

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2015-2017) OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN

78TH Sitting

Friday, 8TH December, 2017

Assembly convened at 10.21 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

MOTION

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2018

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

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

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

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

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

Assembly resumed Budget debate.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Assembly will now resume the Budget debate for the year 2018. This is day five of our debate. The first speaker has already delivered their statement on day three. So, the first Member to speak today will be the Hon. Raphael Trotman. You have the floor, sir.

Minister of Natural Resources [Mr. Trotman]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good morning, Colleagues and Members of Parliament. Mr. Speaker, in rising to make my contribution to this debate on Budget 2018, under the apt theme: *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*, I believe that my first duty is to join with Members of the House, both on the Government's side and the side of the Opposition, to congratulate and thank the Minister of Finance and his capable team for presenting the fourth Budget of this A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government.

This Budget, a mid-term Budget, is one that is designed deliberately and specifically to allow us to rise to the challenges that have been encountered and to foster the conditions for the creation of opportunities for the renewal and the expansion of the economy in order to secure the "Good Life" that lies ahead in the future.

Our Minister of Finance has outlined a number of strategic objectives for 2018, which includes:

“...consolidating the macroeconomic fundamentals; fostering higher growth for more and better jobs; improving the quality of life of our people; investing in skills development;

investing massively in infrastructure; doing more to facilitate business; stimulating growth and employment in the productive sectors; and supporting micro, small and medium enterprises, among others.”

We recall that His Excellency the President graced this House with his presence on 2nd November, 2017, just a few weeks ago and adumbrated the Coalition Government’s policies on the common good, as he termed them, for the ensuing year. This Budget adds the proverbial flesh to the frame and the nuts and bolts to the chassis of the framework that the President has laid down on the 2nd November, 2017.

This has been a challenging and testing year, both ministerially and politically. And yet, it has not been without its triumphs in each, such that we can say proudly that we had been embattled but we have not withered. We are fighting a good fight. We will finish this race and, at the end, we would have kept the faith; all the while, we recall that it is, “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts”, that we will overcome. I feel particularly honoured, this morning, as I am sure all of my Colleagues, feel the honour to be a member of a college of Ministers and Members of Parliament (MPs), who are filled with a passion to transform this country. We are all committed in humility and with the wisdom that we have been bestowed to find ways to work through differences and difficulties that attend coalitions, in particular, and Governments, in general. I am proud of the leadership of President Granger and Prime Minister Nagamootoo. And I have unmitigated admiration for my Colleague Ministers who persevere against great opposition and uncertainties. Yesterday, Minister Henry, in fact, showed emotion that we all feel inside and many of us contain. But those of us who have been privileged to serve the people of Guyana as a Minister, and there are many on that side, would know that it is no easy task.

The Coalition is not without its challenges. But, as Leader of the AFC, I say that the Coalition is strong and the Government of this country is strong. The AFC is comfortable and happy with the leadership of Brigadier David Arthur Granger and we will fight to defend the legacy of the APNU/AFC Government, despite all of the attacks that are levelled against this Government. Today, we, as a nation, are faced with the terribly painful reality of the state of the sugar industry. Everyone who confronted this week’s newspapers must feel a sense of sadness and pain for those who have laboured today, yesterday and over the centuries for what was described at

one time as the sweet of Europe. All of us, save and except our Indigenous brothers and sisters, came here because of sugar. We well know the pain that was mainstreamed to that journey. Today, I wish to salute all of the workers and, hopefully, offer them a new vision that will take some time to fill, yes, but not so much time that we cannot plan now for it. We will not abandon the right of the workers to be treated with dignity and in keeping with the provisions of the law. The Government will not abandon you, I say to the workers, in your period of transition.

In 2020, the first revenues from oil, a product that has created global upheavals over the decade, will come on stream, here in Guyana. We have heard little else, over the last few months, than words about disease, curses, corruption and disaster. But while we must ensure that none of that long list of what I have just read out becomes a reality, we should not let it become our vision of the future. Oil has the possibility, nay, even the obligation, to bring about change. We need an oil change in this country. Our centuries old engines are failing and our drivers, in every sense, have to be changed. We have a new product and we must create a new country where we retain and retool our old and young to take advantage of this.

I am acutely aware of the anxiety and weight that the closure of sugar factories will bring to all Guyana. That is why I am both relieved and pleased to announce that the entire contract, as first revealed by Minister Harmon, of the ExxonMobil, Hess Corporation and China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) Nexen will be revealed in the month of December, 2017. And when it is revealed, it will be seen that this contract is no different to any one that had been inked and signed by the previous Administration and I believe that many are going to be disappointed because they believe that something was hidden. Some of us who have had the fortune, online or to have seen the newspapers this morning, would have seen a front page on two newspapers, which, I believe, was deliberately organised to cause some embarrassment to this Government. But the Government is not ashamed, embarrassed nor afraid of any attempt to stymie it or to cause it to cower in fear. It is well known that we have entered into a contract with ExxonMobil and its partners Hess Corporation and Nexen. I wish to, for the benefit of this House, state some of the more salient aspects of that contract. I do not know if there is some move to say that there is something special about it.

I should say, I recall, as my good Colleague, Minister of Public Health, pointed out a few minutes ago, that they meant evil by releasing this letter, which is a standard letter, but the Lord

meant it for good. I recall the words of Joseph to his brothers when it was that they thought that they had sold him or had gotten rid of him. But he had been sent ahead, in fact, to prepare for a famine that was to come. And he said to them, in Genesis 50:20:

“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it unto good in order to bring to pass this present result to preserve many people alive.”

Nothing that this Government has done, yesterday, today and will do in the future, was done and will be done except to preserve the lives of the people of Guyana. And, for this reason, I wish to say a few salient points.

Firstly, upon ascension to office, there is no legal obligation on the part of ExxonMobil to renegotiate a contract. This Government respects and recognises the sanctity of contracts. We did not want to be labelled as a pariah state where we call in to review everything that had been done before. We also recognised that the contract of 1999 was not a bad contract. I have said so many times, publicly. In fact, at the time, it represented a good contract, and we said so publicly and we respected that. Nonetheless, we were able to receive a 2% royalty when there was no royalty before. In fact, the law states that there shall be a royalty of 1% which shall be paid for by the Government from its share, which means, in sum, that the royalty was zero. We have now secured a 2% royalty on the gross which will give this country US\$380 million, at today's prices, per annum. So, we have moved from zero to extra.

Secondly, we have raised the annual fees for the licence from US\$250,000 to US\$1 million, per year; so, we are getting that per year. We have also included the sum of US\$300,000 per annum for capacity building and training for scholarships and we have also included US\$300,000 for corporate social responsibility projects, a portion of which was given to the Government, only recently, to assist our Caribbean Community (CARICOM) brothers and sisters which are suffering under the ravages of two hurricanes. This is what we do – a caring Government – for the people of Guyana and for this region. And, yes, the Government received a larger sum because we had been advised that the previous Administration, when faced with the terrible situation in July, 2000, when a company attempted to explore with its rig, it had been chased from the waters of Guyana. And some of the advisors who advised the then Government remain as advisors of this Government, and they advised us and we verily believe that a certain company

handed over a certain sum, which I challenge anyone to deny, to aid the Government's work in defending its rights in any court of law and to advance its diplomatic efforts. And so, this Government took the advice that had been given to the previous Government and we adopted that advice. And yes, we did what we did to preserve the safety and wellbeing of the people of Guyana and to safeguard the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of this country. And if it is that we are to be blamed, let us be blamed for doing what is right. And as has been done by the previous Administration, we seek only to defend our country.

10.36 a.m.

We do not have war planes, fighter jets and naval destroyers. What we have always had, since Independence, are our legal prowess and our diplomatic abilities. Those are our best tools. We wish to see this region as a zone of peace and our best tools are our diplomatic efforts and our legal prowess. Yes, there is a sum and, yes, it is reserved to safeguard this country.

In matters of State, certain things have to be done. As they were done under the then President Jagdeo, so they are done under President Granger because the State must be protected. We are only stewards. We come this way but once and, while we have stewardship of the State, it is our duty to preserve it. I am not ashamed. I am quite relieved that the facts are coming out because there is no slush fund; there is no group of Ministers jetting off and spending money anywhere. All we are doing is what had been done in the past – preserving the good State of Guyana.

I believe that, in time, everything will be revealed. The previous arrangements, when there was that so called 'gun boat' incident in July, 2000, none of it was brought to Parliament. We are coming and bringing everything into the light. We respected the right of the then Government to do certain things to preserve the State. We did not seek to pressure anyone. We ought, I believe, to be accorded some amount of comity and be given certain rights of respect. When His Excellency the President came here on the 2nd November, he was treated with the worst disrespect a Head of State of this hemisphere has ever received in a National Assembly.

However, notwithstanding all that had been done, we believe that, by the end of this month, we will make all available. For those who want to know more, the Government has relied on two law firms, both international, to advise it. You may write. They are Michelet & Co. out of the Kingdom of Norway, which is a law firm of high repute. In fact, it is a law firm that advises the

Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). The second is Jones Day which is one of the largest firms in the United States of America. We are not sailing blindly or doing things on our own. We are getting the best advice that the world has to offer.

I move on and I say that, when water has to move, it finds a way, and, if one way proves difficult or impenetrable, then it changes course and finds another way. But, find a way it must and it will. So it is with the policies and programmes of the Coalition Government.

Last year, some measures were introduced which were met with strong and sustained opposition. The Government has listened. Some of them we have withdrawn; some of them we have modified. We are a listening Government; we are a caring Government.

I am reminded of the words of Miguel de Cervantes, whose words have lived long after him:

“Man appoints, and God disappoints.”

Those words assume biblical proportions but they are quotes from the very famous book *Don Quixote*. At the beginning of his term in office, His Excellency David Granger invited the Leader of the Opposition to be a part of a number of committees and, except for critical support in foreign affairs and sovereignty issues, the support from the Opposition has been palpably absent.

The invitation came in September, 2015 and five committees were recommended to the Opposition. Agriculture: Let us work together to solve our problems in sugar. The Budget: Let us consult so that we have a National Budget. The border: There is some cooperation there and we are very grateful and thankful. National unity: Let us work together to solve the social and ethnic and other tensions and reduce them; and, lastly, securities. As I said, save and except in the area of foreign affairs and sovereignty, there has been a refusal. That refusal was even reiterated and reaffirmed a few weeks ago when it was now declared that there shall be no cooperation by the Opposition with the Government. That is the truth. That is, in law we know, a notorious fact which is irrefutable and cannot be changed.

Natural resources are the patrimony of the people and we are, once again, asking for your involvement, Members of the Opposition, and your support. We are willing to sit and discuss with you the issues and solutions for the improvement of the lives of the citizens and the safeguarding of our motherland. If you are invited or when you are invited to discuss

ExxonMobil, its business and its contract, and I say this publicly, I expect that there will be no refusal and that they will sit with us in the same way that we sat with them when they were in Government, by showing respect to them in Government. That invitation is going to be issued and we say so publicly that we would expect that it be met with acceptance.

The Government, in 2018, proposes to establish a multi-sector stakeholder committee for the oil and gas sector that, hopefully, will comprise both civil society and Members of the Parliamentary Opposition. Again, I trust that support will not be withheld.

I said earlier that this year has not been an easy one for the sector and, more so, challenged even the Minister of Finance and every Minister. We have had, in our sector, unusual and unkind weather conditions, insufficiently maintained roads - we accept - and some measures which we have since reversed, which caused angst within the mining and forestry sectors. However, despite the dooms day predictors, the see-far people, the pseudo sayers, the pessimists and even the psychological and open warfare waged against the two Ministers of this Ministry, we have stood and we are standing.

This is why I thought to have it placed in the newspapers today; the staff thought that we should place it in the newspapers because every attempt is going to say that you have done nothing, you are a failure you are a no good to every one of us. There used to be, in this House, a time when we, in Opposition, would single out Members of the Government and give them some praise; yes, we recognised that you did good here or there. **[Hon. Member: Never.]** Yes, it has happened. I have been on record for recognising it and I could prove it. If you listen now, it would mean that this Government has done nothing. This is why, when Minister Jordan, was criticised for his billboards... I believe that it was Shakespeare who said that the good that a man or woman does is buried with his bones but the bad is remembered forever. I paraphrased. Unless you say a few things, they let the nation believe that you have done nothing, that you are incapable and incompetent; you are lazy.

And so, for the record of this House, I wish to just state some of the successes that Minister Charles-Broomes and I have achieved in this year. With the help and support of the Commonwealth Secretariat and our international partners, we have revised the petroleum mining and forestry legislation of the sector. We have established the Compliance Division. We have

launched the Core of Wardens, which is the brain child of His Excellency the President. We are going to deploy the wardens – 45 of them - alongside mines and forestry officers and alongside, when necessary, the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) and the Guyana Police Force (GPF), so that we could have better management of the natural resources of this country.

Proudest of all, perhaps, is the establishment of the brain child of Minister Charles-Broomes – the Syndicates Programme, and I, today, salute her for her perseverance and perspicacity in ensuring that we have the syndicates, who, despite the Hon. Member’s, Mr. Lumumba, statements yesterday that nothing has been done for them. I believe I have a newspaper report, “Way cleared for syndicates” and this is not a lie; it is the truth. Another lie or fake news I wish to put an end to is a statement that says that only 42% of the Ministry’s budget had been spent. As of 1st November, we had already spent 78% of our budget and had one contract outstanding, which contract has since been awarded for the deployment of oil booms. By 31st December, the Ministry of Natural Resources would have achieved 100% of its programmes.

Going on, we have advanced the reorganisation of the Guyana Gold Board and, as a necessity, we have had to *clean house* because some things were discovered where billions of dollars were either moved through or siphoned off of the Guyana Gold Board. We have reduced the deficit which we inherited through bad trading in 2012 and 2013. We have brought the deficit down from \$14 billion to \$6.7 billion.

We have gained membership to the Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals and Sustainable Development. We have achieved membership as the 53rd member of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. We have granted, in the history of this country, the first production licence to ExxonMobil, Hess Guyana Exploration Limited and CNOOC Nexen, the Chinese partner, to ensure the production of oil will commence in 2020.

We have also supported the work of ExxonMobil and its partners to ensure that there have been further discoveries, two of them in this year, in Snoek and the Turbot-1 wells. We have established the petroleum department. We have signed a MoU with the Petroleum Institute of Mexico for greater cooperation and for training. We have completed the revision of the National Forest Statement and Forest Plan. We have redistributed two quarters of the previous Barama concession and two others are available. One is going to be held in reserve for conservation in

keeping with His Excellency's statement about reserving another 2 million hectares and another, this week, will be advertised for small loggers so that the small logger could, too, get a share of what is happening.

We have launched the Youth in Natural Resources Programme. We have launched our National Public Relations Programme. We have advanced to the point of initialling the Voluntary Partnership Agreement with the European Union (EU) for the Forest Law Governance Enforcement and Trade Agreement. We have advanced the forest carbon partnership facility. We have advanced a 3 million cubic meter water catchment area in Nappi village, Rupununi, to avoid the drought conditions. We have collaborated with the Conservation International to establish Guyana Green, Gold and El Dorado Project and we have completed the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supported mainstream biodiversity project. We are working and we are, despite, yes, some slippages, continuing to work.

I will not go into all details because next week is available for that; suffice to say that we have gained the approval of the Ministry of Finance for our budget, this year, to be, I believe, its largest – \$1.11 billion. This money is going to be deployed over three programmes, of course, policy, strategic planning and administration, fixing our policies, natural resources management and petroleum management. I could say much of these and about these and I will just highlight a few because I know that Members have a right to know, and particularly in the area of oil and gas which seems to be the invoked topic and rightly so these days.

As I said before, with the kind assistance from the Commonwealth Secretariat, we just completely the revision of the Petroleum Act 1996. We have updated our oil and gas policy. We have completed the local content policy with the assistance of a UN expert. We have brought to the House a Petroleum Commission Bill and we have paused, in fact, the advancement of that Bill because we were asked to wait for two important submissions from two international agencies and we have since received one and are assured that the other should be here before the end of the year. I speak specifically to the Deloitte team and to the World Bank with which Minister Charles-Broomes has been interfacing so that we put a gender perspective to that Bill. This is why we have paused and there is another reason. I believe that I ought to say it.

We have listened to the comments and the criticisms. Some of them have been wholesome and some of them have been downright outrageous. But, at the end of the day, this moment of preparing for oil comes only once and how we handle or mishandle this is not going to just judge us and affect us now, but it will judge and affect us for hundreds of years to come. In that regard, it is my intention, and I speak personally, to approach Cabinet, again, on this Bill to ask for further guidance and, perhaps, hopefully get concurrence and agreement to make the Commission, through the Bill, more inclusive and more independent.

10.51 a.m.

Cabinet has informed me that we ought to go the way of the standard semi-autonomous agency, which operates, whether it be the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC), the Forestry Commission or the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC). I believe that I should *re-approach*, if I can use a term such as that, Cabinet asking that this Commission be more inclusive and more independent. We do not and will not have another opportunity such as this to put the right fundamentals in place.

I had mentioned the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). Where natural resources management is concerned, we are spending \$334 million in that sector. It may seem blotted, and I know that there are some who are probably anticipating and salivating at the opportunity to say that we are operating a slush fund but, this year, we are preparing for the 45 wardens and their deployment into the field. They have to be equipped with materials, vehicles, and uniforms, and they will not have any water cannon, but they will certainly have, if the need arises, material support by way of weaponry.

As well, we are, this year, providing specifically for the Hon. Minister Charles-Broomes' Secretariat, and so there is a sum of money that is specifically identified in that programme for the Hon. Minister.

I wish to speak briefly about the Guyana Forestry Commission and the functioning of the forest. This sector employs some 20,000 persons, annually, with approximately 4500 of those persons being employed at the community forestry association level. The sector, for the year, has contributed an average of US\$40 million. We have seen an average here in the production of timber ranging between 330,000 cubic meters to 500,000 cubic meters. However, the years 2016

and 2017 were particularly challenging in terms of revenue generation since, both domestically and globally, there was a decline in the demand for forest produce and, as I said earlier, some of our measures seem to have adversely affected the sector. We accept and admit to that.

In addition, 2016 and 2017 saw a transitioning of the forestry sector, whereby efforts were made to improve the management and oversight of the sector in terms of concessions, issuance of licences, management and monitoring. In 2017, the forest sector faced several challenges and I speak of a lower domestic demand, lower prices for tropical timber products and a general contracting of international markets, particularly in China and India. I can say that income for the commission this year is \$1,340,000,000, with projected expenditure being just over that. We are holding our own and we are holding on. I must say that there are good people in the Guyana Forestry Commission as they are.

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

Mr. Trotman: Thank you for that Sir. I was about to say that they are good people in the agencies - forestry, mining and in the Guyana Gold Board.

Just a quick word on pinewood before I wrap up. We are importing 60,000 cubic meters of pine into this country every year. It is now displacing our local forest products and the Government has moved to correct this, both at the level of the Ministry of Natural Resources and at the level of the Ministry of Finance.

Gold - we were given a projection this year of 694,000 ounces. I can announce that, as of today, we have crossed the 600,000 mark and we are on our way to 700,000 ounces. So, when we are told that we are not producing, I do not know what figures, what fake news or fake reports my Friend is reading.

We have an aggressive road programme, which I will get a chance, I hope, to be questioned about. It is because I have a list of about 40 roads to read out.

This year, the Guyana Gold Board has earned for the country US\$744 million, as against \$730 million for 2016. We are doing better in earnings this year than we did last year.

I come to the end because time is against me. In the incoming year, we hope to complete revisions of our laws; establish the Petroleum Commission of Guyana; complete our oil response and the contingency plan. There is a lecture on Sunday on oil spill response and all are invited. We will be holding nationwide consultations; we will complete the feasibility study for the establishment of an onshore base in Berbice because we believe that Berbice needs some support; we will finalise our local content policy and the legislation; we will implement our log export policy; we will be targeting gold at 800,000 ounces; and we will commence, in the last quarter, manganese production in Matthews Ridge, Region 1. The work for this is underway.

I come to the end. We have gained tremendous support from those in Guyana and those outside. It would be remiss of me not to thank everyone. It is difficult to name everyone because, of course, time does not permit it and I can run the risk of omission and bring myself and the Ministry and Government into some difficulty. However, I wish to say this: Those of us, who have difficult jobs, can either, when faced with the difficulties, wither and whimper or we can stand and fight. There are some who, when they get cut, they cry and run away. Some cut and paste and come here with their comments, but I would like to quote our laureate Martin Carter. He says:

“I am pleased by the glories and sad with the sorrows”

Because there are sorrows.

“rich with the riches, poor with the loss.

From the nigger yard of yesterday I come with my burden.

To the world of tomorrow I turn with my strength.”

Mr. Speaker, Minister Charles-Broomes and I, will take our cuts and we will not run away. We will stand and we will fight, fighting with the armour of God around us because we know that the weapons of our warfare are not only carnal. We speak of truth, of righteousness, of the gospel, of peace, of faith and of salvation. I am blessed to be Minister and I feel privileged. So, I say this morning, long live the President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana; long live the parties in the coalition Government of this country; long live the people of Guyana. May God

bless and keep us all, both Government and Opposition alike, as we provide leadership to the good people of Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I am proud to call Guyana my home, and like yourself and my Hon. Colleagues in this House, and every single Guyanese, we share a common destiny, which is the achievement of the good life. Let us work together and let up prosper together. Mr. Speaker, thank you and may God bless us all. *[Applause]*

Leader of the Opposition [Mr. Jagdeo]: We just heard from the Minister of Natural Resources and he spoke about the deep patriotism that runs in the blood of the Members of Parliament, particularly those on the Government's side. We are also patriots on this side. At every single moment, as we sit on this side, we will always seek to advance the interests of Guyana and all of its people. We will do so in a manner that is fearless; we will do so in a manner that brings dignity to this House; and we will do so in a manner that represents the wishes of the people of Guyana. So, I endorse what the Hon. Minister said.

We have heard several speakers pointing out that this is the 4th budget of the coalition Government and that it is a mid-term budget. There is a fallacy in that argument that it is a mid-term budget. This budget takes us to the end of 2018, a mere one year and a few months before the General Elections in 2020. One would think that a budget that would have catered for almost four years of the Coalition Government's term in Office would have been clearer on the directions that it wants to take the country in. It would have by now clearly defined a growth enhancing, welfare expanding, national plan for Guyana, since this was promised in the manifesto of the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) Government, when they contested the last elections to be completed in the first 100 days in Office.

We are going to be four years in Office...*[Interruption]* It is a sign of this season Mr. Speaker. *[Interruption]* Relax, it is okay. It is Christmas, Mr. Speaker.

One would have thought that, after promising this plan for Guyana in the first 100 days in Office, they would have been much clearer by now. This Government has no plan for the future. So, we hope that next year, when the Minister comes and speaks about Guyana and the plans again, we are not going to be regaled with studies, as we have seen him speak about several studies to be completed and the work towards creating a plan for Guyana.

Before I enter into my main presentation, I have to respond to some of the issues that were raised by the previous speakers. The mere fact that the Leader of the Alliance For Change (AFC) had to come to this House and speak about how well the coalition is doing, points to the many cracks in the coalition. These cracks are evident and have been explored, extensively, in the public domain. There seems to be huge tensions between the partners, and a lot of it is because of the AFC's position, where it supports fully, policies - I suspect, in the Cabinet and when they come to the National Assembly - the policies of the coalition - but when they meet at press conferences or in their private circles, they deny the very policies that they support. The AFC was central to the whole reform in the sugar industry that has now led to almost 7000 workers being terminated. Today, we hear from them, suddenly, about how concerned they are.

11.06 a.m.

We have witnessed, recently, a statement from them calling on the Government, their own Government, to urgently pay the severance to the sugar workers. As we are here, debating the budget in this National Assembly, many of the workers at the Wales Sugar Estate are still awaiting their severance. We are told that this coalition partner, the Alliance For Change (AFC), that has so much power and is so respected in the coalition, cannot secure the severance for the workers at the Wales Sugar Estate. It has been almost one year since they have received their termination letters, but are now calling on the Government to make available the severance for the sugar workers.

Mr. Speaker, I know that you do not like the word duplicitous.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, and so you would not use it.

Mr. Jagdeo: No. I will not use it.

Mr. Speaker: Then do not mention it.

Mr. Jagdeo: Mr. Speaker, in the City Council, we saw that the AFC did the same thing. It fully subscribed to the parking meter fiasco. In fact, it defended the passage of the legislation, the by-laws which gave effect to the illegal and very controversial contract that was corruptly imposed on the people of the city. They said that Cabinet approved the contract and then, suddenly, we

saw them denying it. They were saying that it was not the AFC and that it was the People's National Congress (PNC) that wanted it.

Thirdly, we have seen the same nature, not the word that I mentioned, in the AFC on the Value-Added Tax on education. It supported it fully in the debates here in the National Assembly and they told the people, who were rightfully protesting for its removal, that the AFC had no part in that decision.

It was the same issue with the appointment of the Chairman of Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM). We saw the AFC saying that it had no part in the decision, but that it fully supported it.

The Hon. Minister of Natural Resources came to this National Assembly and publicly reaffirmed that the coalition was strong. For me, I believe that it is because of these tension lines, the fault lines that are developing in the coalition, that he had to do this. The Hon. Minister, who preceded me, also spoke about a meeting that I had with President Granger. He said that, at that meeting, the President had invited us to participate in several committees and that they had only gotten cooperation in one of those committees that had to do with the border and our sovereignty. The Hon. Minister should have indicated to the National Assembly and to the people of Guyana what my response to the President was. I said that we had made it clear that, in the Opposition, we were going to support the things that bring benefits to people and oppose anything that will bring hardships to them. We have consistently followed that path – that philosophy. There has not been a single instance, on this side, where we have sought to block or to cut the budgets of any sector which are bringing greater benefits to the people. Contrast that with the behaviour of the coalition, while it was in Opposition. It had cut the budgets of the University of Guyana, the Student Loans Fund, hinterland airstrips, the Amerindian Development Fund, and from a whole range of sectors that brought benefits to the people.

We have been constant in our advocacy for greater benefits for various sectors. We have opposed the introduction of taxes on a slew of sectors, such as the miners, farmers, and the ordinary people, through the implementation of Value-Added Tax on a range of food items. Given that philosophy, we are always willing to collaborate. I had said to the President, at that time, that, "You are still in campaign mode and that whenever your Government comes out of the campaign

mode, then we may have grounds to talk about issues and to collaborate on issues in the other sectors”.

Mr. Speaker, let me just give you an example about the campaign mode of this Government. This used to be the senior citizens’ pension voucher; this is what it looked like in the past. Look at the new one for this year - the party colours. This Government has never stopped campaigning.

I said to the President that, in the agricultural sector, when we have discussions, when there are rational evidence-based discussions about approaches to the industry, we will participate. We will participate on social cohesion, when the discriminatory behaviour of this Government stops. We will participate on some of the other committees, only when the Government gets into a serious mode. We made it clear, right at the beginning that we were going to support the Government, fully, on issues of national sovereignty.

I further offered the President that we were prepared to do a handover brief on several matters to him, including matters that had huge outstanding liabilities to the Treasury, or potential liabilities to the Treasury, and that we were prepared to do that immediately so that the State would not be affected, specifically in the Dipcon Engineering Limited and the Demerara Distillers Limited (DDL) matters. We have seen the consequences. They never accepted that. Had the Government been serious at that time, when that offer was made and had accepted our brief, we would not have been faced with a situation now of a potential liability to the Treasury of \$80 billion on that DDL matter alone. I believe that the offer was made in good faith. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Minister of Finance [Mr. Jordan]: Mr. Speaker, I think that you would appreciate that the matter that the Hon. Member had just referred is in the Courts and should not...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, are you standing on a Point of Order?

Mr. Jordan: Yes Sir.

Mr. Speaker: What is the Standing Order?

Mr. Jordan: It is Standing Order 40 (a). I think that the Hon. Member has referred to a matter which is in the Courts and I believe that you have said that matters, which are receiving the attention of the Courts, should not be mentioned or discussed in this House.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. Hon. Members will allow me to handle this. Hon. Member, Mr. Jagdeo, you know the rules. If you are referring to matters that are even remotely, because we have a lot of arguments about whether this is even remotely in the Courts or occupies the attention of the Courts, then my advice is not to use it. I will not wish to rule you Out of Order, but if you do I will rule you Out of Order. Please proceed.

Mr. Jagdeo: Mr. Speaker, this tells the full picture of that conversation which I had with the President. For the Minister of Natural Resources, the Hon. Raphael Trotman, to come here and to present that conversation, the courtesy call that I had on the President, as a part of our reluctance to engage the Government on issues on concerns to Guyanese, is not an accurate picture and it needs correction in this House.

The Minister spoke extensively about several issues. I wish to as I have said before I go on to my main presentation, address some of the issues of performance in the Ministry of Natural Resources. We saw in today's newspaper, and the Minister read out all of the things that were done by his Ministry and we have a long list of them here about accomplishments in 2017 highlights.

One of those deals, in relation to reducing the Guyana Gold Board deficit at the Bank of Guyana, from \$14.4 billion in November 2016 to \$6.7 billion in November 2017, and we are told by the Hon. Minister that this is a major achievement. I would like to go to the Estimates. If we go to the Estimates, we would see the true picture of the situation at the Guyana Gold Board. In 2014, a surplus of \$1.1 billion was budgeted and the outturn was \$9.8 billion. In 2015, a surplus of \$1.9 billion was budgeted and the outturn was a deficit of \$9.1 billion. In 2016, \$6.7 billion was budgeted and the outturn was negative \$17.9 billion. In 2017, \$3.5 billion was budgeted and the outturn was negative \$19.7 billion. In 2018, \$690 million surplus is budgeted. In the three years of the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) Government, the Guyana Gold Board lost \$46.7 billion, which are two Skeldon factories lost in three years, just at the Guyana Gold Board. The Hon. Minister tells us how well they are doing in this regard. If we look at the variance from the

budget, that is just the loss, it is \$58.8 billion variance from budgeted performance, which is two and a half Skeldon factories that just disappeared.

11.21 a.m.

We heard a lot about how gold production has increased. It is true that in the last few years, we have seen higher gold production, but this was not because of any effort on the part of the Minister or the Coalition Government. The fact is that the two new gold mines which added significant production to the national output in this sector were started under the PPP/C and came online during this period.

What are the facts today? In spite of the reversal of some of the measures that the Hon. Minister of Finance imposed in the mining sector in the last budget, today, the net is worse off than when the PPP/C left Office. This is because the re-introduction or the reversal of the 2% final tax on gross revenue is not a full reversal because it has now been set on a sliding scale. The miners still have to pay the 14% VAT on their equipment, which they did not have to pay before. This Government has not been a friend to the mining sector.

In the forestry sector, which again falls under the stewardship of the Hon. Minister, Raphael Trotman, in 2014, we produced 492,377 cubic metres of products. In 2017, it was 297,070 cubic metres, a reduction of 40%. The tenure of this Minister in Office has seen a loss at the Guyana Gold Board of close to \$50 billion. Production in the forestry sector is falling by 40%, and those are just two sectors.

We have heard a lot about oil and gas, and so Guyana has to discern the pattern of the Coalition Government in this sector. We heard talk about the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) that is another achievement of the Government. That was part of our plan, even before we found oil, to join the EITI. If one checks the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), he/she would see that as part of our plan. But, what is the use of joining the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, when the behaviour of this Government, in the oil and gas sector, which is a sector fraught with lots of complications - has been less than transparent. What is the purpose of joining the EITI when you are not going to be truthful to the people of Guyana? To get information from the Government, which belongs in the public domain, one has to almost get it through a series of leaks or when the Government, in its own time, decides that the people of this

country should know about it. I want to give you a few examples of this pattern of behaviour that we have seen from this Government in this sector.

The first has to do with the Petroleum Commission. We saw a Bill being brought here and now we are hearing that it may be amended. A Bill which states that the Minister has the right to appoint a board to the Petroleum Commission; the Minister has the authority to fire the Board; and the Minister can become the Board, if a board is not appointed. What does that tell you about the orientation of this Government? It speaks a lot about their words surrounding transparency, accountability and fighting corruption. They do not match the actions because they want ministerial and political control of what is essentially a technical commission. It goes further to state that the Minister appoints the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and if the CEO is not appointed, then the Minister becomes the CEO. So he becomes the Board and he becomes the CEO too. This tells you a lot and we have heard a lot. They have a *fig leaf*, an excuse that “oh we have consulted with the international community on this issue”. The entire international community, all the experts in oil and gas, are up in arms against this model that was tabled in this National Assembly because they believe that it could lead to corrupt practices in Guyana. This betrays an orientation.

On the Sovereign Wealth Fund, which is another promise of this Government, in 2015, we were told by the Hon. Member, Raphael Trotman, that the Government envisions that before the end of 2016, model legislation would be laid in the National Assembly for scrutiny and debate.

Then in June of 2017, the Ministry of Finance, in the *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper stated:

“The Ministry of Finance is currently finalising the draft legislation to govern the establishment and operation of a Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF).”

On 30th June, 2017, Minister Jordan said at a Guyana Manufacturers and Services Association (GMSA) dinner;

“...legislation has benefitted from extensive comments by a number of Guyana’s multilateral and bilateral partners.”

“An inter-ministerial technical team has also been formed to oversee the finalisation of this draft...”

Then we heard the finalisation of the Sovereign Wealth Fund is on the horizon. This promise started in 2015 and has been ongoing. There are great expectations across Guyana that we will see the Sovereign Wealth Fund in place because it will speak to a rules-based system for managing the resources of the petroleum industry. We are nowhere near getting that Sovereign Wealth Fund.

In this 2018 Budget, this is what we heard from the Minister of Finance. He now gives us, once again, the justification for establishment of a fund. We have long passed the justification for the establishment of a Sovereign Wealth Fund. We are expecting legislation in this National Assembly. So he said:

“The development of a rules-based SWF is critical to ensuring that our resource revenues are responsibly managed within a transparent framework that promotes the highest levels of accountability.”

Yes, we heard that four years now that is why we want it.

“It must be noted that the SWF will not just serve for investment, but is also to save for future generations and to stabilise the economy in times of global economic instability.”

Yes that is why we want it. Now we are hearing that,

“During 2018, we will publish a green paper to apprise this honourable House on the proposal for the SWF and to seek feedback for further refinement, and to stimulate a national discussion...”

From a promise of legislation in the House, now to a withdrawal or a retreat to a green paper that will come to the House for discussion before we have the legislation after four years. They have been misleading this nation through the many pronouncements that we are closer to a Sovereign Wealth Fund. I asked myself why is this Government running from a Sovereign Wealth Fund Legislation and the creation of a Sovereign Wealth Fund? It is because it will do precisely what the Minister said and that is what they do not want to happen. It is because if we do not have a Sovereign Wealth Fund, the money that comes from the oil and gas sector, the revenue, could be allocated and spent or distributed at the whims and fancies of the Cabinet and the Minister of Finance.

Secondly, a pattern - two elements, the first with legislation, and the second has to do with the Sovereign Wealth Fund. I think that we can see a pattern emerging here about this Government.

Thirdly, we have heard about the disclosure of the contract with the ExxonMobil Corporation. Now, when the Civil Society Organisations started the call for the disclosure of the contract with the ExxonMobil Corporation, the Government sought to, as per normal, blame the People's Progressive Party for its non-disclosure of the contract. The excuses were that, somehow, three Ministers, all of them from the AFC, which is a part of the coalition, said that Mr. Jagdeo and the PPP amended the petroleum legislation and they had different dates - one said 1997, one said 2008 and another one had said 2011 - that we amended the legislation to prevent non-disclosure. We had to point out that no such amendment took place to prevent any disclosure. In fact, amendments surrounding the disclosure of the contract were in the original Bill that was passed in this House and signed into law by President Desmond Hoyte. Even those provisions did not prevent disclosure of the contract. There is no legal reason why the contract cannot be disclosed. Yet, they sought to mislead, for months at end, that somehow it was some action on the part of the PPP that lead to the non-disclosure. So I just gave some indications.

The Department of Public Information (DPI), Friday 9th June, 2017, Minister Harmon:

“According to Minister Harmon, the Petroleum Act provides for a ‘confidentiality clause’ in contracts like Exxon’s ‘which says that during the course of the negotiations that certain things have to be kept in a confidential way’”.

Well, the negotiations had been completed, so I could understand that, in the process of negotiating, there may be some need for confidentiality. But when the contract is being negotiated it becomes the property of the people of Guyana and the 1999 contract that the PPP had signed with the ExxonMobil Corporation is already in the public domain.

11.36 a.m.

The Hon. Member, Raphael Trotman said, on a televised programme in July 2017, and listen to the tone Mr. Speaker,

“that sinister moves appear to be afoot by others to gain access to the petroleum agreement. There has been - I can only say this much - a very active effort by others, to

gain access to our documents. We have every reason to say publically that some people have “put up” and tried to gain documents on behalf of, or for obvious reasons.”

This is plain talk. It is not their document. It belongs to the people of Guyana. The civil society organisations and others who are calling for the release of this document have every right to know about what is in the contract, but that is the mindset. Then the excuse changed. Minister Trotman, again, 23rd July, *Kaieteur News*:

“I believe that the framers of the law wanted to safeguard our national patrimony as ours without showing off percentage to the world, which is not always a hospitable and welcoming...”

He is saying now that the excuse has now shifted, after being exposed that there is no legal reason for releasing the contract, now it has gone to not “showing off” to the world and somehow there are some national security implications involved in this.

After all of this on the 9th of June 2017, Minister Harmon, in the Department of Public Information (DPI)’s release, goes back to the legal argument saying that, “there is a legal consideration that prevents a full disclosure of the ExxonMobil contract.” Then in *Kaieteur News*, on November 2, 2017, the Minister of Natural Resources said that he has every confidence that in time, the citizens of Guyana will have full access to everything.

We had heard another thing when the 50% was taken. The 50% salary increase that the Coalition Government took for itself after six weeks of being in office, the same Hon. Member said to the media that the country should be grateful, basically, because we were thinking about taking 100% but we only took 50%.

The *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper, the 9th, Minister of Natural Resources Mr. Raphael Trotman said,

“...the Government has been advised by external advisors and lawyers that it should not release the full contract with the United States (US) oil giant ExxonMobil, noting that a number of extenuating and external issues are being attended to some of which have foreign affairs, sovereignty and national security implications.”

Now, where did all of those issues go? Now that the Government has promised not to release the contract today, but to say sometime in December you are going to get it. I want to submit that there is no legal impediment to the release of the contract; there is no political impediment to the release of the contract; there is no national sovereignty implication which prevents the release of the contract. The only thing that has prevented the release of the contract is the coalition's proclivity to secrecy and lack of transparency, after lecturing Guyana about contracts. We now are hearing some elements of the contract. The Hon. Minister told us the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) had a good contract. Suddenly I heard differently in the public domain, but today we heard that "it was a good contract but we managed to improve it". Here is what he said, "we can now get a 2% royalty when the law only provided for 1% under the old contract."

Mr. Speaker, if you look at the contract, if they maintain that provision, then you will see that the royalty is deducted from profit oil. It is not incremental benefits you are going to get. What you are getting is an upfront payment. If you examine it carefully, the \$380 million dollars that we are going to get in royalty assuming, that all of the... This figure is very suspect because it is very susceptible to the price of oil, the factor in global markets. They have done this. This \$380 million dollars was calculated for the price of oil being \$80 a barrel when now it is \$50 and something and we know how oil prices move up and down. The figure could be vastly reduced. Then he said, "We got another \$1 million for something and another \$300, 000..." for something else. That is what we heard about the great revision of the contract but they have refused to make it public. That is the third element, painting a pattern of this Government's behaviour in this critical sector.

The fourth has to do with the oil blocks available. At a press conference, now that Guyana has found oil, I spoke about the need to ensure that we maximise our take from future blocks that are issued, future licences. I urged the Government to go out to competitive bidding or an auction. Their own adviser, in the *Stabroek News*, on of September 15, 2017, the adviser on petroleum, said that competitive bidding is the way to go to avoid the risk of corruption.

On the same day, at a press conference held by the Alliance For Change (AFC), in the *Kaieteur News* newspaper, this is what the headline screened, September 15, 2015, "There is nothing left/Patterson." He said, "There is nothing left to give out and Jagdeo knows that." We got information from the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC), an entity of this

Government that showed there were several remaining blocks, both in the continental shelf and in the deep sea. The Minister spoke about this, but the evidence was different. Yet he was supported by Minister Harmon. Minister Harmon said that when Minister Patterson made that statement he was referring to offshore oil blocks. Now, whether it is onshore or offshore, there are still several blocks available. This is it. Then he goes on to say that when Minister Patterson speaks, as a Minister of the Government, he speaks on behalf of the Coalition Government.

This is the issue. Until today there has been no apology issued for this blatant falsehood which states that we give out all the contracts, all the offshore blocks and there is nothing left to give out. The Government has not only gone silent on this matter. It has gone silent on the core issue and the core issue is: Will it go to a competitive bidding process for the remaining blocks? If it does not, as its own adviser said, it could be a vehicle for corruption. We have heard about a de-risking. That is the fourth element that tells you about the oil and gas sector and the lack of transparency by this Government in that sector.

This brings me to the issue that we see in the newspapers today. The front page of the newspaper, *Stabroek News*, there is a letter that we will come to in a moment. The *Stabroek News* on October 30 stated that Mr. Christopher Ram was aware and said that there was a signing bonus with ExxonMobil and there is silence from the Government. When Minister Harmon was asked about this issue, the DPI issued a statement. He side-tracked the matter and said that he endorsed Mr. Trotman's statement that the contract will be made public at a later date. He never addressed the core issue about the signing bonus. Was there a signing bonus or not? On the 23rd of November of this year, I said at a press conference that I could be reasonably sure there was a signing bonus. And then on the same day in the *Kaieteur News*, it states "No signing bonus with ExxonMobil." It is on the 23rd of November in the *Kaieteur News*, newspaper. Jordan stated that such a claim..." [Interruption]

I am quoting, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: It is Hon. Member Mr. Jordan.

Mr. Jagdeo: Hon. Member Mr. Jordan stated that such a claim is a figment of the imagination. It is on the signing of the bonus and that there is no agreement for any bonus. Further he noted that the Government did not request such a bonus.

In light of the fact that today we have seen published in the newspaper a letter emanating from the Ministry of Finance on 20th of September, 2016, which states:

“Dear Gobind Ganga,

Governor of Bank of Guyana

Regarding signing bonus granted by ExxonMobil, request to open bank account.

I shall be grateful if you would arrange for the undermentioned foreign currency account to be opened at the Bank of Guyana in order to receive a deposit in the form of a signing bonus to be given by ExxonMobil.

This account should not be treated as part of the Bank’s reserves, instead the proceeds should be held in the currency of the deposit, that is, the United States Dollars and invested in secure interest rates-bearing securities.”

This was signed by Hector Butts, Finance Secretary.

There are several issues here. Clearly the first is if the Minister was truthful in the comments that he gave to the *Kaieteur News* newspaper, then the Minister does not know what is happening in his own Ministry.

11.51 a.m.

Secondly, if the Minister of Finance knew of this and he deliberately misled this nation in such categorical terms, that it is the figment of our imagination, then there must be another motive for trying to hide this money. There must be another motive and I think that if he knew and misled this nation, he should resign as I said.

It is not only the Minister of Finance who knew of this. This letter was copied to the Hon. Minister Raphael Trotman. He too should resign, because they knew of this signing bonus and they categorically denied it. It was since September, 2016 for almost over a year this country was in the dark. There are even more fundamental issues that the content of the letter must cause us to worry, that if money is paid over by ExxonMobil, it either has to go into the account of the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission or the Consolidated Fund. This is revenue. This is a

signing bonus, and it is revenue. There has to be a significant breach of our financial laws, almost a criminal breach of financial laws. If the money is not there, where is it reflected? These estimates will be understated by at least \$4 billion, because once money is collected by this Government it has to be recorded and reflected in those estimates, and so we do not see this in the estimates. This is ground enough for calling to withdraw the entire estimates, as being illegal and fraudulent – these estimates. Also, this breaches the Constitution.

What we have here is a major scandal. The Government of Guyana took large sums of money in the form of a signing bonus, did not tell the people, to put it into a special account, not paid into the Consolidated Fund or to GGMC. What if a few years had passed then someone could easily, because it is not recorded anywhere, draw down money from this fund. It is illegal and we were told that the People's Progressive Party (PPP) had such funds in GGMC, but every cent was paid in, it was just not transferred to the Consolidated Fund. Here it is a totally different situation and the entire Government should resign now. We have seen a pattern.

Five issues that I pointed out to you on the oil and gas sector and those five issues would tell you a story about what is happening in Guyana about the sector now and in the future. With this approach, oil proceeds will never benefit Guyana. It would benefit a special few as the Hon. Member Edghill pointed out. Mr. Speaker, no amount of quoting and misusing the scriptures can change this. You could quote the scripture all day long but that will not change this behaviour in the Government. When I look at the natural resources sector - abysmal failure. I pointed out how the gold industry made huge losses. I pointed out how the forestry sector is falling apart, and oil and gas.

Let us look at some of the other achievements of this sector. The Minister spoke about approving the re-emergence of manganese mining with BOSAI Minerals Group Co. Ltd. I signed that framework for the manganese agreement before I left office, and that was since in 2011. They are desperately looking for things to put in the achievement column. Re-distributed the former Barama concessions for large and small-scale operators and conservation, they did not tell the story that 500 persons lost their jobs, and that is the story here. The achievement of the Minister in this sector is to re-distribute the concession, not the 500 workers who now cannot feed their families who were working at Barama.

We have seen even the mining syndicates accuse this Government of corruption. The videos can be looked at online, about how the mining syndicates are being given the royal run around and they tout this as an achievement. “Supported exploratory activities that led to oil discoveries and a turbo well...”, what am I hearing now? This is their achievement. This is desperation and I suspect the Minister had this published today because he was speaking here and he does not have anything else to say. They are working with international agencies and development partners to prepare the country for its first oil in 2020 and beyond. Most of the development partners have been examining all of those issues that I mentioned and they conclude, or of the same view that I have, that Guyanese have a lot to be worried about because of this coalition Government’s stewardship of this sector.

I wanted to now talk about the budget. I just had to deal with the speaker who preceded me before I got to my main presentation. In 2013, the Consolidated Fund was \$41.6 billion in the negative, in 2014 - \$51.2 billion, 2015 - \$60.6 billion, 2016 - \$91 billion, negative and 2017 - a \$123.7 billion. What we see is a pattern of the total funds as of 31st December, in those years, and you would see that the Consolidated Fund is being overdrawn significantly. It is going more and more into the negative. This tells a big story about the state of our finances and how we are financing our activities as a country.

I looked at the estimates of 2015, 2016 and 2017 and beyond, and guess what happens? I discovered something pretty unusual. It is that in every one of those years the first and second tables in the estimates were the Consolidated Fund, that is the balance on the Consolidated Fund, that was Table 1 and Table II, the Consolidated Fund account, the cash balances. I am going through the estimates to look at that for this year and those two tables have disappeared. Along all these years, historically we have always had those tables which showed the financial position of the Government. It is so bad that the two tables just disappeared and so the first table now is what used to be the third table, that is, the central Government summary of revenue and expenditure. This tells you a big story that the Ministry has deliberately removed that because that is the first thing you see when you open the estimates – the financial position of Government. They are ashamed of it. They know that it will tell the picture of what is really happening in Guyana. That is why the Minister had those tables removed.

There are three lessons, if we look at the tables again - critical things. It is what is happening to deficit, what is happening to revenue and what is happening to current expenditure. They are development tools, fiscal tools, that often assess the health of the fiscal situation. From 2015, the deficit, that is central Government, has grown from \$9.3 billion, this is on the current account, to \$34.4 billion. The deficit is increasing. Secondly, on current revenue, that is how much taxes the Government collects from people, money that it took out from people. In 2014, on the current side, a \$145.7 billion was collected. In 2018, it is forecast to be \$201.8 billion, a \$56 billion increase, which is a 40% increase over this period. Now, what that says? In 2018, this Government would be collecting \$56 billion more a year from the taxpayers, from businessmen, from cleaners, from workers and from citizens of our country. They promised that the tax burden in Guyana was too high and they will reduce it, but they are collecting \$56 billion more this year than we were collecting in 2014. That is what is sucking the essence out of the economy too, because if people pay this they cannot spend it in the economy, on welfare, on themselves, and create demand, nor do they want to invest, because their investable capital is now going to the Government coffers.

12.06 p.m.

Then the current expenditure has grown from \$127 billion in 2014 to \$188.3 billion in 2018, a \$60.9 billion more, spending only on the current side, not on a recurrent budget. They are collecting more and spending an enormous amount of money. They are spending \$61 billion more in 2018 than we spent in 2014 on recurrent revenue.

People may want to ask where is all this money going. The estimates tell us a great story. For example the line item Dietary, in Government - the Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall - wanted me to tell you, it was \$3.6 billion in 2014 but it is now \$5.2 billion in 2018. It is \$1.6 billion more on dietary, a 44% increase in spending. It is \$5.2 billion on food in the Government. The line item Other - I am speaking about Table 9, Abstract of Current Expenditure by Chart of Accounts, grew by more than \$800 million. You know what could happen when it states "Other", because it is not defined. The other category of Other Goods and Services Purchased, line item 628, with an allocation of \$628 million, has grown by \$3 billion. This is the Government that talks about definition and fighting corruption. They have an amorphous heading under the "Other Goods and Services Purchased". The "Other" category now has nearly \$3 billion more in the head. I can go

on to point out several issues where the money is going regarding its profligacy; it is waste; it is not transparent spending. It is almost like the creation of slush funds because these “Other” categories have all grown enormously and they are now at the discretion of the Ministers to spend, billions of dollars of discretionary spending.

If you look at the same budget you will see what the priorities of this Government are. This is why I could never buy the excuse that there is not enough money for the productive sectors. We on this side can take that same framework and find \$30 billion to spend on productive activities and welfare enhancing activities without harming any of the development objectives that are stated. We can do that, but, let me give an idea of some of the spending and priorities of this Government. We know about the bond because that had been discussed here extensively, and we know how it came about. There was no public tendering for it. This is the drug bond, the Sussex Street bottom house drug bond. It is a small house that is rented for \$14.5 million, inclusive of the Value Added Tax (VAT). We know about that. Until now, in spite of the fact that the newspapers asked how did this gentleman know that the Government needed it if it was not publicly advertised. The Government has gone silent on it. The Cabinet established a group of three to review the bond, three eminent lawyers, the Hon. Moses Nagamootoo, the Hon. Joseph Harmon and the Hon. Mr. Trotman, and they have concluded basically that nothing is wrong with it because the contract is still there. It has not been terminated.

Mr. Speaker, if you multiply \$14.5 million a month by 12 months, it gives you a \$174 million. Let us look at what the Indigenous Peoples’ Commission receives - \$25 million, the Women and Gender Equality Commission - \$43 million, the Human Rights Commission - \$31 million, the Rights of Child Commission - \$42 million, the Judicial Service Commission - \$10 million and the National Toshias Council - \$16 million. It is only \$167 million. One single individual, who is renting a ‘bottom’ house operation to the Government for \$14.5 million a month, gets more in this budget than the Indigenous Peoples’ Commission and the National Toshias Council have to administer to the affairs of 10% of our population. The Judicial Service Commission looks after the entire legal system. The Right of the Child Commission gets only \$42 million, the Human Rights Commission and the Women and Gender Equality Commission. These constitutional bodies get less than a single person.

The Director of the Public Prosecutions' office gets \$174 million too. This single individual gets a bit more than the Director of Public Prosecutions for Guyana. This is the person and the office that has to take care and fight our cases against drug dealers, rapists, murderers and thieves. This is how we value law and order. One individual, through a corrupt act, gets more than the entire office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. Is this not shameful behaviour?

If we abolish the Prime Minister's Secretariat, we will save \$300 million a year without harming anything in the country. They will not even notice that there has been a change because of the lightweight portfolio that the Prime Minister has. The Hon. Prime Minister prides himself talking about transparency and accountability, and no doubt, after I have finished speaking here we will be regaled with that again, the same tone. With respect to his own secretariat, under the heading Other Goods and Services Purchased, line item "Other" is not defined. This category has no transparency and we do not know what the money is for yet, because it is at the full discretion of the Prime Minister. In 2014, it was \$3.3 million in that category. In 2018, it is \$109.2 million. The Prime Minister has, at his discretion, \$109.2 million to spend and yet he talked about corruption under the People's Progressive Party, when the former Prime Minister had about \$3.3 million. It is unbelievable. We will get examples of all of these things.

This brings me to another point on the budget. It also has to do with the variance. I have always said that there is one big issue with these early budgets and this has to do with the incompetence of the coalition Government, and, the lack of skills in forecasting will cause this Parliament to debate issues and scenarios, that in reality, may be different. And what do I mean in this regard? When the budget comes before the end of the financial year - it is presented in November - the Minister comes with his best estimates for the remaining part of the year. Had the budget come just after the financial year, there you would have had actual figures. We have only had one full year, 2016. I want to show the variance that we have from what the Minister came to this House with in November of the year and one month later how the scenario changed dramatically. What we were debating here in this House may not have been the real economic picture as presented by the estimates.

Regarding the current revenue in 2016, the budget was \$173.3 billion. The revised figure was \$174.8 billion. That was when the Minister came in November and presented Budget 2017. He said we expect this figure at the end of the year. What was the actual figure? It was \$177.3

billion, \$3 billion more. On current expenditure, it was \$164.3 billion revised upwards to \$166.6 billion. Another month later, another \$3 billion in variance, and this time it was on the current expenditure side. On the current balance, it was budgeted in 2016 for \$2.4 billion. When the Minister came it was \$2.6 billion, while the actual balance was \$8.4 billion. Imagine the original budget is \$2.4 billion. He came here and said a month more we are forecasting and it will end at \$2.6 billion. Instead, it ended at \$8.4 billion. How can you be so wrong? This is the current balance on the fiscal account. Then it is the same thing for the capital account, \$52.1 billion was budgeted in 2016. It was dropped to \$47.6 billion and ended at \$46.6 billion, another billion dollars of variances. It tells a pattern and you can see a pattern, Mr. Speaker, but what is more egregious is the balance of payment. Those are only central Government accounts.

If you look, Mr. Speaker, at the current account of the balance of payment, budgeted was US\$116 million deficit. The Minister came and said it will be \$100.8 million. Guess what the out-turn was? It was \$13 million positive. It moved by US\$113 million in one month. The current account of the balance of payment is supposed to be negative US\$116 million. The Minister came and said that it will be negative US\$100 and the out-turn was positive US\$13 million. It is a variance of US\$113 million. You have to add the two. On the net merchandise export, they came and said it is \$316 million, revised to \$185.5 million. Guess what was the outcome? It was negative point 72.

12.21 a.m.

He missed the merchandise exports, that is import and export, within one month by US\$168 million. The services on net, which is \$237 million budgeted and \$189.8 million revised, and the outcome was \$300 million. It was missed by over US\$100 million and the overall balance tells the same story. The Minister budgeted \$46.6 billion in surplus and came in November and told us it will be - \$29.2 million. The outturn, one month later, was - \$53.3 million. That is the overall balance of the balance of payment. Does this not speak about bad forecasting? And it puts into question the entire framework that we are debating for this Budget because, if you are so horrendously wrong, then how can you really expect serious analyses or economic analyses of the Budget? This will, I suspect, repeat itself in the years to come. In this year, this is just one full year of experiences we have had with this early Budget and this abysmally poor forecasting.

This brings me to the sugar industry. We have heard quite a bit being spoken about sugar workers and we have seen the crocodile tears that are all around about how concerned the Coalition Government is about sugar workers. In this make-believe world that the Coalition Government lives in, I think right is wrong and left is right. They want the sugar workers to believe that they have acted in their best interest and that they love them, which is why they had to fire them. Because of this intense love for sugar workers, they had to terminate them.

We have heard a lot from the Hon. Prime Minister and, no doubt, he will come back here and speak about sugar again. So, if you trace the pattern ... Last night, I had a look at the Manifesto of A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government and I wanted to see if, when they went to the electorate, they hinted, even in the Manifesto, because we know what they told the sugar workers about a 20% increase and no closure... But I wanted to see in their Manifesto whether they mentioned anything about closure. The language in the Manifesto was all upbeat, working with the industry to fix Skeldon Estate and to do a number of things. So, they did not go to the electorate with this promise. In fact, it was all positive.

When the Government changed and the Coalition Government came into office and were asked about sugar, they claimed that they had to do a Commission of Inquiry (CoI) before any steps were taken in relation to the sugar industry. They did not do the same thing in relation to the 50% increase they took. They did not wait on a CoI or any other study; they just took it. But they needed a CoI to do this.

The CoI concluded that there should be no closure of any estate. There were 10 members of the CoI and they all concluded that there should be no closure of any estate. Immediately thereafter, the Government, when confronted with the reality that their own CoI did not recommend closure of estates, repudiated their own CoI Report. Then we had the almost immediate closure of, or the decision to close, the Wales sugar factory (the Wales Estate). Mr. Speaker, you know, because some of these issues have been debated in the Parliament, the confusion surrounding who made the decision, whether that decision was made by the CEO and the Board. Then they blamed the People's Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C) for making that decision. They said that the PPP/C - which was not true - was not planting new canes there. So, they blamed the PPP/C first and then the Board said that it is not them, it is the Minister and then we heard that it is the Cabinet. Until now, we are not clear but it is this Government that closed the Wales Sugar Factory.

We saw the fiasco when they came to the National Assembly and, when asked about plans for the industry and the workers, we were assured that the workers would receive their severance, that there were diversification projects that will take care of workers and that workers could get lands at Wales, so we said that there seems to be some plan to address this. Nothing happened because, frankly speaking, there are no plans to address the welfare of workers. They are just putting them on the breadline without any regard for the consequences to them and their families.

We indicated, at that time, while visiting Wales, *et cetera*, that we were willing to work with the Government on the sugar industry because the excuse that they were using, and what they are continuing to use, is that too much money was spent on Skeldon Estate. Today, we have dealt with the issue that it is not \$200 million, which I heard one Minister, the Hon. Mr. Bulkan, mention, over \$200 million. It is about US\$125 million and this includes the co-generation facility that Mr. Clive Thomas himself point out is critical to the electricity supply in Region 6. It also includes the purchase of the Wartsila units there. We know that the Estate is valuable because of the large number of interests that this Government has been receiving from people who want to get their hands on that Estate. So, that was one of the excuses used.

Two is that \$84 billion of debt would have been accrued to the industry and that it is unsustainable. I think we know by now that several of the accountants and the Guyana Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU) have disaggregated that debt to show the difference between the enormous sums, the inclusion of pension liabilities, loans contracted by the Government, long-term loans that were lent to the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), suppliers' credits and liabilities to Government that were waived for private companies but will be not waived for GuySuCo. The real debt of GuySuCo, the short-term debt, approximates to maybe US\$20 million. So, we have debunked that because they have used that massive figure to plant in people's heads that Skeldon Estate is unsustainable because of too much debt.

The third argument is that they cannot afford it, that this Government cannot afford it. I think some of my Colleagues have dealt with the affordability issue. Hon. Member Bishop Edghill dealt with that substantially and we have pointed out that, in this Budget, we could probably save enough to keep the 7,000 jobs alive with those people earning in the same Budget.

Those were the three positions of the Government and, no doubt, you will hear them repeat this. We sought, by promising participation and working with the Government, to address those issues because we believe that, if we went to the meetings and sat with them, maybe they would have been driven by other motives apart from a political motive and that they would have seen the technical and economic arguments as to why sugar is so valuable to all of Guyana and not just to sugar workers. So, we promised to go to the meetings.

Mr. Speaker, there were three perfunctory consultations. I am telling you this because, at the party level, we received a notice on one day to go to the meeting on the following day. That meeting was on 31st December, Old Year's day.

Ms. Teixeira: 30th December for 31st December.

Mr. Jagdeo: We received it on 30th December to attend the meeting on 31st December, a day later. Then, we had two more of those, one in late January and one in February. The GAWU presented a document that is comprehensive and is 10 times more profound than the State Paper that was produced in this National Assembly. It is 10 times more profound and dealt with the challenges in the industry as well as the consequences to Guyana and offered suggestions as to how we can move forward. Willing to work, the PPP/C took the position that, if an industry or a company must be privatised, then studies on it will be wanting. This is an industry that has so many implications for people. The least you could do - and the Minister of Finance talks a lot about data-driven policymaking and evidence-based policy making... What evidence was used in this regard? They refused to do the economic feasibility study which would have pointed out, and we believe, that the transitional cost of the subsidy is lower than the other benefits that were accrued to the country in financial terms. That, by itself, would have pointed out that the industry could have been supported through a transitional period, but they refused to do that. They refused to do the social impact assessment and they refused to do the diversification studies. I believe, contrary to what the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, said, and the AFC was at the centre of this all, contrary to all of this talk about collaboration... I heard them speak about how they wanted to collaborate with all of us. The Government of Guyana had already made a political decision to sell the sugar industry. What we were engaged in was just an exercise in futility. They created the veneer of consulting with the Opposition and with the Union but the decisions had already been made in relation to sugar.

This document has been presented to the House before. I think it was read in the House but I just want to read this again. It is a letter from Minister Harmon, dated 16th November, 2016, and you would recall that our first call for consultation, our first invite to the consultation, was on 31st December, but, on 16th November of that same year:

12.36 p.m.

“The Government of Guyana hereby authorizes Mr. Bryan Wesley Kirton to engage in discussions on its behalf with interested companies, parties regarding their possible interest in acquiring the Guyana Sugar Corporation in whole or in part to facilitate the arrangements for negotiations between the government and interested companies parties.”

It demonstrates to this country and to all of those who are talking that long before technical studies were done, long before this perfunctory consultation was conducted to show that they are open-minded, a political decision was made to close the sugar industry.

We were going to rue the day we made that decision because it would not only affect our sugar workers. This is a multi-ethnic industry. I have heard a lot of people talk about only one group of people – Indo-Guyanese - who are there. People of every race, Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese, people who support both the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) and the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU), are going to suffer. Somehow in the misguided notion from the public statements I heard that somehow this will harm the interests of the People’s Progressive Party because it gets a lot of support from the sugar belt clearly is a position that seems to be guiding the coalition but would not be factual on the ground.

I think that I have outlined... We had a promise of a State Paper but long before this State Paper came to the Parliament, the First Vice-President and Prime Minister, Mr. Nagamootoo, went to an estate where they had been producing sugar for over 300 years and spoke at the Martyr’s activities in Rose Hall and announced the closure of Rose Hall Estate.

This approach is a terrible one. I can hear some people (the critics) say that the PPP severed the field workers as the factory was closed at Diamond by late President, Hugh Desmond Hoyte. It is true that a few hundred workers who worked there... I dealt with that issue in this Parliament. I sat as President and met with the workers. The Union, the Board and the workers sat. The Union

was fully involved. We did not have money to pay severance but we made it available. We paid the severance and we reoffered employment to many of those people.

The 250 who were at the La-Bonne Intention (LBI) Estate, most of them were offered jobs at Enmore factory. A lot of them took their jobs there. We maintained the workshop at LBI and several others worked there. Of the 250 workers, I think only four got severed and lost their jobs. Those were continuous Estates. We worked with people. This is not only with the sugar workers.

As you know, in the bauxite industry, we had a similar situation because we had an industry that was suffering from major losses. When we took office, we had to make a decision whether we should close the operations at Linden because the Initial Reconstruction Programme (IRP) that was funded by the System of Stabilization of Export Earnings from Mining Products (SYSMIN) and from the European Investment Bank and the World Bank had as one of its objectives the restructuring and closure of the industry. We refused to do that. We refused to close the bauxite industry in Linden, recognising that this was critical and, in fact, one of the only sources of employment for people in Linden at that time.

What did we do exactly? We worked; we kept it alive until about 2000-2002. We then managed to get Cambior, Inc to invest in the bauxite industry there. At that time, we were under the International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme. We worked our way out of the IMF programme almost a decade ago. We do not have a Fund programme. We are monitored and have article 4 – consultation, *et cetera*.

At that time, we were in the middle of a Fund programme with restrictions and being a Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) country, we could not expand the deficit, so we got Cambior to manage it on a cash neutral basis and keep it going. We privatised it and then, subsequently, BOSAI invested and we preserved many of the jobs – not all of the jobs but we preserved the activity in that area and many people in Linden managed to keep their jobs.

What else did we do? I dealt with this already. Immediately, we did an area study and we decided... Before I go on to the area study, we kept 80 of the workers at the Linden Mining Enterprise (LINMNE) secretariat. Even after privatisation, some were sent to the Guyana Fire Service. Some of the workers were placed on the bridge, some were security guards and some

managed the West Watooka House. We sought to keep people employed who had been removed from the industry.

Subsequently, we did an area study. We applied for a grant under the European Union (EU) that we secured. As a result of that, we established the Linden Economic Advancement Programme (LEAP). We built a business incubator in Linden to start small businesses. We put in a place a small loan programme so those businesses could access cheaper capital. We built the road into West Watooka so that we could open more farmlands for those farmers. We built a call centre so that over 100 persons could start working there. These are just some of the things. We did a syndicate almost, a better arrangement than this one, where community forests were allocated to people from Linden. They got together, organised themselves and they got leases in the forestry sector.

We worked with the community. Not everything was perfect. Subsequently, when I heard the young Member of Parliament from Linden talk about some of the things, I excused him because he simply does not have the history to remember what it was like – the depression in that community - and how we have changed this to an air of buoyancy. It was not perfect. Now the community is going back into despondency.

We spent billions of dollars on the housing schemes – Amelia’s Ward and Block 22 - and on a new water treatment plant, invested in power, new hospitals and several schools. This was important and, moreover, we spent billions. In the tenure of the PPP/C, we gave, on water subsidy and electricity subsidy alone, over \$30 billion to that community. That was a totally different approach.

Let us look at the Berbice River. In the Berbice River, when ALCOA Company decided that they were going to walk away from the American Magnesium Corporation (AMC) because they would have shut it down, in 2000, the People’s National Congress (PNC) and the Union at that time said they should not merge the Berbice Mining Enterprise (BERMINE) with the Aroaima Mining Company (AMC) because this is black gold that we have there (bauxite). The ALCOA said that they were walking away. We renationalised the company because ALCOA was managing and they had 50% shares. They had the management contract. We took back the AMC which was 100% owned by the Government of Guyana at a time when we were in an IMF

programme and they frowned upon those things. They were very unhappy but we said that that would not happen; we would not shut down the place that is the only source of income for people in areas like Kwakwani and surrounding areas like Ituni so we took it back. A few years later, when BERMINE lost their contract – the marketing - the workers asked us to merge. We merged the two companies and kept them on our books for several years, in spite of a fund programme, until we managed to get a new partner (RUSAL) to come and invest. We preserved a lot of those jobs.

It was not just the Berbice River but in New Amsterdam. You would remember that BUSCALES, VICEROY, JP KNIGHT GROUP SHIPPING, all of those, were employing many persons on the shipping site. We managed to get ALENDOLF and another company to come in and preserve those jobs too. This was how we worked with people. We then took over the community water and electricity in Kwakwani and we put it on the budget so that people could continue to live. It did not matter to us that that community voted almost 90% for the PNC. It was our job as the Government to take care of people, regardless of who they were. We did not need party colour or party flag to be waved there because we saw that our job is to preserve employment and not to take away bread from people. It seems as though this philosophy is one that drives this Government.

Sugar's contribution to Guyana has been documented. When we took office, over 20% of total Government's revenue came from the sugar industry. Sugar paid, from 1976 to 1996 or so, a sugar levy. That was a major source of Government's revenue. It sustained all of us. Sugar then went into difficulties. During the latter years, it needed some transitional help. We did it in the bauxite industry too. Look at the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs', Mr. Greenidge's, affidavit that he signed. He pointed out that US\$220 million was spent between 1982 and 1990 in subsidies or loans, *et cetera*, to the bauxite industry.

A year or so ago, I pointed out to this House that, if you look at the value of dollars in 1982 to 1990 in 2017 dollars, it would be over US\$1.5 billion (which is over \$300 billion) because of the time value of money.

We took over loans, liabilities from the bauxite industry, and issued debentures to cover many of them and they are still on our books now, in the State's coffers.

12.51 p.m.

If you go through the Estimates, you will still see liabilities from the 1970's in these very Estimates that we ended up paying – when we took over the loans. They cannot help the sugar industry now by a few billion dollars because the Government can easily take over those loans. They are already with the Government. The Government can easily give the same tax treatment that it gives to so many private people and now it has announced an amnesty to the sugar industry. But do you know what is absent? It is the desire – the will. This is a decision driven by vindictive politics. And so, it is not good for the sugar workers. It is not good for the country; it is not good for our people and bringing our people together. It is partisan, and they will pay the price for it. And I say to the sugar workers, remain mobilised; you will have your time and a lot of these things will be reversed. I can imagine the despair now in the hearts of many fathers and mothers, who cannot, after 1st January, tell their children where the next meal will be coming from, 7,000 of them. While we have here, in this Ministry, a \$300 million spent on a Prime Minister who does very little in this country, except drive around.

I wish to now talk about Amaila Falls Hydropower Project and the Power Sector – energy. The Minister of Finance, in his Budget Speech in August of 2015, said that it would be criminal to proceed with the Amaila Falls Project. In the 2018 Budget, he says this:

“However, Government has already expressed deep and open reservations about the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project being the primary hydropower solution. In addition to unresolved technical, cost, environmental and other issues, the main sponsor, Sithe Global, has withdrawn from the project. Government has opted, therefore, for a comprehensive energy mix with natural gas being actively considered as a prime component.”

This is what he said.

Similar sentiments have been expressed by the Hon. Member, Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon. But the Hon. Member, Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon, goes on in *Stabroek News Newspaper*, 2nd October, 2017, article, titled: *Amaila Falls hydro canned – Harmon - gov't focusing on different energy mix*.

The Hon. Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon said:

“...the AFHP is too costly to explore and the government does not have the financial wherewithal or intellectual property documents at its disposal. Given these circumstances, he said it would be virtually impossible to enlist a new investor and as such a decision was taken to look at other energy alternatives.

Asked specifically if that means that the government was not prepared to go out and find another investor, Harmon replied. “No. The point is: are you going to give us money to do that?”

Harmon explained that with an estimated “US billion-dollar” AFHP project, government could not fund it on its own even if it accessed the US\$80M that the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) is holding through an agreement with Norway.”

So, we are hearing several things. We are hearing that project was criminal and that the Government cannot go ahead with it any longer because, somehow, concerns were expressed by Norway on the technical, environmental grounds, *et cetera*, and that there will be no new investor, *et cetera*. What is the reality? There has been a deliberate ignoring at best, or, a deliberate misrepresenting of the facts of the Norconsult Report. What happened is that, after they were making all these charges about corruption, we asked that there be a fact-based assessment. The Government agreed and Norconsult was hired.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just take you through a few of the statements in that Report that addresses every single concern raised by this Government. The first one is on page 3 on the Norconsult assessment.

“The only realistic path for Guyana moving towards an emission-free electricity sector is by developing its hydropower potential and the fastest way forward is to maintain the AFHP...”

So that is so much for that energy mix which puts gas as its prime component, although the feasibility of gas to supply electricity in the long run to Guyana has not been completed. But the Government wants to elevate it to the prime component of the energy mix. This is not evidence-based policy. This is not evidence-based strategising. This is acting on the basis of whims and

fancies and I suspect that there are other things in the train, which I will talk about just now about why they want to go this route because of who is going to supply this gas power plant. It also states:

“The new government has confirmed its devotion to the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), which was introduced in 2009 by the former government...”

That is on page 3. We do not hear that much here. But, privately, that is what they are saying, that they like the LCDS, but, nationally, it is too limited. This is what they are saying:

“...we regard the soundness of AFHP as evident and in order to follow up the intentions of the LCDS as fast as possible, we recommend the preparations for AFHP to be resumed.”

That is page 38.

This is a world class consultancy hired by Norway, independent, and they are saying that the soundness of the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project (AFHP) as evident and recommend the preparations to be resumed as quickly as possible. The Government ignores this. And it is our opinion that the Build-Own-Operate-Transfer (BOOT) project public/private partnership model should be maintained for the project implementation. An internationally, well merited investor and operator in the hydropower industry should be invited to take the majority position. They believe that you can still find investors and I do believe so, and that is why, as soon as the PPP resumes office, that is one of the first things we will resume. We believe that it could happen, contrary to what Minister Harmon said.

They used to say that it is a corrupt project. This is what the independent assessment states on page 32:

“After competitive bidding between five pre-qualified candidates, AFHI in 2008 selected China Rail First Group (CRFG) (in association with North West Hydro, a design bureau in Xian, China) as EPC Contractor.

...constructing Amaila Falls would cut electricity costs by more than 50% for the energy produced by AFHP, or USD 3.3 billion over 20 years.”

US\$3.3 billion over 20 years is over \$600 billion, nearly \$700 billion in 20 years. This is the conclusion. So, this is the original argument that it was corrupt, no tender, and that is not true. The Norway Report stated that it was done through competitive bidding. That it is technically unsound: there is nothing to that effect that it is technically unsound. They used to argue that it would saddle us with crippling debt and that is not true. There is not a cent of debt and it will cause significant cost savings to Guyana. We have just heard here, US\$3.3 billion over 20 years savings on all the grounds: technical, saving grounds, feasibility in terms of its contribution to our national goal of 100% renewable by 2025. AFHP stands out as an example and it is transparently done. The only reason that this Government does not want to pursue the AFHP is because of politics and the procurement of these.

It was the *Stabroek News* newspaper that recently pointed out that, a month after advertising for dual systems for diesel and gas powered systems for the 50 megawatts (MW) for the Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL), they now changed it. Imagine they capriciously changed it to only a gas power plant. That is not how you plan energy needs for the country. And we suspect that this is all part of a plan because they have already identified people who they want to give this to, similarly to how they have spent the \$1 billion that was in the Budget last year for solar panels that never went to tender.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I interrupt you to remind about imputing improper motives to Members.

Dr. Jagdeo: Okay. So, this 50 MW, I asked ExxonMobil, directly, have you done a feasibility study for a gas/fire power plant? And they said no, and this Government has not done any either. Yet it is included in the energy mix.

We did a feasibility study on Amaila Falls. We did an environmental impact study. There are about maybe 10,000 pages of documents of technical work that was done on Amaila before the decision was made. It was on hydrology risk and a whole range of stuff and it was shared with them. This Government is making a critical decision of this nature that would lock us into fuel, that maybe unsustainable but definitely so on the environmental side, that runs contrary to their own stated objectives under the green state economy, and with no studies whatsoever; just by bravado: it is our time now, we know what is best. And this country will be paying the cost in the

future. And none of what they are doing will end this spate of blackouts now. They have no short-term plan to deal with this.

1.06 p.m.

We have heard the Minister of Finance speak about this much vaunted green state development. The Green State Development Strategy is supposed to replace the LCDS because it is supposed to be better, in an amorphous sort of way better. I am not going to be speaking extensively about this because we have dealt with this matter before.

I have before me the LCDS, it was tabled and there is a table here which states on page 38 chapter 02:

“TABLE 1: INVESTMENTS FROM FUNDS DERIVED FROM SALE OF CLIMATE SERVICES”

We had a projection of how much we would have earned over the period and where it would have been going. The Amaila Falls Hydropower Project -\$80 million; low carbon transport- \$2 million because it cost \$1 million each year in 2013; micro and small enterprises -\$10 million in the first year, \$5 million in the second year, \$5 million in the third year and \$5 million in the fourth year. That was between 2011 and 2014; eco-tourism development - \$2 million in 2012, \$2 million in 2013 and \$2 million in 2014; aquaculture is \$9 million; Amerindian Development Fund, that is US\$21million; Amerindian Land Titling Project -\$7.5 million; and Hinterland Access Programme (ICT) - \$17 million. The much wanted proposal in this budget that the Hon. Member, Ms. Hughes, spoke extensively about - ICT in the hinterland, is financed from this programme. The Hinterland Distance Learning, through ICT, - \$6 million; Bio-diversity research centre - \$2.5 million, \$2.5 million, \$2.5 million, and \$1.5 million; institutional strengthening is about \$10 million; curriculum development; money for canal rehabilitation; hinterland adaptation measures; coastal infrastructure, which is nearly \$80 million; comprehensive adaptation and climate resilience programme; and strengthening the hydro meteorological service monitoring system. I am reading this and I am giving allocations because these are real plans, with real resources attached to them.

What we have in the draft of this Green State Development Strategy - and I have had some experience of this around the world - is a copying of almost every best practice manual and putting them together in beautifully stated objectives. No specific programmes like the ones we have that will be transformative, that would use 'green' money earned from the country through our initiatives, and particularly on mitigation, to transform our country along a low carbon trajectory. What they are doing here is not a strategy to earn, but to spend more money. Up to now, they have not defined where the money will be spent in the strategy and secondly, where they are going to access this money. Not by earning, as we did, through the sale of forest carbon, but they are now pursuing development funds from different hand-outs from various donors to fund their strategy.

I have seen so many of these documents, like this Green State Development Strategy, that are just gathering dust. They do not mean anything in a practical way to people. Look at the seven pillars, green and inclusive structural transforming involving diversifying the economic base. That is the first one. Well, we had it because that was the purpose of investing in a world class bio-diversity centre so that we could start exporting new forms of services now; educational services in the environmental sector.

We are supposed to do research and development so that we would attract big companies that will look at our biodiversity here, the vast bio-diversity we have, and have research and development jobs coming to Guyana.

With the village economies, you have heard how much money we were putting there. This would have been transformative in every single Amerindian village so that they could have secured food security and have other things to do. I have seen the Government warmly embracing the turmeric, black pepper and nutmeg projects. We had already started to do exactly that, to diversify some of those villages into crops that would be non-perishable and would come in the long run. This is what we had in very practical ways. You saw tens of millions of US dollars allocated for small business development so that money from the green sector would have been transforming the economy. That first pillar that they are talking about in their new strategy, we have already been doing it in real practical terms, in policy, *et cetera*.

The second pillar - Sustainable management of natural resources and expansion of environmental services. We had already moved from the sale of forest carbon to several studies about other ecosystem services, trying to get a market for this. The slew of legislation that we passed in the forestry sector, environmental sector on bio-diversity and the commitments we made, wild life management and protected areas, these are just parts. This second pillar was already being done.

Energy transition to renewable energy - that is the third pillar. Now we see not a transition to it. Here is a policy that they are implementing that runs contrary to the objectives of the Green State Development Strategy. In our case, it was moving in that direction. Resilient infrastructure, the Conservancy Project, like the Cunha Canal, mangrove, the Hope Canal, better flood control and water management. These are what we were doing on more resilient infrastructure. Human development and well-being, even the garbage, we started a new landfill for the garbage collection on the curriculum. We had money in there to reform the curricula in the school system, so that we could get people more involved in this.

Governance and institutional pillars - we had the Multi-sector State Holders' meeting that involved everyone, the private sector, the labour movement, the miners, the foresters, women, young people, indigenous peoples' organisations, National Toshias Council (NTC) and everyone. They have practically disbanded that because everyone sat around the table in the management structures.

On procurement, this would be a big issue in that pillar, because one cannot buy solar panels by calling some people in and giving them the contract or giving your party supporters a wind farm contract. You have to tender it. On governance, we have serious problems with governance.

The seventh pillar is international trade and investment and those have all declined.

The seven pillars of the new Green State Development Strategy are nothing new. We were actually doing things in every single one of those areas. It is all a fancy talk because this Government does not have a development strategy. It is desperately clutching at and is getting some foreign consultants to work with them on this. At the end of the day, in 2020, it will be relegated to the dust bins. **[Mr. Nandlall: [Inaudible]... painting buildings...]** Yes, painting buildings *et cetera*.

The Minister of Finance, in his speech, spoke about the APNU coalition being an agent for healing and reconciliation. In actual fact, it is the most divisive Government in our entire post-independence history. We have heard about the party manifesto guiding public servants, including the judiciary; the party colours on pension books; and the party colours on State buildings. How do these things really help to portray that you belong, when you are a Ministry, that you belong to all the people or when they come to a public building that they will all be treated equally? Party colours should be banned from all public buildings. These buildings do not belong to any private individual or party, and everyone must see it.

This obsession with small things is what harms the big picture of where we are going. The big picture always has to be, how we are creating more opportunities for people to do better in Guyana, in terms of their welfare and wealth, that they could enhance their holdings, in terms of their health, education and security. We lose sight of the big picture of Government, the purpose of Government, when we focus all of our attention on these little things – *our time now*, painting this little thing, taking a hand out here, creating the slush funds, *et cetera*.

The Minister listed some of the impressive achievements and successes of the Coalition Government since it got into Office. He said that they had made steady progress with their manifesto in the past two and a half years. He commends the Government on achieving the... He said that the debt to Gross Domestic Ratio (GDP) ratio was now 45.2% and that Guyana had one of the lowest debt ratios in the Caribbean. The Minister is absolutely right. He is right that it is 45.2% and that we have one of the lowest, but he ignores the fact that, when the PPP/C took Office, according to the affidavit signed by the Hon. Greenidge, the debt was 913% of GDP, and by the time we left Office it was under 50% of GDP. That is the success. He ignores that whole history and takes credit for where it is now. The only reason that they got it lower is because of the cancellation of some of the promissory notes that were issued under the PetroCaribe arrangement.

The Minister then says that, “We have established the Public Procurement Commission (PPC)”. That is true, but, how? The only reason that the Public Procurement Commission is in existence today, is that, when we were in Government, we argued that the Government side should have three persons and that the Opposition side should have two nominees. The APNU, at that time in Opposition, had said no that the Opposition must have three and the Government should have

two and that stalled everything. When the PPP/C became the Opposition, we said fine, we will take two of the nominees and the Government could have three, as Government and that broke the deadlock. So, you should not take credit for this. In fact, it is only because of that position that the PPC is now in place.

1.21 p.m.

Simultaneously, he does not speak about how they disbanded the Secretariat of the Integrity Commission. He talks about the PPC being in place. This is the very PPC which had said that, in an investigation it pointed out that it had awarded a contract for \$605 million illegally. It does not address that. You could have probably save as much as \$200 million had the contract been awarded competitively. It ignores that. It ignores that this Government, after three years, has not submitted a single statement to the Integrity Commission. It has disbanded the Secretariat and so it just talks about handpicked issues.

Restore Local Government Elections (LEG) - he ignores the history of why the delay took place. The 10 years in that (Bi-partisan Task Force) Committee that we sought to work with the PNC to come up with a system after the constitutional change that they steadfastly refused to agree to. When we attempted to move forward, unilaterally, they argued against it.

Look at the Executive lawlessness. Look at what happens in the tied areas. In the tied areas, where the PPP/C had equal numbers, the 'Minister imposed' PNC Chairmen in areas where the majority of the votes voted PPP, he delayed the establishment of the Local Government Commission until we had to push him. The Minister is involved in trying to stack the tender boards; handpicked people across the regions and in these places, stacking the tender boards with people favourable to the coalition and we know what happens if he succeeds there. We do not hear about that.

The Minister, as a sign of progress in his own budget, listed a number of things. I am just going through them. He reduced the marginal rate of VAT to 14% and failed to say that he had put VAT on 46 food items; on building materials - so all of this housing talk; on agricultural equipment and inputs; mining equipment and inputs; and a whole slew of things that were not VAT-able - and water and electricity.

In fact, in the APNU Manifesto, I checked it last night and as I had mentioned before, it is stated that they were going to remove VAT from all food items. In fact, they did the converse; they put on the taxes because they were moved from the zero-rated category to the exempt category. He spoke about the increase in the old age pension but, in that same manifesto, they spoke about doubling the old age pension and public assistance within 100 days; immediately doubling it. Here he tells us that they have increased it by 47% and 27% for public assistance, but the promise in the manifesto was to double, for public assistance and old age pensions, their receipts in the first 100 days. He said 'immediately'. He fails to say the hardships that many of the pensioners face now, when the electricity and water subsidies are gone. They have to pay VAT on a whole range of things like prescription drugs and a whole range of other stuff. If one looks at the Consumer Price Index, although it is a 2% increase, when one looks at critical categories that affect cost of living for low income people, then you will see how they have increased significantly and that brings hardships to people.

The Hon. Member spoke about the net increase of foreign assets from \$611 million to \$613 million in 2015-2017. That is a big achievement, but it does not speak about the two new massive gold mines that started operations that should have an impact on the net foreign assets of the country or the collapse in oil prices, which had also helped in terms of spending less of our foreign exchange. He says absolutely nothing about the massive deterioration in the loan portfolio of many banks, more than double the loan portfolio. If there is one place that you want to see where the health of the economy is challenged, that is in the banking system. If people cannot pay their loans, more and more of them cannot and bad loans have more than doubled, then it tells the story on the ground.

What is the true picture? He listed all of these things. He listed these as achievements of the Coalition Government. But what is the true picture? The developments in the domestic economy in 2017, under that head in the Minister's budget, one is that, in 2017, the budgeted real growth rate was projected at 3.8%, mid-year it was revised down to 3.1% and the projected outturn is 2.9% or we could hear 2% because I have dealt with that already. We do not know if the figures for the next month will change dramatically.

The current account of the balance of payment during last year deteriorated from a surplus of \$13 million in 2016, to a projected deficit of \$235 million, which is \$250 million deterioration in the

current account of the balance of payment. The economy is not performing as projected and the balance of payment has a disastrous outturn, \$250 million worse than budgeted.

Number three, Net Domestic Credit is projected to expand by 8.1% with private sector credit growing by 2.1 %. Mr. Speaker, listen to this carefully. The Minister is saying Net Domestic Credit, so when people borrow in an economy to invest, normally when you look at the health of the economy, you are going to see a healthy growth rate in borrowing. That is domestic credit. In this case, the private sector borrowed by 2.1 % over last year. That is the increase in credit to the private sector. But guess what? The inflation rate is 2%, so, in real terms, the private sector has not borrowed anything at all. In real terms, it is stagnated and that is why we are seeing the sloth in the economy. It is because no one is investing. They do not want to invest.

This brings me to the second part of that same statement made by the Minister. Public sector credit has increased by 233.6 %. Imagine this, private sector borrowed increase by 2% and the public sector by 233%. It means that the Government is borrowing more to finance its programme and is crowding out resources, *et cetera*. It tells you a big picture.

Even though the 8.7 % more revenue had been collected in 2017, than in 2016, what we have is more revenue collected. I think I made that point, but we saw \$10 billion moved from the statutory accounts over into the coffers of Government - Consolidated Fund. We are running down those accumulated balances and bringing them in as revenue now. At some stage it would all disappear. So a potential source of future financing is gone. The Government is borrowing more, spending more, running down balances, *et cetera*.

The external debt is also projected to increase in the future. May I just point out that in investments and jobs and that is another section of the Minister's budget. In his Budget 2017 Speech, the Minister said that over the course of 2016, total investments, including Foreign Direct Investments, facilitated by Go-Invest, totalled \$114.8 billion, which is a significant improvement over the \$89.3 billion inflow in 2015. In this budget, the Hon. Minister of Finance says that the Government facilitated almost \$23 billion in investment, which, over time, will create over 750 jobs across various sectors.

In 2018, Go-Invest anticipates investment of \$154 billion that will create about 5225 jobs. These figures cannot be supported by the domestic credit to the private sector; they cannot be supported

by the numbers that I showed you from the banking system in Guyana; nor can they be supported from the inflows of Foreign Direct Investment from abroad, as recorded in our balance of payments. They cannot be supported. The \$89.3 billion in 2015 is a fallacy.

In 2016, they said \$114 billion was spent and that 6000 jobs were created. Then the Minister disaggregated in 2016 that there were 1327 jobs in agriculture. Which sector? Where? In Information and Communication Technology (ICT) there were 1500 jobs. I checked around and there was nothing. Tourism 1483 jobs, and in the energy sector 1366 jobs. This is what the Minister said happened in 2016.

In 2017, the promise was \$139.8 billion and 3870 jobs. Listen to what the outturn quietly was. The actual was \$23 billion and that is like selling 100 high priced houses in Georgetown and that is the end of it, your investment for the year. Nine hundred and seventy jobs will come in time, the Minister said. The Minister had to climb down from this big figure to the reality of what is happening in the economy. Now, this big projection again for 2018, is \$154 billion and 5700 jobs, as I have demonstrated it is fallacy. This is their biggest job creation activity in the budget. Nothing! We are going to have a harder time.

We have an abysmal failure of the criminal justice system. It is a disaster under the APNU Government. The entire top leadership of the Police Force were hauled before a Commission of Inquiry (COI) and now they are under the plough. This cannot be good for morale in the Police Force. As we have said before, we publically accused them, we said that we knew what the outcome would be on the COI. And as we predicted, the outcome was the same as we predicted. That there is an attempt to remove career officers from their positions in the Police Force and to stack the Police Force with people who are compliant with Office of the President.

1.36 p.m.

Look at the excuse for doing it. We need to take any threat against our President as a serious one. One could easily solve a problem if there was a shoddy investigation into a plot against the President, than try to remove all of these officers by using it as an excuse to remove the officers. Morale would be poor and it is creating major problems in the Police Force. We have had, under this Minister also, two fires. The first claimed, at our prison, 17 lives and the second one wiped

out the entire prison. We now have to spend billions of dollars of taxpayers' money on building back these prisons. That is his track records. Compare that with the PPP.

The undermining of community policing, you have heard a lot about that. Undermining an important arm that relates with the community has been one of the key hallmarks of this Minister's tenure. The inability to respond coherently to rising criminality - talks of dogs, horses, amnesty and that the British will be our saviour, and hanging on for dear life to a couple of old PPP/C's projects, will not cut it. It is not the security plan that they promised to the country in the first 100 days. In fact, it is confusion and they are undermining it further.

When prisoners' release is treated as a State secret; we are trying to get the names of the people. When President Obama did this, he had the Justice Department publish the names before he made a decision. In Guyana's case, we have had over 70 people released and we are trying, through the Access to Information Act, motions and a whole range of things. We cannot even get the names of people who were released.

This proclivity to secrecy and locking down the information makes us very suspicious that people, who were released, were not released in accordance with the public explanations which we got. The public explanations were that they were only first time offender, petty thieves, *et cetera*.

The Minister, on numerous occasions, giving directions to constitutional bodies and, of more recently, of an operational nature, he gives directions to the Police Force on who to promote, who to transfer, who should go on leave, *et cetera*. All of these things, taken together, plus the withdrawal of the one month tax free bonus for the Disciplined Services, must be affecting the morale of our security forces. One of our biggest fears that our people have now is the rise in criminality and the hopelessness of this Government to address it. It will affect investors in the long term too.

We have seen, in this budget, the miners praising the President for reversing some policy decisions which were made on some taxes. The miners are worse off. Every sector is practically worse off. Especially, given what has happened with this matter of release of prisoners, we would like, for transparency purposes, to have the Ministry publish the names and the amounts written off for all of those who will benefit from this amnesty that he announced in the budget.

We would like to see that happen because we are worried that this is a policy designed to help only a few people. There are lots of things that I can go on to, but I suspect that people are getting hungry too.

I must ask: Who is celebrating this budget? It cannot be the rice farmers; it cannot be the cash crop farmers; or the small livestock rearers because they have all seen the markets decline for their products when they go to sell them. They have seen their costs go up, including VAT on input, higher licensing fees, and a whole list of things. For the small farmers, rice farmers, and livestock rearers, there is no cause to celebrate. In fact, they are worse off today than they were when we left Office.

What are the pensioners celebrating? Is it a \$500 increase? The VAT on water, electricity, higher food prices, *et cetera*?

What are the retailers or market vendors celebrating, whose incessant complaints, every time you visit them, are about slow sales? They almost overwhelm you with the complaints that they cannot sell and that they cannot even make their payroll, when they had businesses that were doing so well before - market vendors and the retailers. What are they celebrating? Had it not been for the Cubans coming into Georgetown, I shudder to think of how more depressed this environment would have been.

It cannot be the taxi drivers and boat operators celebrating because they are telling you that they were doing several trips and, now they are doing few trips. It cannot be them celebrating.

It cannot be the small miners. As I said before, they are worse off. They have to pay VAT on their equipment. They are worse off than when the PPP/C left Office. It cannot be those in the forestry sector. Although the Minister banned pinewood importation, ostensibly to create a demand for local wood, they still have those small... There is no guarantee of any premium accruing because of that ban going to the loggers. The loggers now face, on their equipment, a Value-Added Tax of 14%. It cannot be them celebrating.

It cannot be the teachers and the public servants who have had high expectations after promised collective bargaining. This is what the APNU campaign has done. Collective bargaining, they refused to do it. They imposed the sliding scale often and the sliding scale obfuscates often what

the average increase is. When you look at what the average increase is in wages and salaries, it does not depart radically from what the PPP/C offered in the past nor does it come anywhere close to the coalition promises.

As I said before, are the Disciplined Services celebrating? They have lost their one month's bonus.

What about the sugar workers? Nearly 7000 of them, as I said before, cannot tell their kids what they are going to do next year. I can imagine the agony in those families and what they are going through. What about the youth and their elusive job? What about our young people? If this was not so tragic it would be laughable. These young people, a lot of them had high expectations.

In the manifesto, the Prime Minister's message, which was printed on the front page of the manifesto, said that it was about jobs, more jobs, and jobs and that we could wait another five years for jobs. Where are these elusive jobs? What do you tell the young people who are finishing? Who then, does this budget really support? It cannot be our children because they stole \$6.7 billion from our children. In four budgets, if you multiply \$1.67 billion by four you will come up to approximately that figure. The cash grant for 167,000 kids times 10,000, which would give you \$1.67 billion per year, if you multiply that by the four years of this coalition, \$6.7 billion was stolen from our children. We could buy 1,500 buses with that. So, when the Minister sheds crocodile tears here about how they care for our teachers and children, it is 1,500 buses that the Government could have bought. These 20 odd buses that they branded 'David G', which are now given to people, we must all prostrate ourselves before them for the mercies that they are handing to us when they stole it from our children?

Who then is this budget support from, if it is not the *fat cat* cabal? Since we are going green, I am told that you cannot say "parasitic" anymore, you have to call the Government a "bird vine" Government because they are green and sucking the life out of the nation's people. When I talk about these people, they are not people of a particular ethnic group because all of our people fall in the categories that are listed. They are Guyanese people, our people. They may be different races, they may support different political parties, but they are Guyanese people, our people. They cannot look forward to anything. We have a duty, on this side, to vociferously and vigorously represent them, all of Guyana and all of our people, and we will continue to do so.

I expect that the bravado will take place after we leave. You are going to hear things about how the People's Progressive Party/Civic has been corrupt in Government, never mind the 50 audits, never mind the call I made for us to hire an international firm to trace assets for former Government officials and current ones that they refused to act on; never mind that we brought a motion here to make public the integrity declarations; never mind that the Auditor General reports, on a daily basis, or in his report, the egregious corrupt practises in the State on procurement; never mind the Auditor General cannot find the documents to audit the \$1.4 billion Durban Park stadium. And they will come and tell us, never mind the lack and transparency on all of these oil and gas issues; never mind that they lied to the country about the \$20 million, or that there is \$18 million or \$20 million, that they received as a signing bonus, which they said was a figment of our imaginations. All of those things and you are going to still hear them talk about their clean hands, because they live in a big bubble. You are going to hear about how badly we did with the Guyana Sugar Corporation Inc. (GuySuCo), but the people who are working there, and I pointed out how we kept bauxite workers working, I want them to say... The bauxite workers will show our track records.

1.51 p.m.

[*Interruption*] Never mind all of that, they would tell you how they care for everyone.

[**Bishop Edghill:** And how God fearing they are.]

Yes. The budget did not live up

to expectations.

The Minister said that he consulted with lots of people and that may very well be true, but many of them spoke to me, their ideas have found no reflection in the budget. Many of those are visionary ideas. We ourselves submitted a motion that was rejected by the National Assembly outlining some of our ideas, but with this Government, it is hard to get any ideas to it. As I said before, they live in a make believe world because they themselves are doing well they believe all Guyana is doing well too.

I cannot support this budget. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, at this time we will take the suspension. We will return at ten minutes to three o' clock.

Sitting suspended at 2.50 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 3.07 p.m.

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: I welcome this opportunity to address Your Honour, this august Assembly and the people of Guyana on the national budget, Budget 2018 under the theme, *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*.

I believe I would not be singular in saying that the person who best captures the positive nature of the budget presentation is the Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan. I cannot help looking again at his broad smiles and his confidence. If I had the resources, I would have mounted a billboard in every village so that the people of this country know that we have financial planners and experts who well understand the nature of people's needs. Together with his hard-working team at the Ministry of Finance and incorporates with various Government agencies, the Minister of Finance, the Hon. Winston Jordan has indeed produced a people's budget.

I was given a snippet of what was said by the Leader of the Opposition (LOO) to this House and it seems that central to what he was saying is that no one benefits from the budget, from the taxi person to the teacher to the nurse to the farmers - absolutely no one benefits. I believe, as old people would say, *easy lesson good for dunces*. I walk with a chart here to show the people of our good nation that this budget has something for everyone. This budget has social content. It is rooted in communities; it is rooted in our schools and medical facilities and in our institutions that provide security for our nation. It is rooted in all the requests made by our people on the coast and the interior for attention to their needs. Sir, one has to really be a prophet of negativity and doomed, if the provisions of the budget is looked at and it is concluded that it has nothing for anyone.

I will come to the reasons for that dismal take of the budget. As we can see in this display that I would use as my speakers' notes -

- It could not be that there is nothing for the people for Sophia who would benefit from a \$144 million for the Drop-in Centre.
- It could not be that no one would benefit in the rice cultivation sector with 14 new pumps that would be able to irrigate 50,000 acres of rice lands.

- It could not be for the young people of this country would not benefit from the \$1.7 billion for youth programmes, \$600 million for medical equipment, \$160 million to rehabilitate the Vreed-en-Hoop and the Stabroek Stellings, that the commuters and the vendors would not benefited.
- It could not be that no one would benefit from the additional \$6.3 billion that would go in support of Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) for the sugar industry, in addition to about \$32 billion that had already been allocated by this Government to the sugar industry to help it to crawl out of its travail and to survive.
- It could not be that no one would benefit from the Lethem airstrip that would be upgraded to a regional hub or the \$178 million to improve solid waste management in the city - it is countrywide - particularly that we inherited, that had become a huge pile of garbage and the stench was sending even tourists and visitors away from our beautiful city once styled the “garden city”
- It could not be that the people of this city and those who travel to our country, in more recent times, do not appreciate the efforts of the municipality in collaboration with the Ministry of Communities and the Ministry of Public Infrastructure to keep our city clean, to keep it properly drained, to avoid flood disasters that had become an annual feature of our lives that people had waded through knee-deep water in the city.
- It could not be that no one would benefit from an additional of \$2.4 billion for the University of Guyana, \$2.2 million for medicines and medical supplies.

We had heard a lot of bellyaching about medical supplies and I will come to that in a while because we all know who controlled the drugs and pharmaceutical lobby and those people who have deep pockets They had been able to stretch their long arms to many people who would come and advocate the situation that had existed in the past of sole sourcing, discriminatory allocation of billions of dollars wafted in contract for pharmaceutical.

- It could not be that no one would benefit from \$840 billion for bridges, \$2.7 billion to continue the road on the East Coast of Demerara, which is very crowded as we all know,

congressed, and it will soon, I understand, be completed to form another highway to join the East Bank of Demerara Highway, so commuters can have some ease.

It could not be that no one has benefited or will benefit from anything that has been allocated in the budget for next year.

We have and we could go down the entire list for all the expenditure \$35 billion more for public infrastructure. I would like to come back here to say that what you have here... I brought a copy to distribute to other side, but I t have enough copies to distribute to the National Assembly, but I will come back to this chart in while.

I was told that our goodly Minister Winston Jordan, for having brought his fourth consecutive budget to the National Assembly, in under a thousand days had in fact, not done a good job, but that is what we were told, but we know otherwise and the Guyanese people know otherwise. We are told that Hon. Minister Winston Jordan should resign. That was the most amusing part of the harangue. That someone who had mentored the speaker, the person who had spoken, the Hon. Member, and who had been the architect of his previous incarnation as the Minister of Finance, of the budget's presentation and estimate that that person could have this one moment of reckless evaluation in the talent, ability and learning of that person, to ask for the person's resignation.

3.20 p.m.

It smacks of, as I would say, a lack of appreciation and gratitude. More importantly, we on the Government's side of the House, when we were over there, in the Opposition, were also calling for the resignation of the then Minister of Finance who was accused of spending public money, accessing the Consolidated Fund without the approval of this National Assembly, in violation of the law and in violation of the Constitution. What we had was the same Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues at his side, the post-Jagan PPP. They circled the wagon. Vice-President Mr. Ramjattan laid a complaint with the Commissioner of Police, to file criminal charges against the then Minister of Finance. There was a motion moved to place the Minister of Finance before the Committee of Privileges of this House for investigation into serious financial malfeasance, but no one from that side called then for the resignation of the Minister. I find it very amusing that you could circle the wagon selectively in a case that glaringly called for sanctions and allowed your Government to fall on its own lack of response to this call. At that time, the central call of

the Opposition was for local government elections and the setting up of the Public Procurement Commission, because, at that time, we believed, as the major reports had shown, that Guyana, under that PPP/C's administration, was culpable for pervasive corruption and Guyana had slid to the bottom of the corruption perception index of the region. It was then when we called for an investigation as to why the National Assembly was being bypassed, it was ignored and it formed the prelude to the removal of that corrupt Government.

Today, as I said, it may be good politics to let it appear as if the Opposition, PPP, which was the immediate past Government, is committed to pious politics and that the people of this country have a short memory. It was an attempt to sanitise what was the image of that Government for 23 years. I know I have been part of that administration, but the immediate last 12 years of the administration, the post-Jagan administration, had never ever seen in Caribbean politics, the descent to political and financial sleaze and scandals of every sort and scams of every variety to the extent that we had become a pariah state among democracies in the Caribbean and the world. That is the attempt, today, to be able to have an exercise of political revisionism. As it was baptised, for the former administration to say what it could have done, what it might have done in 23 years and trying to compare an administration of 23 years with a baby Government that is hardly a thousand days old, young. That is the motive, to repackage the administration.

Sensing as you were, that local government elections would be next year and the national elections would be two years thence, that you could continue to take the Guyanese people for a ride and you believe that we could all forget and forgive the administration that had to be kicked and dragged to an early poll, after it prorogued the National Assembly prematurely because of that record of sleaze. The very Guyanese people, who they say had not benefitted from this administration in the last two and a half years, not so long ago, were the ones who exercised the judgement against that administration. We trust the sense of justice and we trust the sense of quality of our people that they can compare what they see now as against what they had experienced in the past.

I just want to briefly turn my attention... I want to say, Minister Jordan, that you are going nowhere, and you are here to stay. You are our Winston Jordan and keep smiling. I would like to see more of those posters because obviously you are not seeking to run for a third term. Nothing was wrong when ambition took to the sky and there were placards and billboards around. Of

course, your smile is more infectious and you may deserve a third term with your billboard, but the others had to be taken down prematurely.

Again, we have a mixture of the presentation, not only with historical distortions, but it is to try to repackage and distort even the present reality. I just want quickly to respond to these as they are fresh in mind. It was said that the Prime Minister has an allocation of \$300 million for his secretariat. I do not mind the fatal attraction. I am big enough to handle that because I am 70 years old. You could not be having a nightmare even with figures. I have checked what the allocation was and the \$300 million was totally invented. If it was to make a point against the Prime Minister, you cannot do that by invention. The Office of the Prime Minister is very small but it has wide functions with regard to parliamentary affairs. My predecessor, the honourable Samuel Hinds, was Prime Minister and designated in the last Tenth Parliament Minister of Parliamentary Affairs. I am not designated the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs. It only falls as part of my responsibilities as the leader of Government's business in the House. Therefore the author of the rubber stamp does not really know what a rubber stamp is. The school I came from, Mr. Farley, the headmaster, had a rubber stamp and it was made of a big heavy wood at the top and then a little stamp at the bottom. You would not understand that. It was nice good Guyana wood. I come from Berbice.

It is safe to say that the Office of the Prime Minister continues with what happened in the past, to give a subvention to the National Communications Network (NCN), to give subvention the DPI, to which the Leader of the Opposition referred to several times, obviously very impressed that this new Department of Public Information is doing a good constructive job. He did not quote anything negative about it. We also give subvention to the Integrity Commission and subvention to pay salaries for the Commissioner of Information, who is not functioning as he ought to under the law and has not presented since we have taken office or any time before, a report of the duties he performs. As just to not attract any allegations of either political or ethnic discrimination, we have to keep the feeding frenzy and so my office graciously would pay the commissioner from allocations to the Office of the Prime Minister.

It was alleged, here, that the Office of the Prime Minister, and the Prime Minister, receives \$109 million for which he does not have to account for under a line item in his budget that is titled "Other". Here is another attempt to present a distorted and at least to mislead the people of this

country, that the Prime Minister was pocketing \$109 million a year under a line item called “Other”. This Prime Minister has responsibilities for constitutional reform. Constitutional reform has been voted the hefty sum of \$94 million in Budget 2018 but this was deposited in the Office of the Prime Minister, because I have the portfolio responsibility for constitutional reform and the constitutional reform process. We cannot go forward until and unless the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Constitutional Reform considers the Bill that had been sent to it earlier this year, a bi-partisan Committee of this House, a constitutional Committee. I have had discussions with the learned Attorney General who is the Chairman of that Committee, that in the new year this Committee should meet to plan the way forward for constitutional reform in Guyana.

As I said, the former Attorney General is a Member. He has come to this House and I asked him whether he wanted constitutional reform and he clearly said no. He is insisting on something he considers being constitutional compliance. Apart from constitutional reform, the Office of the Prime Minister also has to supervise the operations of the regional radios and that requires outreaches in the hinterland and to places where we have identified or consulted as places or venues for these regional stations. There is no such thing about the Prime Minister not giving account. Every cent allocated to the Office of the Prime Minister is accounted for.

3.35 p.m.

I do not know if the Leader of the Opposition can say the same because I recall seeing the accounts of his safaris overseas and his large entourage. We call them the *bariat*. It is a Hindi word for those who go in a procession. It is as many as 40 persons on one trip, taking his best friend on joyrides and the General Secretary of his party, a political functionary, as if there was something called paramountcy of the party under the former administration. For those jaunts, \$84 million had been spent on airfares and hotel accommodation. More importantly there is a head that is considered as contingencies for which the President does not have to account. It is inherited. It still was bequeathed to this administration, but hopefully it is not abused as it has been under Mr. Jagdeo who spent US\$307,000 as contingencies equivalent roughly to \$63 million. A sum of \$147 million spent on travels.

We heard in the House allegations about extravagance and travels overseas. I think it is double-standard to want to insist on having a Government that is accountable and having a Government that respects people's resources when you were guilty of... One Member in the Opposition, the Hon. Member Mr. Neendkumar, was trying to call the word *bill-away*, but he was pronouncing it in a Hindu word, I believe *billaway*. It was as extravagant spending, dish it out, throw it through the window and there was no regard for people's resources.

Sir, I believe that we can forgive the Leader of the Opposition for being fed with inaccurate information, but it constitutes misleading this honourable House because the figures are here, before the National Assembly. You could not have waffled on these figures. If you could do so in broad daylight, in this august Assembly, then how do we know what happens under the cover of darkness. This is the kind of leadership behaviour we were presented with in this honourable House.

Sir, I was told that there was an interlude, perhaps comical or otherwise, but certainly not something that I would expect in a House such as the National Assembly during its sitting, a visit by Santa Claus and a dictionary was provided so that we could have some fit and proper spelling. I also was going to bring a copy of the dictionary and thesaurus, so that those who want to spell the word "divide" could consult not only a dictionary, but the thesaurus.

When I was listening, there was such a haste to place fault on this administration, that a reference was made to a drug bond and very quickly \$14 million was being paid for it. Multiply that by 12 and it would give a figure of \$174 million. Why \$174 million? Immediately, it was said that the Director of Public Prosecutions was allocated a \$174 million and look a \$174 million was being spent on a drug bond in a phoney or questionable deal. I would not comment on that, but the question is \$14 million multiply by 12. I also decided to add a calculator. We have to pay attention to all of this, because you cannot try to reinvent your image or the image of any one unless you do basic arithmetic and English.

Sir, I want to comment on a matter that has not been commented on here and to place this on record. When the Hon. Leader or the Opposition stood to make his presentation, you may have observed, Your Honour, that I made a gracious exist from this honourable House. I believe my other colleagues have done similarly. They had walked out as he was about to speak. How can

we forget the 2nd November, 2017, the day on infamy in this House? How could we ever forget, if we are Hon. Members of this honourable House the disrespect shown to this august Assembly and the disobedience demonstrated towards the Hon. Speaker of the National Assembly? If we say we respect the separation of powers and we respect the judiciary and legislature as we respect the executive, then we cannot, under any pretext, come to this House and show an outrageous contempt for the tradition of parliamentary democracy and good behaviour and in the presence of the executive authority of the land, who we pray for every time we stand here, for his good health and happiness. How can we flagrantly disregard our own prayers, our own commitments to good behaviour and we could in a cowardly display of a petty act of domestic terrorism hide behind a placard and behave bad, making noise, wailing, bawling, crying, hollering, muttering, groaning and screaming? How could we justify that behaviour which Your Honour has condemned in no uncertain manner as a contempt for the tradition of this House?

We walked out because we believe it is a revolutionary act if one were to refuse to reward or recognise, show disrespect and hooliganism. It is, for me, a serious act, a revolutionary act. In walking out, I felt that we were sending a signal as the President himself had remarked that we would not give respect to vulgarians. In Berbice, when the old people call you a *lungayra*... and it is a bad word. *Lungayra*, probably means you are behaving bad, but I think it meant the same as vulgarian - *lungayra*. For all the years that I have been in this House I have not seen anything more outrageous than what had happened on the 2nd November, 2017. Even if it is late in the day, all Members of this House should resoundingly have condemned this act of local terrorism in the House. Sir, that was a part of trying to deflect the speakers, we saw another attempt here at the insipient heckling and disruption aimed at derailing the debate, aimed at distracting the Government from its committed path and taking advantage of the live coverage of these proceedings in the media.

Sir, I know that some of what we are seeing would filter out to the outlying parts of Guyana, because now there are regional radio stations, regional outreach, and they too, as us in this House, cannot believe that they are listening to debates from a former Government, in Opposition now, that refuses to recognise anything in this budget as being meaningful to their lives. The old people would say, *blind man nah deaf*. If they cannot see anything good in this budget, they must listen to what the people are saying. For the first time ever, people are

listening in Lethem, in Mabaruma, in Mahdia and in Bartica. They are listening on radio, regional outreach radio, of the NCN. One person said that I should deliver the message to the Opposition, all honourable men and women, in three words, “shame on you”. They realised that if you could not recognise something on the ground, you could at least hear or being given reports of those who hear from the new radio stations. To deny their existence is a grave act, not of omission, but, for me, it is a flagrant denial of the right of the Guyanese people to the better life, because listening to radio emanating from the coast is to bring the coast and hinterland and the coast and the interior closer. Sharing our lives with each other, and you are denying them that right of existence of their station that it does not exist.

It is an unreal type of presentation that we heard from all the Members of the Opposition benches with very few exceptions. Of course, the success story of radio land for the very first time in Guyana is not settling good in the ears of the Opposition Members because they are negative, *nelistic*, and they would rather tell the world that Guyana is one country where time has stopped, where nothing is happening and where we have all either moving backward or we are sliding downwards. Soon we will continue this beautiful sound, this beautiful sound on the airwaves with new radio stations in Aishalton and Orealla, and if arrangements fall in place and our scouts out there succeed, we should be able to have either Aishalton commissioned before old year’s day. Next year, we will bring another regional station on board, that is Radio Moruka 95.1 FM.

3.50 p.m.

Sir, we have better quality of public broadcast in Guyana, and no one, who has been in Government for a period of over 20 years, and I have served as Minister of Information as part of those 20 years and had revolted against the quality of broadcast in the latter part of what was considered to be the period of political *Jagdeoism*, of partisan political propaganda infecting the airwaves of what was supposed to be public communication and infecting the content of public information. We have seen, today, an attempt to clean up the airwaves and to restore professionalism, which is not an easy task; it will take time. Many people are still there swinging to the old tune and old influences, but I know professionalism will win. We have decided to use radio and television for the benefit and the needs of our Guyanese people. We have refurbished the studios of the Voice of Guyana (VOG), the short wave 506 and 101F.M. and 98.1 F.M. radio. We are creating these stations to reflect the cultural needs and other needs of the people of

Guyana, and so we are proud that we have brought about these changes. Soon, we will have televisions relayed to Lethem, Mabaruma and Kwakwani. We are working on that now. It is a work in progress.

We have just discovered a u-matic mass where we can begin to get live coverage of shows from places such as the National Cultural Centre and the Sports Hall. We could have live coverage on television, particularly the shows in these centres.

Public information has also benefited because it is under my portfolio. I was told that I am a person who has nothing to do, and who would drive around in a little car around the country and try to speak to every Minister and to make my presence felt, whether in the field of agriculture, health, education, labour, security, public infrastructure, because this Prime Minister has a real responsibility for domestic affairs in between, with the permission of the President, to chair Cabinet's sub-committees, business sessions, *et cetera*. This Prime Minister has a *lot in his hand* but yet he is able to have an input because of his past experience as a print journalist in ensuring that the Department of Public Information (DPI) produces sectorial information, newspapers and periodicals. We have the DPI producing the hinterland highlights that focus mainly on the people in the Interior, the Berbice Bulletin, the Rupununi Round Up and soon we will have the Essequibo express, west side diary and the diaspora digest. All of these are monthly publications and the *Chronicle*, as you know, has commenced a New York edition publication of where Guyanese in the United States of America will not be subjected to the propaganda and distortion of the itinerant travellers in the Opposition, who go overseas to spread fear, uncertainty, insecurity and doom as the reality in Guyana.

Sir, I want to say that I am disappointed, deeply so, with the exception of the Hon. Members in here like Ms. Indranie Chandarpal and Ms. Sheila Veerasammy who made some suggestions as to what they would like to see in the Budget. I am disappointed with the content and approach of the Opposition but I cannot tutor them an approach. They will have to find a leader of the calibre that we have on this side to do that, but they cannot do that. That quality leadership must get them to engage and not simply to criticise, condemn, regurgitate history and trying to use the National Assembly as a complaint desk and trying to use the time of this National Assembly to rake up all kinds of small matters that should engage a meeting with an official or a visit to an office. These things could be resolved and not be brought here to the National Assembly as if

they are authorised to be the chief complainer and the chief bellyacher, and that you must disgorge or unload yourself of all these burdens in the National Assembly during such an important session as debating a \$267 billion Budget which would be spent to bring about improvement, to run the country, its bureaucracy and to bring about some improvement to the lives of our citizens.

We were told, as you could see here, *staring at me smiling*, these wonderful green benches, as if they were so because they are beautiful when they are not being occupied by Hon. Members, who come to occupy these seats only to breathe negativity in the House. They walked away, as they had done before, *cut and run*, and this is not the first time, and I must place it on record because one must allow our future citizens to see the behaviour of the responsible Opposition. I explained why they walked out but there is no justifiable reason for not sitting through a budget debate, especially when the Leader of the Opposition would have taken three hours for a long ‘*harang*’ or a long narrative and a long exposition of his own capabilities and lack thereof. The question is...you have to learn to give as well as to take. We sat here on this side and we listened to all the other Members of the Opposition benches because we were learning from them, as best as we could, from the few who made some constructive suggestions. We had a situation where we did not want it to be said to the rest of the world that we are violating some norms of parliamentary practices and that is why the Opposition keeps exiting every time or periodically in protest. That is the complaint.

Your Honour and I were at the Inter-parliamentary Union Meeting recently. We went to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and we knew that there are organisations that are constantly making petitions that their nation states do not observe good parliamentary practices. So, they are gathering evidence on these walkouts but I want to place on record in this National Assembly that the walkout has no valid foundation. When we reconvened here at 2.15 p.m., they boycotted the National Assembly. They said the Elections were rigged. The Elections were certified as free, fair and transparent to the rest of the world. The Commonwealth Observers, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and observers from all over the world came here and said these were free, fair and transparent elections, and that the will of the people had been asserted and the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) was sent packing as the Opposition. Since then, they have been caught in a time war, in a bubble and they do not know how they got

there. So, like *Alice in Wonderland*, where am I? *Rip Van Winkle* They must wake up one day and acknowledge the fact that they had placed themselves in the Opposition with very little help from this side.

In the first Budget, they had *cut and run*. They stated that they were not consulted. In this Budget, they were invited to be consulted but chose not to be consulted. Instead, in a dilatory manner, tabled a motion in the National Assembly, the length of which was from 'a to z' and which had all the issues as their contribution to the Budget because remember last year they came here and said we should withdraw the Budget. This year, they repeated part of the withdrawal because they believe that they are the only Opposition in the world who has the right to run the Government from the benches of the Opposition. This is an Opposition masqueraded as a Government and they want to present this Government with its Budget. Really? You could see this obsession over the loss of power, and, as I said last year, and I am repeating it now, it is because of the salivation that will take place on the eve of Guyana becoming an oil and gas producing country.

Marcus Garcia wrote about *the One Hundred Years of Solitude* and, in the book, you see a lot of people committing suicide and they get mad and all of that, but I cannot. I probably would write my *magnum opus* one day on this 100 days of solitude in the Opposition. They are producing all the aberration and trying to tell us that they could run the Government and trying to repackage what had been and what could have been, as if it is a brand new lecture to the Guyanese people on how to run Government and that we, on this side, are a bunch of people of less attributes. We do not need that; thank you very much. I think we have capable and learned persons here who form this Government, this six-party Coalition and this historic Coalition that had broken from one party rule. We are not going back *deh*. No one party can aim to come on this side ever again.

We have to learn that, in making suggestions on budgetary allocations, you cannot claim that you could do so from the Opposition. You have to come in and enter a process of bipartisan, cooperation and dialogue; not boycott; not non-cooperation; not civil disorder; not withdrawal; you do not do that in multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-party countries. We must also know that, on one previous occasion before this, the Leader of the Opposition felt that he had the right to speak after the Prime Minister of Guyana. I am wrapping up this debate on behalf of the Government side. The Minister of Finance has his right to reply as is his right to reply to the

comments made on all sides. The Leader of the Opposition has a right to wrap up on behalf of the Opposition, but you cannot deny the Prime Minister, as the Leader of Government's Business of this House, to be able to summarise the case that has been made by the Government benches in favour of the Budget. That is how it is done under the rules of debate. So, Sir, they walked out and they *cut and run* when I spoke on the last occasion.

There was the previous occasion when His Excellency President Granger came here to address the National Assembly and they again *cut and run*. This time, they were running out of excuses and they tried to tell the Government that they should employ someone who had been considered to be and who was facing some criminal charges. I would not mention the person's name. I might have been temporarily unfit to hold the constitutional office and so they used that *as roost to cut and run* and then we have, again, in December, 2016, they did the same thing; they stayed away and they walked out.

4.05 p.m.

So, this behaviour, this pathology of disorder, was also seen in a location where we did not think it would have been demonstrated. All of us were at the D'Urban Park, the much aligned D'Urban Park, the much aligned place where thousands and thousands of people celebrated the 50th Anniversary, the Golden Jubilee Anniversary of our Nation. They turned up at the Stadium and fought for VIP seats, and when they could not get the VIP seats at the Stadium of the National Park that they so hate and despise, and we wasted money on it, they walked out. They showed a flagrant disregard for the flag of Guyana and for the solemn occasion of the 50th Anniversary of our Independence. There is no scruple nor is there any coherence or logic in the walking out. It was all to show that you are petulant and that you are not ready for Office and, if you had been placed there, it was, in fact, a mistake. You could not demonstrate the type of behaviour that is required of leaders, the calibre of which this country requires.

When we hear that no one will benefit, and my Hon. Friend Catherine Hughes, the Minister of Public Telecommunications, and other Ministers came forward and spoke to the issue of pension for old people in Guyana, for one moment, we saw a little dampening of the chorus about the \$500 per month addition.

It was Dr. Bheri Ramsaran who said - one word he used during his presentation that caught my attention - that politics is about continuity. Politics cannot be abruptly constructed from minute to minute; it is what you inherited and from what you will continue. For most enlightened nations, continuity means change, renewal. So, if we had inherited a situation where the pension had been \$13,000 in 2013 or 2014 and we brought it to \$17,000, in 2016, and then incrementally to \$19,000 and \$19,500 in 2018, it is continuity. It is bringing a change for the better in the lives of people because you are giving them more, not less. Therefore, we are missing this element of the politics of continuity by trying to show that life started two and a half years ago and that we should just give everyone everything one time. They are not holding us to the politics of continuity at what had happened before. They are holding us to what they said we had promised. As the Minister of Finance said, we have not promised that we will do it in one term—not in the first month, not in the first year, not in the second year. We are walking this journey to the better life and this journey will see incremental changes and incremental improvement in the lives of the Guyanese people. We may not be able to see the dynamic process, to which some referred to as the dialectic process of change. In the same way as we look at water turning into ice, we do not know the exact moment when water is put in the fridge that it will turn into ice. It is a dynamic process but you see qualitative development in your society and I would say that pensioners who are grateful, even for small mercies, will respond “shame on them, shame on them for not recognising that, even though the difficulties are great, and the wants are many, at least there is a Government that gives us something, a little something.”

A little something goes a far way for the small man, not for those who have been wallowing in privileges, perks, corruptions and sleaze of one type or the other, and in the deep pockets of the lobbyists, but for the small people. It is for the people who have never had potable water and who are now getting water as the Minister of Communities... as my learned good Friend, Ms. Hastings-Williams, said, in the long catalogue of communities now where water is being supplied—from Morawhanna to Point Playa, right down to the last point of Crabwood Creek, people are benefitting from better water supplies. When those who want the saddle to be placed on their backs again, in the future, or at least aim to, say that no one has benefitted from this in the last two years, they would want me to say “shame on them”. From people who benefitted from new roads, more street lamps, new schools and renovated health centres, they too would

protest and would want me to say “shame on them for denying them these little comforts, these little improvements, in their lives”.

To those students who are now the inheritors of a new telecommunications revolution, Ms. Catherine Hughes sits in their imagination as their heroine, as the person who has come forward to open a new world that they felt they had been denied of for many years when the cables that were being ran from Brazil got lost in the mud tracks and could not be found. They could not even find the fibre in the cables; they could not even use it for a clothes line. The students felt a rejuvenated hope that they could now have access to computers.

We were in Port Mourant, the other day, at the Corentyne Comprehensive High School, the New Amsterdam Multilateral High School and at the Auchlyne Primary School, where both President Granger and I, along with my wife, attended when we were young pupils, and we presented, from the Minister of Telecommunications, the laptop computers. We also announced that the Primary School would perhaps be the first to be provided internet services. I was surprised at the loud cheers and celebrations of these little children who felt that they have now entered into a modern world and that they have entered into the new age.

The narrative that we have received for the last 23 years, through the last speaker, could not say why we had not revolutionised the education system in this country and why we had not provided e-help services, why we had not completed the e-governance process, though they had placed their sons and close ones in multimillion dollar contracts to ensure that these projects get going. They could not explain why we could not have this revolution and become, as so many parts of the world, a knowledge-driven society. It is happening here today and denying it does not mean you could wish it away. We have brought this to the young Guyanese generation in a matter of months. It does not matter how much you could talk or how much you could *pour cold water* on the projects or try to counterpose them as against a cash award about the buses, the boats and the bicycles.

We have the multifaceted “B” project, which was initiated voluntarily and without a charge on the National Treasury by President David Granger. You cannot deny those children, who are benefiting from rides in these school buses, the entitlement that they now feel they have to be provided transportation. Because you want to titillate the young people and because you want to

play emotions of mothers, you dangle \$10,000 as if you are giving them a lottery for lifetime. The buses and the boats in the riverine areas, the bicycles, the boots, the breakfast and the books are all magnificent “Bs” that we have brought into this country and into the life of our people, not the bees that have existed before, not the honey bees that were associated like a cluster, the bees that had raided the best out of our economy.

I am very pleased that we have the miners and the wood producers coming forward to applaud the Budget. Even the Guyana Trade Union Congress (GTUC)...we read a statement which said that this was a very cursory put view on the Budget and that it did help but it did not go far enough—well, good enough. If we did not go far enough, we have come a far way and we still have a far way to go. As the Minister reminded us in the previous Budget, it is either this or that. It is Robert Frost who said, “we have many miles to go”. We are not going to sleep and this old man, as they sing in the song, “*he aint get tired yet*”.

Our tourism operators have commendable words to say about the initiative taken. Those workers in the private sector, who will now benefit from an income tax benefit on holiday travels overseas, I believe, are also grateful for the provisions that have been made in the Budget.

Sir, I want to come back to what I have said earlier about the reason we are having the aberration in this House every time there is a National Budget. It is nothing normal; it is an aberration. Most Oppositions in the world would come forward and say, “Thank you very much for what you have given my constituency, but I would like to have something more.” They do not deny the existence of what there is and what has been given because the Government has the responsibility to access the National Treasury in the name of the people and with the approval of the National Assembly in a very coordinated way, not the Opposition. Therefore, the Opposition must fight for their constituents and not practice the game of division. We saw the division in this House reflecting itself in many respects. It is a game that I understand and that I have read well and have analysed. It is a game to sow disaffection at this mid-point of our Government, to sow disrespect, to sow disdain, discord and division. It is as when the Vice-President, Mr. Allicock, was speaking and a Member of the Opposition was heckling and saying “*your brudda, your brudda*”. In simple terms, it is a tactic or a game to set brother against brother, sisters against sisters, race against race, and geography—one geographic area as against another. As you can see, they articulated the bonanza that had been given to Linden in the form of an electricity

subsidy. We were asked, “Why should we be giving Linden subsidy and not be giving Region 6 subsidies?” You are comparing two geographic locations, two occupational regions with different ethnicities and you are setting them against each other.

4.20 p.m.

If anything that the Leader of the Opposition said today, I believe that he recognised a *faux pas* when he admitted that it was under his administration that the subsidy had been extended. Therefore, he must have considered it that it was a great provocation against those people to say that you are helping bauxite workers. We know the reason but you are not helping the sugar workers.

This division is intended to breed the suspicion of the country because they could find nothing tangible in which they could mount a viable opposition that could get a ground flow of people coming out in rebellion against the Government. The non-cooperation and the civil disorder were intended to do that. It is failing. All that they have following me around the country are 12 placard bearers. They are recycling the same old placards and recycling the same old bad spelling because their mission is to follow Nagamootoo and sing the song “naga, naga, naga”. They are singing the song and practising the politics of ‘devide’ – the politics to divide.

I believe that I could excuse his immaturity. I could excuse his inexperience and that he is young and has just been blooded into politics. When the Hon. Member Charlie, I think someone called him *yackard Charlie*, came here and said something that no House in this world, in a democracy would countenance, without indignation...he said that this Government was practising genocide amongst our Indigenous peoples. He repeated it. As he was saying the word “genocide”, the Opposition Members were chanting genocide, genocide, genocide because everything else is failing; everything else is falling apart and they wanted something that could catch the attention of the media, something that will catch the attention of the un-weary public outside of Guyana, that something bad and bizarre was happening in Guyana so they went for the maximum allegation of a crime against humanity.

Genocide is a systematic extermination of a race or of a people, as had happened in Rwanda, Germany against the Jews, in Kampuchea, former Cambodia, when Paul Pot who, I understand,

was a hero of the other side, ran amok and slaughtered the intellectuals of his country. It was systematic extermination.

I want the people of Region 9 today to listen carefully that someone purporting to be their representative is claiming that there is systemic slaughter of peoples of Amerindian descent, our Indigenous peoples of not only Region 9 but in other parts of Guyana, which is totally false, which is totally irresponsible, which is not only unacceptable but should receive the condemnation of this House.

Of course, you cannot end any presentation without resorting to the whipping boy – the sugar workers. Running out of issues and running out of causes, they dragged the sugar workers into the House and they started to whip him. From day one of this debate right to the end, they were unflinching in their torment of the sugar workers. You have to be a class actor to come into an august Assembly such as this and pretend that you had no part in the decimations of the lives of the sugar workers, that you came here with your hands clean, like Pontius Pilate, and you pretend that you do not know where the descend of sugar began.

Mr. Dharamlall: Mr. Speaker, I think that the Hon. Prime Minister, with the use of the word decimation... Point of Order - Standing Order 40(a) - the use of the word decimation was not allowed previously and I do not think that it should be used now.

Mr. Speaker: What word was that?

Mr. Dharamlall: The use of the term “decimation” by the Prime Minister...

Mr. Speaker: ‘Destination?’

Mr. Dharamlall: ‘Decimation.’

Mr. Speaker: Decimation.

Mr. Dharamlall: Yes. I think that I had used that term and I had to withdraw it. I think that the Prime Minister has to do that now. The Prime Minister said that the lives of the sugar workers are being decimated. He used words to that effect so I would appreciate if the Prime Minister could withdraw the use of that word in this honourable House.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. Hon. Prime Minister, I am sure that you could find another word to...

Mr. Nagamootoo: They have desecrated what was once an industry in which we all were proud. The Hon. Member came from the west side, Bath, where there was once a sugar estate. My roots are buried in Bath Estate. My grandfather on that side was a driver. They said 'driva'. My mother and father worked in that Estate. We have our roots in sugar and on that side. It was once, perhaps, the only means of livelihood. We understand that, from history in the early 18th Century to present time, the number of sugar estates has been reduced over the years from an estimated 300 plus in 1660 or thereabout. We all forgot Devonshire Castle. We all forgot that the first sugar estates were in Essequibo because, today, there is no sugar estate in Essequibo, no sugar plantation in Essequibo or no sugar factory in Essequibo.

We do not go around beating our breasts, wailing and mourning, "Where has sugar gone?" It is because we understand the dynamics of the readjustments that sugar had made. When we were, in 1967, I believe that, at that time, we had 17 estates or thereabout. By the time we sound the turn and we came into the 21st Century, we ended up with 11.

Then the La Boone Intention (LBI) went and Diamond went. With some haste, the learned Hon. Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Hugh Desmond Hoyte, was in the driving seat. As if they had the devils on their tails, they demarcated the lands at Providence and handed it out to many of their friends. Not a single sugar worker was offered a piece of land after the Providence Estate was closed and after Diamond Estate was closed. They had some pieces of land for housing. Many of their friends were given first preference and then they started to give away land to the sugar workers.

It was not the closure of the estate that was striking. It was what they did with the resources of the estate. When you tried to shift workers, having shut down the LBI and called it "integrate LBI with Enmore", you created two workshops, two junior staff, two sets of plough hands, two sets of this and two sets of that.

Political expediency cannot be prudent management, cannot be proper decision-making and so, when they packed the deck and they could not find money to support their decision, politically, they did two things: they wanted to know what to do with the Guyana Agricultural and General

Workers' Union (GAWU) by 2010 in anticipation of shutting down LBI in 2011. I lived through this. It is in my system and it is in my DeoxyriboNucleic Acid (DNA). My revolt against the attack that was made on the sugar industry and sugar workers under Mr. Jagdeo when he was the President of Guyana... I lived it; I fought against it. I sat at the meeting when a letter was handed to the then President of GAWU. I am telling this story all over again because the young people of this country must be reminded, Hon. Member Mr. Chand, that the sugar industry had decided to derecognise GAWU in 2010. It was then that I wrote an article, "Light a candle for sugar workers".

I risked being expelled from the People's Progressive Party (PPP). The expulsion was being called for because of that article. I believe that they were trying to muzzle the sugar workers' unions in advance of shutting down the LBI Estate because they did not want any protest against that decision.

Closure had been a political decision. We heard lectures here that what is happening in the sugar industry today is political and it is not motivated by economics. It could not in 2011 because, immediately, the National Assembly was approached for \$8 billion, then \$12 billion, then \$6 million. We were asked to take moneys from the national Treasury to bail out bad decisions that were made by politicians and that they would keep the sugar workers happy, content or pacified because they were the voters machine. They produced votes and that was political when that decision was made. When that decision was made that they had to spend \$50 billion and the Leader of the Opposition is glossing over it as if "well, you know we had to fix the Skeldon factory".

As a matter of fact, it was a political decision because they recognised that Berbice in the throes of opposition to the Government had to be kept pacified. He decided to make the speech to justify spending what amounted to \$50 billion on Skeldon. He said that, without Skeldon, sugar is dead. Well sugar died and we did not get Skeldon. I wrote in an article that the \$50 billion was like water on duck's back, except that duck at Skeldon never quacked. It died and it brought down the sugar industry. [An Hon. Member: They killed it.] They probably cooked the duck.

We were told that the \$85 billion that had been amassed under the Leader of the Opposition's watch as a debt by GuySuCo could be written off. But when the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Jordan, decided that he would write off debts and things like that, that became bad. Here we are talking about absorbing the debt, writing off the debt as if, with a stroke of a pen, we could justify placing a sugar corporation in debt to the tune of \$85 billion.

When I heard, today, the lamentation about the redundancy in the sugar industry and that people are agitated and affected and all those feign affectations for sugar workers, I was sitting and was thinking "Where am I? Which world am I in? What am I hearing here today - this drama?"

4.35 p.m.

When we were talking the other day where GuySuCo said that they were completing the process of integrating the estates for efficiency and to maximise productivity, we were told that that is not the way to go, that everyone should be kept in their places whether sugar is produced or not; whether sugar is being produced higher than the price of the World Market's price for sugar. It did not matter that it could have been kept, as one person said, as if the Government is an automated teller machine (ATM) so that one could always take money as he/she feels to keep this ailing industry from falling apart.

Today, I am sad because the sugar workers are not to be blamed. Sugar workers want jobs and they want, alternatively, opportunities to move on. We know that wherever sugar factories had closed, like at Port Mourant where people were shifted and they went to Black Bush Polder, they become independent proprietors, producers and they turned to cash crops.

Recently, I read in the *Guyana Times* newspapers, an editorial and that is the ideologue, the right wing – the ethnocentric ideologue of the PPP – the Jagdeo PPP. The Jagan Party was of a different ideological persuasion. This is of a different right wing orientation, with an Afrocentric view. [Mr. Jordan: *Indocentric.*] Sorry, an *Indocentric* view, that you could not

offer sugar workers/cane cutters different jobs. One editorial described cane cutters as ballerinas, only fit for the Bolshoi Theatre. That when one sees them cutting the cane, slashing the tops and cutting the bottoms and slashing the cane with their cutlass, one would think that they were ballerinas in a Bolshoi Theatre. Well, there are some who studied in Russia, where the Bolshoi Theatre is located. They said no, you cannot put these fine dancers to do other crops. There is the

vested interest to be able to use sugar workers as the political fodder, and as voting machines, keeping them there in the sugar industry; keeping them disaffected, if they have to; keeping them in a mode of rebellion. Let them be there, but do not provide them with a piece of land so that they could plant other crops; so, that they could have an independent mind; and so that they could now be de-unionised. They do not have to pay union dues; they do not have to suffer the denial of benefits that have accrued, from social benefits and from the union. They had not been paid any of those benefits. They have to be kept there so that they become the union's paying machine, so that the labour aristocrats can continue lording over the sugar workers, and not leading them into viable new lives.

Today, the sugar workers are caught in the middle of a process that has not started today. I will say this that, I am not happy at the manner in which all of this is being done. I think that it would be justified in saying that I had expected GuySuCo to come forward, long before it contemplated sending the retrenchment or severance letters to the workers, to work out their severance packages and to speak to them about it. I am pleased that Minister Jordan has since said and GuySuCo I believe, that severance would be paid. Even if it is not paid in full, there should be a sum and I understand that there is a sum that could be used to deal with the issue of severance, but it should have been discussed before.

We should have been able to have an inventory of the workers. I understand that GuySuCo has the inventory, but it needed to go in the public to say how many of the workers would be retained. As you may know, GuySuCo had managed the drainage and irrigation system in the sugar belt, which benefited a lot of rice farmers and independent cash crop producers. And so, when GuySuCo would come out, or it would divorce itself from some of these estates, it should be able to start the process of identifying how many of these workers should be retained in handling the drainage and irrigation system? Or how many will be absorbed by the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA), as the new entity responsible for drainage and irrigation facilities, the management and servicing of pumps, and all of that? How many will be absorbed in the health system? How many will be absorbed in the community centres? How many will be absorbed by new investors who would diversify, maybe, the crops or the holdings on the estate? They would need labour. How many could be retrained? How many could be given a parcel of land? Where is the land? These things are responsibilities of GuySuCo. It is an

autonomous, independent Board, even though, it is a State Board. We do not give it political direction, but it does not mean that, I am not, as Prime Minister, immune from making criticisms because I believe that the sugar workers need a fair deal.

I am hoping that, in the days ahead, the Opposition should not just walk around like an apostle of hope or discontent among sugar workers to capitalise on the lot at this point in time. But that we should come forward with GuySuCo, with the new unit that has been formed – the Special Purpose Unit – with the unions and the investors, and they should hold consultations on the best way forward to create alternative jobs and occupations. Also, that other agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) could be involved as well in helping sugar workers or former sugar workers to access loans, to be able to access skilled training and to be able to access markets in the areas where they may wish to produce local products and may face certain challenges. I believe that, rather than being here to bring down the curtain, as if there has been a *pal of death* on the sugar industry that we see the challenges as part of a new sparkle of hope, where the children of sugar workers could be helped to access quality education and could be trained in relevant skills to be able to make them available for the new oil and gas sector. They could be trained away from being Bolshoi Theatre ballerinas, as the *Guyana Times* newspapers would want them to be. They are not born to be cane cutters. They are not born to be *beast of burden*. They are not born with a bundle of cane on their heads. They are not born to walk barefooted in the slippery and [*Inaudible*] damns of the sugar estates. They are born to be better than they are; better than their parents. A compassionate Government must work with all parties to ensure that it offers a ray of hope and a light for the sugar workers. I will continue to light a candle for the sugar workers.

I just want to deal with a couple of other issues, and I will crave the indulgence of my Colleagues on this side. I know that it has been a long day and I know that we have had a lot of speech making. I am not here to deal with the length of this presentation, but I believe that there is certain righteousness on this side of the House that we should set certain things right. It is because we cannot allow perception of wrongdoing against this Government to persist.

My good Friend, Minister Jordan, is going to deal with the statistical issues, the macro-economic picture, *et cetera*. I want to deal with the issues that tend to sow confusion, misinformation and to demotivate our people, at a time when we should feel that there is no new hope or optimism

for Guyana because, as everyone has recognised, we are not the same Guyana we were a few years ago. And a few years from now, we certainly will become a new Guyana.

We have some big lies, not only some massive ones to spread the misinformation, we even have the ridiculous, when someone came into this House, purporting to bear a message from Jesus, our Good Lord and Saviour, what blasphemy. That one could claim to come to this House, that you are bringing a message from Jesus to this House. During the last elections, a similar blasphemy occurred that had Jesus come down to earth he would have voted PPP. Obviously, Jesus did not come and the PPP did not go anywhere; did not walk through the door of salvation. It walked into the open seats of the Opposition. We had all kinds of contributions to be able to deflate the energy of this side of the House and to try to slap us up, as if we are guilty of malfeasance and wrongdoings.

The most important or more pathetic of all of them was when it was said in this House, emphatically, by the Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill, I do not know if his name is Bishop or his name is ... **[Hon. Members of the Government: His name is Juan.]** His name is 'one'; he is not even 'two'. He came and talked about how we must stop bullying the judiciary and the legislature. I think I have to come here because this is a very pernicious propaganda to leave these halls that this APNU/AFC executive is bullying the legislature and the judiciary. It is because the world needs to know that we respect the Separation of Powers, and it is there for the world to see. They said that we are sabotaging the legislature and that we are not calling meetings to discuss their motions. But that is one side of the story.

The fact of the matter is, and this is history, under the PPP between 11th and 14th November, when the Parliament was prorogued, dissolved for new elections, the Tenth Parliament met 88 times. There were 88 Sittings under the PPP/C Administration in those years. The PPP/C shutdown the legislature for nine months, and their authoritarianism resulted in the vote of no-confidence. It was their authoritarianism that had led, as I said earlier, to the parties collating – the Alliance For Change to come together with the five-party APNU. It was to be able to confront a situation of the denial of parliamentary democracy that the greatest coalition in the history of this country was formed. And so, we could not have been lectured on this side that we are undermining the Legislature.

4.50 p.m.

Since May 2015, when we came into Office, this National Assembly met on 79 occasions. Yes, it has not surprised us all here. We are working hard. The Speaker, the Clerk, Deputy Clerk and the Members of the Parliament and even members of the media, they toiled with us here as we labour for the Guyanese people. We met 79 times and by the time we go into recess for the Yule Tide season, we would have met 84 times. Eighty four Sittings only in mid-term, only in a couple of months and we are just half way of this Eleventh Parliament. We are four Sittings short of the target which was achieved by the model of parliamentary democracy.

They shied away, during what I call the minority Parliament, from holding Sittings and they have now come here to point their fingers that we are not calling Sittings of the House, that we are busy travelling, every manner of blame; every manner of sully that they could dash against us as to why the National Assembly is not convening.

They believe, and they are repeating it, that when they prorogued the National Assembly, it was the first time that was ever done since 1953. It was only the colonial power that did that. They disrated the Parliament and landed troops in this country to depose an elected Government, in which both President Burnham and President Jagan had served. It did not happen until Mr. Jagdeo and Mr. Ramotar came together and decided that history must be repeated. They believed that if they came into the House and they repeated the lies, the bigger the lies the more likely it was that they could be believed, that they would come back here. Everything we said, over and over we give explanations, we gave answers and we debunked, as erroneous and false, the allegations that we promised rice farms \$9,000 a bag for paddy. When they listened to that, they said no, may be you did not put it in your manifesto, but someone shared your platform and might have said that. When they repeat it in the House, it sounds as if it is the gospel truth.

Then they came sabre-rattling about how we must have told the Venezuelan something to result in the cancellation of the PetroCaribe deal, at the time when Venezuela imposed a blockage against us - a trade in embargo. Could not have sold us their fuel or bought our rice on the eve or just around the elections time, to use that as blackmail or to blackmail Guyanese people ostensibly for their friends here. But, that is another story.

They asked, “Where are the markets?” I had gone to Mexico to solicit Mexicans to buy Guyana’s rice. For a while the chorus had gone up, not a grain of rice was sold to Mexico. When we eventually got Mexico to buy our paddy, they started to complain that I did not spell the word paddy p-a-d-d-y, and that it should be spelt p-a-d-d-y instead of p-a-d-i. They started to *pick row* with me on Facebook on how to spell paddy. Whether it is spelt p-a-d-i- or p-a-d-d-y, we have... Mr. Holder, how many tons went to Mexico? It was 75,000 tons of paddy that went to Mexico. We secured a market, a new market, for paddy farmers in Mexico. The price may not be all that we wish, but it is trending, it is going up, it is getting better and we are producing more rice, more lands, 14,000 new hectares have gone under cultivation. This is because the private entrepreneurs in the rice industry found independent proprietorship a viable economic alternative to working with people or to labour in cane fields. That is a model that we have to think of as a successful model to sell to sugar workers. It is upon them if they wish to choose to go that way. Since then, as the Minister of Agriculture had reminded this House, we have secured markets in 34 countries. We have added now Cuba and Peru to the list of countries buying Guyana’s rice products.

We are told by the learned friend, Mr. Nandlall, that when the Wales Estate Factory was closed, GuySuCo did not pay severance. I am sure that Minister of Agriculture might have answered that before in this House, that in excess of \$80 million had been paid to the sugar workers whose labour has been severed. It was a blatant falsehood to tell the nation that GuySuCo had severed the Wales Sugar Estate workers without paying severance. What had happened on that occasion was a very curious turn and twist of events, where the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers' Union (GAWU), on the eve of the sugar workers being paid their severance, filed a motion in the High Court and got an injunction to block payment of the severance on the ground that it had not been consulted. It is part and parcel of the politics of this affection and division that they wanted the sugar workers to agitate, to go into a moment of ferment to take to the streets. The sugar workers came to me, I told the story, and I repeated it in this House. I told them, “You have nothing to fear with this Government. We will represent your cause to GuySuCo and you will receive your severance, but, you should take your pickets and you should go to GAWU. You should go up High Street and you should picket the Union for blocking you from getting your severance”. Today, I believe that it is a falsehood to portray in this House that we severed without agitating for our workers to receive severance pay.

Of course, the *whipping horse* here has been Ministers. I can tell this House that, not a single Minister has received a cent, in addition to the raise which was given two and a half years ago or thereabout. They did not receive any money in 2017, 2016 and in 2018. Sorry my Colleagues, not a cent. But you have to see what was done. Not that we are in recompense for a decision that had been taken. Look at the way this issue is being handled. The Leader of the Opposition repeated, “When they took 50% for themselves”. Several other Members would say, as a matter of casual passing comment, “and they took 50%”. The *Hansard* should reflect that the 13 senior Ministers, not all Ministers, 13, they were receiving a salary of \$870,000. That was the salary that was created because there were no senior Ministers before. This was a category for 13 persons. Junior Ministers - I will tell you about these figures. They were paid \$695,000. That is the salary for a Minister within the Ministry. That is the salary that is lower from the salary received by a Permanent Secretary. The nation should know this. When they talk about the *fat cats* and the perks and the fat salaries received by Ministers, our Ministers are still languishing with their Doctorates and high qualifications which they have and specialisation, some having left their professions, others having left their trade for \$695,000 a month.

Our Vice-Presidents, three of them are receiving \$927,000. That was less than the salary received by the Presidential Advisors and some others – consultants. During the previous Government, this was chicken feed. The telephone bill for one Minister would come up to \$1 million. I do not want to reduce the level of this debate, but I could say many things because I had been on that side, I know the players, I know what they have got. The Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, worked as an Advisor, she must know that this here is *cos cos*, what the Vice-Presidents are getting, and they have to pay one-third of it or thereabout, in taxes. These salaries, by no stretch of the imagination, could be considered to be exorbitant and definitely it was not across the board 50% for everyone.

The Prime Minister received a salary of 4.5% more than the Attorney General. The Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall, I would not have brought it up if he did not. I was waiting on him to bring this issue up. It is because his salary was higher than that of the Prime Minister. I could imagine when there had been a Prime Minister, who was not a lawyer and who was a Prime Minister with Minister of Parliamentary Affairs. I could imagine that. He realised that the Prime Minister is an attorney-at-law, and, therefore, the argument that he had put forward before that

an attorney-at-law should paid more than a non-attorney in the Cabinet, cannot hold anymore. Yet, for all, there is a system and I am not saying it started today, it started a while ago and it continues. That is the politics of continuity or the system of continuity that the Attorney General does not pay income tax. If you take one-third from the Prime Minister's salary, the Attorney General still has more money. I am saying this in the House because of the persistent repetition of a falsehood that the Prime Minister is getting or has received 50% increase and he is a *fat cat*.

Of course, we all know the story of the President's pension; that the leader of the Opposition chose to accept, to perk it up 500% and to fatten the calf before he left Office. We revealed all of that when the Former Presidents (Benefits and Other Facilities) Bill came up here. It is called PPP – President's Pension Plan. The salary was inflated on the eve of him demitting Office so that his pension became \$1.6 million per month tax free. When he was offered \$927,000 a month as a Vice-President and as the Leader of the Opposition he said, 'nah nah, nah, I want higher'. This is the kind of political morality about which we beat our chest in this House, our love for the Guyanese people, our entitlement to frugality in the interest of the poor sugar workers. We chose the higher salary, and we chose the higher pension where we get the better advantage. We cannot be selective in telling truths or in most times untruths. [Mr. Ramjattan: Plus the other benefits, you did not mention those.] And the other benefits, oh yes, the uncapped. We had to cap the number of cars, we had to cap the number of maids and gardeners and the salaries of persons looking after the pool, *et cetera* and the gallivanting spouse or no spouse oversees on tax payers' - leisure.

While we were doing that, the drama took another form. The drama was that the Ministers got salaries but we are not taking ours. That became a controversy in the public recently again. I had raised this matter here and I have some evidence to show that, only at the beginning of 2016, they had said that they were not taking any money. It was bad money; it was unconscious-able, it was dirty money, they were not taking it. They were going to put it in the special bank account and it would be accessed at someone's pleasure or leisure, sometime in the future. They did not say the Members of Parliament's (MP's) salaries, including the Opposition MPs, their salaries jumped from \$166,000 to \$200,000 per month. Under this Administration, they received a larger salary, \$33,000 more. When we checked, only 12 were being paid into the account. There are 32

Members here and 50% chose not to pay the money into the bank account. They kept the money. But they make noise here that they were giving it up and that they were not taking it.

5.05 p.m.

When I checked more recent public information, only three of them were paying this year - three. There is rebellion in the camp and the explanation being given in public is that “No, they do not have to send it directly to the bank from the Parliamentary account that they will pay it in themselves. They are going to collect the cheque, let the cheque go to the bank, then they will go to the bank and they will draw cash then they will take over the cash”. Do you see? Do you know what a tangled web you have weaved? Sir, we have to know, when all of these things are coming up in the National Assembly, that the story is not necessarily the story of truth, and we have to correct these things because they can incense the Guyanese people, particularly in a sensitive political and industrial time, when you could expose officials of the Administration to the ranker of people who believes that you are entitled; that you are getting certain things which are being denied to them.

Then both the Hon. Members, Mr. Nandlall and Ms. Gail Teixeira, came to the House and they said that the Prime Minister’s (PM’s) Residence was being renovated at a cost of \$100 million. Another untruth being told in this honourable House. It is in the newspapers and it was said by the former President of this country. It would have not been tragic if it had not been said by the former President. The *Guyana Times* newspaper, 15th November, 2017, “PM’s \$100 million annual salary, moneys could have saved 1000 sugar workers- Jagdeo”

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Nagamootoo: This is the newspaper Sir

Mr. Speaker: Could you refer to the Hon. Members as Hon. Member?

Mr. Nagamootoo: Sir, I am reading the headline. The headline states “Moneys could have saved 1000 sugar workers- Jagdeo” It has a nice little dash in front.

Mr. Speaker: Is this being quoted from a document?

Mr. Nagamootoo: Yes, I am quoting from a document. This is what the document states. Sir, I will give you a copy. It states:

“The annual salary of Prime Minister Moses Nagamootoo which is currently close to \$100 million could have been better utilised and put towards helping to save the jobs of 1000 sugar workers...”

This is according to Opposition Leader, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, who told a press conference on Tuesday that this, among other huge spending, being undertaken by the Government should be in the lime light instead of the Members of Parliament and what they are doing with their increased salaries. He was trying to counterpoise, use me as a cannon fodder, to set me up against sugar workers because that is the intention. I am an authentic working class proletarian leader on this side of the House. Their ambition had been clipped; the wings of their ambition have been clipped and, therefore, they have to select a target of their fury and disappointment, and so they chose me as a target. They want to set me up. The Hon. Member, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, had told me that I could not go back to Berbice. My navel string is buried in Berbice, on both sides of the river. No Jagdeo, honourable or not, would ever dislodge me from the native county of Berbice and from my association with the working people of this country. This mischief that they are trying to set, I wish that the Minister of Public Infrastructure would have answered that allegation because there is no such sum, not even remotely so, being spent on the maintenance of the residence.

That is the one about the Prime Minister’s salary. I just dealt with that - \$100 million annual salary. We know, and that is why I brought the calculator, that one cannot multiply the Prime Minister’s salary by 12 and come up with \$100,000; you cannot even divide it by 12. If he uses the formula D-E-V-I-D-E, he cannot come to my monthly salary. They tried to pedal that and then they had another paper which states that:

“The residence is being renovated at the cost on \$100 million.”

They love this \$100 million. They are stuck in the big sum. It is easy to call. It has one and two noughts. That is why they love my name it has a lot of noughts in it - Nagamootoo.

Sir, they are trying to project this to build a culture of political hate in this country and to target members of the Administration. On this occasion they reserved the special attention for the Alliance for Change, but as Minister Trotman had said so well, and had articulated so convincingly in such a calm disposition, and, of course, he aptly placed some holy words among what he said. He said that this coalition is here to stay. This coalition is unbreakable because we understand what had motivated us to come together. We came together in the national interest. We answered the call of nation. Not walking in and walking out as if were answering to the call of nature. We have a call of nation and that is why we are over here. We know that all of this will not deter us.

Everyone knows that if the Prime Minister had a choice, and this is not about me, this is about principle, I would have never gone to live in that place, which is a national asset, which is a national treasure, a heritage building, which was found in a condition like a horse pen. I refused for one year to go into it. While my wife and I are there, she does not earn a State salary. She spends every day of her life to fix it so that our nation can be proud of a national asset. It is not my property. They know about the rats. They left one of them inside of the stove.

Sir, I believe that the National Assembly should not be a place to spread this information, an outright falsehood. All day, in and out, they are peddling about the Prime Minister's Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV). I want to because I have to defend my Ministry and the Prime Minister as well. We said, repeatedly, that there was one vehicle bought for the Prime Minister for the sum of \$13 million, but they keep peddling that the Prime Minister's vehicle was bought for \$100 million and that it was a specially custom built vehicle, bullet proof with a refrigerator and bed, maybe ovens as well. I would have loved one with a bar inside or a swimming pool would have been better. They are peddling this because they believe that people can believe that the Prime Minister is irresponsible and he is living it up while they suddenly felt that the poor sugar workers were having a hard time. And so, they demanded that I should account for the trips that I had made overseas. I came to this House, and it might be the first time someone holding the Office of the Prime Minister, or even a Minister, would have disclosed everything that would have been spent on the Prime Minister's trips.

They should have disclosed the contingencies, the \$62 million and the \$84 million spent on his safaris, but still Hon. Member Nandlall came here to this House and he said, today, again, and

yesterday, he repeated that the Prime Minister was going abroad and that others were travelling with their spouses. Whenever my spouse travels with me, most of the times, six out of nine times I travel overseas, the sponsors pay for my tickets. Everyone who knows me, they know that I put a condition to my travel and I also limit the number of times that I would travel overseas. So they are picking on the wrong horse. This thoroughbred is not going to drop every time they criticise him. This may be the last time that I am going to deal with this issue in the House because it may be said that I am spending too much of the Prime Minister's valuable time to answer these unmeritorious accusations. They are frivolous and they are vexatious and so, we are going to have to put that aside once and for all to deal with some bigger issues.

When Hon. Member Bishop Juan Edghill spoke, he said, and I wish I could have told the joke of one, two, but I am not going to do that here, he spoke about the free press in Guyana and that the press was under attack. There are members of the media out there with whom I have been a colleague like Collins for many years. Collins and I probably went through this track, maybe for the last 15 years and they can testify that the press in Guyana has never been as free as it is today. Never! No more are journalists called carrion crows. No more are they locked out of press conferences and State House functions. No more are advertisements withdrawn from newspapers as an economic discrimination or pressure, if they did not toe the line. No more are the newspapers controlled by political directorates who link, giving favours, as a matter of the survival of newspapers. We have streamlined and regularised the broadcast landscape this year in this House by amending the Broadcasting Act to allow free, open and competitive access to a very scarce resources in the electromagnetic spectrum. That is the frequencies with which radio and television are broadcast. Now, for the first time, we have an aberration that we may have to live with. I do not know if we have to, but where the former General Secretary of a ruling party, a former President and several former Ministers have become owners of broadcasting stations, and applied and were given frequencies in a way that snacks of the worst type of nepotism and sleaze by a President then, who felt that it was the right thing to give a ruling party radio licences and to claim, as my good friend Joseph Harmon had said, a licence for every region of this country. It is political domination, it is political discrimination, it is political selectivity and it is being done in the name of democracy. We repudiate this and I believe that the Guyana Broadcasting Authority has a big task before it to be able to regularise television so that we do not bring to the airwaves and into the sitting rooms of our people, the division that we see, in this

House for example and that we do not taint the lives of our citizens and our children with the type of political contamination that we see in the wider society and being pushed by the irresponsible Opposition.

We now have to debate on whether political parties should have entitlements to television and radio because it allows them an advantage to intrude into the lives of people and to spew their xenophobia, their ethnic proclivities and, of course, the political line. They should deal with the free media and give advertisement and buy time, if they wish. That is my opinion because I feel very strongly about this issue that the press should remain open, the press should remain plural, not politically plural, but free as well.

I want to say that we have improved on the infrastructure of governance in Guyana; we have improved on the infrastructure of the democratic system. We brought to the National Assembly an amendment to the code of conduct that the inside integrity, as part and parcel of the integrity legislation and it sets new standards for the behaviour of people in public life.

5.20 p.m.

We hope that in the far future we can have a new Integrity Commission, members of whom have already been identified on certain consultative processes have to be completed. All who hold public office can declare their assets and we can know that we do not have unjust enrichment. We do not have disproportionate wealth, disproportionate to the jobs that we do, disproportionate to the salaries we receive, or the benefit we receive, and to be able to have money on the side from other types of activities that are not necessarily clean activities.

We also have the Constitutional Reform Commission. As I said, we have \$94 million voted to continue the Constitutional Reform Commission. It is with some regret that I say that here. As I said earlier, the Opposition must come fully on board because we need to have a Constitution that accords with the will of Guyanese people, the wishes of the Guyanese people. We budgeted for money for 100 consultations to take place throughout Guyana. The Constitution, as the President said, cannot be done by armchair specialist or armchair people in a boardroom. It cannot be done, as the hon. Nandlall said yesterday, by a White Paper being brought to this House. It has to be done from the wishes of the Guyanese people and the committee has to do its

job to decide where they would have to do the consultation and how to bring to this House a revised copy and of the Constitutional Reform Consultative Bill.

Yesterday we had another lamentation taking place in this House, that the Hon. Minister cuts the votes for Parliament Office and cuts the vote for the judiciary. That was in pursuant of the argument, that we are interfering with the judiciary and we are interfering with the legislature. We were not guaranteed the autonomy of these institutions as they should be under the Constitution. Sir, there are many constitutional agencies, apart from Parliament Office and the judiciary. There are the Teaching Service Commission, Judicial Service Commission, Police Service Commission, Public Service Commission and Human Rights Commission. There are also the Women and Gender Equality Commission, Rights of the Child Commission, Public Procurement Commission, Ethnic Relations Commission, Indigenous Peoples' Commission, Public Service Appellate Tribunal, Office of the Ombudsman and the Guyana Elections Commission. These are protected agencies. Mr. Nandlall came here and said how we want to cut, how we are truncating, the budgets and how we want to have political control.

Well Sir, I remember in 2012 very well that, right in this House, Mr. Carl Greenidge tabled a motion to ask that we include the Parliament Office, the Judiciary as constitutional agency. In other words, we should not have the right as a parliament to harass these constitutional agencies from receiving moneys. In other words, you could not get a judge to beg you or the chancellor to beg you for money. I just want to read into the record here. The very Hon. Member 'Kshatriya' Anil Nandlall said that if it is being tried to make the judicature a constitutional agency, he deemed it to be a wild and reckless suggestion. The argument by Mr. Carl Greenidge was that the independence of the court was being undermined because you had to go to a Minister. The resolution taken from the *Hansard* 10th May, page 251:

“AND WHEREAS the Supreme Court of Guyana and all other Courts are being treated as a Budget Agency, a practice which seriously calls into question the independence and autonomy of the Courts,”

The resolution was it should be taken out from the Financial Management and Accountability Act and put into the transfer as a constitutional agency, so that there is a process by which a constitutional agency could make a request to the Minister, the Minister would then, represent in

Cabinet, make a representation and it comes to Parliament for its approval, and all that is approved is a lump sum, so that it do not have political interference in the allocation for the commissions in these constitutional agencies. You cannot hold them at ransom, you cannot blackmail them, and you cannot subjugate them to the will of the executive or the political directorate.

The Attorney General then said that he was the Attorney General who signed on approving the budget of the judiciary. He said that, at that time, that he was the one signed and approved the budget of the judiciary. He went on to say in the *Hansard*, and I would like to read this... In fact Mr. Ramjattan then, I do not know which side he was on, was trying to help him by telling him, the other day, that the Auditor General was a constitutional head and, therefore, it is not so bad. He said that there is no such legislation or framework for the judiciary. Meaning that there was no way that the judiciary was able to spend the money.

“The judiciary with all of its independence cannot be aloof of the governmental structure of the country. It is a public institution, it is funded by taxpayers’ money and it must be accountable to the people of this country.”

You could read in that that it had to be accountable to the Government, hence the Minister has to decide how much money the judiciary should have, how much money the Parliament Office should have, how much money the Auditor General’s office should have, how much money the Office of the Ombudsman should have, how much money the Guyana Elections Commission should have. He said that it was “...organ that is funded by public money; it remains a branch of Government...” Could you imagine? Look at that. The former Attorney General came here and he was beating up on his chest how we were interfering with the judiciary and we were cutting the amount of money that the judiciary had request and other constitutional agencies.

He quoted rightly, Constitution article 222A, (a):

“the expenditure of each of the entities shall be financed as a direct charge on the Consolidated Fund, determined as a lump sum by way of annual subvention approved by the National Assembly after a review and approval of the entity’s annual budget as a part of the process of the determination of the national budget.”

It is very clear what the Constitution states, that once the constitutional agencies, be it the Parliament or the level of the judiciary, would bring a request for allocation, it is subject to the process of approval by this National Assembly. There is no issue of cutting it. It is whatever the National Assembly deems to be the sum that it could afford within the milieu of national affordability. The national needs have to be taken care of, everyone. You do not have a right to an unlimited and an uncapped sum of money because you request it and because you are a constitutional agency.

It was this side of the House that defended the right of these agencies to be considered to be constitutional agencies, to be aloof from the exigencies from presidential *dictat* and executive authority. We fought for and we won the independence of the constitutional agencies. Mr. Nandlall, from the Opposition, was trying to carry this trophy away as if he was a champion of the judiciary when here in 2012 he argued against the judiciary being made against the constitutional agency and its authority for the judiciary to be financially autonomous and independent. Sir, that nails that one.

In politics we should be held, as Mr. Ramjattan loves to say, accountable for what we do and not be labelled as an act of dukes of unprincipled dunes. Sir, we want to say that we are the defenders on this side. The constitutional agencies asked for \$10 billion and within the concept of what we can afford and what has been spent before, from what have been allocated, this National Assembly voted \$8 billion for the constitutional agencies and I think that is a decent sum.

I know now it is late and I could speak on, because I think that there are so many issues could be dealt with in trying to set the record straight, in trying to defend the measures proposed by this Government that it needs time. I do not want to over strength the tolerance of the chair. Sir, there is one issue I would like to conclude on. This is the issue of the liquefied petroleum gas (LPG).

The Minister announced that there would be concession for those who sells the gas and those who would use the gas. We have from some self-anointed expert a kind of deprecatory response that “Where are you going with that? There would not be a single gas station using the LPG gas.” This is called the green fuel, Sir. This is cheaper by 40% than regular diesel and gasoline. I had googled this. Why could they not do that? Show the world if you want a clean environment,

if you want to be able to transform the traditional way of transportation that you can follow other countries that have now gone to use auto gas. It is said that it is a clean gas; it is a third most popular alternative fuel in the world, and there are about 16 million people already using it in Turkey, South Korea, Poland, Italy, Australia, 615,000 cars and 3,700 refuelling stations are in these countries. China has now joined the list with Sri Lanka. Canada is now doing auto gas for all the buses used by children to go to school and all public taxis because it found that this was the way forward on how to modernise your economy and how to help to green your economy. There is no use coming here and quarrelling about the green chairs. They are enjoying sitting on them, or some green house. We have the famous book *The Green Mansion*. Green is not dangerous. Green is what our country is all about and they cannot try to divide us that we are yellow and some of us are green.

The Alliance For Change flag is green and gold because we recognise the potential of this country for agriculture. We recognise the potential of this country and its forestry resources, its savannahs and its wealth as its mineral resources. I believe that taking an initiative and giving an incentive to green the economy and the livelihood of people should be applauded and not mocked at. I think this is where there is the myopic vision of the learned Member from the Opposition who was making fun of this proposal or insensitive and who is not held by me in any esteem.

Today we want the Guyanese people who are listening to the debates in this National Assembly, that what they get from this budget, I want persons to answer them. There are many people who benefit from personal income tax and from income tax remission. There are people who now are entitled for vacation allowance. We want you to tell them when they ask you, if you are listening to me right now, I am speaking in this National Assembly and addressing His Honour, the Speaker. When asked whether young couple wishing to have a housing unit pay less for the housing unit, tell them that the Minister had said there would be no VAT on the housing unit at the price of \$6.5 million. Every married couple wants a unit and, therefore, the couple will be exempted from paying taxes.

5.35 p.m.

Those in the tourism industries who have been asking for concession to have zero-rated tax on vehicles used for tourist purposes, tell them that this concession has been granted. Tell them that there is no VAT on passenger buses; tell them that this will help to bring bigger buses, safer transportation and that people could enter into the transportation market. We have to tell them also that young entrepreneurs, young Amerindian youth who are in Hinterland Employment and Youth Services (HEYS) project, who have come out of the HEYS project, there is support for independence and self-employment and you have to tell them that there is a \$100 million set up as a development fund for small entrepreneurs. Today we could believe that we are adding, as I said, incrementally, to all the sums we have added before in the short span of half a year in Government. In the politics of continuity and in the economic continuity, we have given more to the little that people had before.

There are so many other things I could say today, but I have taken up enough time of this National Assembly and I want to say that this budget is visionary. When I was there discussing it with the Minister of Finance Winston Jordan, there might have been ideas floating in our heads of the legacy project of the prestige project, the signature project, but when we look at the details that were given to us of the lives of the ordinary people who would be touched and who would be changed from what is allocated in the budget, I believe that it is starting from a right place. It is a transformative budget; it has social content; it has people oriented measures inside and it focuses for development. It is a focus that I fully share. It is a grass roots bottom-up development process.

I thank you very much and I commend this budget for the support of the entire House and the Guyanese people. [*Applause*]

Minister of Finance [Mr. Jordan] (replying): We have come to that time of the year when the task is mine to wind up this debate on Budget 2018. Perhaps, it is my worth in life that I am given this task on a Friday, a time when most people might have imbibed their third or fourth or maybe even their fifth drink. At a time when some are wondering when they will begin imbibing, because I have been asked to limit my presentation, even though others have taken three and half hours.

I am very proud that this Government has been able to restore normalcy to budget presentations in this House; that it has been able to restore predictability to budget presentations in this House; and that, of all things, it has been able to restore the timeliness of budget presentations in this House.

I am also proud that Budget 2018 ranks among the earliest of budgets to have even been presented in this House on either side of our Independence. This, sometimes, may be taken for granted and, indeed, those who conspired to keep budget presentations somewhere between the end of February and the end of March, this might sound as nothing to them, but our Constitution never contemplated that budgets will continue to come towards the end of March, even though it has that contingent arrangement of 90 days into the new year. What was a contingent became the normal. Sometimes having been exposed to that normal you then tend to forget or realise that indeed there is a normal normal. The normal normal anywhere in the world is for budgets to be presented before the start of the fiscal year, so that there could be a full fiscal year for implementation. I will come back to this just now because Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira has raised this issue again, and I am not sure what was the issue about, having explained and gone into some details last year November. Maybe, Saturdays are not enough for lessons. You may have to go on Sundays also.

I am also satisfied that come 1st January, 2018 all budget agencies, indeed all Guyana, will be in a state of readiness to implement this budget. For these advances and for these gifts, for the renewal and the hope that we have been experiencing, I have my sincere thanks to the following persons: First, I would like to thank His Excellency President David Granger whose leadership continues to be the guidepost of the green Guyana agenda. I would also like to thank my colleagues whose unwavering support continues to energise me. I would like to thank our budget and allied staff of the Ministry of Finance who continues to redefine the limits of endurance.

Mr. Speaker, while I am here I may wish to refer you to *Kaieteur News*, Friday, December 8, 2017, today, reporting on the Hon. Member Priya Manickchand's address in the House and partly referring to the Hon. Member saying that:

“...the absence of the Finance Minister and senior officers of the Finance Ministry is proof that the coalition Government is just being ‘robotic’ about the budget process.”

Mr. Speaker, “‘robotic’ about the budget process”? A process where if one person on the Government side is not present, the entire Government could fall, being “‘robotic’”. How could the Hon. Member, who was a Minister in the previous Government, who worked with many of the staff in the Office of the Budget, be so unkind to the enduring efforts of the budget staff? I am sure if the Hon. Member looked carefully, the Hon. Member would have seen, at all times, senior staff of the Ministry of Finance being present in the House. I would ask that the Hon. Member, whenever she reappears in this House, apologise to the staff.

While I am at it, I would like to, for the benefit of the *Hansard*, say that in recognition of the hard work by many of the staff in the Office of the Budget, one of them was recognised with a national award this year, the Director of Budget, Ms. Sonya Roopnauth, who was given the Golden Arrow of Achievement for long and dedicated services in the field of finance and budget. This is the second time that such honour has been conferred on a staff of the Ministry of Finance. Previously, Ms. Donna Yearwood was given the Cacique Crown of Honour (CCH) for long and dedicated services in the field of finance and debt management. Again, I ask the Hon. Member to apologise. I know she will do the right thing when she returns here.

I would also like to thank the Hon. Members of the Opposition, especially the Member who is here presently, whose contributions, even if a reflection of the humdrum and sameness that afflicted them over the last 30 months, are nevertheless valued.

To you, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank you for the efficiency with which you have handled these debates.

Very often, sometimes we come here and we debate and we forget for whom we represent. So, at this stage, I would like to take a moment to thank the citizens of this great country of ours who have stood by this young Government through the good times and the bad times, even when they were being bombarded with politicking of the Opposition or the pontificating of the so-called experts and armchair generals, who were apt to breathe fire and brimstone as they peddled their doom and gloom. The people have stood by us. For that, I want to thank every citizen of this country who might have gone unrecognised - whatever is your political affiliation, religion, race or creed. Since May 2015, you have embraced this Government and its good vision of a “good life.” I want to say to you, our citizens, that the journey to the “good life” may sometimes appear

to be distant or hard; however, be sure that the “good life” will happen for each and every one of you. It may take a little longer than we had envisaged, but as sure as night follows day the “good life” will come to all of you.

Over the last five days, there have been a lot of uninformed and misinformed comments and discussion in this House, the printed media, the electronic media and perhaps even in some blogs. I have heard repeated, for the fourth budget, a number of inaccuracies which had been corrected in this House - and the *Hansard* will show that - which continue to be repeated in this House. I do not know what could be done about that. Some people say it is democracy, and so forth, but I believe somewhere along the line that if the *Hansard* shows that these are more of a strategy to misinform rather than to educate, then, perhaps, it needs to reflect that this is being done deliberately, because I cannot understand for the life of me after, four budgets, the same thing is being repeated over and over, despite it being shown to have been inaccurate and continues to be used. This House must not be desecrated in that manner. We have to find a way of sanctioning whenever these inaccuracies continue in spite of them being corrected.

I want to go to some of the people. As the Hon. Prime Minister had said, their debate has been more of the same - quite uninspiring in a sense. When Hon. Member Priya Manickchand could have been questioning the absence of the Finance Minister and deeming it to be because of his lack of interest in the debates or what the Opposition had to say, you know, indeed, how shallow it is, how people are fishing for something. I am sure if the Hon. Member had requested and asked... I do not want to hide anything. I went there on Government business. I was not in Barbados, as this newspaper states. I was further north in the Bahamas, so to speak, working for the Government and working for the people of this country. Hon. Member Priya Manickchand, you are so informed.

Hon. Member Odinga Lumumba spoke about several things, but the only one I remembered that concerns me really had to do with the absence of, in the Minister of Finance’s budget, employment and unemployment figures, which somehow or the other signified some disinterest.

5.50 p.m.

I do not quite understand this because the budget speech speaks to a labour force survey that is being done by the Bureau of Statistics. It started this year, after months of preparation. It is well

on its way and the first set of figures should be available by the end of the year or early next year. This would be the first time we have official unemployment figures, rather than using proxies or information from the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) to determine the unemployment figures. Indeed we cannot plan properly if we do not know what the overall unemployment is. We cannot plan properly, if we do not know what the regional unemployment is. We cannot plan properly and do proper policy formation, if these figures are not used in a coherent and planned manner so that we could bring about the desired results. After saying we do not have official unemployment figures, the Hon. Member still was able to trot out a whole set of figures for Buxton, Linden and other areas, that he called a 40% here and a 50% there. Which is another story we have to be wary about, that you, Mr. Speaker, have mentioned on a number of occasions that we should quote the source from which we are getting these figures. It is easy to say, "I met someone on the road, and I met so many people in region who said that the \$500 was nothing," but I could bring 2002 people who told me that they are glad for the \$500. I keep saying that if we continue in this manner, this House will not be the House from which all our citizens would like to hear and learn what their representatives are doing.

Rather than grandstanding and politicking, we can use the available information, hopefully statistical information, to present many of our arguments rather than making up these tales about who did not say what and all these things. I will call them tales. Until I could see the people, I will call them tales.

Hon. Member Ms. Gail Teixeira as reported again in today's *Kaieteur News*, at page 11, headlined, "PPP/C Parliamentarian protest early budget." Really, we actually have parliamentarians who are protesting early budgets. It goes on to say, I will read a few quick sentences:

"While early budgets may have its advantages, it brings as well, a fair share of worrying, legal and financial complications."

Is there a legal complication about an early budget? I would love to know, because we do not want to be on the wrong side of the law. Legal complications about an early budget? The whole world must be on a legal spin because it has early budgets. We were the ones who were the pariah, in having all these late budgets for over 30 years.

“Expounding on this conundrum on Wednesday in the National Assembly was Opposition’s Chief Whip Gail Teixeira.”

I am just reading.

“Teixeira explained that when the Opposition sought to examine the 2017 Budget and its estimates, it was faced with a fundamental issue. It could not figure out when was the cut-off date for the figures that were presented by the Minister of Finance.”

Even if you bring a budget in March and you check the estimates, there are four columns. In the left column the figures are actual figures, one year after, because at that time the Auditor General would have audited the figures and those are what you want to call the actual. The next two columns are the budget and the latest estimate for the present year. Even if you bring a budget in March, it is still the latest estimate at the end of last year. It does not matter if the cut-off date was November, September or December, it is still the latest estimate. The right column is the budget for the upcoming year. It has been like that all the time. The Standing Orders and the Constitution require it in that fashion. What is this business about cut-off date? We have patterned ourselves in this regard after Australia. It has the early budgets. They are presented before the start of the fiscal year and it brings within the first quarter, a final synopsis of all the figures and everything. We did that last year. We promised it to the House and did it last year.

The important thing about this Government is that regardless of the criticism, we do and we present, not in a cloak and dagger manner. We presented in a detailed manner, explaining point by point. We are not afraid of criticism; it is good, whether it is healthy or bad. We learn from criticism and this is why our budget speeches have this thickness. It goes in depth. It analyses, broadens and expounds. Check our budget speeches against those things that were called budget speeches in the prior 23 years. It is not boasting, it is a different calibre. Yes, some people remember I used to write them, but I am not responsible for the end product. There is no mystery about this. I hope this is the last time this business about early budget would be brought to this House. [Ms. Ally: They will come again.] I am like the honourable Prime Minister: this is the last time that I am dealing with this matter, because there seems to be no learning process with it here, so to speak. I am not going to waste any more time worrying about something which is normal for everybody else, but it is a major issue for this set of people.

I wish to reiterate, because the Opposition clearly was in Government for 23 years, so the Member knows the system. Many of the questions that they asked, which would be searching, are as a result of knowing the system and knowing what used to take place in the system. It is not that they do not know. They want to embarrass the Government to see if the Government is doing what they used to be doing in this system. They are asking about whether books continue to be opened after December 31st. Do you think we can risk that with the Auditor General who we have? An Auditor General, where the Government had 50 audits conducted - we call them forensic audits - but they were ordinary audits. There is nothing forensic about them. Things that should have been seen and picked up a long time ago, we had to waste money going after those things.

The Finance Secretary has already sent out his circular saying that the imprest will be cut off on the 15th of December. Some Ministries, because of their size, will be granted a temporary relief. Come 31st of December, I think the 31st is a Saturday, whatever it is, the books will be closed. It has been so under this Government. Any person worth his salt will tell you: Notwithstanding that the books have been closed, it does not mean that cheques are not out there in the system. Come on, cheques will be out there in the system but there are booked out as cash because we work on a cash basis.

We do not go padding the capital work or the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) by calling in contractors at the beginning of December and telling them to take everything so that it looks as if our PSIP is this massive implementation. We do not do that. That is all I am saying. We do not do that in this Government. We do not call contractors and tell them to take all this money so that the PSIP looks bumped up. I am not calling any names.

The Hon. Member and the other Members of the Opposition have nothing to fear. Under this Minister of Finance, I am trying to bring rectitude of the highest order. This will prevail, I believe, well into the future, because once we establish this culture, it is going to be solidified. We have to work on a system. I keep telling people that it looked hunky dory and rosy but at the end of the day it was a broken system, broken all round. It will take an enormous amount of time to fix, but, as the Hon. Minister of Education has said, this journey to the “good life” is a journey and not a distance. It is not a destination, so we have to go brick by brick, piece by piece and step by step, until we have a solidified base from which we can take off. This is what we are going to

be doing throughout our time, whether it is our first or second term or whatever the number of terms the good Lord has in mind for us.

Before I get to the main speaker, who had a lot to say, and I have a lot to respond to, I want to just touch on Hon. Member Bishop Juan Edghill. Juan is a Spanish word. Two aspects I would like to look at, because I believe both Hon. Member Juan Edghill and Hon. Member Nandlall - in the latter case, waved something in the air, the circular, and claimed that we were asking the constitutional agencies to go to A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change's manifesto to plan their budgets. I do not mind the grandstanding, but when false information emanates, from none other than a Hon. Member, one begins to wonder what the agenda is. What is the agenda? Over time, with practice, training and exposure, we have been able to develop a budget circular that is comparable to anyone, anywhere in the world. It has come through the ranks. You know, I was looking back at the days when I did budgeting, when I was the budget officer in the 1980s right through to today. You can see the magnificence of the changes. Sometimes it is a worry that the budget agencies do not really study this circular before they actually start their preparations. If they did - it is like a work of art - it requires maybe a whole week of training on it.

This circular has at page 3, paragraph 2.7:

“The socio-economic and macro-financial policy objectives and priorities of Government are detailed in the APNU/AFC coalition manifesto, the framework of the Guyana Green State Development Strategy and budget speeches, 2015, 2016 and 2017. Further, the strategic objectives of Government Ministries as approved by Cabinet must serve to inform the programme content and performance indicators for each sector.”

The law states that constitutional agencies must follow the circular in the preparation of their budgets. This is a guide. How does that take away from the independence of our constitutional agencies? The Women and Gender Equality Commission, for example, which is a constitutional agency: where does it get its overarching vision and objective from? Does it pull them out of the sky? Or the umpteen members of the commission sit down at the table and say listen, “we are going to do ‘x’ and ‘y’?”

6.05 p.m.

They are part of a global, which is the country and this country has a certain vision set out by the ruling Government. It has a path to that vision and none of the independent agencies could say that they are off on some island, in abstract of division of the Government or the general objectives of the Government. Who? Is that what independence means? Are we not getting into the realm of the ridiculous where this is concerned? That is why you worry, sometimes, when you hear these things coming from knowledgeable, educated and supposedly responsible people, who, in Opposition, are supposedly a Government in waiting. Is this what you are asking people to buy in to? We are not telling anybody that they have to take the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Manifesto and use that as your budget plan. We are guiding you to say that, in the preparation of your budget and developing your overarching vision, this is where to go. If the APNU/AFC coalition Manifesto states that security is a high priority and this means that we would be spending more money on the Judiciary, law books and so on, just by way of example, is this not pleasant news and sweet music to the Judiciary? Does it then mean that they are following slavishly the APNU/AFC Manifesto"? No. They have an overarching vision. They understand and appreciate where the Executive arm would like to go and, as a Judicial arm, they could set their budgets and speak to security being a major issue in the country and where the Judiciary can play its role.

So, what is this nonsense about the Finance Secretary sending out circulars telling the Constitutional Agencies that they must go to APNU/AFC? Is this the level of debate that we are having in this House? The speed into nothingness within which this country and House are descending is unbelievable. So I would hope that this would stop and, maybe, for our last two Budgets that we would see some improvement. But I am not going to hold my breath. I would either drown or suffocate; I know this. So I would just hold on to play along as we see fit.

[**Mr. Bulkan:** Last two Budgets in the first term.]

That is right.

Then the Hon. Member, Juan Edghill, spoke about a US\$66 million loan for road rehabilitation and he insinuated that the Government might have been partisan because it picked Sophia. I know both the Pattersons, both Ministers, dealt somewhat with this matter but I propose to go a bit further because I have all the time.

A letter, dated the 30th November, 2017, was sent to me and signed by Juan Edghill, People's Progressive Party/Civil Member of Parliament. This letter was received by my office on the 6th

December, 2017, two days ago, as I came back in the country on the 6th December, 2017. As I was going through my mail the morning of the 7th December, 2017, before coming to Parliament, I came across this letter and I sent it to a Head of Department and said to please draft response by close of business the 8th December, 2017, which is today. The goodly Bishop, man of the cloth, without waiting for any response, comes to this House and spews out the same contents in this letter. He starts out by saying:

“Dear Sir,

We write to seek clarification, while expressing grave concern on the reformulation of the above referenced loan (an International Development Bank) IDB loan...”

Now, there is no International Development Bank. I do not know any International Development Bank.

...loan agreement valued at US\$66 million and the consequent impact it will have on communities which will not be serviced as a result of this loan.”

He said:

“According to a state media report, US\$30 million from the US\$66 million loan agreement will be expended on the Sophia, Patterson, Turkeyen, Cummings Lodge and Cummings Park areas and that the proposed works include providing subsidies for the construction of CORE homes and home improvement projects. It was also reported that the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA) held consultations with residents as part of the IDB requirement. We seek to confirm the accuracy of the above mentioned report and confirmation on the details on the reformulation of the loan.”

Then he went on to other things. And to make certain that I got it and act on it, he sent it to Luis Alberto Moreno, President of the “International Development Bank”. He then sends it to Jerry Christopher Butler, Executive Director, “International Development Bank” and then Sophie Makonnen, Country Representative, “International Development Bank”, the Guyana Office.

Let me give a bit of history on this loan. The original loan is for \$66 million. The project was called the Road Network Upgrade and Expansion Programme 2741-BL/GY and it was signed the

15th March, 2013. It was a multiple works project, where the representative sample of the loan was proposed as the Sheriff Street/Mandela Avenue Road. The budget for this road was US\$24 million or 41% of the civil works component of the loan. The other indicative works were the re-surfacing of Canals No.1 and 2 roads and the East Bank Berbice Road. The East Bank Berbice road was in this loan. Provisions were made for the following studies, the Linden/Soesdyke Highway, Linden/Ituni road, the Railway Embankment and the Wismar Bridge. However, the road did not provide for the study of the Diamond to Timehri upgrade. This study is being programmed under another loan. Remember, this loan was signed on the 15th March, 2013.

Between the 15th March and October, was the period that was used to make the loan effective and to do all the background work to get the loan into effectiveness. Then the first tender was launched in October, 2013. Advertisements for firms were sent out and, in December, 2013, the date for submissions closed. Eleven firms submitted bids but only four were shortlisted as having met the requirements. Nothing happened between December, 2013 and October, 2014.

In October, 2014, four shortlisted firms were invited to submit full Requests for Proposals called (RFPs). So the *twilding of thumbs* was taking place between December, 2013 and October, 2014. While they were *twilding thumbs*, the loan was attracting interest. From the time a loan is approved, it begins to attract interest and you would know that because if you borrow money from the bank and the bank says, yes, just sign on the dotted line, by time you walk out the bank, it starts to attract interest. It is no different with the multi-lateral banks. The deadline for the RFP's was December of 2014. Two Brazilian firms submitted bids, namely Envy Park Constructora and Ecmon Engenharia SA. Ecmon's bid was deemed to be substantially non-responsive. In subsequent due diligence, the other company, prior to being awarded the contract, it was discovered that the company had significantly falsified the bidding documents which they submitted.

In March, 2015, the bidding process was cancelled by the Work Services Group and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) not the International Development Bank. So, we are down to March, 2015 where nothing has happened. Loan signed March, 2013; two years after, nothing has happened on the loan. So we lost 20 months of the project execution due to this story.

The second tender was launched when we came into power in May, 2015. In July, 2015, the tender process was closed. Five bids were submitted and none of the five bids met the minimum requirements for their bids to be considered as responsive. By April, 2016, the entire bidding process was annulled.

So, between March, 2013 and April, 2016, three years afterwards, nothing has happened on this US\$66 million loan – not a single work was done on this loan. A third invitation to bid was launched in January, 2017, this year. March, 2017 the bid process was closed and, at this stage the programme was just one year away from its final disbursement deadline and, at that time, over US\$63 million had remained unused on the loan. And this particular loan has caused us so much grief in two ways: one, it was used against us in our next round of allocations by the IDB because they said we do not have capacity and we have so much moneys outstanding. It is difficult to allocate new moneys to us. That is what this loan and several other loans that we inherited from the last Government have done to this country, and we must know it. We must not have people coming here and talking this and that; we must know what took place.

I hope all the journalists are here because they do not tend to hang around when I have to speak. We must know it; four years had passed and US\$63 million was left on this loan and would have been written out had it not been for the persistence, perspicacity and every other adjective that you could find of this Government and its officials in partnership with the Inter-American Development Bank.

So, both the Bank and Government sat, *knocked heads together* and we decided to re-formulate the loan in order to save this money so that it could benefit the nation. We had to find a quick disbursing project because they did not have the time to go through all that preparation, studies, this, that and so on, and we hit upon housing. The housing project had to be done along the contiguous boundaries of the original loan which was the Sheriff Street/Mandela Avenue Corridor.

6.20 p.m.

That is why you are hearing about areas like Patterson, Sophia, *et cetera*. This has nothing to do... They know what they did. That is why they are trying every time to look and see what is going on and then saying, discrimination. There are a number of communities in need and we are

sorry for them, but we can reassure you that we are working on every community that we could look at. They suffered for 23 years under the previous Government and, yet, the previous Administration is coming here like *Judas* thinking that they are the saviours of these people. The people are suffering so much and yet they want to be their saviours. I would like to see the community that suffered for 23 years and listen keenly to them.

Just recently, on October, 2017, 10 bidders responded. The Sheriff Street/Mandela Avenue Project was awarded on 27th November, 2017 to Sino Hydro Corporation for the sum of US\$31,027,627.36, for the entire lot 6, which stretches from the Rupert Craig Highway on the East Coast Demerara right down to the East Bank Demerara at the bypass at the Distribution Services Limited (DSL), where you would turn to go on to the East Bank. So that entire road would be rehabilitated. The Hon. Minister of Public Infrastructure has indicated already that the Sheriff Street/Mandela Road will have even more features than were originally intended.

The expansion and rehabilitation of the Sheriff Street/Mandela Avenue Road will be US\$31 million. This is US\$7 million more than was provided for under the original loan. The original loan had US\$24 million and now it has gone to US\$31 million for this entire road. The Programme has been remodelled, redesigned and reengineered from the first contemplated iteration. In terms of the revised scope of works, it will accommodate additional travel lanes, bicycle lanes and parking lanes; installation of concrete curbs, sidewalks and medians; installation of pipe drainage system, embankments, new pedestrian bridges and renewing and upgrading of culverts, traffic management and traffic calming measured signals, street lighting, traffic signage, road markings and new guard rails. Pedestrian features will include special accessibility designs for people with disabilities.

The housing component of the project, which is called quality housing and basic infrastructure, has two components. The first one is called affordable and sustainable housing. This sub-component supports affordable housing solutions for the lower-income households, (a) - home improvement subsidies: these would be focused on basic improvements, including repairs to roofs, walls, floors, expansion to address overcrowding, sanitation improvements including pit latrines and water closets. The subsidy would be capped at US\$2,500 and (b) core homes: these target vulnerable households, including those led by single parents and those living in structures that are not habitable with a minimum of 400 square feet at an estimated cost of US\$20,000

each. These two sub-components are similar in scope and content to interventions used under the Low Income Strategy (LIS) 1 and 2 and the current hinterland housing programme.

Under the second sub-component, which is called consolidation of existing housing schemes, this follows a multiple works approach and will finance the completion or rehabilitation of infrastructure and services on housing sites in the project areas. Specific interventions include: one, rationalising and alignment of roads, including removal of utilities; two, grading and base preparation of roads; three, paving of roads in asphaltic concrete; four, construction of reinforced concrete drains; five, grassing and other forms of soil stabilisation; six, construction of reinforced concrete sidewalks; seven, installation of street lights; and, eight, construction or rehabilitation of civic infrastructure such as sports, recreational facilities and community centres. There is nothing in these interventions that was not done in the earlier loan.

The previous loan had studies earmarked. What is the new thinking? The Linden/Soesdyke Highway is now being earmarked and to be completed with alternative resources. I can tell you that we are working assiduously with an international development partner, which is a multilateral development bank, to get a fast disbursing loan that will be targeted to the resurfacing of the Linden/Soesdyke Highway. The Linden/Ituni Road is currently under discussion. We have not identified a source of financing, but we will, in our discussions with the multilateral bank, put this project at the top of the priority list. The railway embankment, as you can see, is being done in-house by the Ministry of Public Infrastructure and the Wismar Bridge is being programmed under the new Caribbean Development Bank facility. All aspects that were in the previous \$66 million loan are still under active consideration, even though we have taken \$30 million of that loan and saved it and placed it into housing so that everyone will benefit - housing will benefit, all the other studies will benefit, the roads will benefit, *et cetera*. In terms of Canals No. 1 and 2, they were also, under consideration in the \$66 million loan. We have the following sums in the 2017 Budget: for Canal No. 1 \$40 million was programmed and, for Canal No. 2, \$30 million was programmed. These sums will be used for the following: milling of the roads, procurement of crusher run and asphalt concrete. In the 2018 Budget, the following sums are proposed: for Canal No. 1 - \$34.7 million and, for Canal No. 2, there is \$34.7 million and these sums will be used for the completion of the sections which are the 4 kilometres on each road and which started in 2017.

On the East Bank Berbice Road, by now you should know a lot about it because the Hon. Minister Patterson has talked about it. That road could not be done under this US\$66 million loan because the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) stated that the loan was too late, including its studies, so it could not be done. They said that we had to find some other resource. We could not wait to talk with any other development bank about this matter, so with *pain in his eyes* and with the *bigness of heart*, the Hon. Minister Patterson came to me and said that we have to do something. I said, yes, because the last Government promised the people the road and could not deliver. We promised the people a road and we must deliver. So, immediately, we found half of the money and we said, “Do not worry about this. Let the Work Services Goup do it and save some money.” They have half of the money, which is \$600 and something million, and they have gotten the second half of the programme in the 2018 Budget. To the East Bank Berbice people: if you are listening, your road is on the way.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, we do not just promise; we deliver and this is what this Budget is setting out to do. It is not *hot air* and talk; it is the same thing you were hearing from 2015 when this Government came into office. We are being consistent in what we are saying. We will take our *blows* but we will strive to make certain that whatever we promise, we can deliver. Where we cannot deliver all, we will say where we shortfall and we will press on in the next round of things. And that is how it must be done. We are not coming here to waste time and see who will win a debate based on what they said or what they did not say. At the end of the day, the ordinary person in the street does not care who won the debate; they care whether they are better off after the debate and that is what we have to concentrate on. Winning the debate is fine. If you do not win, that is still fine. You have to still go out there and deliver, and that is what must be our focus.

I will now say that the rest was not worth commenting on at this stage because it was more of the same. I go to, obviously, the main speaker, the Hon. Member, Bharrat Jagdeo. I met a few journalists on the corridor just before we resumed and I said to them that I knew a definition of torture which I cannot share in this House at this stage because it is a bit raunchy. But torture has been redefined today by attempting to listen to the Hon. Member, Bharrat Jagdeo, in his three-hour rampage and three hours of mindless and aimless ranting. But from what little I can

glimpse, I will seek... There is a lot to rebut but, like I said, it will be difficult to do so, at this hour. Nevertheless, I will try to rebut as much as I can, tonight.

Before I get to the Budget aspects, he mentioned something about the Signing Bonus. This seems to be a big issue because someone in the financial circle leaked a document. I do not know why they are calling it leaked. If we did not want a document to be in the open, we would have kept it under secret and made certain that only certain persons saw it. However it was there in the open. The letter that was put in today's newspaper was there since 2016. As can be seen, it was written in 2016 and it remained an open Government document for all that time. Ask yourself why it suddenly appeared in the newspapers today. We do not care. If whoever leaked it felt that that is the approach to how Government's business is done, well so be it. It is out there, but what does it say? "Opened an account for signing bonus." They said that I lied to the press or lied to someone else. I did not lie to anybody. There were two questions asked of me regarding this signing bonus and all of them were ill-directed questions and they gave me the opportunity to say nothing and I said nothing. One person asked, "Mr. Ram said that the Government received this signing bonus of US\$20 million." I commented, "Twenty million dollars? I do not know anything about a US\$20 million signing bonus, but I will go and find out. It must be a figment of somebody's imagination."

If the people had their recorder, they would have heard exactly what was said. Nobody came back to ask me if I searched. I am not under obligation to give anybody any information that they did not ask for. It is not a court but, still, if you ask me a question, I will answer you directly. You asked that Mr. Ram said that the Government got a signing bonus of US\$20 million. I said, "It must be a figment of somebody's imagination. I will go and find out." I went and found out and there was no signing bonus of US\$20 million. Up to today, there is no signing bonus of US\$20 million. So I do not know what is the big *jumping up* and all of these kinds of things.

I believe a second journalist, Mr. Adam Harris, my good friend, who I have known for a long time (and who does not do anything for me, so do not think anything), called me and said, "Minister, I just came back from Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo's press conference and he said that the Government got an advance of US\$20 million from Exxon." I said, "Buddy, we have never approached Exxon nor have we received any advance of US\$20 million." As of now, as I speak, that remains the story. We have not received nor approached Exxon for an advance of US\$20

million or any figure. A letter, in today's newspapers, just speaks of a signing bonus but nobody asked me whether the Government received a signing bonus. They had a specific figure attached to it, a signing bonus of US\$20 million. My specific response is no and that remains, up to today, the same thing.

6.35 p.m.

We have not received a signing bonus of US \$20 million. So, they could *jump high and jump low* and, if that is what my former student thinks he can use as the basis of saying, "Hon. Member Trotman should resign," then it would take a lot more than that to move me. I know why he wants me to go, but I will continue to be *a thorn in his side* while I remain in this House; I am not going anywhere. Try something else because I am not going anywhere. Then he speaks about the sovereign wealth fund and goes through a history about 2015 and that they were promised, in 2015, a sovereign wealth fund. We were cogitating the idea of a sovereign wealth fund in 2015 because we had just heard that we got some oil. Is that not so? We were cogitating if it would be good to set up a sovereign wealth fund. That thing got going in 2016 under the auspices of the Hon. Minister of Natural Resources and we had invited the Commonwealth Secretariat to assist us in that regard. For the most part, the Hon. Minister Trotman was running with that and when we went to Uganda, last year, and saw what Uganda was doing, and so on, we looked at the draft that the Commonwealth Secretariat gave us and we thought that it needed a lot of work, including best practices and places that were close to our situation, in which Uganda was one of those places. Hon. Minister Trotman took it upon himself to do some redrafting and, in January, 2017, he handed two drafts over to me—his redraft plus the original, that is, the Commonwealth Secretariat's draft.

I invited a number of our development partners to take a look at the Commonwealth Secretariat's draft and see how we can improve it and strengthen it and so on. They have kindly provided extensive comments, which we handed over to the Commonwealth Secretariat and I can report to you that the Hon. Gentleman is due in the country this Monday. He will be sitting with our team, our local, inter-ministerial team, and will be going through the latest draft, together with all the comments that the different partners have put together, to see whether we could get another draft that we can *sink our teeth in*, so to speak. That is where we are.

In the meanwhile, His Excellency had thought it best that while we will be going through all of that - it will be a pain and maybe - we should put a green paper out there on what our thinking is about the sovereign wealth fund and how we see it evolving. So, we are working on that green paper, which we hope to get to the Cabinet sometime in the new year and our thinking is to get this green paper into the Parliament by, say, the middle of next year or thereabout. The thinking is that we can get the legislation into the Parliament before the end of next year. People want to know how... all of this rush about the...

The sovereign wealth fund legislation does not have any money. It only means something when the money starts flowing and there is nowhere to put it. That is when the sovereign wealth fund has to be put in place. The sovereign wealth fund being in place in 2015 does not mean anything to us. There is nothing to put in it so it does not mean anything to us. Last time I heard, the oil will be flowing sometime in the first quarter of 2020. This is December, 2017. We have to get it right because the Hon. Member, Mr. Trotman, brought a Bill to this House and, before the ink could even dry or before one word could have been read, it got *a blast of hot air* with persons saying: *“the Bill aint good, it aint got this, it aint got that”*. Everybody wakes up, finds something some place and says *“that Bill got that thing inside”*. We have been having semi-autonomous agencies in this country under different Governments for all of these years; for all of these years we have been having semi-autonomous agencies, some more powerful than others.

My understanding is that the Petroleum Bill takes the best practice together with what our law here is. But, you are hearing, “The Minister is going to fire the Board. He is going to hire the Board. He will hire the Chairman.” You could check around at many of the places that we have; that is what we do. If the Board has to fire itself, then somebody has to be in charge; the Corporation or the Semi-autonomous agency cannot die. That is what we have. It is the same thing that you hear about local content legislation. Everybody wakes up every day and finds something in some place and says, *“Your legislation aint got this, your legislation aint got that.”* Let me say, very clearly, that we could have the best legislation in the world and it could have no faults, but that does not guarantee a place at the table for all of our local people because, at the end of the day, if you do not get it right, then no amount of legislation will help you. If people want oranges of a certain size and you are growing oranges of all different sizes, then they would not buy it from you. No matter how much of a local content it is, they would not buy it from you.

If they want skilled technicians on their rig, with how many years' experience and so on, they are not going to pick anyone from here. They are not going to try that. Out there, when we went on that rig, we could see the precision and the efficiency with which they move and they have to do it. They only have one chance on that rig. If we want to be a part of this cake that is emerging, then we have to stop talking and get to some doing. We can sit down and talk all day about how we got this and we can bring in this expert, that expert... Every expert will be brought in. Everybody is an expert. But guess what? A couple days ago I read that Mr. Indar, who is the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI) President, saying that he looked at the registry of all of these companies and has seen all of these foreign companies being registered, but he is not seeing them being aligned with the locals here. That is why he wants the local content legislation in place. Tell me how the two can go together, seeing all of these foreign firms being registered at the Deeds Registry...and if the legislation was in place, they would have had to come to you. Nobody is going to come to you if you cannot give them something.

Since last year, when everybody was chatting and doing all kinds of things, I went to various places, whether it is the Guyana Manufacturing and Services Association (GSMA) dinner or the Embassy in Washington, and I said, "Do not wait on local content legislation. Go out there and scout for people with whom you can form partnerships." But there seems to be an aversion in this country, especially by a certain class of people, to partnerships and to public companies. Then it will be said that *these people coming in here and they aint want to thing with local people*. Do you want to go with them? We do not have the technology. We do not have the finances. We do not have the human capacity. So how are we going to compete side by side with these people who have all these years of experience, knowledge and everything? We have to creep before we walk, so creep by forming partnerships with these people who know, so that you can get a toe into the business. Learn the business, accept the technology transfer and gain some financing before you can get out on your own. The idea is stop all of this talk, talk, talk—all of this talk all day about legislation, legislation, legislation. While we are awaiting legislation, as he rightly said, a number of foreign firms are being registered.

Another person said that the Chinese have US\$10 million of Public Service Investment Programmes (PSIP) contracts, as if we called them and said, "Mr. China Company, take this one." This is a different Government. You have to work hard to get what you want. The

procurement system is as open as anybody wants to see it. It is far more open and far more rigorous. If the Chinese firms are coming and are winning the bids, especially the international bids, then what can you do? It is not to throw up your hands. Again, as I said, we have to find creative ways around this. These firms are bringing a level of technology that we do not have. They are bringing a level of efficiency that we do not have. Let us *call a spade a spade*. The typical example is the Guyana Marriott Hotel Georgetown. At what stage would the Marriott have been today if it were being built by a local company? This is not chastising the local company; this is a reality situation. We have to *get off of our laurels*, whether public sector or private sector, and get with the programme because nobody is going to hand us anything anymore. It is a different Government and we have to go out there and work for what we want.

I am saying that I am a local content person. I want locals and, in fact, my Colleagues will tell you that I am pressing in the Cabinet for Treasury money to be used, first and foremost, to buy local things and then move on. It is horrible trying to find a bottle of local water. Can you imagine that trying to find a bottle of water at our only major international airport - because the other one is a regional airport - there is no local water on sale? Would you believe the water that is on sale there comes from Jamaica? Can you believe it? The water being sold at the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA), in the shop that is there, comes from Jamaica. There is no local water, no Banks DIH Ltd. bottled water nor any Demerara Distillers Ltd. (DDL) water. What is wrong with us? And we are talking about local content. There is no water that tastes better than Banks DIH Ltd's water or DDL's water, and I refuse to drink foreign water, unless I am out of the country. What is wrong with us? I went to the Corentyne; someone invited me there, and I have witnesses - the Hon. Minister Harmon and Mr. Gaskin. We went there— water. All of those persons who went up there said that prices gone up there and the Government must do this and that. And then I went up there and I said, "I listened to everyone, but are you listening to yourselves?" I said, "Just take one look around. What do you see?" Nobody said if they were seeing anything. I said, "Look at the water. It comes from Suriname or someplace." There was not a single bottle of water from Guyana, and they are harassing the Government about this incentive and that incentive and to buy local and so on. But they are not fair in whatever they say. How will we survive, as a country, if we think so poorly about ourselves? How are we going to survive? It pains me, personally, as I go around because I am a 1970's baby and I know what this country can do in the face of adversity. Many of us who grew up in the

1970's know about the adversities of the 1970's and that it brought out the best in us. It brought out the worst in some of us too, but, when it came to manufacturing, industry, and so on, it brought out some of the best in us. Today, you can still see one or two tapirs in East Berbice, and that is a local machine. You can still see one or two tapirs, so I know that we have it, but what is it that is keeping us locked down in there? What is it?

Other people can come here complaining of Guyana going backwards and of anemic growth and so on. I was in the Bahamas over the weekend and there was this person who came up to me and said, "The only country in the Caribbean that has a future is Guyana." That is gospel; I am not lying. That is what the man came and told me. He said that the only country in the Caribbean that has a future is Guyana and he indicated that whatever it takes, he is trying to get here next year. What is it that these people are seeing that we are not seeing? We have the Leader of the Opposition coming here and breathing his fire and brimstone, saying "*Doomsday. Oh God. It falling down. The country bruck up.*" Is this what we are doing to our own country? In the name of what? I think it is time that we, as a people, begin to believe in ourselves, love ourselves and stop this internecine strife and come together and move this Nation forward. I believe that it can happen.

6.50 p.m.

Do you know why? It is because, in an impromptu little talk that I had with three female members of the Opposition, yesterday albeit, on full bellies, perhaps, I do not know - I passed by and I said, "hi" and so on, and we talked about sugar. I was amazed about their sincerity, passion and the resolve to find solutions to the plight of the sugar workers. I said to them:

"Both of us seem to be on the same wave length because we have the same passion over here too. What is stopping us from forming a nationalist view on a national problem?"

I said:

"Listen, we have two national problems right now – we have a border problem and we have the sugar problem. These are national problems - huge."

If you could find the time to say that you are supporting on the border issue, then what is the problem about the other national problem? The sugar workers are your supporters, but is it not a

national problem? Are we going to sit back and bemoan the fact that 2,000 or 7,000 people would be fired? It makes a good headline, but these are 7,000 and 2,000 human beings. Should we not come together, nationally, and help these people? Why do we have to play politics with the lives of these people? Why? You have them marching up and down with placards in their hands and not earning any money while sugar is being destroyed in the ground. The cane is disappearing in the ground and the juice is getting, whatever. Twenty-two thousand man-days lost, at a time when every penny counts for the sugar workers. Is that fair to them? We were at this since last year. In fact, I will come to sugar in a general way and I will show you how much moneys were lost in sugar under the previous Government. All the crocodile tears they cried today, they ought to be ashamed that they are using the plight of the workers to promote and foster their own ends.

It is a national problem and we have to stop the politicking and get together to solve this national problem because there would not be any winners at the end of the day. All of us might be consumed in the Carterian sense, if we continue on this road to perdition, instead of on the road to prosperity.

While I am on sugar, I want to disclose a couple of facts that seem to have been hidden. This whole business of sugar, as we well know, I do not have to go and repeat it, but sugar has been a main stay of this country for quite a while. It is going through its pains at the moment. I would not say its last breath, but it is going through a lot of pain. At best, what we could seek to do is to try to ease the pain but I would not stand here and claim that life would be all hunky-dory at the end of it. Structural adjustments of these kinds happen all over, whether it is in Linden or in Pittsburgh in the United States of America. When the steel industry went under it cause a lot of pain. Now, we are hearing, "What are you doing for the workers?"

How long ago did the European Union (EU) say that the protocol life was coming to an end? That was over a decade ago. We stubbornly thought that we could *buck the horse*; that we could be like Australia, Brazil, Thailand - or wherever else produces sugar of any consequence in this world - and so investment in the factory at Skeldon. I do not know. They said that there were studies and so forth. Maybe they had done studies for putting the factory there. I do not know if they were studies as to whether it was a viable proposition at the end of the day.

There is the Skeldon Sugar Estate where a lot of borrowing took place to build it. In fact, on the loans alone, over US\$125 million was borrowed. Roughly about US\$29 million was borrowed from the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), another US\$40 million was borrowed from the China Exim Bank and US\$56 million in a combination of World Bank loans and Government of Guyana Reserves, making a total of \$125 million of borrowed moneys.

We need to add the amounts that were put in by GuySuCo to get what the Skeldon Sugar Estate is. The overall project for the Sugar Modernisation Project would have cost US\$200 million. The factory cost \$125 million, plus borrowed moneys, plus whatever GuySuCo would have put in. For the press, I have the numbers. I could give it to you, if you want them later.

Not a penny of this money is being repaid by GuySuCo. It does not have the wherewithal, and so this is being met from taxpayers' funds, the very taxes that the Hon. Leader of the Opposition said we were raking in. I will come to that soon. He made it sound as if we were this ghoulis monster, grabbing and eating everything in our pathway. We were left with these debts. This is one of literally hundreds of these dead projects, which were left for this Government to clean up. This is not the first time that I am mentioning it and it probably would not be the last, as long as they come here with their pretence. We have to say it over and over again that this is money wasted in the Skeldon Sugar Estate.

Do you know what? GuySuCo, together with two banks, and I probably would not call their names, lent moneys to the farmers to expand cane farming in the Skeldon area. One bank gave 546 loans and all are non-performing. This means that nobody is paying back. The other bank gave even more, it gave 869 loans to farmers and 800 of those loans are non-performing. This particular bank is trying to ask me what the Government is doing to help. I told the bank that it was a commercial decision. I need help myself. Everybody is asking me for help. I do not have the money. They need to solve that problem with the farmers.

As long as these farmers owe the banks, they are doomed. The banks are not about to lend them more money. It is the same Leader of the Opposition who, in his presentation, spoke about non-performing loans increasing at the banks. [Mr. Bulkan: His legacy.] It is his legacy that has caused the non-performing loans. It is not this Government. People must know the truth. The two biggest areas of non-performing loans in the banking system are housing and

agriculture - specifically sugar and rice. Why are you making it out as if this situation here is causing all these non-performing loans? For the poor sugar farmers, we have to find some way, maybe, not now, but we have to find some way of trying to help them because they cannot pay back these loans. At this time, we cannot help them because we do not have the room to help them. We would love to help them.

As the Leader of the Opposition said, the Consolidated Fund has \$60 billion or whatever figure he called, I am sure he did not tell an untruth where that is concerned, but that is the reality. It is in deficit. We never hid it. That is why we cannot do the kinds of things that we would like to do. We would have to kill that deficit and bring it down to a manageable level. I am in sympathy with these farmers. They took the moneys in good faith and there is no Skeldon. Even if they had the cane, there is no way for the Skeldon Sugar Estate to grind it and for them to get the moneys to pay back. That is causing the non-performing loans to rise.

All the different loans, if you look at housing and I do not have to do the Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Communities, Ms. Patterson's work, she and the Minister of Communities also have made the point about all the house lots that they tried to translate into houses. How many are unoccupied – half or more than half? It means that persons did not go to any bank for loans.

Of the ones that are occupied, several have two or four things in the air or are abandoned. They may have been to a bank, I do not know. Others went to a bank and got loans which are almost finished and they have difficulties repaying the bank and so on. It is like a housing bubble. I said that the bubble would have burst 10 years ago, virtually, just about when I was leaving the Ministry of Finance. I saw it coming. It has nothing to do with the economy today and so on.

All of those problems could be seen. It can be seen in the Berbice River Bridge. That contract should come to this National Assembly. I hope that we would bring it here to let people see what the previous Government had agreed to in relation to the Berbice River Bridge. People would see what the tariff for crossing the bridge should have been today, in 2017. The people in Berbice should not be fooled. That is what they agreed to. We must bring all here, not only the contracts with the Guyana Goldfields Inc. In the name of transparency, let everything be brought here.

It was a bit sad to hear that protocol which everyone thought should have been inviolate, under the World Trade Organization (WTO) rules, it was not deemed to be so and it had to be brought

to an end. From 2006, the European Union entered into arrangements with the Government of Guyana under what was called the EU-Accompanying Measures, in which a lot of moneys were transferred to the Government of Guyana. It was to be divided between a fix tranche and a variable tranche. Under the fixed tranche, that is where the Government had to meet certain pre-conditions to do with macro economy and its public financial management programme and its PMA, governance issues, accountability issues and so on. To the credit of the Government then, they never failed any one of those targets and so moneys were disbursed, in each year, identical to what was agreed to. For example, in 2006, EUR€3.27 million was the fixed tranche and that was disbursed. In 2007, for fixed tranche, EUR€13.213 million was agreed to and that was disbursed. In 2008, EUR€12.086 million was agreed to and disbursed.

7.05 p.m.

In 2009, EUR€8.9 million was agreed to and disbursed. In 2010, EUR€9.3 million was agreed to and disbursed, and in 2011 EUR€12.35 million was agreed to and disbursed. In 2012, EUR€4.64 million was agreed to and disbursed. In 2013, EUR€6.9 million was agreed to and disbursed. In 2014 and 2015, you know the story, the proroguing of the Parliament, this and that and no moneys. But, in 2016, EUR€6.9 million was agreed to – that was EUR€6.9 million which should have been given since 2014, but in 2016 it was agreed to and disbursed.

Between 2006 and 2017, EUR€77.559 million was agreed to and disbursed, under the fixed tranche. Under the variable tranche, GuySuCo, this is the GuySuCo component, in other words, when I say the GuySuCo component, I mean that this is where GuySuCo had to meet some benchmarks for the disbursement. It does not mean that it should not have access to both the fixed and the variable tranches. What I am saying is that the Government had to meet some global benchmarks – the variable tranche and GuySuCo had to meet some specific GuySuCo benchmarks.

In 2006, the variable tranche agreed to was EUR€1.63 million and that was disbursed. In 2007, the variable tranche was EUR€13.213 million, but only EUR€6.06 million was disbursed. GuySuCo failed to meet the targets. It failed to meet over 50% of the targets and, therefore, less than 50% was disbursed. And by the way, it is not in the pool anymore, it is gone – bye bye, see you later.

GuySuCo, in 2007, lost over EUR€7 million. In 2008, EUR€12.086 million was agreed to but only EUR€7.252 million was disbursed – another EUR€5.0 million, bye, see you later, gone. In 2009, EUR€8.9 million was agreed to, but only EUR€6.264 million was disbursed, another EUR€3 million plus gone. In 2010, EUR€9.3 million was agreed to, but only EUR€3.255 million was disbursed. In 2011, EUR€12.35 million was agreed to and only EUR€7.41 million was disbursed. In 2012, EUR€18.56 million was agreed to and disbursed. In 2013, EUR€16.1 million was agreed, but only EUR€12.884 million was disbursed. And in 2016, which should have been 2014, EUR€20.74 million was agreed to, but only EUR€17.524 million was disbursed. In the aggregate, EUR€12.879 million was agreed to, but only EUR€1.385 million was disbursed. So, GuySuCo lost critical funding in excess of EUR€30 million. You must know this.

Today, these crying babies are coming here and using the sugar workers for their own ends, but they would not tell you what the story is. Now you know why, when the Government came in May 2015, the man who was getting US\$35,000 per month, he dropped it and ran and said “*Yall tek it.*” He dropped it and he was gone. That same week, sugar workers would not have been paid, had it not been for this Government that came in with all the problems that it came in and met. We had to find money to pay, to give to GuySuCo, to pay those workers for that week and that month – from day one, these people who come here and pretend that they have the sugar workers’ interest at heart. They talk about fat cats and 50% pay to 13 ministers - not 13, they said everybody. They were paying one man US\$35,000 while GuySuCo was going down and could not have met its own variable targets and losing EUR€30 million over the years. The ordinary sugar worker was being used and abused. We had to find \$12 billion and from since that day there has been no let up. We must know these stories because we get beaten and we get licks and all kinds of things because these people are able to get the press. They have their own and they have the sympathisers and they run with these stories. Nobody does the homework. We have the figures. You can come and get them whenever you want them, if you are honest and true to yourself. This will not appear tomorrow in the *Guyana Times* newspaper, but at least it will find its way in some news.

Let the people out there know that it is crocodile tears. They do not have the interest of sugar workers; they want to be sure that the workers are going to vote for them in 2020. That is all. They do not have the interest of the sugar workers on hand. The workers themselves must not be

fooled. This Government has pumped \$12 billion in 2015; \$11 billion in 2016; and \$9 billion in 2017, for a total of \$32 billion. In addition, in 2017, we have facilitated the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CHPA) buying \$2 billion worth of land. That is \$11 billion. We have just signed onto the guarantee for GuySuCo to go to a bank to get \$2.5 billion to carry it to the end of the year. Nothing is going on in GuySuCo.

For this year alone, when GuySuCo is going to produce, maybe even less than 150,000 tons, but we are holding our breathe. We are hoping that it is 150,000 tons because we do not want to damage the growth rate too much more. When it is going to produce 150,000 tons or thereabout, their take, collectively, from the Treasury and related ally treasury matters, because the guarantee that we gave today to the bank, it is us who are going to have to find the \$2.5 billion to pay the bank. We are just buying time, as they say.

For this year 2017, a total of \$13.5 billion would have been transferred to GuySuCo, at a time when it is producing the lowest amount of sugar since we came into Office.

We do not cry, we stick to our guns and we proceed. They were gleeful or so they appeared. Let me take it back – they appeared gleeful when the premium market in Venezuela was lost for the rice. We were told to negotiate with these people. The people who told us, when they went there, and we had in our company, Mr. Da Silva, who was the Ambassador, we had in our company Mr. Jagnarine Singh, who was the General Manager of Guyana Rice Development Board's (GRDB), and also in our company was Ms. Donna Yearwood. They were all there as witnesses when two high ranking representatives– the Head of Petr6leos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA) and a representative of PetroCaribe – told us in no uncertain term. They said, Mr. Minister [*Inaudible*] and so on, we told the last set of people who were here that we do not want any more rice from Guyana. They said so, and they named both of them. One of them was Ms. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett and the other one was Dr. Leslie Ramsammy. They tried, but the Venezuelans said, no. They gave me a nice statue of Chavez and sent me on my way.

I came back and I reported, but these people continued to bring this false thing to the House, saying that we lost the rice market. I saw the *Kaieteur News*, the Peeping Tom and all of them with this thing about us losing the rice market and we must negotiate with Venezuela. Let me ask something, they say *Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel*: Do we not have enough

scoundrels in this country? Where has our patriotism gone? Maybe, we should begin to question how this sweetheart rice deal came out of the blues. It is because, and look carefully, as soon as this Government came in, they pulled the deal – it died and left a whole set of farmers in the lurch. Again, to the rescue, this young two/three months old Government, we had to find billions of dollars to rescue the rice farmers. And if I am not mistaking, I believe even up to this day, they may have rice rotting on the wharf - those poor farmers. They abrogated the existing deal even before it came to an end. That was how bad it was. And we were told to go talk to the people to get back the rice market. Where is our sense of patriotism?

Today, we have been able to recover – markets in Mexico, Panama, and Cuba. In fact, one, Mr. Nand Persaud, I believe, is actually building a mill in Cuba. That is where we are today. We salute all the rice farmers. Again, a lot of people who are claiming that they are on their side, but it is this Government who has proven to you that we have your interests at heart.

We do not sit idly by, twiddling our thumbs and mindlessly wondering what the Hon. Leader of the Opposition would be coming with next. We do not have time for that. These are the last times that we try to answer these. We do not have enough time; we need 26 hours in a day, but we only have 24 hours and we still have to sleep.

The Hon. Leader of the Opposition is making a wave over the removal of two tables: Table One and Table Two in the *Estimates of the Public Sector*. Now, I do not know if, like Rip Van Winkle, the Hon. Member has just awoken. It is because to remove a table, it has to run its life for three years. If the table is going to be removed in 2018, that means its first life started to end in 2016, when one column would disappear, and in 2017 the next column would disappear and then in 2018, there is nothing, so, the table does not appear in the *Estimates of the Public Sector*. He is saying that we are hiding some Consolidated Fund balance. I do not know if he has any sense of economic history, as it relates to Guyana, but these tables came through the ages from the 1950s and so on. One would note that of the two tables, one had marked “Consolidated Fund Current” and “Consolidated Fund Capital”.

7.20 p.m.

We do not operate any such Consolidated Funds anymore. We operate one Consolidated Fund; all revenues must go in and expenditures come out. These two tables in a sense were misnomers,

so we aged them out and we removed them. This is all part of a process of reconfiguring the estimates into friendlier estimates. I watched all of you, including our people on our side, after the consideration of budget is finished, I cannot find the estimates on anyone's desk. We do not want that anymore. We want the estimates to be there on your desk and you are consulting with it all through the year, not only during the budget time. To do that, we are trying to make the estimates a bit friendlier. We realise that it is a bit heavy going. We are trying to remove from the estimates tables which we consider not to be germane to the passage of the *Estimates of the Public Sector*.

How could we hide the Consolidated Fund balance? You could call the Bank of Guyana. It is not a State secret. Just as how you could procure the letter, you could procure the balance in the Consolidated Fund. The Auditor General does not *make joke* in putting it out there – "...and the Consolidated Fund balance is even further in deficit and so on". It is there. It is your right to inspect it. We cannot hide it from you. So what is this big noise? Is that all you could do? To come here and waste time, talking about two inconsequential tables. If you want the Consolidated Fund budget, call the Governor tomorrow and he will give you it. Call the Finance Secretary and he will give you the Consolidated Fund deficit. He already knows it. We do not hide anything. These are public accounts; they are public records. If you are having a problem getting it, you call my office and I will make certain I will get it done. We do not hide anything. It is out there. If you want to know how much is in the Ministry of Legal Affairs' account, call us if they do not want to give you. These are public records. They are not to be hidden.

This is not the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPPC) Government, where one had to call the Office of the President to get rainfall data out of the Hydrometeorological Office. What I am telling you is true. At one time, you had to call the Office of the President to get Hydrometeorological data. The people were so scared to give you the information. This was top secret information to know whether it would rain tomorrow or not. Unbelievable, but true. We do not have anything to hide. If you want the Consolidated Fund balance, it is right there. If you want it by Monday, I could bring it to the House and give it to you. It is right there. You call up the Governor or the Finance Secretary and say that the Minister said in the National Assembly that you could get it. You will get it. We do not have to hide anything and come here wasting

time talking about two tables disappeared from the estimates; non-germane tables disappeared from the estimates and you are making a big noise over it.

The Hon. Member talks about the deficit of Central Government increasing. Well, we did not hide it either. But wait a minute. Is the deficit of the Central Government increasing? Which deficit is the Hon. Member talking about? Then I look back again. He is talking about the nominal deficit. Alright, the nominal deficit is increasing, but any economist worth *his or her salt*, would tell you that that figure is misleading. What you have to do to compare is the relative deficit. That is the nominal divided by the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the current year. That will give you the Deficit/GDP Ratio and that will give you an indication as to whether your finances are deteriorating or not. It is because it may be expected that if your GDP is growing, you are able to maybe borrow a bit more to expand the economy. And so, you incur a bigger deficit today for a bigger expansion tomorrow. It is simple.

We are not hiding that the nominal deficit maybe growing. That is fine, as long as the relative deficit, for comparison purposes is within the ballpark. But notice: he did not jump up and say what was the relative deficit. Maybe he did not know. All my students - ask the Hon. Member of Legal Affairs, he will tell you - how I teach.

The Hon. Member spoke about the debt. He admitted that the debt had declined, went back to, only the good Lord knows when (1980 something) and said that 900% plus is in some affidavit of the Hon. Greenidge. I heard that in 2014, I was checking through the *Hansard* and so on. It was probably in 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018. And you could write it down: in 2019 and 2020, it will come back again, in excess of 900%. Hon. Member, Mr. Greenidge, said that it was in excess of 900% but that his (Jagdeo's) Government brought it down to whatever it is.

I am not going to go back till there. What I do know is that it was around 48% when we entered in 2015, roughly around there and, today, it is 45%. That is a stat. The Hon. Member might say, alright, it came down, from in excess of 900% to 48%, well you take the 45%. But, do not take the 45% as yet. It only is 45% because of cancellation of promissory notes under the PetroCaribe arrangement. How do you like that one?

I will tell you this much, the Petrocaribe arrangement, this is how it should have worked. Let us say the oil cost US\$1. Let us say that the price at which oil is, suggests that the ratio that will

kick in is that you will pay 40 cents and 60 cents will go into the PetroCaribe Fund. The ratio could change, depending on the price for the oil. There are different ratios and so on. But, let us stick to that one. So, 60 cents goes to the PetroCaribe Fund. Every posting - I think they call it that - every time a shipment lands here, it lands at a different price or combination, depending on what is the World Market price. These moneys are going into this Fund. Every land in is a new contract and the contract is standard. I think it is 12 years. Is it 12 years? It is 20 years [Hon. Member: It is twenty-five years.] It is 25 years. How many years' grace? It is 25 years and two years' grace. So be careful here. A landing comes today. In other words, a boat goes to Venezuela, picks up fuel and comes to Guyana, and that is a landing. When it lands here, you pay 40 cents to Venezuela and 60 cents goes into the Fund. That contract you sign – promissory note; 25 years and two years' grace. Are you with me? [Hon. Member: Yes.] Good. The next week a boat goes over and comes back. Let me stay with 40 and 60 cents. Sixty cents goes into the account another contract is formed – a promissory note, 25 years and so this thing will continue.

Every time a landing comes, you get a new contract and it is 25 years with two years grace. Two things are happening here, the debt is being pushed further down - kick it down the road. Two, you have what you call a Sinking Fund created, that this fund, when the debt becomes due, in one of the promissory notes, when the first payment becomes due, you can go into this fund because it acts like a Sinking Fund and pays the debt. Meanwhile, you could get a little “raise” by going and invest this accumulated balance somewhere. You could cream off that amount and use it for developmental purposes. Are you with me? [Hon. Member: Yes] Good.

Guess what happened? A deal was consummated for rice with Venezuela. It was, if you want to call it a barter deal. I pay you for rice and we write down the debt. If, in a whole year, I sell Venezuela US\$110 million worth of rice, the debt is written down by US\$110 million in one shot, and so the 25 years that you had going way down, have gone down the drain. You get no benefit from the PetroCaribe arrangement. The benefit you get, perhaps, is selling the rice.

This could not continue because, by the time we got into Office, with all of the shenanigans that took place, of moneys going to some place here – Guyana Power and Light (GPL) - and all of these different places, the Fund was empty. The Fund would have been empty anyhow, under

that kind of arrangement, because as the prices got lower, the split is less in your favour. The accumulations in the Fund would be slower than when the prices are high. How could the Fund have survived?

When we came into power in 2015, the Fund was dead. The Fund had US\$890,000. That is what it had. We had outstanding payments in the millions of US dollars to the farmers. People must know these things. They are running here saying that they would give rice farmers this and that, and that they are sorry for rice farmers. The rice farmers and the sugar farmers have been used and abused and they must know it. You have got to know these things. They came in here like saints, like they are above Caesar, but, when you do not know, all could be fooled. No disrespect to blind people, but *a one eye man is king in blind man country*. We have to educate ourselves otherwise we would be fooled all the time. It is not difficult.

I am not going to knock the journalists, but I am saying our journalists need to start doing work and stop reading press releases. Do the background work, the information is there. Stop with all these press conferences and press releases. Do your background and you will be amazed to see what you could dig up. There is a lot that could be dug up. There is a lot out there waiting for you to dig up. It would not take very long to do so.

The Hon. Member talks about all this revenue that we are collecting. He said that we have collected \$56 billion. Perhaps, either when we came in or now, I do not know. He said \$56 billion. This is an indication of the tax burden that is being faced by our people. Let me give you some quick statistics again. He was quick to say that, under current expenditure, this has grown by \$60.9 billion. Is simple mathematics not good for dunce? We are collecting \$56 billion and spending \$60.9 billion. How is that a tax burden? We are spending back the money and even more. Which means that we are borrowing in excess of \$3 billion or we have some reserves somewhere else. Put the two together. You are taking in \$56 billion, you are putting out in the economy \$60.9 billion and you are saying, this is why the economy is shrinking, because they took out \$56 billion and the tax burden is increasing.

I am going to say again: the tax measures that we have put in place on the income tax side are second to none. We have put in place a regime. Forgive me if I get worked up sometimes. I would get calmed down by my Director.

Then there is the Private Sector that was looking out for an increase in the threshold. Is the private sector the union now? I mean, I expect the unions to ask us about threshold increase every year.

7.35 p.m.

We tried to avoid doing threshold increases by putting in a regime where, as your salary passes that threshold, that we have there, the one third should be able to kick in, one third of your gross salary. I am telling you, several persons came to me, people in middle management and told me “thank you very much”, because, instead of getting the standard egalitarian threshold...Whether you are working for \$60,000 or \$600,000, there is an egalitarian movement. You work for \$60,000 you will get \$60,000 and if you work for \$600,000 you will get one third of \$600,000, that is, \$200,000. Is that not a reasonable fair system? Why are you asking me, again, if I did not move the threshold? We have a built-in multiplier in there. If you want, it is there. It is the most progressive thing that there is in the Caribbean and it is trying to avoid every year’s movement in the income tax. An income tax, as any other tax, must be a predictable thing. We must not be tampering with the tax system every year. It must be a predictable thing. Why are you asking me again? “We want it go to a \$100,000 this year”, and all this kind of story. We have done that. We have reduced the income tax from 30% to 28%. We have brought in a category of 40% to take care of the higher income people. I had worked it out last year and showed you where substantially more disposable income is being taken home by the people. Then added to that, the fact that we had removed the income tax from your NIS employee’s contribution, you could take that home too as a set-off. This year we have gone again and given something to the ordinary person. We said, listen, we understand situations where you could work part of a year, and those things, take the entire \$720,000. Whatever taxes you may have paid, file a return and you are going to get all back as long as you do not go pass \$720,000. These are not ordinary measures. As we said in the budget, this will cost us over \$700 million, but we are happily giving it back. It will help to stimulate the economy.

Why do people think that these are piddling or piffling measures? These are measures that affect the ordinary person. You should see the joy on the faces of people of a certain departmental store on Main Street when I was in there to purchase an item. “Look the Minister. It is he who gave us the tax-free vacation allowance.” I am thankful for the two kisses that I got. This is what this

Government is about. The Government said that, as we seek to broaden the tax base, it will give back more to the people and this is what we have been doing.

This \$56 billion - Mr. Ram would not like to hear it, because he thinks that this budget only concentrated on tax administration. The two go in hand. If you do not have proper tax administration none of the reform measures will mean anything to you. We know that he should have been the last person to make that comment. I do not know if he is now running out of steam because the more I read his comments every year it is the more I begin to wonder. He should have been the last person, having been on the committee for tax reform to even comment that I was concentrating only on tax administration. Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) was a broken, decrepit organisation. We have strove to put that institution in a place that all of us should be proud. We have to strive even harder to make certain that it is ready for oil and gas. I have healthy respect for him, but, of all people, he gives the impression as if he is just criticising for criticising sake. We will concentrate on both tax reform and tax administration in parallel. It is not one and then the other, but we have a lot of work to do on tax administration at the GRA. And I want to publicly compliment the GRA Commissioner General for his steadfastness in getting that institution to become a professional organisation. Sometimes, it is easy to criticise people but other times, as the saying goes, we must give *Jane she petticoat*.

A snide remark was made that this expenditure is growing more because we are eating more. We, the Ministers, or whoever, are eating more. I would have let it pass but just by way of quick assessment: in 2014, dietary was \$3.665 billion, of which the education sector accounted for \$1.942 billion. In 2018, dietary is projected to rise to \$5.237 billion, of which the education sector is projected to get \$3.145 billion. We are feeding more children, more nutritious meals. The Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) and the health sector had \$368 million in 2014 that will rise to \$448 million in 2018. When you add those two together, together with the prisons, where are the public servants feeding? These people come here and it is not an analysis. It is an aggravation. It is like an ant trying to buck on an elephant. It is that piffling. That is what we are being reduced to in this Assembly, piffling analysis or trite comments, snide remarks, and so forth. That is making up a show in this House.

There were comments made about the real growth rate; there were comments made about the current account of the balance of payments; there were comments made about net domestic

assets. The real growth rate, I understand him to be saying, that it has declined and we do not seem to be able to get it right. It was 3.8%, then, half year, I think it went to 3.1%, now it is 2.9%. Again, as I said, we do the best in terms of forecasting that we can, so to speak. I just want to do a quick analysis of where we are.

Let us look at a historical series of growth rates here. In 2007, the growth forecast was 2.9% and the growth realised was 7.2%, which appeared to be the best year of the PPP/C Government because the growth that came in 1993 was as a result of growth that was picked up from 1991 and 1992 because 1991 was 6.1%, 1992 was 7.9% and I think 1993 was 8.2% and that was picking up from the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP). From there on there was a flat line that was coming down and the Hon. Member should show his record as the Minister of Finance in growth, not as a President - his record. Which one of us could line up the record and see what it would have said?

In 2008, it had a projection, a forecast of 4.8% in growth, but only realised 1.8%. You are talking about projections being off. How can you project 4.8% and end up with 1.8%? I am not knocking because that is how an economy stay. We try to be conservative in the projection and then something comes in and knocks you off your feet. In 2009, the projected rate was 4.7% and ended up with 3.6%; in 2010, projected 4.4% and ended up with 4.1%; 2011, projected 4.6% and ended up with 4.2%; 2012 projected 4.1% and ended up with 4.3%; 2013 projected 5.3% and ended up with 5% and in 2014 when this slide started... I do not want people to think that this slide started under this Government. Just as how they had inherited an upswing in growth in 1992, we inherited a downswing in growth in 2015. In 2014, they projected a 5.6% growth rate but only got 3.9%. As you know, 2015 we got 3.1%, in 2016, it was 3.4% and 2017, it is 2.9%. You can check to see the reason why we got the 2.9% and not the 3.8%, and it is almost exclusively GuySuCo.

Even the low target that we gave GuySuCo of 187,000 tons, it ended up with 150,000 tons and then you are trying to beat me down on a growth rate of 2.9%. I am happy that other sectors stepped up and did not allow the slide into negativity. There are calibre countries that are senior to us, in terms of income, which are going through serious crises, such as Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, anemic growth in Jamaica and Bahamas has its troubles. I just came back from there, and you are scoffing at my 2.9% and saying that the economy is declining. There is a

reason why the economy is declining. The economy for 50 years, despite all of the hot air and the talk, depends on either the mineral sector or the agriculture sector or both for performance. There is no diversification here. You are talking about services that are 50% of the economy. These are not the services that Rostow and all of the other people were talking about. We are not selling any services to any economy.

When they were talking about moving to a service economy, they were talking about the United States, all the high-end services that it is selling. We are buying and selling here. That is what is making up all of our services - buying and selling. That is why the main pinewood importer is up in arms, because a 40% common external tariff (CET) was added. We know why it is 2.9%. We had projected 3.8% because if sugar came in at 180,000 tonnes or thereabouts we will be in *gool*, as they say. Do not come to us to say things such as “there is mismanagement in the economy”. We know what sugar is. What do you want us to do? Is it to beat up on sugar? We cannot go and beat up sugar. We know what the crisis in sugar is. We had hoped that it would have come in at the 180,000 tonnes. We did not in our wild dreams think that it could do 150,000 tonnes, and even in our wilder dreams think that it can do 115,000 tonnes in 2018 – 115,000 tonnes. The outlook is so dim that by 2020 it will do 147,000 tonnes. If it were not so painful, you would have laughed, but that is the reality. By then, even without oil we should have been able to make some inroads into diversification.

7.50 p.m.

As I remember this point, let me make it right now. I heard a lot of scoff by the Hon. Member, not necessarily in here, but outside, scoffing about this being a plantain chip economy, laughing at these small people, as if an economy is built on skyscrapers, and so on. We said our emphasis is on small businesses. Whether it is the ‘souse lady’ or ‘black pudding lady’, the plantain chip, the *pholourie*, the *bara*, or whatever, we have to nurture these businesses. We are laughing, but do you know that roti from Suriname is coming to this country, ‘doubles’ from Trinidad, *chick-chick* peas is coming from Trinidad, and *sugar cakes* are coming from the islands? This is unbelievable, and we are laughing and scoffing at plantain chip.

Listen to this, Mr. Speaker: if a thousand small businesses employ five persons, that is 5,000 jobs. If Walmart is brought here, how many jobs will it bring to you? You brought BaiShanLin

and gave it all the concessions in the world, how many jobs did it bring? How many jobs? You gave away the house and everything in concessions, and we have the records. Vaitarna Holdings Private Inc. is here. How many jobs did it bring? Whoever else is here, how many jobs? Small businesses have the potential to solve our unemployment problems, and that is why, when you look into the budget there are a number of programmes targeting small businesses.

We, of our own, have gone ahead and put in \$100 million into the small business fund. We have upped the Sustainable Livelihoods and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) programme from \$100 million to \$150 million. We have increased the youth employment initiative. The youths on the HEYS programme are getting better and better. I saw some of the products that they are doing and as you walk around this country and look at the demonstration at the exhibitions, and so on, it tells you that we are back on the road to becoming a manufacturing nation. We have to nurture this; we have to promote it. It is not only to the exhibitions, but we must be able to move these people away from the exhibits to commercial production. I think that is the next step that we are waiting on, and we have to help them. They throw out the baby with the bath water with the things that were done in the 1970s. I think that we can learn a number of things that were done in the 1970s such as the Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC) that used to go around and buy people's goods. GMC used to do ham and bacon and all of these different things. We need to get back into that mode where we feel proud and we eat our local stuff.

I do not want to hear anything more about our national airport shops selling water from Jamaica. I do not care how much we are CARICOM brothers. We must be our brother's keeper first. I am ashamed that you could walk into a store in Guyana at your international airport and cannot even find one bottle of local water in the "land of many waters". Can you believe it? This is reality. We have to move from the talk into the walk. Those very people, who like talking a lot, invite me to all kinds of things, come and open here and make a speech here, and you would look right there and see that all the things are foreign. You cannot get anything local.

I am not joking. The biggest pinewood importer here is upset because we have put a restriction on it and we have gone on to put in the CET at 40%. You cannot serve two masters. You want to serve the private sector and at the same time you do not want our local things get ahead. Well, we are for local.

The Hon. Member Bharat Jagdeo said that the external debt is projected to increase. Is this really for real that the external debt is projected to increase? Is the external debt projected to decline? Well, let us assume away the oil. When you look at the economy of Guyana, the basic infrastructure is missing. Most of our money is spent on infrastructure and we are still trying to get there. We do not have the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) structure in place that will give us the kind of return that we are looking for. The two attempts, which we have made at using the PPP, have gone awry: the Berbice Bridge and the Marriot Hotel. They are not models that sell themselves for future PPP. We are putting together a PPP framework with help from the Caribbean Development Bank. We have a finalised version that will be going to Cabinet soon for discussion and, hopefully, we can get it into this House, in the National Assembly, here to debate it and let us adopt it.

In the meantime, while we depend heavily on our multilateral partners to help us with infrastructure, we are a small country, in terms of economy, but big in terms of physical size. But they do not look at size as important. They look at the economy and, therefore, we could only get so much in borrowing, but our needs are so much. On this journey, we have to take that proverbial first step, rather than leaps, until the handmaiden steps in, because people will say you are depending on that. My friend, that is the best thing that ever happened to Guyana since sugar came to this country. It is ours. We cannot be ashamed. What are we ashamed of, because everybody else is coming for it?

We said that we will be using these resources to diversify this economy. Everybody wants food, so our agricultural sector would continue to play a big part in this country. We are working with a multilateral partner to develop an industrial policy. We have our heads on. We heard the story, but we are tired of hearing too, the many experts coming around here and telling us this and that, and so on. We have heard all the stories, and so on, and we are trying to put them together, but please let us breathe a bit. Before you could even take two breaths, another one will come and tell you that something will happen. Let us breathe, so to speak.

We understand all the traps, and so on. We are not saying that we are not going to fall into one or two. That is human, but we are clear, in terms of... That is why the faster this Green State Development Strategy could finish it would be better for us. Do you know why? It is because of all the people who are washing their mouth on us saying that we do not have a development

strategy; we do not have a plan; we do not have this. Even in Budget 2015, Budget 2016, Budget 2017 and Budget 2018, there are common threads coming right through on what our vision is, what our strategy is, what our plans, programmes and policies are. Then, they have their fellow travellers in the other areas who come out to say that we do not have a vision for employment and the youth and no long-term vision and plan. All of these things you can go on the internet or textbook and pull, then you would write and make statements, but it does not help us, because if plans and strategies were symptomatic of your stage of development, we would have been an upper class country by now. We have more plans and strategy in this country than anybody in the Caribbean and look at where we are. We had two good plans in this country. The Feed, Clothes and House (FCH) has been one of them, and perhaps the most progressive. We had a range of strategies under the 23 years.

When that Government came into power in 1992, as I recall, I do not think the Members realised that they would had won the elections, because at that time most people were going with the People's National Congress (PNC), until the situation in Russia happened. Then, with the policy of Glasnost, people started to fall off. The long and the short: it was their Government which came to power, but they did not realise that they would have come into power. They had no plan. Mr. Carter and his Centre thought that they could make Guyana, and another country in Africa - I was there and I helped out - a model country. He sent down his team to help us, together with one hundred and something people here in Guyana, to put together what is called the National Development Strategy. When it came out... I think it came out with seven volumes, six plus a summary volume. They were of a nice colour green. I do not know why they hate the colour green. All of those things were in the colours of green and yellow. They knew what they were coming in to from since then. They were green border and yellow in the middle. The Minister at the time was the Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, Minister of Finance. The first thing was that with all of those documents no one was going to read them. Mr. Cater said that it was all right. Under the auspices of the late Dr. Kenneth King, they sat to revise the documents into a single document. Well, everyone knows about the stories. I used to write the budget speeches during that time for the then Government.

Every time I attempted to write the opening and put - just as it is in this circular here, where the people should consult to get the Government's vision and policies - even, the National

Development Strategy down, the Hon. Member would scratch it out. I said that this is the Government's premier document. He said not to put anything on the National Development Strategy. I asked him why? He said that the National Development Strategy got something that they did not want to do. I asked, "What"? He said that the strategy had that "we must privatise sugar." This was somewhere around 1996, and we will not do that. Every time I attempted to put National Development Strategy he would scratch it out. [Mr. Bulkan: The man saw the

votes.] I do not know what he saw. The then Opposition, in its wisdom, decided to call the Government's bluff and it brought the National Development Strategy to the National Assembly.

I have the *Hansard* here, 5th Sitting, December, 2006, at page 96. Public Business, motion, item 9, the National Development Strategy. This is a motion that I believed was moved by the Hon. Member Mr. Murray. I will read everything.

“WHEREAS over 150 members of Guyanese civil society of various walks of life and from fields of endeavour have put forward a National Development Strategy that details a series of bold economic initiatives and exciting programmes geared towards the transformation and diversification of the economy;

AND WHEREAS among the stated objectives of the National Development Strategy are attainment of the highest possible rate of economic growth, the alleviation of poverty, the equitable geographic distribution of economic activities and benefits and the diversification of the economy;

AND WHEREAS the National Assembly of the Eighth Parliament unanimously passes a Resolution on 15th December 2005 for an update of the National Development Strategy at the earliest practicable date;

RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly accepts the National Development Strategy and the measures and policies therein as an overarching strategy for pursuing the economic and social transformation of Guyana;

8.05 p.m.

FURTHER RESOLVED,

That this National Assembly directs that the National Development Strategy be placed before a Special Select Parliamentary Committee to commence consultations immediately with the private sector, wider civil society and other stakeholders to establish a Representative Cross Sectional Group, supported by a suitably resourced secretariat with access to research expertise to update the National Development Strategy at the earliest practicable date;

FURTHER RESOLVED,

That this National Assembly directs that the Representative Cross Sectional Group reports periodically to the Special Select Parliamentary Committee and that the finally updated National Development Strategy be submitted to the Special Select Parliamentary Committee to make recommendations to the National Assembly for the consideration and adoption of the said updated National Development Strategy;

FURTHER RESOLVED,

That subsequent to the adoption of the updated National Development Strategy this National Assembly authorises its Sectoral Committee on Economic Services to monitor the policies and the implementation of the National Development Strategy by the Executive.”

This National Development Strategy was the Government’s own, the then PPP/C Government. It was the Opposition that brought it for national debate and acceptance. Guess what, Mr. Speaker? I am going further down.

I am now at page 146, it was after all the debate had gone through, and so on, passionate debates by Mr. Murray and Mr. Corbin, and everybody. I am now at the back of the page.

“Question put.

Mr Winston S Murray: Division!

The Speaker: The Clerk will take the Division, please.”

I am only going to read those who voted against. I am going to read all the names of the people just now, but I will give you the end of the vote quickly. It states:

“I wish to report that 33 Members were against...”

Thirty-three Members were against the motion to adopt the National Development Strategy. It was a national document, 33 members were against it. [Mr. Bulkan: It was 33 Government Members.] Well, it could not have been the Opposition Members.

“...21 supported the motion.”

Twenty-one Members in the Opposition supported the motion to make the National Development Strategy a national document and update it. It could not get through. Sugar was to be privatised, and it was not going anywhere. The poor Clerk or the Speaker said, “The motion is therefore negative.”

Among the people who voted against their own strategy:

“AGAINST

Mr Whittaker

Mr Seeraj

Mr P Persaud

Mr Neendkumar

Mr Nandlall

Mr Nagamootoo

Mr Lumumba

Mr Khan

Ms Edwards

Mr Chand

Mr Atkinson

Mr Ali

Ms Shadick

Mrs Chandarpal

Mr Nokta

Ms Teixeira

Mr Ramotar

Mr Prashad

Ms Webster

Dr Ramsaran

Dr Fox

Ms Manickchand

Mr Nadir

Mr Benn

Dr Anthony

Mr Lall

Dr Westford

Mr Nawbatt

Mrs Rodrigues-Birkett

Dr Ramsammy

Mr Baksh

Mr Rohee

Mr Hinds

33”

Most of whom are on the western side. At least the good Lord saved Mr. Nagamootoo and put him over on the eastern side, and he has come to see the light. When you hear these people come to you and say “*Oh they ain’t got no strategy; they ain’t gat no vision.*” “We had a NDS”. They had an NDS? It did not exist. Mr. Speaker, I tell you the gospel, Lord above me, I worked all the time with those people. The formula was “*if they ain’t gat nutin in it fu we, I ain’t worrying with it. NDS, da is a waste of time*’.

Move on to the next strategy, the Poverty Reduction Strategy. They had things in the Poverty Reduction Strategy, do you know why? It was attached to the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) that allowed significant write-off of debt, even for the first time by many multilateral agencies. Over \$200 and something million of our multilateral debt got written-off by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and all the different places, International Monetary Fund (IMF), I think too. Some loans from the IMF were written-off.

Then when HIPC could no longer serve us any useful purposes, we moved on to the next strategy, the National Competitiveness Strategy. Now, we had got money from the IDB, big loan money, to finance this useless project. All kinds of fellow travellers were getting paid all kinds of money doing nothing, and the best thing the private sector could tell us is, “You know under the National Competitiveness Strategy, we had a council and it used to be chaired by the President, and we could have got to meet the President.” My understanding was that one time that meeting was chaired and the members were harassing us about this council. We said, “Listen, this thing is not about council and this kind of thing. As long as we could get an interaction that is positive, and so forth, we should go for it. Do not get wedded to council and the President and all this kind of story.”

The President has his minions who are the Ministers and the Ministers have their minions, who are the Permanent Secretaries, and all these kinds of things. We have layers where these are concerned and do not believe that you have to go to the President for everything. Of course, in

that former regime, the President was king. In this regime, everybody has a little cubbyhole that people could be called into. The National Competitiveness Strategy was a total waste. Lots of money we have to pay back to the IDB.

What is competitive in Guyana? I mean, let us be blunt: what is competitive in Guyana? We could not even sell our calcine bauxite for which we had ninety-something per cent. What is competitive in Guyana? Total and useless waste of money, and this Government has to pay back this loan. Move on, that is a waste of time. The loan money has been disbursed. Forget it.

Now, it is legacy time, the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), [Mr. Bulkan: It is another hocus-pocus.] Hocus-pocus. Only at this time, this is his legacy, because, as you see, he was leaving power, so he had to have something there. So he hit upon the Low Carbon Development Strategy. Get an international expert, the McKinsey Group which came and prepared this strategy and so on and get the Norwegians to buy-in.

There it was: US\$250 million for the Low Carbon Development Strategy. The deal was signed in 2009, for five years, so, it means that it had to be finished by 2014. How come the Norwegians still have to disburse moneys in 2017? It was the same one, not a new programme. If you read well, you will remember that there was a lot of tantrums thrown by the then President, His Excellency, about the Norwegians, and that they were not disbursing this money.

As the Hon. Member, Joseph Harmon, indicated to this honourable House a couple of days ago, the US\$250 million soon became US\$215 million because we lost money to a combination of exchange rate depreciation and not meeting targets. We have this penchant for not meeting targets. We lost a whole set of money, €30.1 million under the European Union (EU) programme. Now, we lost without even a start. We have already lost a set of money under the Norway programme and still a significant part of the Norway money remains undisbursed up to today.

By now, they were already ensconced in climate change and forest this and so. You are rubbing shoulders with Mr. Clinton and whoever, and so on. *That is them bai thing*. It is except that the Low Carbon Development Strategy, which was hurriedly done, was not a National Development Strategy. In comes the Green State Development Strategy. He could curse it out as much as he wants, he could criticise it or tear it up. The Green State Development Strategy which is being

done with the assistance of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) is meant to be an all-embracing strategy.

Within the next 18 months, or thereabout, through a multi-stakeholder process that had been described in the budget (that we do not have to go through again), this strategy, the draft of it should be a reality. I am not saying that the fun is going to stop. They will still claim that you do not have a strategy or that your strategy is not home grown, somebody did it for you, and so on. Well, I do not have any problem if somebody is doing something for me. If I do not have the resources, human or otherwise, I would ask people to help me. As long as along the way, I own this strategy. Nobody is walking into my country and tell me that it is a strategy. That is why there are 14 plus multi-stakeholder groups going all around the place and talking to people in the Amerindian communities, in their own language, not people coming and tell you something and then by the afternoon they would have gone back in the same plane and said that they consulted with the Amerindians, and so on, in their own language and everything else. This is going to be a properly done strategy because it is important. It is coming on the eve of the oil resources and that is why we have to give credit.

This is the last time I am going to talk about strategies in this honourable House. We are wasting time. I hope the *Hansard* and the journalists take note. All this talk about “you do not have vision” and “you do not have strategy and all kinds of things”, this country is still poor with all the strategies that we had. It is still poor and they love to say how much growth they had in how many - five years - before this Government arrived, and so on. Where is the evidence? Tell that to the people in Buxton, whose roads we are now trying to repair and give them water. Tell that to the people in Victoria, who houses look the same, since the time the slaves bought them. Tell it to those people and hear what they will tell you. Tell it to the people in Sophia who are now seeing what it is like to get light, a nice road and water: they could come home a bit late, could go to a party, and so on. You could not do that in the past. It was too dark and you were afraid of the two-foot and the four-foot animals, but now those people could do something. This is what this budget is all about.

It is not talking about building skyscrapers and all kinds of things. It is talking about reaching the ordinary individual. I do not know who he spoke to. Of course, I may have known who he spoke to because they were not too shy in coming publicly with their whispers. I must admit openly

that I was disappointed with a certain private sector entity because I had thought that we had formed a Roundtable, worked with this entity to the bone, put an entire technical group in place, working with it. It identifies the first sector for serious and critical analysis, being the forestry sector and everything they requested for the forestry we put in the budget - the roads and everything.

The removal of the VAT: our portion indicative of the stockyard, the \$100 and something million to do the forest inventory, we went to the CET. We got the CET. The people were stunned that we got it so fast. So, from 1st January 2018, it will be moving from 5% to 40% on pinewood products. The Minister of Natural Resources put in the restrictions stepping from the first. Everything they asked for we got, and then we got a brush aside. When asked to comment on the budget, it was as if we did not do anything. They went through something that they gave me. I do not know what they gave to me. We sat at a Roundtable. The Hon. Member is there. He was there. He was part of the Roundtable. We went through it. We said that the next sector was going to be with the agro-processing. We are not asking for laudable kudos. All we are asking is to give the public the right impression. We are not asking you to tell us that we have done great, and all kinds of story. This is the kind of thing that is there. Then somebody will bring something last minute and that person will be rushing to the press and saying that we give Minister Jordan all these things, a shopping list. I do not know. I do not run a shop. The people in the gold industries will tell you how they struggled, long and hard, how I 'kicked' them up the road every time they came to me to bring evidence, and they brought more until they were able to convince me that this is the way to go.

8.20 p.m.

You look at the shopping list in the newspapers, and I am not lying [*inaudible*]. When you ask them for evidence, you get nothing. Even in the forestry sector, there was a difficulty getting evidence, because somebody brought something and said how the Forestry sector declined by *x* per cent. I am saying that there are lies, damn lies and statistics, and I am good at statistics. If you look here, the reasons why the Forestry Sector fell down are three basic things: Baishanlin International Forestry Development Incorporation (BIFDI) is out of the market and they were huge, Barama Company Limited (BCL) is out of the market and they were fairly large and Demerara Timbers Limited (DTL) is out of the market. If the three biggest players in the market

are out, then it must show a reduction in the Forestry Sector. You are using that as a base to tell me, “You have to stimulate the Forestry Sector.” These people are gone.

When I ask you about the Value Added Tax (VAT), you cannot show me any numbers but all you are saying is that the people are crying about the VAT. Where are the numbers? You do not know but we go ahead and we give it. Sometimes for these low hanging fruits, we may as well just give it up. You do not want too much crying. We gladly accepted it to go ahead, but every time you ask for evidence-based...there is nothing. Do you think all those lobbyists could turn up at the Congregational Budget Office, always with some *pie in the sky* demand to reduce things by x amount and do not have the evidence showing what will happen and so on? I am no different. If you want to convince me, bring the evidence. I could tell you why I go down that road. It is because, this year, I had a meeting with a private sector group and they were complaining about the VAT on the water killing their businesses. I said, “Really? How is that so?” I said that the last time I checked, I had to threaten the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) to start collecting the VAT on water because he was in breach of the law, so how is this killing your businesses? He said that he did not know that. I am telling you the truth; people were in the meeting. This is the kind of story you get. No VAT was being charged on the water yet and they were complaining how the VAT on the water was killing them. This is what you get for commentary and analysis, but these people have sacred spaces in the top newspaper entities. Of course, you know, they have their adverts and so on. What can you do? I will maintain that, if you want something from this Minister of Finance or if you want something from this Government, bring the evidence and stop with these anecdotes such as: I met a man in Parika who said this and a woman is this place that *seh duh* - all anecdotes but no hard evidence, none whatsoever.

I believe I heard that no person is pleased about this Budget. As I said, tell it to those lovely people in the department store in Main Street who are happy for the removal of the tax on their vacation allowance, which they can now use to help with their children’s fees and so on. Tell it to the people who are not paying any education tax anymore and the tributors who are only paying half of the tax.

The last thing is amnesty. Why is amnesty a big issue? Amnesty was first asked of us by the Gold Sector. I said this on the day of the thing. It was asked first by them and they were the only

people who asked for the amnesty. In-house, we looked at it and said that this may be the opportune time to give everybody an amnesty, not only the Gold Sector - everybody. You are getting an amnesty against your interest and penalties, not against taxes owed. So, where does this come in that we are trying to get big supporters, somebody who built the headquarters for the Alliance For Change (AFC), and so on. Where does that come in? The big supporter who built the AFC's headquarters still has to pay his taxes, if he is in the position of what he has to take of the amnesty. He is only getting amnesty on the accumulated interest and penalties. Why is this such a big issue? When the Georgetown Mayor and City Council (GMCC) gives an amnesty, they do not tell you that you do not have to pay rates and taxes. You still have to pay the rates and taxes but they give amnesty against the interest that has accumulated. I wish they would have mercy on the people like me who pay one year in advance. When they raised it this year, somewhere around September, they said I owe them \$30. Can you imagine this? I paid since December, 2016 and they are telling me that I owe them \$30 because they raised the rates sometime in September. [Ms. Ally: Pay your \$30.] I paid it. [Mr. Patterson: Are you sure?] It is the principle and not the amount.

The Hon. Member was speaking to people, but people spoke to me too. I will only just give you three or four of them. An individual who held a very high position in the last Government, this is what he wrote:

“Congrats on a very astute, relief-oriented Budget. I am sure from miners to pensioners will see the positive.”

[Mr. Patterson: *Inaudible*] No I am not... A former Assistant Representative of the United Nations (UN) said:

“Just a quick congratulatory note on an excellent Budget presentation yesterday. Your proposals were strategic, balanced, and appropriate and will certainly address the needs of your main stakeholders.”

An Ambassador:

“I have read your insightful Budget several times and must congratulate you on its pertinence.”

Two highly ranking people came in person: one brought a bottle of tequila and the other a nice cake which I shared with my staff. I am thankful for the Guyana Miners Association (GMA) and the loggers. I am thankful for the grudging acknowledgements of the good things in the Budget by the Private Sector Commission (PSC) and, even more grudgingly, by the Guyana Trades Union Congress (TUC). I am thankful for all those people, my mom, in particular. When I went there, I said, “You heard it is only \$500 I giving to you.” She said, “Well boy, we are thankful; it could have been nothing.” I think that is the position.

Let me just close, which might be a relief to many of my Friends, but I know we will go and take a drink so do not worry. In conclusion, the achievement of the good life is a journey, not a distance. I said, in the Budget Speech, that the road is long with many winding turns. But, we will get there. We believe in the goodness of our people, their resourcefulness, creativity and resilience. I urge the Hon. Members of the Opposition to remove the blinkers from their eyes that are preventing them from seeing what this Budget is: a people’s Budget steeped with something for everyone, a growth propelling Budget whose premises and promises bode well for the hopes and aspirations of our people. I urge all our people to take advantage of all the measures in the Budget. I urge especially our young people to seize the opportunities available under the various youth initiatives, the expanded public investment programme and the small business allocations to be their own bosses, to build a better life for themselves, their families and the nation. In the words of Orson Swett Marden:

“We advance on our journey only when we face our goal, that we are confident and we believe that we are going to win.”

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

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Minister for his statement. Hon. Members, this brings to an end our 2018 Budget Debate of which 65 Members of the National Assembly contributed. I hope to give you, at another time, the number of hours spent. Hon. Members, now that the Debate has ended, we must consider the results of the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply and, to do that, we must go into the Committee of Supply.

Assembly resolves itself into Committee of Supply

In Committee of Supply

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I wish to report that the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply met yesterday and today and considered the allocations of time for the consideration of the 2018 Budget Estimates of Expenditure in the Committee of Supply. The Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply was unable to reach consensus with respect to the allocation of time for five agencies. The Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply agreed that the time allotted for the consideration of the Estimates of Expenditure for the five agencies should be referred to the Committee of Supply for decision.

Hon. Members, I now put the matter for the decision of the Committee. A Draft Schedule, which was prepared by the Clerk of the National Assembly, proposing the hours for consideration of the various agencies, was circulated today to Members. I hope Members are able to look at it so we can have a decision. Copies of the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply's Minutes and Schedule have also been circulated. I am putting the entire Schedule before the Committee of Supply for consideration. I invite Hon. Members to agree with the proposal contained in the Schedule or to propose changes.

The Committee of Supply has allocated to itself five days for the consideration of the Estimates. Consideration will begin on Monday, 11th December, 2017 at 10.00 a.m. and will continue thereafter on Tuesday, 12th December, 2017, Wednesday 13th December, 2017, Thursday, 14th December, 2017 and Friday, 15th December, 2017, which is the last day for the consideration of the Budget Estimates. I now have the floor open for your comments.

Minister of Social Cohesion [Ms. Ally]: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We, on this side of the House, support the proposal as set out by the Parliament Office but I just would like to call attention to page 3 of the first day, Monday 11th December, 2017. I think there is a repetition there. I believe some adjustments should be made.

Mr. Chairman: Could you specify?

Ms. Ally: Ministry of Agriculture: 3.30 p.m. to 5.30 p.m., one and a half hours, and we have the break from 5.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m. Then from 6.00 p.m. to 7.30 p.m., the Ministry of Agriculture

continues but the same pages and agency programmes are reflected there. I do not think that the Ministry of Agriculture is really three hours; I think it is a slight mistake or typographical error.

Mr. Chairman: Would it be correct to say that one reference to the Ministry of Agriculture would suffice on that page?

Ms. Ally: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Is it correct to say that it is envisaged that, from 3.30 p.m. to 8.00 p.m....

Ms. Ally: It is 3.30 p.m. to 5.00 p.m.

8.35 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, an explanation has been offered here, which seems quite feasible in the circumstances. Although the time of the break is placed between 5.00 p.m. and 6.00 p.m., that is not a certain time given, if the discussion at the given moment when 5.00 p.m. arrives is still continuing; that is why it was continued. In other words, a second reference to the same *[inaudible]*.

Ms. Ally: Sir, are we saying that, for the Ministry of Agriculture, we will be utilising three hours? That is what is reflected in the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, the explanation given is that one and a half hours are all that would be utilised for the Ministry of Agriculture.

Ms. Ally: Yes. So we will correct that.

Mr. Chairman: I am bound to ask the same question the Hon. Member just asked. We have four times here, one of which is...

Ms. Ally: Just remove the bottom and then move up all the timings.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, a correction would be made. I am given to understand that the time allotted for the Ministry of Agriculture is 3.30 p.m. to 5.00 p.m.

Ms. Ally: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: So the necessary adjustments would be made to accommodate that. Thank you.

Mr. Trotman: Sir, just by way of enquiry, I notice that the Ministry of Natural Resources has been allotted two hours while the Ministry of Agriculture has been allotted an hour and a half. Is there some particular reason why this smaller Ministry with smaller mandate has two hours?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, my thinking on it would not be very helpful. I would say that good things come wrapped up in small parcels and so they take a longer time to look at. But then that would not be very helpful.

Mr. Trotman: We are not afraid because we have nothing to hide, so we would make ourselves available. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Are you quite satisfied with the two hours?

Mr. Trotman: Sir, if there is need for more, we will be here for more. But we believe that this would take a much shorter time. There are three very small programmes, but, as I said, we are not shying away; I was just querying why two hours were needed. Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Ms. Ally, would you have a comment to make in light of the comment made by the Minister of Natural Resources and taking into account the proposals we have here?

Ms. Ally: Mr. Chairman, I recall that, when we were in the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply, the question about petroleum being something new...

Mr. Chairman: I think it was petroleum management.

Ms. Ally: Yes. So I believe two hours would be adequate.

Mr. Chairman: I got the impression that the Minister was not asking for more time. But the Minister was wondering whether the topics to be considered merited two hours, denying, possibly, some other place.

Ms. Ally: I understand, Mr. Chairman, but you would recall that, when we were in the Committee, the case was made out that they wanted an additional hour to deal with the Ministry

of Natural Resources and their case was that there was petroleum management added to it. So I would think that we could stay with the two hours and not to add or delete anything to or from it.

Mr. Chairman: I thank you. Hon. Members, are there other comments, please? Hon. Members, I would allow a few further minutes for contemplation or exchange of views and then we will proceed to a decision. I would invite any Member of the Committee who may have a contrary view to express it on any item in the Schedule.

I would take silence that all are in agreement with the proposals and accept them in the manner in which the consideration of the Estimates would proceed.

Mr. Holder: Mr. Chairman, just looking back at pages one and two, is there a lunch break? It is a bit confusing in the Schedule. There is 12.00 pm. to 1.00 p.m., one hour, the Guyana Defence Force and then a break and then there is 1.00 p.m. to 2.00 p.m. for Office of the Prime Minister. Something needs to be adjusted there for the break. At the top of page two... The confusion is when the lunch break would be.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. On page two, the break would be the time agreed, 12.00 noon to 1.00 p.m. It is envisaged that all the agencies or programmes mentioned on the right hand column and on the other page - the Guyana Defence Force - would all be taken by 12.00 noon. Hon. Members, is there any other comment?

Ms. Ally: No, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Would it be correct to say that the Committee accepts and approves these proposals as the ones by which we will consider the Estimates of Expenditure?

Ms. Ally: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. There is just one point I invite Members to consider and to be guided by. If comments on particular agencies are still taking place when the time arrives for that particular matter to end, the Chairman proposes to put the question so that we would make every effort to stay within the bounds of the times allotted.

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Assembly resumed.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this brings to an end our business for this evening. I thank you very much. It has been a very interesting day and we will continue again on Monday. Hon. Vice-President and Prime Minister.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Mr. Speaker, I move that the House be adjourned to Monday, 11th December, 2017 at 10.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. The House stands adjourned until Monday, 11th December, 2017 at 10.00 a.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 8.47 p.m.