has chosen not to be. That notwithstanding, I wish to reiterate, indeed, that we have, truly, for the first time in our history, a unity Government, not one, admittedly, that is at its strongest because we are now starting and, as my Colleague has just indicated, what we have inherited, we would not even dare to share to the nation because many would be in tears. We are in a state of tatters as we speak. But, as I said, we are embarking, for the first time, on a Government of national unity.

His Excellency Brigadier Granger, earlier in March, when we were together at one time, made a little note in his notebook and I saw that it had two words; those words were “One Nation”. He later developed that theme of *One Nation* in his speech presented to the audience at the Pegasus Hotel when the Coalition was unveiled. His Address, I believe, best encapsulates the whole concept of not just *One Nation*, but the manner in which this Government will present itself to the people of Guyana. With your permission, I will quote. His Excellency said:

“We are guided by a ‘One Nation’ policy that will bring enormous benefits to Guyana. We envisage the elimination of one-party domination of the government; the enhancement of local, municipal and parliamentary democracy; the elimination of ethnic insecurity; the expansion of economic enterprise; the enrichment of cultural life and the deepening of national consciousness.”

Those words, I believe, encapsulate all that is intended to be achieved by this Government. And even as individual Ministers give meaning to these words or to flesh them out, as it were, at the end of the day, these are the seminal words, the core, the basis, upon which the Government is founded. So, in that regard, as we traverse the words of the Speech of His Excellency, we see him setting out that vision. For example:

“We shall implement measures to instate ‘inclusionary democracy’ and social cohesion in every municipality, every neighbourhood, every region and [most importantly] in the National Assembly.”

Article 13 of our Constitution, Mr. Speaker, as you are no doubt very familiar, sets out the prescription as to how we should achieve that inclusionary democracy. Again, I cannot help but refer to the presence of Dr. Roopnarine in the House, the person who was instrumental in

formulating many of these policies that we now call our very own in the Constitution. Article 13 states:

“The principal objective of the political system of the State is to establish an inclusionary democracy by providing increasing opportunities for the participation of citizens, and their organisations in the management and decision-making processes of the State, with particular emphasis on those areas of decision-making that directly affect their well-being.”

It is in the manner in which we give life and meaning to these words that will define this Government and the five years of our stewardship of the affairs of State. And how do we propose to do so, Mr. Speaker? You have already heard from some of the Members of the House and of Cabinet as to what their visions are and how we intend to achieve this.

Just this afternoon alone, we had a plethora of legislation laid from local government reform to dealing with corruption and crime and the proceeds of crime and to constitutional changes. All of these are fundamental and are going to change and transform the very fabric of our society. This Government has not hesitated to deal and grapple with the weighty and difficult matters that beset it but, as I said, we have gone straight ahead by bringing to the House, immediately, at our very second sitting, which is the business sitting, the legislation which will propel us forward.

I refer to article 13 which is the prescription. Constitutional office holders, for example, can rest assured that they will enjoy the respect that has been denied them for many years. We know that we have had an Office of the Ombudsman established quite recently after a hiatus of many years. It is our intention to meet with that office holder very shortly to discuss with him ways in which we can enhance his work to ensure that it is effective, that it is meaningful and that it is taken seriously not just by us, but by the citizens of Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, you, as have all Guyanese, witnessed only recently, as well, that His Excellency restored the granting of National Awards to deserving citizens of Guyana, a convention which may not be writ in law as being compulsory but which would be one of the fundamental pillars of which a modern democratic state rests and the very fact that over a decade of absence of the granting of these awards beset this nation, tells us, again, we were in parlous state. So, His Excellency and the Government have started the process of restoring that which has been broken. I know that Dr. Roopnarine used a reference to an Eastern European country not so long ago. While we may be there, and I am happy that he said that

we were on the brink and not actually over the precipice, we are slowly but surely pulling us back from that precipice. I am confident that with the array of talent that sits before you and which is even beyond us and in offices and behind desks elsewhere, we are quite capable of doing so with or without our Colleagues to the right.

I come to the Integrity Commission, a commission that has become, if I may say so, the laughing stock of the Caribbean because it existed in name only. On one occasion, the declaration of a person who submitted his declaration found itself into a negotiation process in the law courts of this country. One wonders how a declaration that should have been secret and, in a sense, sacrosanct or a process could have been so viciously violated. We intend to repair that and, at our last meeting of Cabinet, it was agreed that a process of study would be undertaken so that the Integrity Commission will soon be re-established but not as business as usual, not as a political witch-hunting office, but one in which the assets of public officials will be declared, scrutinised and questioned where necessary. That process is in place.

Next, there is a Public Service Appellate Tribunal which last sat since the year 2004. It is appalling to think that a constitutional tribunal has not sat since 2004 on the resignation of one of its Members, Mr. George Fung-On. We are now in the process, again, of looking at this to see how and how quickly we can put these matters in place.

The Rights Commissions, which the Chief Whip and Minister of Social Cohesion will be addressing her mind to, were meant to be the bridge between the people and this House, and I am sure that Dr. Roopnarine would agree. Yet, the reports come and they gather dust because they never seem to be important. Yet, they are not provided with the funding to do their work. Yet, they seem anxious and eager to do what was asked of them by us when they took their oath. But for the past 10 or 12 years since their formation, they have not been given any serious attention. And then there is the absence of the very critical and crucial Human Rights Commission which is supposed to act as a hub for the Indigenous' Peoples Commission, the Rights of the Child Commission and the Women and Gender Equality Commission. That, too, the people of Guyana can expect to be put in place in a relatively short space of time.

I will not try to steal the thunder of my Friend, the Minister of Communities, but to say that the people of Guyana can also look forward to hearing from him about the holding of Local Government Elections, last held in August, 1994, which should have been again held in 1997, but, alas, never again. So we have had Municipalities and Neighbourhood Democratic Councils that have floundered; some have resigned, unmasked; others have been replaced by

politicos. It is time to give the people their power and their due and to restore democracy at the level of local government. It is this Government's intention to have those elections by - I do not want to pre-empt - the end of this year or, if not, in the first quarter, at the latest, of 2016.

His Excellency the President has spoken often and I turn now to parliamentary matters. Three, in particular, I will mention. The first is fixed parliamentary terms. His Excellency is of the view that people should know, with some degree of certainty, how to regulate their lives and that Parliament and Elections should not cause angst, anxiety, and distress where, for weeks, business comes to a halt, school children are afraid to go to school and minibuses stop running, but this should be a part of our routine day-to-day life that we vote, we go home and we go to work the next day. But, in our country, for some inexplicable reason, elections are associated with something that is negative and so there is a proposition, which may be given the force of law, that we will have fixed terms as in some other jurisdiction, most notably the United States of America (USA) where it is the second Tuesday of every fourth year, in November rather. His Excellency is considering naming a date or at least a period at the end of this term when people would know for sure and there is no "hold meh, loose meh", if I can use the vernacular, Mr. Speaker, as to when elections will be called.

Moving on in the menu of measures for Parliament, the independence of this institution, being independent of the Executive as it is and should be of the Judiciary, I am told that earlier today there was an attempt by a member of the Judiciary to effect service of court process in this compound. That is tantamount to contempt of Parliament and, whatever may have been the attempt or whatever may have been the papers, no attempt by any marshal of the High Court should be encouraged in this compound to serve any document from the Court. It is a violation of the principle of comity and respect for the separation of powers. I am not familiar with the exact details but, just to reiterate, no marshal of the High Court has any authority to enter into this compound to serve, on any officer or any Member of Parliament (MP) any writ, summons or any order of the court.

5.54 p.m.

It is just not done because this compound is known, as we all realise, as the high court of Parliament. We have an equal jurisdiction to hold that marshal in contempt or to arrest him or her and try them for contempt.

A Bill will be brought shortly. It was tendered in the Tenth Parliament, but not pursued for reasons relating to our intractable positions, but it will be returned. It vests in the Clerk of the National Assembly independent power, which is akin and alike that power which is held by Clerks in the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, Australia, New Zealand and in other Commonwealth-styled parliaments. The National Assembly will not have to go cap in hand, as the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) had to do – that too is going to change - begging for money for training, uniforms or laptops to be purchased, whether it is for staff or Members of Parliament. The National Assembly will have its own budget and will regulate its own affairs. That, Mr. Speaker, is another innovation we intend to see through.

Last but not least, there is another issue that is quite near and dear to all of us on this side of the House and, more so, to His Excellency the President. There is a promise by him, which I have his permission to repeat, and that is that under this Government there shall never be, and I repeat, there shall never be a prorogation of the National Assembly. If it is that we have lost the favour of the people and we have lost the confidence of the people, we will do what is right and honourable and resign. We will not invoke articles of the Constitution in an autocratic and despotic way to protect ourselves because in fact, we saw what the outcome was. **[Mr. Ramjattan: It was chaos.]** It was chaos and the ultimate rejection by the people. It is expected that the articles dealing with the prorogation, suspension and dissolution of the Parliament may very well come under the scrutiny of the Chambers of the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, with some definition being put as to what circumstances could trigger the prorogation of Parliament, rather than it being used as it was on 10th November, 2014.

With those thoughts having been spoken, I turn now to a second area for which I have had some responsibilities placed into my hands, as Assistant to His Excellency, and that is to oversee the national patrimony of Guyana. The wealth of this nation is our wealth. For too long the people of Guyana have stood by whilst a small group, seemingly elite and well connected, have shared among themselves the fruit of the earth, and the rest of us stood by. While we stood by, we saw logs being cut with impunity and shipped out without regard for the people or our policies. We saw vast tracts of land being dug up and craters like moonscapes being left behind, sometimes only to be told that nothing was found because there was no scientific basis upon which the digging for minerals took place.

We saw roads being damaged, and if one travels to Mahdia often, they would know that, in pursuit of gold, the road is oftentimes brushed aside if miners feel that they are following a vein. The road does not matter.

We have seen women and children trafficked, as Minister Broomes knows best. It is time to change this. It is time to bring order to the manner in which our natural resources are kept and administered, not just for ourselves, but for future generations to come.

People have had to look on without hope, many times without homes and many times whilst hungry, whilst, as I have said, a few have put their hands on the resources and excluded all others. They continued to gorge as if enough would never be enough, but the time for that has come to an end.

His Excellency is firm of the opinion that we speak not of the resources, but of the patrimony of this nation. To be preserved as good stewards, that is our responsibility. It is to preserve what we have, to develop and to pass on and ensure that for generations that are to come, they, too, like us, could benefit, enjoy and partake of that which has been provided.

I commend the Vice-President and Minister of Indigenous People's Affairs, Mr. Allicock, for mentioning the Sovereign Wealth Fund which is to be established. A percentage of all our wealth, whether gathered through the mining of silver, gold, timber, uranium or of course from oil, will go into that Fund to ensure that future generations are educated, taken care of, fed, housed and are able to enjoy the good life. That Fund will be established very shortly. I should announce that through support of the Government of Canada, we are well on our way to examining models that best suit this nation.

It is no secret that oil has been discovered. In fact, it is no secret that the discovery is not an insignificant amount. It is believed that it being in the basin known as the Guyana Basin and given what corresponds off the coast of West Africa, where at one time the two continents were joined to each other, the patterns in West Africa are mirrored in the Guyana Basin. The wells that are found in West Africa are considered to be elephant wells and every indication suggests that there are elephant wells in Guyana. So, it is my pleasure to report that there is substantial oil find off the coast of Guyana. What we now have to do is to develop it and protect it, even from the rapacious advances of our neighbour to the west.

I mentioned Venezuela. Venezuela knows what it has to do and that is to behave itself. We are entitled to develop what is ours, just as they have been entitled to develop what is theirs,

without interference. What is theirs is in abundance and they have had the right to develop and to do whatever they wanted to do with theirs, without questioning by us or from us. So, too, we enjoy and will guard jealously the right to do the same to our resources, without interference. Whilst, we may not number in the millions, rest assured that our desire to defend and enjoy what is ours is not to be underestimated. We hope that they know what it is they have to do. We thank both the Governments of Suriname and particularly that of Columbia for speaking out strongly against Venezuela's move.

As I come to a close, I mention our environment. None of our developments of our resources can take place without respect for our environment. Whilst there are some who believe that there is a zero-sum – either the environment is forsaken for the resources or the resources are capped and the environment preserved, I subscribe to a school of thought that says the two are not mutually exclusive and can be developed and supported together, if we do so sensibly.

I welcome in this Cabinet and to be a Colleague of Vice-President Allicock, who I know is a strong environmentalist and a person whose village I have visited. That village is a model village, in terms of its orderliness, cleanliness and the way even village life should unfold. I recommend that every Member of this Cabinet spend a day with Vice-President Allicock in his village.

Nearby to Surama Village, where the Vice-President hails from, is the Iwokrama, one million acres of land that was set aside by this Government in 1989 and given to the Commonwealth as a place for study. But, if truth be told, it has not lived up to expectations and the rest of the world has not responded in the manner in which we expected. The time has come for us to reclaim what is ours. The average Guyanese is not aware. They know of a nice sounding word "Iwokrama" but they do not have a clue about what goes on, and the truth is, they are not interested because they were never led to believe that it is something for their benefit. His Excellency has asked that a review committee be established to look at the operations and feasibility of the continuation of Iwokrama, whilst at the same time maintaining its original intend, which is as a place of study and sustainable development and protection of the environment. That is something that would be announced shortly.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this motion. I thank His Excellency for the opportunity to allow me to return to the House. I am grateful, as I said, to be here and to be in the company of an excellent array of men and women, who I know are extreme patriots, sometimes people would say too patriotic, but there is nothing bad with being very

patriotic. It is with sense of pride and humility that I commend this motion in the name of the Hon. Prime Minister, as I adopt the policies and the words of His Excellency the President – a man who is not known for his verbosity. He is very economical with his words. Every word has a meaning. I do not wish to go beyond the time I have taken because I would then begin to do injustice to what he presented here. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Minister of Citizenship [Mr. Felix]: Hon. Members of this House, please permit me, on my own behalf, to offer warm congratulations to the Hon. Speaker on his ascension to Office. I trust Sir that your tenure will be one which inspires development in the decisions we make in this House for the country as a whole.

My Colleagues who preceded me have elucidated on the virtues of His Excellency's presentation, which was made in this honourable House on 10th June, 2015. There are many more pronouncements, which I am sure would be made so as to enlighten the public on the President's initiatives. We would have been happy to see our friends from the Opposition sitting on the other side, but it is their choice to abdicate their responsibilities to their constituencies.

His Excellency's initiative seems to be bound up with the desire to keep in focus democracy and development, an improved attitude to governance and an irrepressible desire to refashion the Guyana Police Force (GPF). His Excellency was a member of the Disciplined Forces Commission in 2004 and he apparently linked that part of his presentation with Recommendation 15, which is on page 52 of the Commission's Report, and which reads as follows:

“Civilians should be contracted to perform police functions that do not require police training as follows:

- (A) Examination of vehicles for road fitness certificates
- (B) Processing of passport applications
- (C) Typing and secretarial work.”

The creation of the Ministry of Citizenship gives life to Recommendation 15, to which I have just referred. In a few simple words, the word citizenship refers to, “the status of a person recognised by custom or law as being a member of a state”. A person may have dual citizenship, which Guyana recognises under its Constitution and ordinary legislation.

6.09 p.m.

A person can be a citizen for several reasons. First, where parents are citizens, if one or both of a person's parents are citizens of Guyana, and that person was born outside of Guyana, then that person may have the right to be a citizen of Guyana under article 44 of the Constitution; a person born within the country; persons born to citizens at the date of his or her birth are citizens, and article 43 confirms this; marriage to a citizen – based on marriage of a person to a citizen naturalisation is available under article 45 of the Constitution.

Under ordinary legislation section 9 of the Citizens Act, Chapter 14:01, empowers the Minister to naturalise persons who have entered the country legally and have been granted permission to stay whether they are from a Commonwealth country or an alien. In pursuit of an efficient registration and immigration services of Guyana there is a vision which is articulated in the following term, and it is stated thus, “Developing to its full potential Guyana’s registration and immigration system.”

It is envisaged in the long term that Guyana would be serviced by an efficiently run and decentralised Registration Immigration and Naturalisation Service (RINS) with branches in all of Guyana’s townships. Accompanying this vision is a mission which is to provide a comprehensive and structured system for ensuring that citizens are documented, given the opportunity to know and understand their rights and responsibilities, and have access to recourse in event of anomalies to the system.

The Ministry of Citizenship has been created with the purpose of regularising, streamlining and formalising the structures and systems that regulate citizenship. These structures and systems have until now been functioning as disparate units, unable to share information and therefore not being fully able to serve the purpose for which they were designed. Under the new Ministry there will be a review of the existing systems and structures and the formulation of the strategic plan to integrate these systems to achieve the following:

- the development of a comprehensive citizenship policy for presentation to parliament;
- engagement of the requisite stakeholders;
- decentralisation of natural registration, that is the registration of births and deaths;
- immigration and border policy; and
- the development of a national model that includes civic education to transform the sector for the realisation of the full potential of citizenry.

It is proposed that the Ministry of Citizenship will comprise two divisions. One would be involved in the registration of births, deaths and marriages while the other will be engaged with registration of citizens, naturalisation, visa, extension of stay, passport application and other related matters. The effective coordination of activities flowing from both streams requires a clear and well defined structure which is being developed from this idea. First, the Ministry of Citizenship, we feel, should be governed by a managing board. The Minister will be responsible for overall policy and be the parliamentary representative responsible for ensuring that the Ministry's mandate is realised. He will report directly to the President, Cabinet and Parliament. Then there is recommended to be a Permanent Secretary, or someone in that capacity, to coordinate the activities of the two divisions. The official will report directly to the Minister and oversee the management, administration and planning and functions of the Ministry. Then there will be an Operations Manager who will be the operative responsible for the delivery of the Ministry's services, administration, day to day operations and the Ministry's building, infrastructure and vehicles. It is recommended there should be a Legal Adviser to deal with the legal issues arising and to coordinate with the Attorney General's Chambers.

More importantly is the need for an Information Technology Manager to oversee the computerisation of the Ministry's systems, the integration of systems and structures, the collection of data, the tabulation of reports and the interpretation of data for the purpose of assisting the Ministry in delivering its mandate. Then there needs to be someone concerned with finance and, more importantly, a Communications and Public Relations Manager. The Communications and Public Relations Manager will oversee a department that will focus on dissemination of information about the Ministry and its mandate. It will comprise both a public relations component and a communication section that will use the mass media, social media and publications to provide the public with information about the Ministry and its functions. With all this, there must be a Human Resource Manager with responsibility to recruit, train and interpret the public service policy, structuring of job descriptions and industrial relations.

The operations of the Ministry of Citizenship will be the coordination of all the systems that are instrumental in the life of the citizen of Guyana, from birth to death. These will start when the child's birth is registered and will end when the citizen dies. These will fall under the construct of the citizenship policy which will outline the rights, responsibilities and penalties pursuant to being a citizen of Guyana.

While the Ministry will not be directly responsible for the delivery of services it will oversee the operation of semi-autonomous bodies. All citizens have the right to free medical care, free education, employment, land, business opportunities, employment benefits, old age benefits and pensions. All citizens have responsibilities for registration, school attendance, identification cards, passport, National Insurance Scheme (NIS), gainful employment, maintaining property and its environs, payment of taxes. As I have earlier stated, the Ministry intends to register at birth, or soon as possible thereafter, all persons born in Guyana, and a unique number is to be given to the newborn which will remain with that person until death. A database with all registered persons will be developed which could be accessed by stakeholders such as the National Registration System, under secure circumstances, when that person attains the age of 14 years and is eligible to acquire a national identification card. Similarly, agencies such as the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA), immigration and health departments must have access to the database where reliable information on all Guyanese is available. This would ensure that Guyanese use the names with which they were registered at birth and wherever a Guyanese goes his identity could be established by referring to the database.

A birth certificate is a basic document which must be based on reliable data which every citizen must possess, but in Guyana the culture seems to suggest that this document is not properly cared for, necessitating the need for one person having several replacements of birth certificates while others cannot acquire one because they either do not know when or where they were born. This is an unsatisfactory situation in which a secure and reliable database can remedy.

At age 14 when identification cards are issued biometrics can be taken, which is another feature to aid in identification of citizens, but the use of scientific methods needs information technology to share the available data with stakeholders which would be a useful aid to decentralisation of our service. There is no reason for having a citizen travelled from Corriverton to New Amsterdam and Georgetown to acquire a passport or birth certificate. With decentralisation, these services must be available in each town to ease inconvenience to citizens. The aforementioned measures require amendment of our laws to include new initiatives and to alter old legislation to bring our laws consistent with current realities.

The Citizenships Act, Chapter 14:01, gives the Minister discretionary powers in the course of naturalisation which ought to be reviewed to determine how much of it is desirable and to

seek after best practices in other developed countries to guide our forward movement in the right direction. During my last count there are nationals from over 40 countries in Guyana either operating under employment, business, student or hospitality visas. To this must be added those who are on extension of employment visas which has the largest number of foreign nationals. The count of those nationals is incomplete but the numbers give rise to the need for review of our laws. A foreign national, not from a Commonwealth country, having lived in Guyana between five and seven years, can apply for naturalisation and succeed without any test, demonstrating reasonable knowledge of the language where English is not his or her mother language or a way of life of our country. Examples from other countries suggest that apart from residency in that country for five or more years there is need to write and pass a written examination. A review of Chapter 14:01 to correct these shortcomings is in order.

Guyana is a developing country with a small population, with high unemployment and, therefore, the jobs of Guyanese must be protected where foreign investors enter the country to generate wealth. Our party once picketed a certain investment in Georgetown because unskilled labour was very noticeably working in capacities which could have been filled by unemployed Guyanese. Our laws have permitted this situation. My view is that unless there is a vacancy for a very skilled job that investor ought to advertise that job before importing labour from outside of Guyana. This situation ought to be corrected to enable Guyanese to be beneficially employed. Thanks to the initiative of our newly elected President, Brigadier David A. Granger, MSS, to direct us to correct the deficiencies of our registration and immigration system for the benefit of our Guyanese brothers and sisters.

With or without our absent friends on the other side, we will govern this country for the benefit of all.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

6.24 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today. Hon. Prime Minister, you may move the adjournment.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Mr. Speaker, kindly permit me to observe that the Members who have spoken today, except the honourable former Speaker Mr. Raphael Trotman, have made their maiden presentations as Ministers without being heckled, which is very commendable for the opening of the bowling today, in keeping with your exhortation, that we show respect for each other. In saying that, I move that this Hon. House be adjourned until tomorrow 26th June, 2015 at 2.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: The sitting is adjourned until tomorrow, 26th June, 2015, at 2.00 p.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 6.25 p.m.