

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2015-2018) 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

102ND Sitting

Tuesday, 4TH December, 2018

Assembly convened at 10.06 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Leave to Member

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, leave has been granted to the Hon. Dr. Bheri Ramsaran for today's sitting.

Birthday Wishes to Hon. Member Bancroft

Mr. Speaker: I have the pleasure and the duty of announcing to you that our Hon. Member and colleague Ms. Rajcoomarie Bancroft celebrates her birthday today. You would wish to join with me in wishing her a happy birthday.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

BUDGET SPEECH 2019 - MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2019

“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 2019 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 2018-11-26.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2019, of a total sum of two hundred and seventy seven billion, four hundred and thirty one million, nine hundred and sixty eight thousand dollars (**\$277,431,968,000**), **excluding twenty three billion, two hundred and eighty seven million, and forty three thousand dollars (\$23,287,043,000)** which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in the undermentioned schedule, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to make further provision in respect of finance.”

[Minister of Finance]

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Speaker, please allow me to join with you in extending birthday wishes to the Hon. Member Bancroft.

We had expected that Budget 2019 would have been the oil and gas budget, but it seems that, after more than four and a half hours, it was more gas than budget. After more than 35,430 words, the Minister of Finance has failed to convince us why anyone in this country should support this budget. So far, his colleagues are being just as uninspiring with a lot of policy and coherence, a

hot smudge of plans and big taxes to burden the poor working people of this country. It seems that the underlined thrust of this budget can be broken down in these letters ‘B’, ‘T’ and ‘S’, that is “borrowed, tax and squander”, need us to say that this was a recipe for economic disaster. As responsible Members of this House, we must interrogate and expose the false promises, the failed policies and the waste of taxpayers’ resources.

Let us examine the health sector, the allocation for health, as a percentage of total gross domestic product (GDP), has been in steady decline. Appendix II of the budget speech illustrated that in 2014, the last full year of the People’s Progressive Party (PPP), the health and the social services sector was \$1.94% of total GDP. In 2019, it has dropped to 1.86 % of the total GDP. In the last four budgets, the Government has allocated more than \$100 billion, but the big question is: Are we getting value for the moneys that they have expended? The simple answer is a resounding no.

One of the critical areas of Government’s waste has been the inefficient and corrupt procurement practices. Minister Cummings in her Budget 2018 speech, boldly asserted:

“We have toiled and wrestled with the beast called procurement, and under the sagacious watch of my colleague and Comrade, the Hon. Minister Ms. Volda Lawrence, procurement at the Ministry of Public Health has been brought under control. These industry best practices are not designed to slow things down as they are implemented to practice good governance and leadership mixed with accountably, fairness, balance and transparent deliverables through and through.”

That is the end of the quote.

These are indeed beautiful words that cannot cover up the stench of corruption at that Ministry. I noticed that Minister Cummings, this year, stayed far away from the theme of procurement, instead of praising her senior colleague, she stayed even further on these procurement issues. Moreover, we are left to wonder why. Why did she not talk about procurement this year? Perhaps the answer can be found in the Auditor General’ report of 2017. It seems that the Ministry of Public Health has been guilty of breaching almost every section of the Procurement Act. In paragraph 538 of the Auditor General’ s report, the Ministry was guilty of single sourcing, 13 contracts totalling \$91.422 million awarded to single source procurement method. Single sourcing, as we know, can lead to higher prices for the items because the vendor has a monopoly. How much extra has been paid?

It is still unknown, but conservative estimates show that it has been in the millions. There are other flagrant breaches of the procurement law such as contracts, valued at \$278.5 million, awarded without bid security. That can be found at paragraph 542 of the Auditor General's report

Another case is the single sourcing of drugs worth \$104.1 million. This one has a twist and that is six contracts were awarded without the approval of the tender board. The tender board was asked to rubber stamp the transactions after the deliveries were made to the suppliers. The Ministry was also actively engaged in contract splitting. Paragraph 590 of the Auditor General's report, and this is what the Auditor General had to say, "11 contracts, totalling \$82.5 million, were as awarded by the ministerial tender board to four contractors and given the value of the contract, it would appear that these contracts were deliberately sub-divided to avoid submission to the national tender board."

Despite these transgressions, when you go back to Minister Cummings' speech, she was totally unfazed and she bold-facedly then said:

"The people of Guyana will not be allowed to suffer because of procurement issues at the Ministry of Public Health. May I sound the bell. Any deliberate attempt to stymie the procurement process at the Ministry of Public Health will be met with the harshest of penalties which would be applied to those concerned, condignly and with extreme prejudice."

Indeed, the bell has sounded, but malpractice in procurement continues unabated in the Ministry of Public Health. We now have the infamous case of HDML Labs where millions and millions of dollars were lost. To refresh our memories, the tender board gave approval for restricted procurement of six suppliers, HDML Labs was one of them. Three companies tendered in the first round. HDML Labs was not one of them. Then when they went to the evaluation, what happened? All three of the companies that tendered were deemed non-compliant, but just once before, these very companies were awarded contracts by the Ministry and by the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC), but one month after, they were deemed non-compliant. They went back to the national tender board and they were allowed to do restrictive tendering again with the same set of suppliers. This time around, magically, only one company tendered and that was HDML Labs, the only person to tender. HDML Labs was awarded the contract at \$409.49 million. We know

that this honourable House was told initially that the contract price was \$366 million. When the contract was really audited, then we saw how much more was given to this company.

What was even more important, when we compared the prices between those people who were rejected and this company which actually got the bid, the prices are sparkling. The gap between what was rejected and what was given to this company is a huge gap. In fact, the lowest bidder in the first round of tendering would have given us all of those drugs for Guy\$109.6 million, but HDML Labs was awarded it for \$409.497 million. This is what we are talking about.

10.21 a.m.

This is how our moneys are being squandered and wasted in this country. These examples are just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. If the Government likes to be taken seriously, then they should take actions against these transgressions. It is not only about sounding the bell, as Minister Cummings told us, but it is now about belling the cat and that is what we would like to see happen.

From 2015 to 2017, the Government expended vast sums of money to buy drugs and medical supplies. Many of these contracts were made as an emergency, so that the deliveries had to be time bound. They had to be time bound because they were shortages in the public health system. They were going out to emergency, bringing in the goods, so that the problems could be fixed in the system. If that system had worked, that would have been good. Patient care would have improved. What is unbelievable is that more than \$345 million was paid for drugs, but they were not delivered.

In 2015, the Ministry is yet to receive \$144.6 million worth of drugs that has already been paid for. Fast forward to 2016, again, \$67.78 million worth of drugs that was paid for, but they have not been delivered. Then we come to 2017, \$133 million of drugs that was paid for, but they have not been delivered. Somebody needs to explain what is going on in this Ministry of Public Health. I am sure in 2018 we will have drugs that have not been delivered. This type of situation where, right now, there are shortages of drugs in almost every health facility in this country - every health facility in this country. I repeat that for emphasis for the Minister, because if she goes around to the various health centres, she would know that. Do not come here and pretend that there are not shortages. Right now, at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation there are shortages. You go to any one of the health centres and we can identify shortages. Do not come here and try to tell us

that there are not shortages. We know differently. More so, what is important is that the patients in this country know differently because when they go to the health centre they cannot get drugs and medication. Do not come here and pretend. *[Interruption]*

What is also interesting is that many of these favoured suppliers of pharmaceuticals, many of these favoured importers of pharmaceuticals, do not have licence to import the pharmaceuticals in this country. Many of them are not registered with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). If the Minister would like to dispute that, well then, as I asked her in the last budget debate, she should bring those registrations to this Parliament. Last year I asked for that and up to now, one year after, we still cannot get a single document produced here to show that these importers are actually registered. Something is definitely wrong in that Ministry. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it would be helpful if we all do not try to make a statement at the same time as the Hon. Member is making. It is his turn to speak and we should allow that to take place without undue interruptions. Please proceed.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for your protection.

This situation that we have with importers not being registered, with drugs not being compliant with the national standard, with the quality not being is a total breach of the Food and Drug Act and we should not allow this to continue.

One of the things that we know of the Ministry of Public Health is that it has a flagship programme and that flagship programme is the construction of its new head office. However, instead of this being a flagship, it has become emblematic of incompetence and mismanagement. In the Auditor General's report, paragraph 573, a contract was signed for the construction of phase one of the head office building for \$365 million. The contractor received payment of \$71 million, representing 20% of the contracted sum. However, as of the 13th of August, 2018, what do we find? There has been significant delay in the completion of works. A few piles have been driven and when they went to verify what was going on, there were two workers from the contractor at the site. The site office, nine months after this contract was signed, was still in progress of being built. This must be a national embarrassment. Despite the incompetence, despite the mismanagement, this year, in this budget, we are earmarking another big allocation of \$438.9 million to continue this project. As far as I am concerned, there is need for independent

investigation into what is happening with this contract at the Ministry of Public Health. It is not only happening in the Ministry of Public Health.

It seems that the Ministry of Public Health has a special gift for mismanagement. Let us look at the Diamond Hospital. Upgrading works at Diamond Hospital, a contract sum of \$21.4 million was given for the works for it. What happened? Unapproved, additional works, that is variation of works, amounted to \$18.2 million. The revised contract now has moved from \$21 million to \$39.7 million. Guess what. The Ministry paid, from this contract, of the \$39.7 million, \$38.2 million to the contractor. Here is the punchline. They did not receive any approval from the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) for the variation of work or for the increased contract sum. This is how this Ministry is being managed. There is no documentation, breakdown or details of these additional works and this is what we have going on in this Ministry.

There was another bit of capital works. As a recurring decimal, the doctors' quarters at Port Kaituma Hospital Complex is once again on this year's budget. This year, we budgeted \$23 million. Guess what happened. Nothing was spent. What assurances do we have that when we put this money in here for this year, or for 2019, that after so many years of procrastination by this Ministry that we will now have this needed facility being built? There are many more infrastructural projects as this, where there is total incompetence and mismanagement.

Let us come to another area, outsourcing. Outsourcing of storage seems to now be big business in the Ministry of Public Health. Minister Lawrence, in her last budget, proudly declared, "storage bond at Kingston and Diamond, no more renting." However, in the Auditor General's report tells a different story. Sussex Street warehouse, \$137 million paid from February to December, 2017. Contract dated from the 1st of June, 2016 and signed on the 20th of June for three years, while the landlord was sent a letter to quit. What happened? They ended up paying \$25 million from November to December, 2017 and when we thought that this was over, they paid another \$100 million for January to August, 2018.

It is extremely difficult to make up this stuff. Perhaps, we should make a movie called 'Warehouse One, the Sussex Street Drama', starring George and Volda, costing Guyanese taxpayers more than \$250 million and counting. Then there is a sequel called, 'Warehouse Two, the Princess Street Edition'. This is now a new off site storage space that the Auditor General has now discovered.

10.36 a.m.

The place is so secretive that the Auditor General (AG) was not allowed the information on the location, size, space, or how much we are paying in rental. This, of course, is costing the Guyanese taxpayers millions of dollars.

If Warehouse Two was not good enough, this warehouse series seem to be a lucrative business. The Ministry of Public Health has now produced another one, called Warehouse Three, the Ocean View International Hotel edition. Perhaps, we should rename it “Drugs, Termite and Seven Hotel Rooms”. What we should do is try to find out the cost, how much this extravaganza is costing us? Let us assume that one hotel room cost US\$60 dollars. When US\$60 is multiplied by seven, that would give us US\$420 per day, which would mean US\$12,600 per month for these rooms. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? We hope that the Minister of Public Health would clear the air, come clean and tell this National Assembly how much this is costing us. It is cases like these that have resulted in the Bank of Guyana being overdrawn on the Public Deposit Account by some \$48.5 billion.

At the rate this Government is going, it is pawning the future of our young people by its policy of taxing, borrowing and squandering. This reeks of old school People’s National Congress (PNC) type economics that would eventually lead to bankruptcy. The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Manifesto for 2015 said, they would strengthen the delivery of primary healthcare services to promote greater integration of services in general, including environmental surveillance to meet the needs of remote communities, in particular.

In just three years, there are clear signals or signs of failure in the public health sector. Anyone who has recently utilised the system can attest to its failings. Long waiting times at outpatient clinics, longer waiting times for surgery, all availability of diagnostic test and constant shortages of drugs have plagued the system. As if this is not enough, admission to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) now is like a lottery. Patients must hope that when they get sick and go there, there is a bed that is available. In some cases, people wait in the Accident and Emergency (A&E) for days on end to get a bed in the ward. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, every Member to whom I give the floor, will make the statement he or she wishes to make. We can either allow the Member to say it or we can interrupt the Member infrequently and then we will have a situation where the Member is on the floor for an hour to deliver half an hour statement. Or, we can allow the Member to make his statement and if you feel that you must interrupt, do it with discretion. There is no reason for trying to shout the Member down. I will allow the Member to complete his statement if it takes two hours. Let us be clear as to what we will do here. Please proceed, Sir.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. Maybe, the Hon. Members on that side would probably not know of the conditions of some of our hospitals because they do not utilise the facilities that we have.

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

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Minister, Mr. Jordan, spoke on Tuberculosis (TB) and pointed out an increase in the incidents of Multi-Drug Resistant strain of the disease. Yesterday, Minister Dr. Cummings confirmed Multiple Drug Resistant TB, but what she did not tell us or explain to us was the reason we have Multiple Drug Resistant TB in Guyana. The experts would tell you that Multiple Drug Resistant TB developed because of programme failures. They have been stock-out of critical drugs, inadequate monitoring, poor compliance and sometimes patients' poverty.

Many of these patients are too ill to work and with the paltry sum set aside for public assistance, when they do benefit, it is hardly enough for them to survive. Yesterday, the Hon. Mr. John Adams, sought to placate this House by stating that some functionaries of the Ministry of Public Health stated publicly that there was no shortage of TB drugs. However, what he failed to tell us was when those drugs arrived in this country from the Global TB Drug Facility (GDF). Before that, there were shortages and that is why you are having programme failure. Distorting the truth is probably good for propaganda, but critical shortages of drugs are going to hurt and kill people. Stop playing with the lives of people in this country.

Just a few days ago, on 1st December, we celebrated World AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) Day. Under the People's Progressive Party/Civic's (PPP/C) Government, tremendous strides were made in fighting this dreadful disease. We note that the disease is on the increase in

certain age groups. The adult prevalence rate is 1.7% and when we look at the high-risk groups, it is even higher. For example, among sex workers it is 6.1% and among transgender people it is 8.4%. For high-risk population groups, one of the most effective ways of preventing this disease is for us to introduce Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). I urge Government...

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

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I urge the Government to urgently implement this most effective way of preventing this disease in the country. The Government likes to talk about its commitment to treat all. But, what has happened is, we were told that there are 8200 persons living with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) in this country. Right now, we are treating approximately 5237, which leaves a gap of 2963 patients who are still without medication. I urge this Government to match its rhetoric with action. Let us put in Budget 2019 the amount of money necessary so that we can scale up treatment for these patients who have HIV.

Diabetics - there are 60,000 diabetic persons in this country. What we hear is how much we want to prevent non-communicable diseases, but one of the things to prevent persons from becoming a diabetic or to help patients who have diabetes manage their blood sugar, is to get a glucometer. It cost about maybe \$5000. If we had taken the money that we had wasted on the Sussex Street Bond, we could have bought about 65,000 glucometers and given them to those patients.

Suicide - this seems to have taken backburner. A report that I was reading from the Mental Health Unit of the Ministry of Public Health states that the workers in the Mental Health Unit cannot go out and help patients because they do not have transportation.

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

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. C. Persaud: Mr. Speaker, I rise to join my Colleagues as we all support the Hon. Minister of Finance in his bid to have Budget 2019 approved by this honourable House, unanimously too. I am sure the Hon. Members on the other side, after their *huffing and puffing*, will see the full intent of Budget 2019, and also support it.

Budget 2019 speaks to development across this beautiful country of ours, but I will confine my presentation to Region 6 because it is where I am from and the area that I would like to highlight a lot about what has been happening. Before I do that, what I have is a small list of things that were done in 2018 and things that will be done in 2019. It will take a few minutes to repeat or to read out to this honourable House. But, I honestly believe from my school days that a debate without rebuttal is almost a useless debate. I would like to offer some rebuttals to what I heard earlier.

Very quickly, The Hon. Mr. Joseph Hamilton stood up and during his presentation, the entire side of the Opposition was really laughing. It struck me that he could do well as a stand-up comedian. But then he made a very serious statement, when he said in 2020, this Government would be kicked out. He quoted a very lovely song. I say that statement is serious because I learnt from the legendary, the late great Martin Luther King, that you must have a dream. The Hon. Mr. Hamilton, was dreaming. He cannot be blamed for dreaming, it is just that he will wake up to find that it was just a dream.

I have listened a few minutes ago to the Hon. Dr. Frank Anthony. He made some serious comments. I will not dwell much on what he said, Sir, except to share a term that we learnt in law school. It states: "He who comes into equity, must come with clean hands."

We are accused and most of that was hurled at the Minister of Public Health for having favouritism in tendering. We have unquestionably one of the richest men in Guyana, who was a friend of the Leader of the Opposition. He received almost 99% of contracts to provide drugs at exorbitantly high prices. I would like to ask the Hon. Member, if that individual received drugs as a result of proper tendering or was he just given the contracts. "He who lives in glass houses should not throw stones". We need to remember these things.

10.51 a.m.

I will go very quickly to my Friend from Region 6, the Hon. Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo. For a long period of time, he was heading the Berbice Regional Health Authority and what he could not see or recognised was that pregnant women were sharing beds. I do not know if he could recognise that when you are pregnant, you do not have much movement about you, but you have to share a bed with another pregnant woman.

This Government and the Minister of Public Health is in the process of having a maternity ward built at the New Amsterdam Hospital that will house these women. That should be commended; that is a commendable thing. Why, in 23 years, did the PPP not see the need to have a maternity ward at the New Amsterdam Hospital? It is the vision.

A comment was made by my friend, the Hon. Member, Dr. Mahadeo, that the health centres at Plegt Anker and No. 76 Village were closed due to wood ants, marabunta and who knows what else he wanted to put inside there except patients. First of all, Plegt Anker is about 18 miles up on the East Bank of Berbice, where the roads, prior to my good friend and Minister of Public Infrastructure, Mr. Patterson, taking a stand on that, but we will talk about that in a bit. But it is a lot of travelling to get to that health centre. People had to come out to New Amsterdam to be treated. We do not accept substandard work. The health centres at No. 76 Village and at Plegt Anker which were quoted by my good Friend the Hon. Dr. Mahadeo, have not being opened - closed. The remedial work had to be done after the contractor did not do what he was paid to do. So, as recent as the 20th and 30th November, just a couple of weeks ago, keys were handed over to the health authority in relation to those two health centres. That was not mentioned.

When we are going to lay blame, we need to find genuine reasons for so doing. My good Friend, the Hon. Irfaan Ali, spoke of lies – we told lies... [*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Persaud, and what I am going to say now applies to all Members in this Chamber, that word would not be acceptable. It was used yesterday, in fact, Hon. Mr. Ali began his presentation with a certain reference. Whether in song or in verse, it will not be permitted henceforth. So, please express yourself in other language.

Mr. C. Persaud: I get it Sir. I was simply referring to what the Hon. Member said. But, Sir, we were accused of untruth. What I would say is that, if there is any untruth about anything, then it is the untruth claim laid out to the people in Berbice, Region 6 in particular, about cheap electricity as a result of the function of the Skeldon Factory, which has generators. “We will get cheap electricity”. Sir, that is one huge elephant. Hundreds of millions of United States (US) dollars were spent to put that white elephant where it was by the PPP/C, not this Government. When we were told that we would receive cheap electricity, if this is not untrue, then what else is?

One of the things that is bothering us in Region 6, one of the things that I enjoy, and I would say this publicly because this is public, it is the Berbice River Bridge. That was put, and if I may be allowed to use a term that I have often been told, "*Jagdeo geh ayo bridge*". I am not denying that and I happy. With respect to the Hon. Member, I would simply use that reference, '*Jagdeo, geh ayo bridge*'. Your Honour, that contract for the bridge was not drafted and signed by us, this Government. It was signed years ago by the PPP/C. That contract allowed for \$2200 for a car to drive across. Region 6, Berbice is what the PPP term as their stronghold, but it was the PPP/C, my good Friend, the Hon. Member Mr. Mustapha, who had to pay \$2200 to cross. He was not a Member of Parliament (MP) then.

Sir, this Government reduced the toll to \$1900. We did that, Sir. Just recently, it was supposed to come out on the 12th November, 2018. On the Local Government Election (LGE) day, the bridge toll at the Berbice River Bridge was going to go up to \$8000. At \$2200 that was US\$11. At that time, it was the highest cost for crossing a bridge, including any bridge in the United States of America. At \$8000 it is unquestionably the most expensive bridge to cross in this part of the world. But who did that, if we agree that it was as termed '*Jagdeo, geh ayo bridge*'? Then it has to be his contract. It has to be terms of the contract that they signed to allow for such an increase. Had it not been for this Government and my good Friend and Colleague, the Hon. Mr. David Patterson, people would have been struggling. As my good Friend, Mr. Mustapha, would say, some were looking to sell their cars. The price of that bridge has be stymied, it has been stayed, as we would say in legal terms. It is not happening - \$8,000.

What is slated to happen? My good Friend Mr. Patterson, there is word all over the place that he would be taken to Court. At least, if he is taken to Court, he would be taken to Court for something worth going to Court for. It is definitely not for stealing law books. He will have a defence, he will have a lot of us to defend him for free.

What we have is a bunch of disgruntle people who have high dreams and we are all allowed to have dreams. But, that is what it is. Let us not look to blame others when we ourselves are part of the same thing that we are talking about. We initiated all these things.

I have so much to say, but when we look at this... Sir, I will just go quickly to what has happened so far in Region 6. In Region 6, millions were spent on development. Just the other day, a friend

of mine came back from Canada. He had not been to Guyana for about nine years. While driving through New Amsterdam, he said, “Man this road *ah* like a glass top.” - the main road in New Amsterdam. What he said was that the back dam road should have been built and that the canal should be cleaned. I said, “Come let me show you something.” When he looked at it, it was so clean. Again, it is a brand-new road. People in Berbice, what we are complaining about? My good Friend and former Chairman, the Hon. Member Mr. Mustapha is happy, he is very happy, but he cannot say that publicly.

Look what we have. I would dare him and my other Colleague, good Friend, Attorney-at-Law, the Hon. Member, Adrian Anamayah, [*Inaudible*] the longest straight road in the Caribbean. It was pitched dark and it was a very lonely road. Now, what do we have? The Hon. Member, David Patterson, I could pat him on the shoulder, not just lights, but LED lights. One does not need his/her car lights when driving there. It is a known fact that the road is usually infested with animals, but with those lights one can see them because it is as bright as day. My good Friend Mr. Mustapha, yes or no? I will allow you. The Hon. Member is shaking his head, he still cannot say ‘yes’ aloud. What is there to complain about?

One of the things, the closure of the sugar estate in Rosehall/Canje, I cannot deny that. The estate is closed or was closed I should say. The people who were working there, were paid severance paid. It was more money than they received during their working years, in just a fraction of a year. The rest of it was paid last Friday. Some have used the money, some have bought cars and some have renovated their homes. They could not have done that on the weekly salaries they were getting. What this Government has done by doing that, we were giving money to a business that did not bring back anything in return. Was it sensible? It was not the APNU/AFC Government that crippled the sugar estates. That was done by the PPP. What are they complaining about? We are trying to make the people comfortable. The balance of the severance was paid last Friday, but many of those workers and, again, I will ask my friend to deny, if he has that kind of guts, many of the men and people who were working on the sugar estate cutting cane, are still employed by the same estate. Yes or no? **[Ms. Wade: Yes.]** Yes. That did not stop the Government from pulling out money and paying the severance. If you were not working, then fine, but you are now re-employed and you still got your severance pay, along with the working money coming in.

Again, what is there to complain about? If what they did and I am saying that they did, there is a particular individual who lives obliquely opposite from my home in Canje. He was on television saying, “I cannot send my children to school and I do not have enough money because I was laid off from the estate”. It was about two weeks after the severance was paid and he does not have a child. That is the problem I had to take task with, I had to. He does not have a child, neither an adopted child. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

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

Mr. C. Persaud: Thank you very much, Sir. I will take the five minutes, it is all the time I need to look at what is happening in Region 6 in 2018. We have a capital expenditure of \$61 million and the Regional Executive Office can give you a copy or I can make a copy of the document available to you, so that you would know it is untruth.

We have the extension of the maternity ward at the New Amsterdam Hospital. It is not completed, but it will be. It is being built. The construction of the Doctors’ quarters at the New Amsterdam Hospital. Anyone will see that. Again, I will ask my friend to deny that. The Doctors’ quarters is now being extended Sir.

Phase two of the construction of the CT Scan Room; rehabilitation of the Doctors’ room and I must say this. I went one night to meet a doctor, who is a good friend of mine. When I watched the room where they were sleeping when they take their breaks or their rest periods because of a 24-hour shift, it was somewhere I would put my dog to sleep. Now, that it has been renovated, the Doctors’ have proper beds. That is what we are doing by trying to make everybody comfortable.

11.06 a.m.

We also have the entire kitchen in the New Amsterdam Hospital being renovated because people have to have food, so they have to cook for the patients. These are things that could have been done a long time ago if the then people, who were in control, had the vision.

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

Mr. C. Persaud: Thank you very much, Sir. We are looking, also, at the construction of the No. 36 Primary School; rehabilitation of the Skeldon Primary School; rehabilitation of the Skeldon Annexe; rehabilitation of the New Amsterdam Multilateral School; rehabilitation of the Johanna Primary School in Black Bush. We are not looking to see what area has People's National Congress (PNC), Alliance For Change (AFC) or A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change people. We are doing it for the people in Berbice. We are doing it for the citizens of this country.

What we have in the 2019 Budget? At least \$114 million has been set aside for bridges at Cromarty and No. 65 Village, again, allegedly a PPP dominated area. We are not looking at who controls which area. We are doing it for the people. That is what this Government is about. Excavation of the creek and canal at No. 66 Village and Black Bush Polder. This is to help farmers, please Sir.

I will conclude very quickly. There is a lot more, but I am sure my other Colleagues will assist. I want to, very briefly, end with the East Bank Berbice road. Millions of dollars were allocated by the PPP/C to build that road. It was like a temporary fix. It is now being fixed permanently. We, and many of us who live there, will not outlive that road.

Again, I wish to, at this stage, without hesitation commend this budget to the honourable House. Thanks to the Minister of Finance and his staff for presenting a very detailed and very engulfing budget. I thank the staff for so doing.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I make an appeal, which is to ask Members if they could lift the level in their presentations. Let us try that. The next speaker is Mr. Ganga Persaud.

Mr. G. Persaud: Thank you. Mr. Speaker. I wish to make a few comments on the theatrical address by the Hon. Member, Mr. Persaud. I am advised that, when you look at the theatre, they are make beliefs. They are far from the reality. I am happy with your guidance, which you gave just before you called me to speak.

The fixing of the East Bank Berbice road - five budgets and all that we are hearing is that it is being fixed. There is nothing to shout and be proud of. Severance pay meant for sugar workers was due to them, they did not ask for severance. They were terminated. The laws of this country require that if you terminate them, you pay them and pay them instantaneously. Nothing to shout

about from the other side Sir. Months and even the engagement of the Courts, to cause those people to get their severance pay. That is their entitlement. They earned it. It is not hand-outs.

We are building roads like glass, very dangerous for this country. Glass-surfaced roads that would be accident-prone – nothing to be proud of. We talked about money and we talked about the Berbice River Bridge. These are some of the theatrical aspects that I am responding to Minister Harmon. Talking about the Government taking hold of the Berbice River Bridge and lauding that initiative. Budget 2019 has not provided one cent to support that decision of the Government. We are wondering where the money would come from, maybe Mr. Persaud will go around to the business community.

We talked about cheap electricity. It was not the Opposition that closed the Skeldon Sugar factory, which housed the co-generation plant. It was that and the misinformed people. It was providing electricity to National Grid, that was what the co-generation was doing. They need to check their facts. The theatrics are finished. Let us get to reality.

As I continue with my contribution to Budget 2019, the fifth budget of the APNU/AFC. I can summarise all that I have to say in this one statement: “Budget 2019 is an extremely disappointing budget.” This budget is denuded of any significant measures that can restore the ‘good life’ that the Guyanese population enjoyed before May, 2015, much less to enhance anybody’s lives. We come here with a whole host of rhetoric. We have robbed this nation of the peace, joy, happiness and comfort they enjoyed before May, 2015. We come here with forked tongue.

Budget preparation is a tedious task and, maybe, it is for that reason that the Hon. Minister of Finance caused so much embarrassment to the hard-working staff of the Ministry of Finance by giving directions to cut and paste from Budget No. 1 APNU, Budget No. 2 APNU, Budget No. 3 APNU, Budget No. 4 APNU and put it into Budget 2019. Why I said APNU? It is because, according to Hon. Minister Volda Lawrence, you cannot have a job unless you are PNC. That is why I do not see the AFC as being part of the system – Government jobs rather.

The ‘good life’ found itself again in Budget 2019. That is the ‘good life’. That ‘good life’ continues to be elusive to more than 95% of the population in this country. Apparently, the only place that ‘good life’ exists is in the pages of the three volumes of Budget 2019. Instead of us hearing from the Hon. Minister of Finance about the reduction of taxes, which funds a heavy burden on the

backs of the taxpayers in our country and the populace generally, we have not heard anything about that. If you are not reducing the tax burden on people, then the expendable income will not increase, so there is no 'good life' for that.

Expectation with regards to the reduction of cost of living, all of those were dashed to the ground. Nothing to say to this nation that the cost of living will decrease and so people can have a better life.

Budget 2019 contains some wages and salaries increases. These inadequate and unacceptable increases have drawn reactions from the public at large, more particularly, the public servants and the unions representing the public servants. The Guyana Teachers' Union (GTU) still cannot get an agreement that will satisfy the teachers in this country. The University of Guyana (UG) workers and their Unions have all responded very negatively to Budget 2019.

The sugar workers have demonstrated against the non-inclusion of any increase in Budget 2019, a constant that would have been in Budgets No. 1 to 4 and now in Budget No. 5 of this APNU/AFC Government. There is no increase for the sugar workers. How can we talk about the 'good life'; how could we talk about a budget that should be supported? How can we stand up and say that, when people get severance, they ought to be happy, when you took away their jobs?

Budget 2019 has not addressed the sad state of affairs, of shortages of drugs and medical supplies across the 10 regions of Guyana. The approximately \$10 billion that was allocated to the 10 regions for public health care, which is expected to cater for more than 92% of the Guyanese population, that allocation is less than what we would have given to some agencies, for example, the Defence Force. The allocation that was given to health across these 10 regions is less than that. I have not heard anything or read anything in Budget 2019 that will seek to correct; that will seek to erase the corrupt practices on systematic failures in the procurement, distribution and dispensation of drugs and medical supplies. We are talking about making people happy, when the public health care system is crumbling, and it is eating into the pockets of the small man and woman out there to provide health care for themselves and their families. No wonder the private health care system is thriving. It is thriving because of the crumbling of the public health care system,

The budgets for the 10 regions would have provided \$24.9 billion for the education sector in the 10 regions. That allocation of \$24.9 billion is required to meet the wages and salaries of all teachers

across these 10 regions; provide for their travelling, the other benefits and allowances, and to meet maintenance and materials costs for the education delivery in the 10 regions. No wonder a number of our schools are in dire need of repairs.

Sanitary blocks are no longer functioning, the plumbing is a sad bit of affairs, so much so that students are now forced to walk with their water bottles to school.

I have not heard yet of how we will deal with the rising or the increase in absenteeism, in delinquency and truancy within the education system. We have not heard of how we will deal with those stories. The economic situation is forcing more students to opt out of schools, forcing parents to make choices and prioritising as to who should benefit from a full education, as against who should not within that family.

11.21 a.m.

The Hon. Minister, in his budget presentation, mentioned the Local Government Elections held in 2018. The results for which are known, and which, certainly, as I said in the 2017 presentation, was somewhat embarrassing to the Government side. This time, it is more than embarrassing and they are holding on to straws, as drowning men would do. [Mr. Bulkan: That is not what you said. You said it would not be held.] Alright. Whatever I said, you would get your chance to put that into context.

What should be very worrying, for the very person who attempted to heckle, is the statement made by the Chief Elections Officer, after the conclusion of the 2018 Local Government Elections (LGEs). That statement was that the Ministry of Communities cannot extricate itself from the full blame for the low voter's turnout. The Ministry failed miserably in the public awareness system. So, the Hon. Minister must talk about that. [Ms. Ally: He did not carry them out there.] You carried out yours and that is the reason you got 38%. I am hoping that the allocation, in *Budget 2019*, to the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) would include, as they move to the house-to-house registration, additional biometrics, so that we could have a voter's list, a national register, that is current and that could be creditable and acceptable to this nation.

The Hon. Minister of Finance stated that over \$1 billion was set aside for fiscal transfers to the 80 local authority areas. The first thing is that the mechanism being used by the Ministry of

Communities to disburse allocations in the Budget, under the head 'subvention', to local authority areas is not known.

We, in this House, passed the fiscal transfers legislation. It was assented to. What I was told was that the Ministry of Communities has ignored the three variables - that is geographical mass, population density and the rate of collection - which are weighted in such a way to give 100%. The Ministry has ignored the law and is dispensing subventions to local authority areas in a manner that is discriminatory. So, I am hoping that the Hon. Minister would give us some guidance. When I looked at project code 1902900 in the Budget, I am not seeing that \$1 billion under 'subvention'. I am seeing \$602 million. Maybe the Hon. Minister could help us identify where the additional subvention is budgeted.

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

Mr. G. Persaud: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

What is happening in local government in our country is really sad. The Local Government Commission is in place. Yet, the Ministry of Communities, through its various local government departments in the 10 Administrative Regions, continues to manipulate local government practitioners, particularly Overseers and Town Clerks, using all sort of threats and machinations to undermine elected councils. We are hearing about giving more autonomy and making these local authority areas independent, so to speak, of Regional and Central Government. But what is happening on the ground is that these Tin Gods, so to speak, who we call Regional Executive Officers, continue to manipulate the budgets and the fulfilling of the budgets of the local authority areas. Apart from that, this Government seems not to have a strong liking for proper consultation. So, what is happening is that the same project that is identified by the local authority area is also identified by the Regional Democratic Council (RDC) and, in some instances, funded by the central Ministry. So, there is lots of overlapping and wastage of resources due to the lack of meaningful consultation.

I have heard speakers talking about this Government being non-discriminatory and not being bothered about who supports who or who voted for whom. The reality on the ground is certainly different from those statements. It is because on the ground, there is this heavy uneasiness due to discriminatory practices by all 10 regional authorities.

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

Mr. G. Persaud: Additionally, and I trust that the Auditor General would help us to find out, we were told that the allocations to some regional authorities were moved from one line item to another without proper consultation and approval, and that expenditure of moneys voted in this National Assembly were spent on projects that were not approved by this National Assembly. So, we are hoping that the Auditor General would help us to look into those concerns that are being expressed by members of the respective regions and local authorities.

As we get closer to the year 2019, we are hoping that the Ministry of Communities would make the subventions available to the 80 local authority areas in a timely manner, and that the projects that were submitted by the local authority areas would not be substituted by the Regional Executive Officers and their respective teams.

I, in concluding, wish to support my Colleagues who would have spoken before and that is to say, I cannot support *Budget 2019* in the way it is presented. Thank you.

Minister within the Ministry of Social Protection [Mr. Scott]: Permit me to congratulate the Hon. Winston DaCosta Jordan and his team for the excellent job they have done in the preparation of *Budget 2019*. I immediately would like to express my full support, here today, for these wonderful measures that he has produced. However, notwithstanding its dynamism and a comprehensive impact which it is designed to have on the citizens of this nation in many ways, I could use two words to describe it, those are excellent and futuristic.

The theme, *Transforming the Economy, Empowering people, Building Sustainable Communities For the Good Life* is interpreted to mean that the substance and essence of this Budget are basically human development. Permit me, therefore, to briefly highlight the concept of human development in the pre-birth of this *Budget 2019*. In this regard, reference is made to the United Nations (UN) Report for the year 2016, which was released in 2017, under the caption, “Human Development 2016”, with a subtheme, “Human Development for everyone.”

I do not think that I should have any difficulty in convincing this House that the Budget we are discussing was crafted to generate human development for every single Guyanese. At page 25 of the United Nations Report, the parameters and substance of human development is outlined:

“Human development is all about people—expanding their freedoms, enlarging their choices, enhancing their capabilities and improving their opportunities. It is a process as well as an outcome. Economic growth and income are means to human development but not ends in themselves—because it is the richness of people’s lives, not the richness of economies, that ultimately is valuable to people.”

From this definition, I could identify several core values. Among them are the expansion of people’s freedoms, the enlargement of people’s horizon and the improvement in people’s opportunities; they could be distilled as well as identified in *Budget 2019*. In the circumstances, I must reiterate that a conceptual framework within which it must be located is human development.

To achieve the overall goal of human development, which is the result of a transformed economy, exhibiting sustained communities inhabited by empowered people living a good life, several measures, therefore, have been outlined. It is true that an acceptable indicator of economic performance is real Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which could be translated to the development of our stock of human capital. The Hon. Minister of Finance has revealed that the real GDP for 2018 is projected to fall short by 0.4%. The possible achievement of 3.4% would, however, be surpassing the 2.1% achieved in 2017. This, no doubt, is good news for all of Guyana, but much more could be achieved and will be achieved in 2019, through the operationalisation of the stated measures outlined in this Budget.

At this junction, I wish to draw attention to a cardinal statement made by paragraph 4.36 of the Hon. Minister Jordan’s presentation. That statement reads:

“The effectiveness of public service delivery hinges on the strength of our national institutions, efficiency of its systems and practice of sound public financial management (PEM).”

That tells you that it is the need and the work of the regions and officers as well as our Ministries that must do the deliverables of what has been promised. I believe that, by now, it should be well established that the A Partnership For National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition Government has relied heavily on the cooperative societies as the institutions of change and development.

11.36 a.m.

As a matter of fact, we regard these enterprises as being endowed with the potential to be able to assist in the transformation of our economy so that the good life, which eluded many Guyanese for decades, can be fully realised.

On previous occasions and at various fora, I directed attention to the precarious and sometimes even perilous state in which we found cooperative societies, inclusive of credit unions, when we took office. The task of rebuilding these institutions, from the ground up, was not easy. Several challenges, including a lack of interest, a lack of knowledge of the ethos and benefits of corporativism, had to be overcome and replaced with a passion for these societies whose potentials are universally acclaimed.

Notwithstanding the constraints, including insufficient funds and financial capital, the Cooperative Department within the Ministry of Social Protection, in collaboration with the Guyana National Cooperative Credit Union Limited (GNCCUL), has revealed the following data as indicators of success. The number of societies registered equals 31. The number of applications for societies to be registered equals 25. The number of functioning societies equals 150, of which 25 are credit unions. The registration, guidance and monitoring of these societies are done within the provisions of the effective public services for the sustainable development, as stated in the Budget.

A critical function of the Cooperative Department is the superintendence of its financial integrity and managerial prudence, through principles and practices of auditing of a very high standard. Our records show that for the year 2018, a total of 33 audits were ordered, of which 20 or 61% were completed. The shortfall is attributed to the tardiness by which some societies conducted their affairs. The Department, however, has taken its auditing functions very seriously and is working assiduously to ensure that all societies are audited in a timely manner and in satisfaction of and with the legal requirements, including the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Act (AML/CFT).

The requisite legal provisions dictate that each society, upon being audited, make a contribution to a special fund called the Audit and Supervision Fund, which covers most costs for auditing and other services provided to societies. For this year so far, a total of \$31 million have been paid into that fund. In essence, the auditing function, which is being executed by the Cooperative

Department, serves to promote the integrity and transparency of societies. In the coming year, we will be intensifying this aspect of our mandate as we expand our programme to revitalise the thrift societies in the school system. So, we are bringing back the school thrift societies, which is vital to rekindling the spirit of thrift among school children.

The Hon. Minister of Finance has highlighted Government's commitment to the rest of the world, and more particularly, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Region, to fight against anti-money laundering and the financing of terrorism. Since cooperative societies, and even friendly societies, are susceptible to this type of illegal activity, the Chief Cooperatives Development Officer and the technical staff of the Cooperative Department are constantly engaged in training to equip them to meet these challenges. Training Officers and Cooperators have been expanded to the Administrative Regions of 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 10.

Further, an effort to ensure the Department is adequately staffed, an apprenticeship programme for Cooperative Officers was initiated during the current year. This novel initiative has resulted in apprentices being drawn from Regions 1, 3, 6, 7, 8 and 9. The programme is a pilot, which is intended to be replicated many times over, all with the intention of making the cooperative movement the third most important and powerful economic force in our economy.

The work of the Cooperative Department was ably supported by the GNCCUL, which was provided with a subvention to facilitate the services it provided. I have no intention of highlighting in any detail the misery caused by corruption, which was evident in many large societies when we took office. However, with the assistance of the Ministry of Legal Affairs and other stakeholders, we have embarked on a campaign to rid such societies of dishonest elements, as we seek to reeducate and promote transparency and accountability. We have worked tirelessly to sanitise and regularise most of them which are now functioning or will soon be functioning above board.

The contribution that this Cooperative Department has made to the resuscitation of the cooperative movement in this country is testimony to the effectiveness of public service delivery that hinges on the strength of our national institutions. This House can be fully assured that the Ministry of Social Protection will continue to deliver effective public service in the coming year.

The need for amending the labour laws within the general scheme of our programmes is imperative at this time, as Guyana expects an inflow of foreign business, due, in large measure, to our

newfound wealth. We have embarked on an update and amendment to certain key labour legislation, with synchronisation to enlightened thinking and practices. These laws include the Labour Act, the Leave with Pay Act, the Termination of Employment and Severance Pay Act, the Occupational Safety and Health Act, the Cooperative Societies Act, the Friendly Societies Act and the School's Thrift Act, Chapter 36:04.

Our most important piece of legislation is the Labour Act, Chapter 98:01, which was first enacted in 1942. Even though it has undergone a series of piecemeal adjustments, it is still deficient in many ways. For example, the need for an employer to produce the requisite employment records at the Ministry to facilitate reasonable resolution of differences between himself and an aggrieved worker or ex-worker is not provided for on a compulsory basis, thereby making a thorough and complete investigation protracted and, at times, almost impossible.

The mandate of the Ministry is about fairness, justice and equity, especially for the ordinary citizens who can be disadvantaged by a very powerful employer. But these values cannot be fully manifested within the scope of the current laws. It is therefore against that background that the Labour Act will be amended to provide for the compulsory submission of the necessary records to aid in the resolution of complaints for the benefit of the ordinary worker and towards the promotion of human development.

Within the context of improved labour management relations, we have undertaken to establish either an industrial relations court or an industrial relations tribunal. Towards that end, the Ministry has engaged major stakeholders, who comprise the National Tripartite Committee, which is currently examining a proposed bill which should bring into existence either a court or a tribunal, the object of which will be to enhance labour management relations and, ultimately, the quality of life of all workers, who should be able to experience better conditions within their workplaces.

I now wish to divert my attention to occupational safety and health, which is a main pillar in our mandate. This House will recall that, when we took office in 2015, we resolved to separate the Occupational Safety and Health Unit from the Industrial Relations or Labour Department in pursuit of greater specialisation of functions in both disciplines - industrial relations as against occupational safety and health. That separation or delinking was successfully completed, a consequence of which is the fulfilment of a mandate to investigate all accidents, especially those that result in

fatalities, is fully pursued. In fact, we have set ourselves the target of investigating all fatal accidents in a timely manner, something that we have so far been able to do.

Our philosophy is to educate and sensitise all stakeholders, that is employers and employees, so that workplace or industrial accidents can be minimised and possibly eliminated in the workplace. In pursuit of such an agenda, we continue to conduct workshops and seminars, both at the Ministry and at the enterprise level, with employees and employers, our target audiences. Our training records reveal that, for 2018 thus far, a total of 40 training activities have been done in specialised training in occupational safety and health. The specialised training in occupational safety and health was done against the backdrop of a national policy on occupational safety and health, which was recently completed.

We propose to expand our sensitisation and educational programmes across regions. I wish to emphasise that that policy was developed after wide scale consultation with the main stakeholders and other interested parties such as the Ministry of Public Health and the Guyana Fire Service (GFS), among others.

Our research has shown that the Cooperative Republic of Guyana is the only CARICOM nation state with a policy document of this nature, and for which we, therefore, must be seen as a trendsetter worthy of emulation.

We are mandated to conduct safety inspections, audits and investigations wherever and whenever an infraction of the occupational safety and health rules and regulations occur. I must admit that we are very concerned with the number of workplace fatalities that have occurred in the mining sector recently. Permit me to present the following statistics on industrial accidents for the year 2018. Total number of accidents, 506. Total number of fatalities, 19. This means that 3.75% of accidents resulted in the loss of life, while the others resulted in the loss of time and, in some instances, the loss of a limb. This is an untenable situation, particularly in the mining industry, where the majority of fatalities occurred. In an effort to curb this situation, we have forged an alliance with the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC), the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) and the Forestry Department to better monitor unsafe work practices in remote areas. That alliance is now extended to include the Ministry of Natural Resources, and which shall include the offshore enterprises and those agencies involved in the aircraft industry.

11.51 a.m.

Our objective, at the conclusion of every accident investigation, is to provide guidance to employers, including those who operate within the sphere of Government, to take remedial and preventative action. That apart, however, the Ministry intends to conduct more workplace inspections in hinterland area locations so that safety and health would not be left to chance. We are constrained by the insufficient allocation of funds, but, given the magnitude of the safety issues before us, creative ways and means would be developed so that our agenda will be fulfilled even better.

A comprehensive menu of measures to harness the potentials of youths in our population is prescribed for the stimulation and maintenance of growth and development of the nation. In this regard, the work and contribution of the Board of Industrial Training (BIT) stands out. The mandate of that Board is to provide the nation with a constant supply of skilled labour in many areas of discipline, which would allow youths to take their rightful place in our economic ventures. In 2018, that agency was allocated \$294 million, which was used to provide training for almost 2,000 youths. In 2019, that amount is being increased to \$353 million, which represents an increase of 20% in the budgetary allocation. This increase in expenditure will further realise Government's commitment to advancing the empowerment of our young people. I wish to emphasise that our focus on youth and youth empowerment is not to be divorced from child labour. As a reminder, I, once again, call forth the remarks of the Hon. Minister of Finance who, at paragraph 4.1.6, stated:

“Promoting the well-being of children and the fulfilment of children's rights must preoccupy any responsible nation, from the level of the policy maker to the public at large.”

It is our preoccupation with the future of our youths and youth empowerment that has motivated us to develop a comprehensive policy to eliminate child labour. The policy which we have developed is multi-dimensional and exhibits several guiding principles, objectives and targets. One of those targets, which is long-term in nature, is the prevention and elimination of child labour in all its forms by 2025. Therefore, the budgetary allocation of \$636 million for 2019 must be seen as an investment in the future of this nation. The elimination of child labour, in conjunction with the focus on youth empowerment, will yield astronomical benefits, not only for youths, but for *all and sundry*.

We are reminded that, prior to the assumption of office of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Coalition, the Government's societal expenditure was pro-adult, but during the past three years, it has shifted to pro-child and pro-youth, and that itself is highly commendable.

Be assured that the Ministry of Social Protection will continue to work towards the implementation of child labour policy, as well as observance of the provisions of the International Labour Conventions (ILO) which impact child labour. That policy commenced with the collaboration between the Ministry of Social Protection and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), which renewed and generated a synthesis of all laws which impact child labour. Those laws, which are 18 in number, include the national Constitution, the Protection of Children Act, the Employment of Young Persons and Children Act and the Education Act, to name a few.

Our challenges in the field of child labour are located on the same platform with the challenges in trafficking in persons (TIP), and we have made great strides in both areas. As a matter of fact, just last week a team from the Ministry of Social Protection, comprising our legal officers and technical officers, travelled to Lethem and prosecuted a perpetrator for this form of crime. That was an indicator of the collaboration between the Department of Labour and the Trafficking in Persons Unit.

In addition to the matrix of legislation that was mentioned before, I wish to remind this House that our Government has ratified ILO Convention 182, which provides for the elimination of the worst form of child labour, as manifested through all aspects of child labour prevention initiatives.

However, I find it extremely difficult to avoid reiterating that this Budget is about human development, manifested through several avenues. One of those avenues is wages and salaries. Advancement in such an area ranges between 0.5% and 7% for the year 2018. This, once again, fits into the sliding scale formula of wages and salary increases which gives rise to greater equity amongst the nation's workers, as against the customary 5% which was imposed across the board by the previous Administration for decades. This translates to a daily or monthly public sector increase being \$2,537 or \$64,200, respectively, per month. The relevant record shows that, at 1st January, 1993, the comparative rate was \$191.59 per day or \$19,344 per month. In 2014, which is

the year before we took office, the monthly minimum was \$42,703, which means that it took the previous Administration 23 years to address wages and salaries 21 times and it is transmitted into an aggregate increase of 120% over that period of time. However, it must be noted that, in a matter of three years, we have moved the minimum wage from \$42,703 to \$64,200, which is 50.34% and our Government's commitment has even given a promise to even increase it more next year.

In 2015, the threshold was \$600,000. In 2017, our Government took it to \$660,000, a 10% increase in the threshold. In 2018, we took it to \$720,000, a 9% increase. In 2019, it will be taken to \$780,000, an 8.33% increase. This period of time shows that, in three years, the threshold went up by 30% more.

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

Mr. Scott: This increase surpasses the one-off 50% increase awarded to Members of Parliament, which is for a five-year span. It means that, statistically, it would take the present Government no more than six years to increase wages by 100%. That must be the most welcomed period of increases for workers. We are committed to increasing workers' wages. **[Ms. Teixeira:**

When?]

We just told you. The sum of \$780,000 tells you a lot. The direct increases in wages is not the only benefit to be enjoyed by public sector workers. The income threshold has been shifted upwards up to \$780,000. This is estimated to give a disposable income of \$805 million. Certainly, no reasonable-thinking person would attempt to deny such measures, which translate into giving back to the people of this country what we have promised.

The impact of the Budget measures on our children, our youths and our workers cannot be denied. Specifically, various initiatives that have been earmarked for the empowerment of our youths. In 2019, \$1.7 billion has been allocated. Our senior citizens, also, are happy. We have shown an improvement in infrastructure. The Palms Geriatric Institution for the vulnerable had an increase of over \$11 million for improvements. Old age pension has been increased from \$19,500 to \$20,500. Public assistance has been increased from \$8,000 to \$9,000 per month. With these benefits, an additional \$800 million will end up in the pockets of our senior citizens. Looked at from a comprehensive basis, old age pension and public assistance has, therefore, been increased by 55% and 53%, respectively, since this Government has taken office.

The Budget preparations, which was predicated on a stable industrial relations climate, has been increased in the past three years. From our data, between 2015 and 2018, the number of strikes which threatened the macroeconomic stability of our country has declined from 193 to 35 or by 81%. Certainly, there are now fewer strikes with less forces participating in them.

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

Mr. Scott: In 2015, the average man-days lost in strikes were 363. The significance of the industrial relations climate being stable today cannot be denied.

In conclusion, I wish to submit the entire amount of \$633 million, which represents a 19% increase in the Estimates over 2018. It is our intention to continue discharging our mandate in all our areas that we have identified, as well as develop new initiatives that would be necessary in support of this Budget. I wish to emphasise that, once again, collective bargaining and the grievance procedures are critical to the maintenance of a stable industrial climate. This is why Minister Jordan has said that, for public servants, he will be engaging them in further discussions.

I wish to also emphasise and to reaffirm once more my support and the support of my Comrades for the Budget and its measures, which has been designed to take our country forward on a continuous basis from 2015 to now and beyond.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this is the time when we could take the suspension. The sitting is suspended for one hour and we will return at 1.05 p.m.

12.06 p.m.

Hon. Members, would you kindly reclaim your seats? There is some information which has been provided me which leads me to feel that perhaps we could better use our time in this chamber than wait elsewhere for the meal that we should have. We need to confirm that meal is here, rather than is coming. If Members would just allow me to satisfy myself that that is so, then we will take the suspension.

Sitting suspended at 12.07 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.15 p.m.

Ms. Burton-Persaud: I rise to make my presentation on Budget 2019 in this honourable House. The theme for Budget 2019 is *Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities for the Good Life*. However, it is sad that the aforementioned points are absent from the budget.

The Hon. Minister of Finance brags once again that it is an early budget, but I rather suspect that is too early a budget. This budget is a premature document that needs to be urgently placed in an incubator and administered oxygen if it is to be of substance to this nation. This budget has been birthed by delinquent and irresponsible parents whose only interests was to have the baby born so that they could continue to have a nice time. This is evident in paragraph 3 of page 1 where there is mention of the grand celebration for the Golden Jubilee of the Republic in February, 2020.

It is evident that after three years in office, this Government is still in a celebratory mode. There mantra is vividly *party time sport is mah line*. It is disgusting to note that at a time when all sectors in Guyana are doing badly, this Government would see it fit to allocate \$350 million in a budget to wine and dine. These sums could have been utilised better. What is more disheartening is that this large allocation will be spent to carry out preparatory work for the event, so we could be sure that in Budget 2020 we will see more sums being allocated for the facilitating of the actual event. This money could have been better spent to enhance other areas and projects.

For instance, instead of giving \$10 million to the hinterland community of Smith Creek in Region 1, it could have given \$50 million; instead of purchasing one mill for the tomato ketchup project, it could have purchased two; instead of building one stop shelter for the children who walked through the forest to get to school, it could have provided transportation for them to get there. This would have been more beneficial to these communities. It would have transformed the current projects and business in the hinterland; it would have empowered the lives of the residents; it would have built and sustained their communities and then they could have said that they are enjoying the “good life”. Then they would have become the showpiece of our country as my colleague, the Hon. Member Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, said.

In time for the Golden Jubilee celebrations, it could have provided a larger wages and salary increase and a larger bonus for the public servants. It could have paid the outstanding severance payments to those workers from the Wales Sugar Estate who are still awaiting their payments. As

I speak, those workers are still waiting for those severances to be paid. We sat in this honourable House, not so long ago, and voted for a \$2.4 billion budget increase, so that those payments could be made. We were assured that with the passing of that amount that the sugar workers of Wales Sugar Estate would be included in that payment. To date, it is yet to happen. Once again, I want to remind the Hon. Members on that side of the House that it is a criminal offence not to pay one month after giving the letter of severances, the severance payment to severed workers. There is a jail term of three months and a fine of \$20,000. I want to remind the Hon. Members on that side of the House, including the Hon. Member Keith Scott who carries the responsibility, I hope, for labour and the Hon. Minister of Finance who has responsibilities to those sums that there is a jail term hanging over their heads.

Across the world, a national budget is that time of the year when a sitting Government outlines its plans, policies and projects that will take the nation to another level. It is that time when persons plan their future, their daily existence, based on what is outlined in the budget and the nation waits with much anticipation and expectation. Here in Guyana it is no different. However, sad to say that this is not the mindset of this Government. For after crafting and presenting four previous budgets to this nation, the Government has missed the mark, once again, in guiding our nation on a visionary and prosperous path.

In light of the vacuous presentation made by the Hon. Member Keith Scott who heads the Department of Labour, that department solely concentrates on co-operatives and not on labour issues.

One of the Government's claims to fame in Budget 2019 is the increase in wages and salaries for public servants and the supposedly big non-taxable bonus to be paid later this month. Let me state that for the lowest paid workers in this country, there will be a 70% increase and for the highest paid a 0.5% increase. For the 70% increase there will be, for those who receive the basic minimum wage, a \$4,200 more added to their salaries and for those \$1 million and above, they will receive \$20,000 more to their salaries. The Hon. Minister of Finance stated that this month our public servants will receive \$50,400 as a non-taxable bonus, and that figure sounds big. For those who go into the market every day, for those who have to live on their basic salaries, this is nothing to shout about. If that is going to go into the supermarkets, as he stated in his presentation, it is something nice at this time of the year, the holiday season. It could barely full half of a cart of

goodies for any family. When we look at that increase, come January, it will be when the reality will kick home

The Hon. Minister of Finance stated that there will be an increase in salary. The minimum wage will go to \$64,200 per month. The annual take home after National Insurance Scheme (NIS) and pay as you earn (PAYE) would be \$60,605. That is as a flake of ice in the seven seas put together. It will disappear. It will disappear because items will go up traditionally. We could see increases in transportation costs. When you look at all those little things that will have a sudden add on, if it is even a \$10, that sum, that increase, will disappear. It will have no cost effect, no enhancement in the pockets of the simple public servant.

What is also missing is that these increases are for 2018. What will happen in 2019? Are we now embarking on a tradition that we are giving increases in salaries at the end of the given year? Any trade unionist, any person involved in industrial relations, knows that when you negotiate you negotiate for the present year and the next year. That is the only way that those increases could have any value.

A part from these increases, we have not heard in the budget of the benefits and allowances that would be given our public servants. These are some of the things that come to enhance their salaries, but we are not hearing about it. It is silent. It is missing in the budget.

The Hon. Minister Keith Scott spoke of occupational health and safety, I need to ask what will be done to eliminate the reoccurrence of the fiasco that we had at the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC).

1.29 p.m.

What has happened? What will we be doing to eliminate that factor where many persons got ill, seriously ill, because of a lack in the industrial relations as it relates to occupational health and safety?

I also wish to remind the Hon. Minister that child labour is a direct spin-off or a declining economy, because when the household is struggling to survive, there are many times that children go out there, knowingly and unknowingly, and get involved in labour. They do that because sometimes they want spare change, they want their own pocket money, not knowing that they are getting

involved in labour. A businessman may want to extend sympathy in the situation but in doing so that businessman is breaking the law, so we need to understand, we need to listen. Hon. Minister Broomes, you need to listen. Child labour has various spin-offs from it and we need to ensure that our economy is vibrant, workable, that the adults who work are earning sufficient, so that we will not have the cases of having to address child labour in our country.

Is this the “good life” that we are offering the ordinary Guyanese worker, especially the public servants who are really the persons doing all of the hard work so that the Ministers and other senior Government officials can look good?

From May, 2015 to now, there is approximately 30,000 persons who are unemployed. In the budget, the Hon. Minister of Finance stated that via the Small Business Bureau, 535 jobs were realised and there is another 1,700 via Guyana Office for Investment (GO-Invest) in 2019. However, this leaves 28,265 unemployed persons. We are yet so far away from lowering this margin. For a country with a small population, such as Guyana, this is way off the radar.

The Hon. Minister of Finance, in his presentation, hailed this Government as the most business-friendly administration in recent history. Talking about fake news, that is fake news. This is really a fiction of one’s imagination. The reality that we face is the continuous loss of jobs due to the closure of businesses; the loss of spending power by our people, especially our public servants and those who work for minimum wages; no new jobs being created. We are hearing about oil and in 2021, it seems that we have to wait until then for any type of job creation to take place.

There is the closure of businesses due to a rapidly declining economy. We are seeing corporate businesses, large-scale businesses, medium-scale businesses, small businesses and even individual businesses being closed. The increase of crime on businesses and on business owners, and to that, there seems to be no solution to the increasing crime situation in our country. For the first time, businesses that operated for decades in Guyana were robbed. For decades, persons who operated their private businesses and their individual level were attacked, robbed and injured.

There were also numerous unresolved labour issues at the Department of Labour, both by individuals, companies and trade unions, all of the aforementioned, have helped to create the unstable and hostile industrial relations climate that exists in our country today.

In the budget it is stated that for 2018, in the first eight months, there were 189,066 tourists coming to Guyana. It means that there was an average of 23,633 tourists per month. It will be interesting to know the countries of origin, where did these tourists come from, where were these arrivals from, the time spent in Guyana, because a tourist will not spend over three months and it depends on what they are coming for and their finances and their destinations visited. We are not talking about just travelling around Georgetown.

We are not talking about arriving at the Cheddi Jagan International Airport and going home to Berbice or going home to Essequibo. We are talking about real tourism where the tourists come to our country, they book in at a hotel and they take tours to various parts of Guyana, especially the interior that we often advertise about rustic and adventure tourism. That is what we are talking about, those figures we need. In doing so, it is hoped that those figures do not include the Cubans and Brazilians who come here to do shopping primarily, because we can see them so much about the place. I think that the Hon. Minister of Finance is missing the mark, again, on a visitor and a tourist.

There is noted incentives for investors but none for our local tourists, especially our public servants and students. They too need to see, explore and experience the beauty of Guyana. We need to move pass seeing the beauty of Guyana only on postcards, in magazines and videos, and sometimes in the textbooks. We need to put some of the money for jubilee into making those visits affordable. We can really then be able to allow our students, our public servants who work so hard to experience Guyana. We can give trips that will be supported by the Government. We need that to happen. We need our schoolchildren to touch and feel the beauty of Guyana. Some of these moneys can be used to subsidise tolls to these various parts of the region. We need to move beyond just taking them to the gardens, to the National Park, to the museum, to visit St. George's Cathedral and the Lighthouse. We need to move beyond that if we are going to be a proactive and a progressive Government.

We need to ask the question of tourism, what about the yachting project that is spoken about in Budget 2017? The Minister then of tourism went overseas and came back and was boosting us up about the actual fact that we will have yachts coming to this country shortly to participate in their various activities, as they do in countries across the Caribbean. It seems that when these *fancified* projects are placed in the budget to boost it up for window dressing, when we, on this side of the

House, seek to remind the Hon. Members, on that side of the House, of the things that they placed in budgets before and what is the status, it seems to become a laughing matter. The budget is not just for the Opposition, it is for the entire Guyana, so when we remind you and we ask about it and you laugh, you are not laughing at us, you are laughing at the people of Guyana.

What about the birdwatching project initiative? When I spoke about it last year, Mr. Donald Sinclair, Director of Tourism, had a long article in the newspapers about it and made it a mockery. It is because of what I said, at that time, that the only birdwatching that takes place in Guyana that is widely known is what I see along the East Coast, and maybe some parts of the East Bank, where the local men come out on Sunday mornings and on holidays with the cage to have a competition going on. I am asking the Hon. Minister of Tourism, that in relation to such a project, why do we not have a national competition for those very persons? We need to have things because you have put it into a passage as part of tourism and Guyanese need to be a part of the tourism package.

Where are the jobs? What jobs are available for Guyanese in the tourism industry? We have noted that they have been a lot of high-level positions coming out from the Ministry of Tourism, but they are taken up by persons, as we would say, expatriates, foreign persons, coming to the country. What has happened to our young people who have gone to the university? Some are overseas and would have studied and qualified themselves in these areas. Are they not being acknowledged for such jobs? Are we just giving away all the high-level jobs? Are we saying that they are not intelligent enough or experienced enough to take up those positions?

What about the staycation initiative I read about? Yes, Hon. Minister. I have the print out of this staycation that you spoke about. Here is the evidence, I can lay over the evidence to the House.

There is also the talk about adventure tourism. We need to know about this adventure tourism? What is it all about? Where can we go to experience it? What about the new frontier that was recently, just this year, I think it was in October, and I have the evidence of a newspaper article - of sports tourism?

1.44 p.m.

This is the new level of tourism that we are taking on. What about that? We have not heard about it in the budget. We do not know what you are talking about based on just the little that we have

read in the newspapers. We need to understand what you are talking about and all that it entails because we as Guyanese, we want to be part of that type of tourism. What about the more local events that will not only encourage tourism but that will allow Guyanese to showcase their skills.

We have recently learnt of the discontinuation of Guyana Exposition (GuyExpo). It is very sad, because that type of exhibition commenced in the days of the 1970s under the People's National Congress (PNC), under the Hon. Forbes Burnham. At that time, it was held at the National Park, where all our producers and craft makers went to the park, placed their produce in booths. We had the Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC) which put on stream all its various lines of products that they had. We had farmers bringing out their largest bunches of plantains, cassava and eddoes. We had the largest pigs. We had sheep, goats and cows. Mr. Speaker, you could have gone there and witnessed and understood what agricultural and craft development were all about. Later it became known as GuyExpo. We still had products. We had services being showcased. We still had time where we could have gone witnessed our products and services. Today, that is no more. The question that I am asking the Hon. Members on that side of the House: Where is the avenue or event where our Guyanese businessmen and women could go and showcase their products and services?

I will turn my attention to information and communications technology (ICT). I will continue to say that there is need for more to be done in the area of ICT in Guyana. At our last budget, the Hon. Minister Catherine Hughes, when I mentioned that same area not being workable enough, jumped up and said it was about all the fake news that I was giving. One month later, there was an international report in our media which stated the very thing, that our ICT was underutilised. It has not reached the mark. We talked about girls in ICT, I am saying that we need to move away from girls only in ICT. We have to have a wider spectrum – a wider vision. We are talking about gender equality and gender parity; we are talking about fifty-fifty by 2030. We need to have an ICT programme that is gender inclusive. I would ask the Hon. Minister responsible for us to now have a programme that is about youths in ICT.

We also need to find out about the \$4 billion in the budget for ICT sector. Who will benefit and where will it be allocated to? Where will 100 wireless cameras, as part of the Safe City Solution Programme, be placed around Georgetown? Where will the 79 public internet access points will

be created? Where will they be located? Can we have the evidence of those rice fields that have been seeded and fertilised by drones?

Budget 2019 will not transfer our economy; Budget 2019 will not empower our people; Budget 2019 will not build the sustainable communities; Budget 2019 will not offer the “good life”. Instead, it will leave us empty and hopeless. I do hope that as we hope and wait for the “good life”, we will not die in despair.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Minister within the Ministry of Finance [Mr. Sharma]: I will just take a minute to just inform the Hon. Member who just spoke that she is missing the marker, missing the marker in that indicating that the increases in salary that the people at the lower end is getting \$2,000 and the people at the higher end is getting \$5,000. It is the other way around. Employees at the lower end will be getting 7.5% which is the minimum is \$4,500. This \$4,500 will be non-taxable in 2018 and going forward in 2019, it will be non-taxable. For those earning Guy\$1 million, it is .5% and that works out to \$5,000 because of the tax waiver of 2018, it will be non-taxable, but come 2019, it will be taxable and so it will reduce to \$2,000. People at the higher level of the income bracket will be receiving \$2,000 whilst the remainder of people, at the lower income bracket, will continue to receive \$4,500.

I rise to support the motion for the approval of the estimates of public sector and the budget for the fiscal year 2019 moved by the Hon. Winston Jordan, Minister of Finance. For me, Budget 2019 is more than just being the largest budget ever, the first to cross the \$300 billion mark and the third of the fifth national budget to be presented to this august Assembly before the start of the financial year within three and a half years of this administration’s first term in Government. This is quite an achievement and would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the staff of the Ministries, regions and agencies and most definitely the team at the Ministry of Finance under the astute guidance of the Hon. Minister of Finance.

For me, Budget 2019 represents the crowding achievement of this A Partnership for National Unity plus Alliance For Change (APNU+AFC) Government. It is the icing on the cake as is reflected in the theme of Budget 2019, *Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities for the Good Life*. Budget 2019 caters for each stratum of society with measures to

address our most vulnerable in society, our children, ages 0 to 14 that make up 30% of our country's population; our youths – young people, aged 18 to 35 years that constitutes the significant resources; persons with disabilities; our elderly and our Indigenous peoples, by crafting a budget with programmes that cater for their education, health, protection and provide business and investment opportunity for sustainable holistic development. Budget 2019 also caters for the strata of the business community with favourable tax measures that would stimulate growth and recreate employment opportunities for all.

While tax revenues are projected to increase by approximately 12% in 2019, this is not because of new tax measures, but because of improvements in tax administration and reform, achieved in 2018. The overall increase in tax revenues will be greatly driven by growth in income, value added and excise taxes. Income taxes are anticipated to rise on account of a variety of factors. The recent increases in salaries will garner higher income taxes from individuals. The amnesty programme has provided the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) with information that will allow it to get a better handle of the thousands of taxpayers. Court cases with some companies are expected to increase company taxes, while subsidiaries in the oil industry, which are coming on board in 2019, will be driving higher withholding taxes. With regard to value added and excise taxes, there are a number of initiatives undertaken by the Government that are anticipated to continue bearing fruit in 2019.

The Large Taxpayers Unit (LTU), which was established in 2017, and the Oil and Gas Unit within LTU, to be established in 2019, will also be driving the increase in this category, as efforts continue to be dedicated to ensuring the appropriate revenues are paid by these respective groups.

Prior to early 2018, containers were assessed by custom officers who have to estimate the content of these containers. The acquisition of scanners, as well as the growth in imported goods, is anticipated to also attribute to the expansion in value added and excise taxes, with the former allowing for a better assessment of the content of containers. With regard to the growth in taxation outstripping growth in the economy, it is important to note that this comparison is not valid, as one growth rate is in nominal terms, and the other in real terms. Additionally, it is important to note that overall tax rates will decrease in 2019. Therefore it is not clear what the position is on this issue, by an organisation such as the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI). Should Government not improve tax administration to create a level playing field? Additionally,

Guyana's tax revenue in 2019 is expected to be 26.9 % of nominal GDP, which is well below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 34.3% in 2016.

As a rebuttal to the Hon. Member Irfaan Ali's presentation, I would like to state that any economist worth his or her salt would be able to look at Appendix IV, Urban Consumer Price Index, of the budget speech and tell that the price of a typical basket of goods and services consumed, increased by 3% between December, 2014 and October, 2018. At the same time, the public sector minimum wage has increased by over 50% and pensions by over 40%. It is clear that someone should have paid more attention at university as this would have saved me from having to explain basic economic principles in this honourable House. Or perhaps this Member was too busy creating his own illusions and did not look at Appendix IV. In Appendix IV, it is clear that the price of food is expected to increase by 3.4% at the end of December, when compared with December, 2017, and not 4.6% as this House was told.

The House was similarly misled over the price of clothing and medical and personal care by the Hon. Member. What is worse is that the trained economist, someone who aspires to lead this country, looked at these percentage changes and summed them to come up with a whopping 14% increase in household expenditure.

1.59 p.m.

Any Grade Six student could have told this Hon. Member that this is incorrect. If the prices for bread, rice and sugar increased by 1%, 2% and 3%, respectively, this does not mean that a household must spend 6% more on these items. I am breaking it down simple for you, Hon. Member. If a household spends \$100 on each of these items, then the prices of bread increase to \$101, rice to \$102, and sugar to \$103. Instead of spending \$300 on these items, as you were suggesting, the household would now spend \$306. It is a \$6 increase, which is 2%, not 6%.

In painting a picture of the economy, the Hon. Member said timber production fell by 30.9% between 2014 and 2017, causing export revenue from timber products to reduce by US\$20.2 million. Timber production actually declined by US\$17.7 million, not US\$20.2 million, the *sweet lies* that we were being told, Mr. Speaker.

The Hon. Member did not mention that export earnings from gold and other exports increased by US\$347.7 million and US\$48.3 million, respectively from 2014 to 2017. In 2018, gold and other exports revenue increased by US\$293.3 million and US\$51.9 million, respectively from the 2014 position. Total export earnings will increase from US\$1,167.2 million in 2014 to US\$1,392.1 million in 2018. It is a US\$224.9 million increase.

In 2019, total export revenue will increase by US\$282.4 million from the 2014 position. Net Foreign Reserves is forecasted at US\$476.5 million at the end of 2018. It is not the US\$388 million as stated by The Hon. Member, Mr. Ali, a 28.4% decline. *Sweet lies*, Mr. Speaker.

The overall balance of payments deficit is projected to increase from US\$79.7 million budgeted in 2018, to US\$180.7 million. This represents an increase from US\$101 million to US\$ 180.7 million. It is not an increase of US\$180.7 million, as mentioned by the Hon. Member – *sweet lies*.

The current account deficit is projected to increase from the US\$292.6 million budgeted in 2018 to US\$463.8 million. This represents an increase from US\$171.2 million to US\$463.8 million. It is not an increase of US\$463.8 million, as mentioned by the Hon. Member – *sweet lies*. The Hon. Member, *Sweet Lie* Ali, as I would refer to him, did not mention that capital account surplus has increased from US\$210.1 million in 2014 to US\$228 million in 2017. This represents a US\$17.9 million increase. The capital account will continue to increase by US\$72.9 million and US\$166 million in 2018 and 2019, respectively, from the 2014 position. It is a US\$70.1 million increase from Budget 2018. I hope the Hon. Member is taking note of these figures.

To disclaim the *sweet lies* that this administration expended more on dietary than infrastructure, as the Hon. Member indicated so glaringly, over the years 2010 to 2014, \$98.2 billion was expended on the maintenance of roads, bridges, drainage and irrigation, sea defences and other infrastructure by the previous Government. This amount is 32.9% or \$4.7 billion higher than the amount of \$14.4 billion spent on dietary over the same period under the APNU/AFC Government. These *sweet lies* must stop being peddled.

This administration has improved the allocation to maintenance of roads, bridges, drainage, irrigation, sea defence, river defence and other infrastructure. It is so much so, that, from Budgets 2015 to 2019, the allocation is \$41.1 billion. It is more than double what the previous administration spent in 2010 to 2014 - \$19.2 billion. I hope the Hon. *Sweet Lie* Ali is taking note.

Further the \$41.1 billion on roads, bridges, sea defence, *et cetera* is 78% higher than the amount spent on dietary from 2015 to 2019, which in this administration amounted to \$23.1 billion. I hope the Hon. Member stops spreading untruth.

If the Hon. Member does not know what dietary consists, I would enlighten him. Dietary consist of meals for the students in our dormitories, the National School Feeding Programme, hot meals provided to our hinterland children in schools and patients in our hospitals, to whom we strive to deliver quality healthcare. It is also for members of the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) and the Guyana Police Force (GPF) who are in the field and on operations. This year, the allocation for dietary has increased by approximately \$1 billion, of which \$799 million relates to increase in the quality and quantity of dietary needed for our expanded National School Feeding Programme and meals to our students in the dormitories. I do not know if the Members of the Opposition are asking us to cut this. This is exactly what they are saying.

To give a brief summary of the Ministry of Finance's budget - in 2018, the budgeted allocation for the Ministry of Finance was \$28.3 billion, of which \$6.2 billion or 22 % was allocated to Other Employment Costs, line item - 6141, which catered for increase salaries, new recruits and promotions within the public service. In the 2019 Budget, this amount increased by 85 % to reach \$11.6 billion and accounts for 32.1 % of the Ministry's total budget.

Statutory pensions and gratuities, Chart of Accounts - 6013, amounted to \$4.7 billion, it is 5% above the \$4.4 billion in 2018. Statutory pensions increase, Chart of Account – 6342, was budgeted at \$3.9 billion in 2019, 17 % higher than the \$3.3 billion in 2018.

Capital expenditure for Ministry of Finance totalled \$5 billion. It is 12.4 % above 2018. This increase caters for higher investment through the Basic Needs Programme by 42.1 %, under the 9th cycle of the programme, which runs from 2018-2020. The programmes earmarked for implementation are: 11 Solar photovoltaic (PV) projects for schools and Early Childhood Education centres; construction of processing facility at Essequibo; upgrade of water distribution system in areas, including Fly Hill, Shulinab, Woweta, Ruperti, and Aranaputa. Fisheries Development Project slated for Victoria and surrounding fishing communities, more than 10 other interventions to improve livelihoods of targeted groups in areas of heavy duty operators, solar PV installation/maintenance, boat building, garment construction, small engines repairs, such as all-

terrain vehicles (ATVs), outboard engines, brush cutters, bakery, hollow block making, and a medium scale poultry project for Matarkai, Region 1.

Also, \$90.3 million is budgeted in 2019 to cater for the Guyana Bureau of Statistics, to support the collection of statistical data to record and measure oil and gas production in the national accounts and institutional strengthening of the National Statistical System.

Major highlights for 2019 in Region 4: Capital expenditure of \$601.6 million has been approved. The major activities for 2019 are as follows: Construction of three timber revetments and one mini-sludge for \$48.3 million; construction of two bridges, one heavy duty concrete, one footpath and two culverts for \$22.1 million; construction of two roads and the upgrading of four roads for \$81.1 million; major rehabilitation to the Bladen Hall Multilateral School for \$70 million; extension to the New Diamond/Grove Primary School for \$58 million; major rehabilitation to the Friendship Secondary School for \$25 million and the construction of teacher's duplex living quarters at St Cuthbert's Mission for \$14 million.

It is interesting to note that this administration has under its belt two consecutive Local Government Elections. It is second to none of any previously existed administration. This administration has provided a budget for the regions totalling \$44.7 billion. Region 4 that voted overwhelmingly for this APNU/AFC Government, in the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) and municipalities, they got \$7.2 billion or 16.1% of the total budget. Region 6 got \$7.7 billion, that is 17.1% of the total budget. Region 3 got \$6.3 billion that is 14.1% of the budget. Region 10, again, voted overwhelmingly for this administration and got \$3.9 billion, which is 8.7% of the total budget.

What this is saying is that this is not a vindictive Government. In Opposition, we sat here and regions that were controlled by us Opposition, the chairpersons, even in Region 4, the Chairman was not given a vehicle. They did not give the Chairman of Region 8, in Mahdia, a typewriter, much less a computer to do letters.

When this budget was being presented, I saw the Leader of the Opposition smiling and saying, "We want this NDC. We want this." He was surprised that we were giving to NDCs and municipalities that they won. He was surprised, but this is how this Administration works. We are fair in how we will distribute the wealth of this country, without victimisation of members of the

community. This Government must build this country, region by region and step by step, every single community.

2.14 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, you will agree with me when I say God blessed the Cooperative Republic of Guyana with an abundance of natural resources and now black gold, oil. As the ExxonMobil Corporation announced on Monday, it has made its 10th discovery at Pluma - 1 Well, Offshore Guyana and has increased its estimate of the recoverable resource from the Stabroek Block to more than five billion oil-equivalent barrels and pushes Guyana's figure to 750,000 barrels of oil daily by 2025. By my calculations, this would bring to the coffers about \$438 billion per annum.

The Liza Phase 1 development is expected to begin producing up to 120,000 barrels of oil per day by early 2020, utilising the Liza Destiny FPSO, which would bring in our first projected oil revenue inflow, which I calculate it to be about \$70 billion per annum. Liza Phase 2 is expected to start up by mid-2022 and will use a second FPSO designed to produce up to 220,000 barrels per day.

And, yet, a third development, Payara, which is expected to start up as early as 2023. This is what the Opposition is fearful of. If this should manifest itself, there is no way that there will be a change in Government and this is pure facts.

In closing, I would like to restate what is said by many, many times over

“Guyana is well poised to truly forge ahead in the 21st century as a petro-development state. These new resources would provide our APNU/AFC Government with the opportunity to shift our development path.”

Our Government is committed to pursuing economic and social policies conducive to equitable, sustainable and environmentally-friendly growth, modernise our economy and with rapid economic expansion, improving people's lives in the short-term, while simultaneously providing the foundation to allow us to transition, in the medium and long-term, to a post-carbon economy that would transform the lives of all our citizens of Guyana.

Budget 2019, is doing this, it is commencing. If one could have \$300.7 billion, when there is no oil then, could you imagine in 2020 what will happen? In putting together the figures for Budget

2019, of course, our Ministries, regions and agencies actually asked for double this amount, but because of fiscal constraints, they could have only be given this amount. We must credit this possibility to the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA). Through its diligence, it collected more than what we are able to present in a budget of this figure of \$300.7 billion. This is no ordinary achievement of this APNU/AFC Government. I believe that the Opposition would be hard-pressed when it puts the no-confidence motion to debate these achievements in the three-and-a-half-year-old Government. Let them match this against the 23 years of their administration and what they have produced in 23 years.

Let me go on record by saying that this Member of Parliament, Jaipaul Sharma, will never support a no-confidence motion, whenever it is debated in this House.

Thank you. I would like to say once more, God bless Guyana and long live our President David Arthur Granger. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I notice that the level of intervention coming from the non-speaking Members is getting higher. Some Members are so carried away that they are addressing Colleagues across on the other side and they are even calling names. I have refrain in this House from naming Hon. Members and I do not wish to get there. Hon. Members, must also be mindful of the fact that there is not a right to disrupt the proceedings of the House. The next speaker is the Hon. Komal Chand.

Mr. Chand: Cde. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to this 2019 Budget debate. The budget, now several days old, has been digested by the Guyanese people who, at this time, are unable to see how it will make their lives better. Cde. Speaker, indeed this fifth budget of the coalition Government, like its predecessors, continue to push our people backward, rather than taking them forward and upward.

It is disappointing to say that the confidence in the future that the Guyanese people had, prior to the coalition taking office, has all but disappeared. While our people are uneasy, the Administration on page 19 of the Budget states:

“...every family being able to afford a healthy lifestyle with all their basic needs of substance, shelter and education being met and great environmental responsibility and personal safety are paramount”

These are indeed lofty aspirations, but, are we being taken there? We of the People’s Progressive Party, along with many Guyanese, are convinced that this is not the case. Our today realities are very different from the utopian paradise the Government seeks to paint. This, obviously, is a glaring indication of the administration’s disconnect from the ordinary people.

My Colleagues on the other side need to step out from their ivory towers to see how the working people are faring. It is no secret that business has slowed to a near halt. Our markets have more vendors than buyers; many of our children walk to school as their parents are unable to afford transportation; crime stalks the land and hardly anyone feels safe. Today, hunger is knocking on many doors and the growing numbers can ill afford to pay their bills. Such are the sad realities of today.

We are told that this is the largest budget in the nation’s history. Indeed, \$300 billion is a large sum and, if properly utilised, it could do a lot for our heavily burdened people. However, this disturbing fact is that we, given our experience of almost no confidence that this will really be the case. In the life of the APNU/AFC Government, taking Budget 2019 into account, the Government would have spent an astounding \$1.2 trillion. To make a comparison, it took the last seven years’ budgets, from (2008-2014) of the PPP administration to spend a similar sum. For that investment, the economy grew, accumulatively, by 28.2%. Old age pensioners received increases in pension apart from water and electricity subsidies. School-aged children benefitted from the \$10,000 grant. Our hospitals and health centres had adequate supply of medicine. Our workers were generally satisfied, apart from the all-round development our people witnessed. Under the APNU/AFC. For that investment, we are promised 15.7% economic expansion; our pensioners have lost their subsidies; our children lost their grant; the hospitals and clinics are often out of drugs, thousands of Guyanese had been made jobless and development has slowed down tremendously.

Nothing for the workers.

From the workers’ point of view, Budget 2019 really has nothing for them to be excited about and it is yet another indicator of the anti-working-class demeanour of this administration. Not even one

sentence in the Minister's approximately 260-minute address referred to any plan to enhance workers' rights and protection. Indeed, there are quite a few matters to address, some requiring legislation or amendments to existing ones. Ignoring these realities, the Government is exposing its lack of concern for the working people.

The administration also saw it necessary to allocate several million dollars to the Golden Jubilee of Republicanism in 2020. Indeed, it is a memorable moment in our country's history and one that will require celebration and reflection. But, while moneys are found to plan celebrations more than a year away, I do not see the same attention being given to the centennial anniversary of trade unionism, which will be celebrated in our country in a matter of weeks. This too is a momentous achievement for our people, more so for our workers. The administration's silence says a mouthful.

The budget is not worker friendly. Of the 28 budgetary measures proposed, only one concern a marginal improvement in our working people well-being. At the same time, there are several measures aimed at assisting the business sectors, which are important. We should remember, thriving businesses rely on people who can afford their goods and services. The glaring absence of equity, among other factors, could, therefore, negatively affect the intended objectives.

The Government is boasting about the adjustment of the income tax threshold, as if the *scrooge-like* improvement was some grand concession. The fact that the administration has resorted to clutching at straws is yet another indication that the budget lacks any substantive policy to really alleviate our people's burden. The increase in the tax threshold works out to a worker receiving \$47 more a day, which cannot even take care of the minibus fare, which I must add was increased by the administration, after it adamantly rejected calls to reduce the tax on fuel.

I wish to remind the Government that, in the Alliance for Change (AFC) column, appearing on the 3rd May 2015, *Kaieteur Newspaper*, it was stated that if elected,

“The APNU/AFC would increase the personal income tax threshold to \$100,000 in a phased approach”.

2.29 p.m.

I wonder what has happened to this promise.

Page 88 of the Budget Speech states:

“The wages and salaries of public servants will be increased in 2019 after discussions with the respective unions.”

Permit me to emphasise that collective bargaining is not an option. It is an obligation which was enshrined in our statute book by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government. It was among the several rights that the PPP/C gave the workers of Guyana. I also wish to remind the Minister that his Government, on page 25 of its Manifesto, stated:

“Enforce the principles and laws governing collective bargaining”.

Today, this commitment rings hollow. The Government really has to stop putting its foot in its mouth. The Minister also said on page 25 of his address, that the Government:

“...is committed to continuously improving wages and salaries of all public sector employees”.

This general statement must be taken against what the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) President, Patrick Yarde said, reportedly, in the *Guyana Times* newspaper, dated 15th November, 2018:

“Public Servants are receiving ‘poverty payments’ for their salaries”.

In fact, the Minister boasted about \$50,400 retroactive payments. It works out to \$138.00 per day, barely the price of a pine tart.

For me, it is sad to note that the sugar workers have received the worst treatment at the hands of this People’s National Congress/Alliance For Change (PNC/AFC) administration. Not even during the days of the Burnham administration were the sugar workers treated as disdainfully as they are now. Could you imagine that, while the Government is trumpeting its paltry increases, these sugar workers did not get one blind cent in pay increases since the APNU/AFC took office. It is baffling to understand why the sugar workers are being treated so shabbily. Why can they not concede that this is plain “eye pass” and blatant discrimination by this anti working-class administration.

Our pensioners: Another issue warranting attention is the increase in the Old Age Pension and Public Assistance. I wonder whether the administration is not embarrassed to talk about its treatment of those entitled to such benefits. It seems clear to us that the administration shows scant regard for the country's elderly and vulnerable. The \$1,000 per month increase works out to \$32.00 per day. What a shame. Is this all the biggest budget in our history can afford?

Redundant sugar workers: Cde. Speaker, the Minister on the penultimate page of his address, *inter alia*: "Having taken the tough decisions".

It appears that Minister Jordan has borrowed his Colleague's, Vice-President Ramjattan, often-used quip, as he seemingly referred to the administration short-sighted decision to close four sugar estates and put 7,000 Guyanese workers out of work. Today, many of those rendered jobless have been unable to recover from that decision and are facing severe hardships.

Interestingly, the Minister, on page 61 of his address, states:

"The sugar sector has huge potentials for growth being pivotal to increasing household incomes, reducing unemployment and ultimately lowering the poverty rate".

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

Mr. Chand: Thank you. If this is the case, why did the Government close the estates and created thousands of new poor. Clearly, this further serves to demonstrate the callousness of the decision to minimise the industry.

The sugar industry plays a pivotal role and touches the lives of tens of thousands of Guyanese. It is therefore disheartening to record the obvious confusion in the industry. The Minister tells us that, by 2021, the industry will produce 145,000 tons of sugar, 48% more than what the industry has anticipated to produce this year. While we in the PPP wants the industry to succeed, the Government approach has been 'hop scotching' to say the least.

The Minister of Finance now tells us that the massive production increase will be realised through the re-capitalisation plans contained in the Sugar Task Force Three -Year Plan for GuySuCo. Apart from a selected few, no one has the plan that the Minister speaks about, even though we continue to hear about it. In fact, the sudden news of a plan is a surprise to many, considering that President

Granger, in his Address to the National Assembly, on 18th October, 2018, said: “A plan is being developed...”. This so-called plan must be made public and for there to be a full comprehensive discussion of it by the stakeholders.

As a MP representing Region 3, I recognise that \$100 million has been allocated to evaluate proposals for the construction of a high level four-lane bridge. The latest allocation comes after, reportedly, \$160 million was spent on a feasibility study that the Public Procurement Commission (PPC) pointed out was improperly procured. It seems that the new bridge will come into conflict with Exxon Shore Base at Houston. During a recent visit to the identified site, it appeared to me that there is no space to accommodate the bridge, unless billions are expended to acquire private property in that area. Indeed, those possible heavy costs... before an inch of the bridge is actually built, it seems that the toll will rival the charges that the Berbice River Bridge was seeking to implement.

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

Mr. Chand: By way of conclusion, I have to drop a piece of what I wanted to say, but let me move on. Budget 2019 is ‘unfit and improper’. It will not inspire Guyanese that better days are ahead. Indeed, it was felt that the Government, recognising this – the dire message from the Local Government Elections results, would have woken and realised the dissatisfaction among Guyanese. Budget 2019 indicates that this is not the case and that Government has continued to perpetuate its unpopular measures that is not an encouraging sign.

On this score, I, like my Colleagues and all right-thinking Guyanese, cannot support Budget 2019. I urge the Government to recall the budget and return it with a more realistic plan. To this end, as Speaker, I wonder if I can receive your support.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Rajkumar: Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the approval of Budget 2019, as presented to this honourable House, on 26th November, 2018, by the Hon. Minister of Finance, under the theme: *Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities for the Good Life.*

Budget 2019 is a comprehensive document of the coalition's plan for the continued development of this beautiful country of ours. It demonstrates Government's commitment to provide the 'good life' to all Guyanese. It is a budget by a caring Government for all of our people.

The Hon. Minister and his staff ought to be complimented for a job well done. In the coming year, this Government proposes to spend an estimated \$300.7 billion in improving the quality of life of all Guyanese. With our Government in command, our future will always be bright and will be bright for a very long time.

The coalition Government has always recognised that education is essential for our future. This year, \$52.2 billion will be spent in this sector. Our students will benefit from the purchase of text books, the enhancement of their Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills, by providing and upgrading Information Technology (IT) labs in primary schools. The establishment of Smart Classrooms, the expansion of the School Feeding Programme. Our Government continues to provide conducive environment for our students to study. It is worthy to note that \$5.4 billion will be spent on the construction, expansion and maintenance of educational facilities across our country.

The University of Guyana (UG) will again benefit from a subvention from the Government to the tune of \$3.1 billion, of which \$508 million will be used to upgrade the facilities at the Turkeyen and Tain Campuses. It is heartening to note that the University of Guyana will be offering studies in the areas of Petroleum Engineering, preparing our citizens to make their contribution in the forth- coming Oil Industry

A healthy nation is a strong nation and will always be productive. In 2019, the Government intends to spend \$35.9 billion in improving the health services to all Guyanese. Three billion, two hundred million will be spent on the construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of health infrastructures across the country, creating worker-friendly environment for all health professionals and a comfortable place for its patients.

In 2019, \$7.8 billion is allocated for the purchase of pharmaceuticals and other medical supplies to ensure that the public health facilities in all our regions have adequate supplies of medication for free distribution to our people.

It is the function of every government to provide a safe and secured environment for its citizens to live and dwell. The APNU/AFC Government would be spending \$35.6 billion on public security. To secure our communities across Guyana, \$700 million will be spent to improve the existing buildings and reconstruction of four new Divisional Headquarters in Regions 1, 4, 5 and 8. Five hundred million dollars will be spent to purchase vehicles, boats, equipment for crime scene and other equipment, further increasing the capacity of the Guyana Police Force (GPF).

2.44 p.m.

This year, Region 2 has benefited from a brand new modern police station at Aurora, built by this Government. In 2018, 'G' Division has received brand new motorcars, motor pickups, All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) and motorcycles, increasing the Force's capacity to continue to serve and protect the people our region.

Some \$38.5 billion has been allocated to expand and maintain the country's infrastructure across Guyana. We will see new highways, roads and bridges being built, linking communities across the country and bringing people closer together; the continued rehabilitation of our sea defences, protecting the vulnerable areas from the sea; and the installation of street lights along our roadways, making them safer at nights.

This Government intends to spend \$480 million in promoting social cohesion, bringing our people together, promoting a culture of brotherhood and respect for each other among our people.

In the new year, our Government proposes to extend the implementation of the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) programme in the hinterland communities. To this end, \$375 million would be spent to equip 20 communities with ICT hubs. Our hinterland students, as well as other residents, will enjoy free internet access, enabling them to access information for their own benefit. All these projects, proposed by this Government, would have a positive impact on the lives of all Guyanese.

Agriculture remains an important and dependable sector for our economy. In 2019, \$17 billion will be spent in the agriculture sector. Essequibo is rice and rice is Essequibo. Our farmers are delighted to learn that this Government would contract a Malaysian research company to carry out

studies on the introduction of three new high yielding and pest and disease resistant varieties of paddy with the view of supporting the enhanced productivity of our rice industry.

In 2018, the high-yielding Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB) 15 was cultivated in the region. Farmers reaped between 45 to 50 bags per acre and received between \$2500 to \$2800 per bag, depending on the grade of the paddy. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Unfortunately, over 700 acres of rice was attacked by paddy bugs and blast causing damage to the paddy grains, resulting lower grade of paddy and, hence, lower price. In some instances, the damage was so severe that some farmers had no alternative, but to burn their entire crop, incurring loss to the tune of millions. We sympathise with those farmers who suffered losses. The Ministry of Agriculture, through the GRDB officers, is working with farmers to come up with solutions to these challenges. Along with the exemption of custom duty and Value -Added-Tax (VAT) on pesticide use in industry, we hope to alleviate their concerns.

However, all is not lost. Rice is rebounding. Paddy price is making a steady comeback. Exports are increasing. New markets, including the Mexican market, unlocked by the Prime Minister (PM) Mr. Nagamootoo, are opening. This Coalition Government has not only found and expanded markets for our paddy and rice exports, but it has been relentlessly seeking, through GRDB, favourable prices.

In August, all the engines supplying electricity to our region mysteriously shut down, all at the same time. The entire region was plunged into blackout; businesses suffered, and our people endured great inconvenience. The messengers of doom had a field day. Their message was blackout until December. The people were in panic. The mischief took a toll on the people, but with the quick action of the Minister of Public Infrastructure and the management of Guyana Power and Light (GPL), electricity was restored to the entire region within a few days. Standby generators were brought into the region with the combined capacity of 6.9 megawatts, much more than the region's demand of five megawatts. This is how a caring Government operates. The three new generating sets have been installed at the Anna Regina Power Station. They have already been tested and are set to be commissioned on the 16th December, 2018. Good things come to those who

wait. This Government has fulfilled its promises to the people of Region 2. No more blackouts in Region 2.

The nursery schools that were scheduled to be constructed this year at Mainstay Lake and Cotton Field were all completed. That is more space to accommodate our students. The rehabilitation of the Anna Regina Secondary School Dormitory has been completed. Repairs to and construction of sanitary blocks at Tapakuma, Malborough and Capoey Primary Schools were all completed. Our students are much more comfortable in their new surroundings.

On the 29th October, 2018, this Government commissioned a high capacity drainage pump at Three Friends village on the Essequibo Coast, demonstrating Government's effort to continue to provide suitable infrastructure for agriculture in our region. The trenches and canals from Charity to Supenaam, which were neglected for many years, were cleaned and de-silted. During the last rainy season, no flooding was reported.

This year, our Government has fulfilled its promises to the residents of the Onderneeming sand pit, who were for years calling for an asphalted road. To the tune of \$40.1 million, the Onderneeming sand pit road was paved, much to the satisfaction and delight of our residents. Promise made, and promise fulfilled by this Government. No more potholes; no more dust. Roads at Anna Regina, Coffee Grove, Danielstown, Richmond, Queenstown, and Sparta, which were all scheduled to be rehabilitated and upgraded, were done.

Government intends to transform the Supenaam waterfront into a modern business hub, with improved facilities for mooring of speedboats and waiting room for passengers and the opening of a mini mall along the waterfront. Work has commenced, and it is expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2019. The approximate 300 metres of sea defence at Johanna Cecelia, Essequibo Coast, was completed. Work has commenced on the construction of the operation theatre at the public hospital and it is expected to be completed in the new year. On completion of the theatre, referrals to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) would be greatly reduced. The region has benefited from many more projects in 2018, too many to mention in this short time. Region 2 is on the move.

During 2019, an estimated \$175 million will be spent in the region on projects, including the extension of the Adventure Nursery School Annexe and the Wakapau Secondary School and

construction of a sanitary block at Capoey Nursery School. Some \$16 million will be spent in acquiring school furniture and equipment, including equipment for a smart classroom, music and sports and computers for Information Technology (IT) labs, among other things. Some \$88 million will be spent on the completion of the operation theatre at Suddie Hospital and the rehabilitation of the electrical system at Suddie and Oscar Joseph Hospitals. The health centres Kabakaburi, Hackney, Wakapau, Karawab and Siriki in the Pomeroon would benefit from the installation of solar system, supplying electricity to these facilities. The communities of Capoey, Hill Top and Mainstay would benefit from improved water supply system in 2019.

The roads at Charity Housing Scheme, Dartmouth, Good Hope, Lima and La Union would be ungraded. An estimated sum of \$54.8 million will be spent on these projects. Bridges at La Union, Lima and Riverstown will be constructed. The residents of Aurora, Warousi are grateful that the much-needed sea defence will be commenced in the new year. These are some of the projects which would be done in Region 2 for the benefit of all the citizens.

Our public servants always look forward for an increase in their salaries at budget time and, again, this Government has not disappointed them. Our workers are happy and grateful for their increase in their salaries. More so, the increase is retroactive from the 1st January, 2018 and would be paid free of income tax; it is more money for Christmas. The income tax threshold has been increased from \$720,000 to \$780,000 per annum, an indirect increase in salary. As of 1st January, 2019, our pensioners would now receive \$20,500 per month. They have expressed their gratitude for this increase. Public assistance has also been increased.

We all appreciate the effort of the A Partnership For National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government in continuing to provide a good life for all our people. Essequibo belongs to Guyana. *Essequibo is we own*. We are grateful that the APNU/AFC Government has taken the decision to invoke the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in relation to Venezuela's claim to the wealthy Essequibo. No issue is more paramount than maintaining our sovereignty and securing our borders. This Government would not allow any transgression of our sovereignty and would spare no cost to ensure that Guyana remains 83,000 square miles.

I am of the belief that *Budget 2019* is a firm plan for the continued development of our entire country and the improving of the quality of life of all Guyanese. In those circumstances, I have no alternative, but to support the passage of *Budget 2019* in this House. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Damon: Hon. Member, Mr. Rajkumar, you are still living in an illusion. The whole Essequibo, every sector, is bleeding. We are going back to the Cinderella stages, let me remind you Hon. Member, Mr. Rajkumar.

Let it be known that the Hon. Member, Dr. Mahadeo, is highly qualified as a doctor. In Region 2, the masses got specialised services during Dr. Mahadeo's tenure in Region 2 for many years. We recognise his work and we now condemn your loquacious behaviour in remarks towards Dr. Mahadeo. I would let you consume the nicotine from your cigar butts. Continue to poison your health with nicotine. Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan, it would be too late for Dr. Mahadeo to assist you.

The Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Communities spoke about glaucoma, referring to a blistering presentation by the Hon. Member, Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks. I am saying that it was an act of deliberate intrepidity by the Hon. Minister. *Those who have eyes to see, let them see and those who have ears to hear, let them hear*, like the Hon. Member, Mrs. Pearson-Fredericks.

2.59 p.m.

But those who are suffering from *cornucopia*, which caused them to build three-walled houses, need *carbonaceous* eyes to see their *depredatory* actions. Hats off to the Hon. Member, Ms. Pearson-Fredericks.

The Hon. Member, Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine, spoke about the mythical El Dorado and that, in another five years in Government, achievements would be in abundance. With the present destruction of the masses of this country by this A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change Coalition, I am certain that we would end up with a bunch of mythical beasts as Ministers in Guyana.

Hon. Member, Mr. Roopnaraine, indeed, education is the key to opening any door of opportunity, but where are the jobs after graduation?

Let me go into the Budget proper. Mr. Speaker and all other Members on both sides of this honourable House, and, of course, visitors and invitees, let me reflect, for a few seconds, on the passing of one of our young and brilliant brains from Region 2 and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), who passed away not so long ago, while pursuing medical studies in the United States of America (USA), but her demise took place in Puerto Rico. She will long be remembered for her distinctive achievements at the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examinations, topping the Caribbean countries. Let me also reflect, for a few seconds, on the passing of Mr. Bush, a past president of the USA, who passed away, a few days ago, at the age of 94 years. Mr. Bush was one of the first Presidents, at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, to have boasted of the late Dr. Cheddi Jagan's presentation at the United Nations on the New Global Human Order. May all three I referred to continue to rest in peace.

Let me now turn my attention to the Hon. Minister of Finance and the presentation of the Budget for 2019. Hon. Minister, it is the longest Budget, I was told, ever read in this National Assembly by any Minister of Finance. But Hon. Minister of Finance, you are huge, you are very strong, and you remind me of the President of the USA, who does things by what his gut tells him and not his brains.

The Hon. Minister of Finance can bring a six-hour, a four-hour or a five-hour Budget to this National Assembly, but it is what is in the package. This Budget is a hopeless Budget, poor of contents. This Budget is nothing else, but an optical illusion presented in this National Assembly. To debate this Budget, one must be Houdini or must have been derived from an illusionistic background.

Hon. Minister of Finance, your reason, as mentioned, for presenting the Budget so early is to give your managers enough time to expedite their projects. Well, as I speak here, only about 60% of Region 2's moneys have been spent. Hon. Minister of Finance, your attempt to justify an early Budget is so wrong. The masses out there are crying foul for this December debate of this Budget in the Christmas season. Hon. Minister of Finance, you are creating a terrible traffic congestion, not only in Georgetown but also in its surroundings. I call on the Commissioner of Police and the Traffic Chief to write this "I-Do-Not-Care" Government and let them be aware of the inconvenience this December debate causes to Guyanese and visitors from overseas.

This “I-Do-Not-Care” Government does not understand the magnanimity of getting to places on time, and sometimes the masses can be left at the mercy of the robbers during traffic congestions. This December Budget Debate must stop. Not another Budget Debate in December. Hon. Minister of Finance. Put the masses first.

As I listened to the Budget presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance, it sounded like the eulogy for the departure of this APNU/AFC Government, the “I-Do-Not-Care” Government, from office. Everything this “I-Do-Not-Care” Government does is to cause its early departure and relinquish power to the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) so that Guyanese can live in peace, progress and prosperity.

We heard from the Hon. Minister of Finance that a *Green Paper* has been presented on how the oil moneys will be spent. Hon. Minister of Finance, are you talking about managing future petroleum revenues and a sovereign wealth fund? Where is the expertise to advise this “I-Do-Not-Care” Government about this *Green Paper*? Can one imagine that, in the 20th Century, this Government took an expert in oil, who worked in the oil sector, being in charge of this sector for 30+ years in the biggest democracy in the world, the USA, and placed this oil expert to work at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in charge? That is not all. Another expert in environment was placed to head the oil industry. I ask: why put the person who has so much experience in oil at the EPA and the expert in environmental protection to manage oil? I am saying that this is nothing else but cornucopia by this “I-Do-Not-Care” Government.

I wonder what this “I-Do-Not-Care” Government is hiding from this oil expert. I am aware that this “I-Do-Not-Care” Government is good at hiding. I remember the US\$18 million signing bonus that was hidden away in a private bank account at the Bank of Guyana (BoG). I remember that the memorandum of understanding (MOU) that was signed with the Chinese was hidden away. I remember the trip by several Ministers to ExxonMobil Corporation’s head office. What came out of that trip? I always remember that the 2% agreement between this “I-Do-Not-Care” Government and ExxonMobil Corporation and many others, which are too much to mention, were all hidden away.

I tend to agree with the World Bank and other organisations warning Guyana about oil sector corruption, because we are dealing with a company, ExxonMobil Corporation, which is not honest,

as shown in court papers in the USA about lying to the American people about oil spills clean up and, of course, to a bunch of “I-Do-Not-Care” Ministers with the *get rich quick* syndrome.

There can be no greater act of patriotism than to have a Commission of Inquiry (COI) into the oil sector. Enough is enough. More than 90% of the countries in the world, at some stage, found themselves being ripped off by these huge oil companies; be it Nigeria, Guinea, Angola, or even Venezuela. If the expert, such as the Natural Resource Governance Institute (NRGI), is warning us, we must make sure that this “I-Do-Not-Care” Government takes good warnings. Do not open your hands and beg for perks and deprive the masses of this country. Once again, oil is precious, and Guyana must avoid simply mimicking other countries’ local content policies and do gap analyses. We must ensure that we do not lose our potential to produce oil for another 200 years. We must stagger our oil production.

Let me remind this “I-Do-Not-Care” Government that, for those who intend to build a fortune illicitly on oil money, there are the anti-money laundering laws. Plus, drones and satellites are beaming in on you.

Hon. Attorney General, our judges and our magistrates must be able to perform their duties without fear, deprivation, interference or threats from the Attorney General’s Office. Let professionalism continue to be the matter of the judiciary and magistracy. There must be a hands-off approach by the Hon. Attorney General on the agencies.

Hon. Minister of Education, I ask of you to consider awarding secondary top status to the Waramuri Primary School, which did so well by topping all of the secondary schools in Region 1 at the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate examinations, although Waramuri entered these children, who did so well, through the Moruca Secondary School. Once again, Hon. Minister of Education, give that school a big surprise so that the students can continue to excel. I thank you.

Hon. Members Allicock and Garrido-Lowe, the bureaucracy and the procedure that will cause our poor Amerindian brothers and sisters three weeks waiting on paperwork to be completed before \$20,000 can be given as a help to offset expenses during admittance to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation is so wrong. I condemn this rampant disregard for our Amerindian brothers and sisters; it is wrong. Our first people must not have to wait until the Hon. Minister of Finance pronounces or approves, which takes weeks. I cogitate that all transactions must take place at the

Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs. Stop this bureaucracy. Hon. Minister of Finance, put systems in place to stop it. Let our first people get what they deserve.

Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, regarding the means of eradicating serious crimes, dogs and horses cannot do it. Hon. Member, as you continue to promulgate, lives are being lost. Get your act together. Our policemen and women need better guns, and they must be paid their December salaries in double. Give our police their extra one-month salary in December. The PPP/C did, and our military acknowledges us for our gesture. Mr. Speaker, there is crime, crime everywhere.

3.14 p.m.

Hon. Minister of Agriculture, why are you not getting it correct? The agriculture sector is not living up to expectations. The Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) is in turmoil. We are now witnessing a 20-gun salute for GuySuCo and sugar. Apart from the People's Progressive Party (PPP), there is no other representation from this Minister of Agriculture and this "I-Do-Not-Care" Government. I wonder where our agricultural sector is going. There is nothing new.

Hon. Attorney General, those law books are the property of the Hon. Member, Mr. Anil Nandlall. The President of the time has spoken, and the law firm has spoken, but Hon. Attorney General, you continue to portray that you are nothing else but a dreamer living an illusion of the past.

The Hon. Member, Irfaan Ali and all of my other Colleagues, the cases that the Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU) and this "I-Do-Not-Care" Government has trumped up against you all are so weak and fragile. All of you will be vindicated. Hats off to all of you, Comrades. We, from the People's Progressive Party (PPP), are fighters and we would never give up. Let them continue to purge. Victory is on our side. Come 2020, most of those Members on that side of this honourable House would end up in *[inaudible]* for their deeds and dishonesty.

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

Mr. Damon: Hon. Minister of Finance, your ideologies in *Budget 2019* sounded like you are in a lost world in the 20th Century.

Hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Moses Nagamootoo, it is a known fact that you signed the Cummingsburg Accord with the APNU Government, but what is happening? You continue to be

marginalised. The Head of Government left this country for several days, but instead of you being sworn in, you were victimised. There was no swearing in for you. You continue to be there, never to be sworn in and picked.

Finally, the Hon. Minister of Finance continues to dream. This Budget that you have presented here is poisonous and distasteful for Guyanese. This is a poisonous Budget and it must be taken over to the Pesticide and Poison Control Board so that it can be exterminated. Destroy it. It has no legs. I would never support a Budget like this.

I thank you. *[Applause]*

Minister of Public Telecommunications [Ms. Hughes]: I rise to applaud the Hon. Minister of Finance and his team for delivering to this nation a national budget that provides astute measures for the transformation of our economy, empowering people and building sustainable communities.

After decades of under development, Guyana is finally on the cusp of a social and economic transformation. Significant discoveries of oil and gas hold the promise of realising the potential, I grew up only hearing about, and the development of an economy with the highest standard of living that has been the dream of Guyanese people for generations.

It is the vision of this Government that these revenues from oil can build more bridges over our rivers, better equip our hospitals and schools, provide proper roads in communities, overhaul and provide a stable electricity system, all the infrastructure we, citizens, expect but which has never been produced in the last 52 years of our independence, and certainly cannot be realised in three short years of our Coalition Government.

Whether it is 28 years or 23 years, what we know for sure is that we have not realised, as a country, the good life in the past. We understand this, and I am convinced that, together, we can change this. This Government recognises the important role technology plays in the transformation of any sector in today's world. And it was for this precise reason that President Granger established the Ministry of Public Telecommunications two short years ago.

This Coalition Government will embrace the use of technology all across sectors in Guyana, as it allows us to leapfrog many of the development challenges that we faced in the past. There is no doubt that the appropriate utilisation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can

improve the lives of all Guyanese. We have seen this in many countries like Singapore, China, Estonia and even in Rwanda today. The transformational effect the use of ICTs can have, especially on small developing states and the corresponding positive impact on national development is real. As a Government, we recognise this and see ICT as an overall cross-cutting component in our national vision to attain developed country status in the coming years. It will involve the growth of this sector and its application in all other sectors to achieve rapid and sustained development.

Our mandate at the Ministry of Public Telecommunications is to create an enabling environment, to support the effective utilisation of ICT in public, private and productive sectors. This will help to put the economy and society on a sound footing so that every Guyanese can live in a sustainable and dignified life, characterised by good health and general wellbeing, personal safety and the prosperity - all intrinsic components of a good life.

The foregoing mandate is being pursued via programmes and agencies within our Ministry. I would like to start by mentioning the National Frequency Management Unit (NFMU), which is soon to be morphed into the Telecommunications Agency and the Guyana Post Office Corporation (GPOC) and the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) also.

The Arthur Chung Conference Centre was fully rehabilitated and modernised, in keeping with Article 2 of the Implementation Agreement on the Rehabilitation of the Arthur Chung Conference Centre, to the tune of approximately US\$7 million in grant funding. It was returned to the people of Guyana in June, 2018 with a slew of additional features and modern audio visual technologies, a main conference hall that now is equipped with new digital conference systems, and also is able to translate and relate, simultaneously, three different languages. The Centre has contributed to the wellbeing of Guyana and enhanced its potential as a conference tourism destination. Since reopening, the Arthur Chung Conference Centre has hosted 37 events, including the recently conducted and very successful International Civil Aviation (ICAO) Air Transport Conference, and in January, would host another United Nations (UN) Conference.

The Guyana Post Office Corporation's main objective is to help people, organisations and communities of Guyana grow by keeping them connected through money transfer, mail and information. This has been a major challenge as the postal services have been neglected for more

than two decades and, today, we face declining and dilapidated physical infrastructure at many of the 46 post offices. Nonetheless, the Guyana Post Office Corporation aspires to provide a safe, secure and structurally-conducive business environment and is trying to upgrade our physical facilities. In 2018, the New Amsterdam Post Office was fully rehabilitated and equipped with adequate ICT, air conditioning, weather protection, seating accommodation for pensioners and proper lavatory facilities to the tune of \$23.2 million. The Post Office was commissioned in October of this year, while repairs to the Wismar Post Office, torched to a few months ago by bandits, will commence this month.

In the coming year, the GPOC will begin capital works which will be carried out at Anna Regina and Soesdyke Post Offices, with a total value of \$38 million. Through support from the National Data Management Authority (NDMA), several post offices will also function as ICT hubs. The Post Office Corporation started the process of rebranding and focusing on providing new services such as its express mail service with online tracking capabilities.

As most persons are aware, the post office is mandated to administer the payments of pensioners in Guyana. This continues to be a massive drain on the resources, especially given the spate of robberies, and highlights the need for Guyana to move into new financial payments when it comes to paying our pensioners.

Just three days ago, \$2.2 million was stolen from the Charity Post Office and, over the last two years, 2016 to 2018, a total of over \$8.3 million has been stolen. It is therefore clear that our postal services, if they are to become financially viable, must reduce the amount of cash it has on hold.

With this in mind, the postal service is committed to *leaving no stone unturned* and, therefore, we have started to look at projects that would be able to increase the convenience of our senior citizens in accessing their pensions. Here, we are talking about implementing other payment systems for pensions. These will include a choice of having a bank transfer by cheque to an account a citizen may have, some of the new financial payment systems like Mobile Money or, if they choose, they can continue to visit the post office. The difference is that, at least, citizens would have a choice. Recognising the significant number of our citizens who are approaching the year of retirement, we know that many of them already have bank accounts and are digitally competent. Therefore, we are sure that they will want to utilise such facilities.

The Public Utilities Commission (PUC) is a statutory body that has regulatory, advisory and enforcement powers and functions under the laws of Guyana. Part of its functions is to initiate and conduct investigations into the operations and standards of service for all public utilities under its purview. Those, of course, include the Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL), the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI), the Guyana Telephone and Telegraph Company Limited (GTT) and U Mobile Cellular Incorporated which, of course, we know as DIGICEL.

The PUC continues to sensitise, serve and collaborate with consumers and operators alike. For the period January, 2018 to October, 2018, the Commission received 487 complaints against utility organisations and are actively investigating 349 of them. I am happy to say that, in the last 12 months, they have actually collected more than \$10 million for citizens as compensation for different challenges that they may have faced.

The National Frequency Management Unit, I mentioned before, will be absorbed into the Guyana Telecommunications Agency, early in 2019, as part of the long-awaited liberalisation of the telecommunications sector. This process has been complex. The skeleton Telecommunications Agency has been established and finally I can see *light at the end of the tunnel*.

I would like to now address the work that we are doing at the National Data Management Authority (NDMA) and our E-Government initiative.

3.29 p.m.

Hon. Members in the House would recall that this Government operationalised Government's fibre-optic network first built by the Chinese in 2014 which laid dormant until after 2015, when this Government put it to good use. It is through this e-Government fibre network that the National Data Management Authority (NDMA) has provided secure, reliable internet access to 116 Government agencies today and continues to improve the internal operations of these agencies. In addition, it has created 79 public access points.

Member of Parliament Ms. Burton-Persaud on the other side of the honourable House, please tell me, how many you connected in your 23 years? Very soon all our regional and National Democratic Council (NDC) offices, including our fire stations, police stations and outposts will be connected improving efficiency and security.

We fully understand that using digital technologies in Government's work can readily provide citizens with easier access to Government services. Therefore we have embraced the concept of electronic Government. That means, our level of commitment to this course of action will be reflected in Government's 2019 allocation of approximately \$1.9 billion or US\$8.9 million in two major projects. The ICT access for hinterland, poor and remote communities and, of course, the US\$17 million project that we have called our national broadband project. These decisions were not made on a whim. We have done extensive groundwork, completing the ICT baseline assessment to ensure that we are able to provide digital services, especially in hinterland, poor and remote communities. These resulted in the formation of six strategic e-Government objectives that are aligned to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, our national Green State Development Strategy and our ICT policy.

The year 2018 culminated almost 36 months of establishing strategic ICT partnerships that will propel Guyana into the modern age. The agreement for ICT assistance and expertise, among other things, we signed with the Government of Estonia is a perfect example of this. This relationship we feel will ensure that Ministries and agencies are able to develop a digital governance road map that will ensure that we are able to operationalise all the plans we have to produce a modern state. This road map coupled with allocated resources will be utilised to manage and maintain the e-Government network and to ensure that we add 200 more Government services online.

I would be the first to recognise that we have failed for decades to provide internet connectivity to our hinterland and interior locations and communities and proper telecommunications services.

When my good friend Member of Parliament Irfan Ali screeched of wasteful spending - I am sorry he is not in the room right now - I could not get out of my head the Guy\$2 billion that his administration spent on a failed fibre-optic cable, badly laid, exposed to the elements of nature and dashing the hopes of providing better internet and telecommunications service from Timehri to Lethem.

I am happy to know that the Leader of the Opposition, in a recent statement, publicly acknowledged that project was most unfortunate. Therefore I hope that someday we may get an idea of what happened with the more than US\$200 million or rather - let me correct that - the Guy\$2 billion that was wasted and went down the drain. We have never had an explanation for

that. Let me remind the citizens of Guyana that this Government is firm on its anticorruption stance, despite the screaming and shouting from the other side. We recognise that is a major challenge all across our society, from the health care worker who removes tablets from a health centre to the big business which prefers to offer a bribe, rather than pay its due taxes. These are the realities we do not like to talk about. I am confident that the increase use of technology could change all of this, increasing transparency and accountability, which we all strive for.

The establishment of 131 ICT hubs to date has been a tremendous opportunity and a source of excitement. We will invest also in the construction of a state-of-the-art data centre to complement existing data centre facilities and to ensure the safety of Government data. We are collaborating with our sister Ministries to implement other initiatives such as e-learning, e-health and a Safe City Solution across this nation.

Government's investment in ICT is continually bearing fruit. A significant aspect is what we call the citizens e-participation platform. This platform when commissioned would be accessible at www.government.gy, a suite of internet based tools that include a Government of Guyana online portal, catalogue of transactional public services and also a Complaints and Incident Reporting tool for citizens to inform Government of the quality of public services they are receiving. I am happy to say that that tool, the Complaints and Incident Reporting Tool, actually came out of a *hackathon* that one of our groups of tech-savvy young people was able to create.

During 2019, my Ministry intends to deploy an additional 25 online fillable forms which citizens across the length and breadth of Guyana, and in the diaspora, could use to facilitate transactions with the Government. This prevents them from having to go to Government agencies and spend a lot of time just standing up waiting. These electronic public service forms, e-forms, will cover services such as, business registration, Police Clearance, sickness and benefits claims, house lot application forms, job seeker registration, job vacancy registration, nursery and primary school applications and, of course, the passport application process which my colleague on my right side has so ably managed and put in place already and the registry of births, marriages and deaths.

In addition to E-forms, several Government agencies, such as the Guyana Revenue Authority, the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) and even the Guyana School of Agriculture (GSA), have taken

up the charge and encouraged their citizens to submit applications and to transact business online. This is the way of the Guyana to come.

Also, I am happy to say that given a collaborate effort with the Ministry of Education, 11 smart classrooms will be deployed in remoted areas with connectivity to the e-Government networks. This would enable students from those regions to actively participate in educational programmes and classes taught by teachers in any part of Guyana who will utilise a main or central classroom to video conference and to connect. We know the challenges of providing education and health facilities in the most remote of our hinterland communities. This Government feels that no citizen, no community, regardless of where they are located, should be left out.

In time, with the provision with these smart classrooms, our project will provide over 40 tablets to students in those hinterland, poor and remote communities to guarantee that connectivity and learning will be possible. In 2019, the enhanced capacity and resilience of the e-Government network will be enhanced as we provide tele-medicine facilities and connectivity to the most remote health centres across the country. This, we are working very closely with the Ministry of Public Health and we know it will significantly improve the lives of many of our residents in those respective communities.

The national broadband project, a US\$8.3 million project, and its Safe City Solution is of especially big interest to me. It is clear that technology and crime fighting techniques are the only ways to combat the dishonesty of some persons. We are therefore excited that safe city component of our national broadband project will add a modern fibre-optic network to the existing e-Government to sustain not 100, Member of Parliament Ms. Burton-Persaud, but 306 surveillance cameras that will be deployed strategically more than 100 locations across the country. These surveillance cameras will be connected to a command centre, including our emergency 911 call system. With digital licence plates, internet ready police cars outfitted with dash cameras and mobile dispatching systems, we are confident that these initiatives will improve transparency, accountability and enhance security for citizens, residents, tourists and businesses, and around our capital.

In addition to this programme, we are confident that our e-participation programme will empower citizens, giving them the ability to better interact with Government. Let me remind you that in the past, long before 2015, several ICT hubs were supposedly created, except we have found empty

buildings at Ruperti, Tuschen and in Enmore which really are a legacy of the former Government's attempt to improve this connectivity in Guyana. I know my colleague on the other side, I would not mention a name, loves to shout out, "fix it". I am proud to say, we will fix it; we are fixing it.

Over \$1 billion is programmed in 2019 to ensure all citizens have adequate access to the internet. We are currently providing free internet connectivity to 18 hinterland and Indigenous communities, including Mabaruma, Port Kaituma, Matthews Ridge, Santa Rosa and Baramita, in Region 1, Mainstay and Whyaka in Region 2, Orealla in Region 6, Bartica and Waramadong in Region 7, Mahdia and Paramakatoi in Region 8, Iwokrama, Karasabai, Annai, St. Ignatius, Sand Creek, Aishalton and Masakenari in Region 9. Never have these communities got stable and reliable internet access as they do today. In addition, we are happy to say that the Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs) in some of these communities will be provided with internet access. We are committed to ensuring that internet access and development are real in our hinterland, poor and remote communities. In addition to our ICT hubs that provides free internet access for any citizen to go in and use, we will also be providing solar power at most of these internet hubs. We will be starting in such communities as Batavia in Region 7, Maraikobai in Region 8, Baramita in Region 1, Kabakaburi in Region 2, Orealla in Region 6 and Sand Creek.

In implementing President Granger's vision, the National Data Management Authority today could say it provides free internet access to over 12,000 users on a monthly basis through 131 ICT hubs and 79 public internet access points which are locations either at a community centre, at a police station or, as I mentioned, at a RDC office. Public Wi-Fi eventually will ensure that more than 50,000 citizens in these communities will have access to the internet.

3.44 p.m.

Why are we talking so much about internet access and connectivity? It is because we recognise that with this, students are able to do research, teachers are able to provide and prepare better lesson plans. We understand that today, young people need to be taught in innovated and exciting manners. Entrepreneurs, where ever they are in Guyana are able to take advantage of a global market and to push the possibilities of being an entrepreneur.

We went to the community of Barakara, a remote village, located 42 miles from New Amsterdam in Region 6, just the other day, along the Canje River. A gentleman explained to us that it has

approximately 350 persons living in that area and over the years, due to a lack of modern amenities, employment is limited and many young people have moved out of the area. In fact, the gentleman that we spoke to said that for the first time he felt as a Guyanese because he can now connect to what is happening in Guyana in radio and in television. This is the power of connectivity to change communities.

I mentioned the importance of access to the internet which can improve the learning of the people. Here we talk about online learning and research opportunities and I mentioned tele-medicine. In the community of Yakusari, Black Bush Polder, Region 6, I paid a visit and residents welcomed the establishment of an ICT hub. Many of them expressed their hope that access to more information via the internet would be able to boost the rice farming practices.

In Parika, on the East Bank Essequibo, before the establishment of an ICT hub, residents were required to pay large sums to get online. One father shared this with me and now he ensures that his children visit the ICT hub at least three times a week to make sure that they are doing research and their homework. These are all exciting things. **[An Hon. Member (Opposition):** It was our idea.] It is which you failed to implement. Ideas and talk are cheap, the doing is a difference.

In 2019, investment in cybersecurity is budgeted to exceed \$100 million, because we recognise that access to the internet opens us up to more challenges, in terms of our security and the protection of our data.

I am happy to say that the NDMA is currently implementing an electronic document management system which we have really needed in Guyana for a very long time. This is being done on a scale that has never been done before. Finally, original paper-based sources of documents and workflows will be streamlined to ensure that we put them into a digital format. The ongoing pilot in this digitisation process has started at the Land Registry's property records and is scheduled to be completed in 2019.

Next year, the National Archives, the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority, the Ministry of Communities and even the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs will be benefiting from the electronic document management system to complete this programme. Our Ministry has already employed over 100 university graduates as ICT engineers and technicians and provided in-depth

training for 40 innovative and competent young people. Most importantly, by January, we are going to have to hire an additional 60 youths to join our team. What I like the most about this programme is that this means that private sector companies now have an opportunity to develop skills and provide services to the Government and to any agency in documenting programmes. As you know, throughout the public sector we have challenges where we have accumulated years and years of paper, that we feel is our great opportunity for our young tech-savvy individuals who we are training to be pushed into employment in these areas.

The main focus of this transformational sector continues to be the development of an ICT ready workforce. We recognise that 75% of jobs worldwide, by 2025, will require some skills in ICT. I am happy to say that this year we have trained 400 young people in ICT literacy in Regions 2, 3, 5 and 6. My personal highlight is when we went looking for 20 girls for a 12-week “Girls can Code” ICT programme, we were looking for girls between the age of 11 and 14 years old, we ended up with 56 applications which, to me, was a testimony that our young people get it and are prepared to learn and to be part of this new digital Guyana. I mentioned our girls only to recognise that in Guyana, as in many parts of the world, girls are less likely to get into ICT field. For the naysayer, I am happy to say that we also accommodated over 50 young boys in coding camps over during the August holidays. Those camps, we targeted 47 persons in Berbice, 30 in Essequibo and 50 in Linden and we did similar training in Kurukururu.

A website development course in Vreed-en-Hoop was a big hit and I want to take this opportunity to say that right now, as we speak, we are confirming a collaboration with Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematic (STEM) Guyana which first introduced robotic training to young people in Guyana. Through this programme, and with the help of the Department of Youth and Sport, 35 of our ICT hubs will be providing, as of two weeks from now, just before Christmas, training in STEM at ICT hubs in Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10. Young people across Guyana would have an opportunity to participate.

One of the joys of what we have achieved in this budget is the fact that our Minister of Finance was able to respond directly to a need and to a request to do more for persons living with disabilities who continue to be left out in many development initiatives. Our goal is to create an inclusive society. This budget, which I am proud to support, has included a transformational measure which allows persons living with disabilities to purchase a smart phone, a phone with accessibility

features that are voice activated for the blind and also features for the deaf that will enhance the day to day living. In addition to that our Minister of Finance went a step further and put in a special provision whereby persons living with disabilities are able to get tax rebates and VAT rebates on the vehicles that may need to be retrofitted so that they could use them. We know the realities of taxis are refused a stop and accept a visually impaired person in a car or in a minibus just because it takes too long to either have that person get in there or to fold up a wheelchair.

There is no question that we have done an amazing range of things. The One Laptop Per Teacher programme which was embarked by our President has now distributed 8,848 laptops to our teachers. We have also connected 11 student dormitories and hostels, including the Amerindian Hostel and the dormitory in Anna Regina. In fact, we have done all of the dormitories. Then we have our much anticipated Centre of Excellence which would provide training in data management in web technologies and in Java to members of the public sector. That is a gift from the Government of India.

In any country, our greatest asset is our youth, our human capital. In Guyana, we know that these ICT development projects have a positive impact on our youth. Two of the things that we will be implementing next year are our venture capital fund and our ICT park. Over the last 12 months we have been supporting several of our young people in ICT who have been doing amazing things. I want to take this opportunity to mention a few of them. The trust of ICT development is the building of entrepreneurial activities and this is where we have changed the concept of going and looking for a job, but creating a job yourself and enjoying the fruits of that.

We have a range of incredible young people who have been doing amazing things, those includes the students from the North Ruimveldt Multilateral School and from the high school in Anna Regina who have developed special apps to check the moisture content in soil. Although we had a lot of laughter when we talked about drones, drones, today, are being used to deliver medicines in some of the remote communities of the world and this is how we see drones being used to develop our agriculture and e-agricultural techniques.

Thank you Mr. Speaker [*Applause*]

Mr. Bharrat: I rise to make my contribution on Budget 2019. Permit me please, from the onset, to commend the Minister and the hard-working staff from the Ministry of Finance for yet another

early presentation of the national budget and to recognise that Budget 2019 is the largest in the history of our country. Surprisingly, there are no billboards around the country. Taking Budget 2019 into consideration, in all means that over \$1 trillion will be spent by the APNU/AFC administration since taking office in 2015. However, are Guyanese better off today after \$1 trillion? Have the lives of Guyanese improved, after \$1 trillion? Is there better infrastructure in our country after \$1 trillion?

The Hon. Member Mr. Charrandass Persaud spoke glowingly about the developments of Region 6 and the glass roads and the lights. How can you speak glowingly of a region where a Government would have closed down the Skeldon Sugar Estate? How can you speak glowingly of a region where the Government would have closed down the Rose Hall Sugar Estate? How can you speak glowingly of a region where the Providence Plantation, on the East Bank of Berbice, was closed down? How can you speak glowingly when the student population at the University of Guyana, at the Tain Campus, has declined significantly because parents cannot afford to send their children for tertiary education? How can you speak glowingly about Region 6 when for the past three budgets we have been hearing the Minister of Business saying that the Belvedere industrial area is in incubatory stage? How can you speak glowingly when the Port Mourant Ophthalmology Hospital is almost closed? How can we speak glowingly when the rice sector is dying in Berbice because of poor infrastructure, lack of market and poor prices? This is some of the misinformation that has taken the Government to this false place of comfort.

The Hon. Member John Adams would have mentioned last evening that the David G buses and , the five 'B's programme that has replaced the cash grant for students, which has been implemented under the PPP administration, are now providing transportation for all the children in Guyana, for all 187,000 schoolchildren in Guyana.

3.59 p.m.

There are 29 David G buses in the country and if we should do a simple mathematical calculation, they are mostly 30-seater minibuses, 29 by 30 is equal to 870. Of the 187,000 schoolchildren in this country, this represents 0.5% of the schoolchildren. We had given them a \$10,000 cash grant for every single schoolchild in this country. This is the kind of misinformation that, again I say, put the Government in a false sense of comfort zone.

Listening to the Hon. Minister of Public Telecommunications, Ms. Catherine Hughes, I was wondering if the Minister is going through her December, 2017 speech because it mirrors almost everything that is in the 2017 speech – almost everything. It means that nothing happened during 2018. There was nothing new that was reported this honourable House that happened in 2018. We heard about the 11 smart classrooms. This is good. We have nothing against creating smart classrooms in our country, but what are we doing to address the truancy in our country, the school dropouts, the indiscipline, the slow learners and the declining pass at the National Grade Six Assessment? These are real issues that need real answers and must be dealt with frontally.

The Minister stopped short to mention about jobs in ICT. ICT should be an area or sector to have been creating hundreds, if not thousands, of jobs for the youths in Guyana. However, the Minister stopped short in mentioning how many jobs were created in 2018, in the ICT sector. As I mentioned, nothing new is presented in the Minister's presentation. I can read from the Minister's presentation, "I am happy to say that utilising our e-Government network, which the NDMA now manages, has enabled us to provide free internet access to 53 Government Ministries." That is what the Hon. Minister said, again, earlier in her presentation. "Ninety-five secondary schools", that is what she said earlier; "three campuses of the University of Guyana", that is what she said earlier, and it was December, 2017.

Further, quoting from the Minister's December 2017 speech, "I want to mention the post office. The post office in Guyana, as many of us know, it has been neglected for several decades." This was again mentioned. To say that we will create ICT hubs at all the post offices throughout the country, yet, the Minister comes to this noble House to say that only at New Amsterdam's post office a hub was created at the tune of \$22 million. In an entire fiscal year, \$22 million in capital works has been done by the Ministry of Public Telecommunications.

The Minister spoke about internet ready police cars, but at the same time, post offices are being robbed everyday throughout our country. The Minister complained about \$30 million that was stolen from post offices through robberies. Maybe, she is making plea to the Hon. Minister of Public Security. I believe that that is the right way it should be.

Budget 2019, as mentioned, is the largest budget in the history of our country. I am stilling trying to figure who exactly would benefit from Budget 2019. The fishermen who risk their lives and are

fearful of pirate attacks on a daily basis, will they benefit? The 7,000 dismissed sugar workers and their families, will they benefit? The displaced vendors and the hire car operators outside of this Parliament Building, will they benefit? Will the schoolchildren benefit? The answer to these questions is a resounding “no”. They will not benefit. This budget is crafted to benefit, as usual, a selected few and the executive arm of the Government, similar to the last four budgets.

Over \$2 billion of this budget will be spent on the Government itself. The money will be spent on dietaries, travelling, charters, security, among others. In other words, the Government will be using \$200 billion to execute \$100 billion of works. That is what the budget is stating. Budget 2019 was definitely not designed to benefit the ordinary citizens of this country. Budget 2019 was not designed to arrest the failing productive sectors and the ailing economy.

Budget 2019 was not designed to reduce the escalating cost of living. Budget 2019 was not designed to encourage investments and job creations. Budget 2019 was not designed to increase manufacturing and exports. Budget 2019 was designed to benefit the Government of Guyana and not the people of Guyana.

A quick look at the measures of Budget 2019 will show that the budget indicated a \$5,000 increase in the threshold, but with the increasing cost of living, it is a mere drop in the ocean. The Hon. Member Carrington mentioned last night, in his presentation, that when pay increases, price increases. We want to say to the Hon. Member that prices would have increased a long time ago. It is the failure of the Government and the stubbornness of the Government to reduce or to take off the excise tax on fuel, so that people can pay less than \$200 per litre of fuel. We know that everything evolves or hinges around fuel. From sending your children to school, putting food on the table and from the vegetables in the market, it evolves around fuel. The \$5,000 is just a mere drop in the ocean.

Secondly, the five-year period to renew your driver’s licence at a cost of \$5,000 is as a result of the Government trying to lower cost again. This is an enforced measure that put into the budget, because obviously the new driver’s licence will cost more to reproduce on a three-year period. It is a forced measure that was included in 2019.

The \$10,000, 46-page passport, how many Guyanese will benefit from this? Today, Guyanese are struggling to buy a ticket. They cannot travel if their families do not purchase a ticket for them.

Concessions for hybrid vehicles and electric motorcycles, I am happy that the Hon. Minister of Public Infrastructure with responsibility for electricity, is speaking, because we are still grappling with giving electricity to households and businesses, but we are bringing electric motorcycles and cars. What will happen to our people on the road?

Reduction in cost for replacement of taxpayer identification number (TIN) certificate from \$5,000 to \$2,000, this is a correction of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (AFC) Government. They implemented this. This is rectifying their own mistake.

Concessions for people with disabilities, it is very commendable, but how many physically challenged persons can afford to buy these specially designed vehicles? How many persons with physical disabilities can do so? Further, this scheme must be managed properly. Further, we warn that this scheme must be managed properly because it can be an avenue for corruption and misuse.

Value added tax (VAT)-free prosthetic arms, legs and teeth, how many persons will benefit from this, again? I do not know if the Government did a survey and have the figures, but I do not see too many one hand, one foot or no-teeth people running around. Yet, again, it is a measure that will not benefit every single Guyanese. Why not set up a fund that can help these people because this is a very small section of our population that we are talking about. This is a very small section of our population who can hardly afford it. If they could have afforded it, they would have had a leg or an arm today. Those are some of the measures in the Budget 2019. There is no indication that this budget will improve the economic, social and physical state of this country. With that being said, you can clearly understand why 62% of the people of this country rejected the APNU/AFC on 12th November, 2018 at the local government elections, and will do so even more resoundingly come 2020.

Further, the \$300.7 billion represents an increase of almost \$20 billion in current expenditure, meaning more travels, more security, more dietary, more charters and more wastage, while there is a meagre increase \$2.4 billion or 6% of capital expenditures, which should have been intended to benefit people and their communities. Instead, if you look at the capital estimates, a significant amount will be spent on studies, design, proposals, vehicles for administration, Government buildings and fences - yes, fences. I say this because a quick glance through the capital estimates

of Budget 2019 will point to the misuse, the mismanagement and the lack of vision of sending down tangible benefits to our people.

Budget 2019 allocates to the Ministry of Presidency, almost \$150 million for motor vehicles, alone. Over half of a billion dollars for buildings – wiring and painting of buildings - and another whopping \$350 million will be spent on preparations for the jubilee celebrations. We can only imagine how much it will cost us for the celebration come 2020, if it is only for the preparation.

My colleague, the Hon. Member Gillian Burton-Persaud would have mentioned areas that this money could have been spent on. For example, we have imposed VAT on light and water, it could have been spent on reducing that. We still owe sugar workers severance pay, why not pay them that? There are people in every single corner of our country who are crying out for jobs, why not create investments where jobs will be created for our young people? Yet, the Government cannot listen to the cries of the people.

Further, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will spend \$46.6 million on motor vehicles in 2019. The Office of the Prime Minister will spend \$18 million; the Ministry of Finance will spend \$24 million; the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs will spend \$64.7 million; the Ministry of Natural Resources will spend \$10 million; the Ministry of Education will spend \$79.2 million; the Ministry of Social Protection will spend \$53.6 million; the Ministry of Public Health will spend \$31 million; the Ministry of Public Security will spend \$86.9 million on vehicles. It means that the Government will spend, in 2019, almost \$700 million on vehicles alone. This is more than any of the ten regions capital budgets.

If we should go further, there is \$110 million allocated for Government buildings and fences. There must be some obsession with fences. One hundred and thirty-four million for the Linden Highway feasibility study. The studies do not stop there. According to the Minister, feasibility studies for the Linden/Mabura Road, the Kurupukari crossing, the Lethem Airport upgrade, the Parika Stelling, the modernisation of the Georgetown Port, among many others, will occur in 2019. These are all studies; these are not projects. These are not moneys that we will be spending to do physical projects, these are studies.

Budget 2019 has an allocation of \$100 million for a monument in Linden. Let us hope it is not a replica of the monument in Mahdia. In my humble view and in full respect of all Members of this

honourable House, I personally do not believe that arches and monuments bring direct benefits to people.

My friend, the Hon. Member Rutherford went through a long list of projects in Region 10, but not once did he mention the \$100 million monument. Maybe he shares the same view, as I do, or he was not consulted. I am sure if we conduct a quick survey in Linden, majority of the residents will agree with me that they prefer the money to be spent on the roads, investments and in job creation so that their families and children could enjoy a 'good life' that was promised to them by the Government.

4.14 p.m.

This shows clearly that the Government definitely has its priorities mixed up, which resulted in wasteful and extravagant spending because there was no consultation with, or consideration for the people of Guyana.

There are much talks about youths: youth empowerment, youth entrepreneurship and youth employment, yet the National Youth Strategy is sitting at the Ministry of Social Cohesion since October, 2016. There was no allocation for the Youth Innovation Fund and no creation of jobs for young people.

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

Mr. Bharrat: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Taking into consideration that the coalition Government would have lost two consecutive Local Government Elections and is facing a no-confidence motion, we had expected that there would have been more investment and job creation for the Guyanese people. That the Value-Added Tax (VAT) would have been removed from school supplies, light water, agriculture and mining equipment, drugs and medical supplies, among other items that were zero-rated. That we would have introduced the light and water subsidy to pensioners; that we would have reintroduced the \$10,000 cash grant to our school children; that we would have incentivised and not penalised the agriculture and mining sectors and, of course, prioritise Government's spending.

In conclusion, we in the Opposition and all Guyanese, call on the Government to govern for all Guyanese as promised in its Manifesto. Prioritise Government's spending, ensure that tangible benefits can be secured and attract real investments that will create jobs and wealth for Guyanese.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Minister of Citizenship [Mr. Felix]: I rise to join my Colleagues who preceded me in supporting Budget 2019 under the theme: *Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities For The Good Life*. This is a Budget which is crafted with Guyana's development in mind and it is a people centred Budget. Our Colleague, Mr. Winston De Costa and his energetic staff, who worked tirelessly with us for months, are deserving of our praise. I say congratulations Hon. Minister Mr. Jordan for a job well done.

As I read his Budget Presentation, I realised that, though we did not get all that my department wanted, we got enough to make us feel happy. The Department has been allocated over \$1.5 billion to expend on its current and capital projects, including the purchase of passports and birth certificates and the continuation of the digitisation project, currently ongoing at the General Registrar's Office (GRO).

Before I continue to outline the work and achievement of the Department, let me address certain issues which the Opposition is taking liberties at lambasting the Government. There is an old saying in Guyana, "*Thief man nah like see matti walk wid bag.*" I sat in this honourable House and heard various Members of the Opposition deriding and castigating various Government Ministers for excessive spending and waste, as though Guyana was born after May, 2105. This APNU/AFC Government took over a colossal mess from the PPP/C Government in every area. Let me remind the Opposition of a few egregious acts during their stewardship.

The modernisation of the Skeldon Sugar Estate, where millions of United States (US) dollars were spent without a cent in return. The Skeldon Sugar Estate has returned nothing to this country. The PPP does not speak about this waste of funds. Billions of dollars went down the drain, and nothing in return.

Investment of over \$2 billion in fibre optic cable, which my Colleague alluded to earlier, between Timehri and Lethem. We know who was in charge of that project. At one time, one could drive

along the Lethem/Mabura road and see the cables peeping out at you. Today, it is the Ministry of Public Telecommunications that is bringing connectivity all around the country, congratulations Ms. Hughes.

The National Insurance Scheme (NIS) was savagely attacked by the previous Government. Firstly, money was illegally invested in a fallen scheme, a company failed, and NIS cannot receive its money. Again, NIS funds were hijacked to invest in the Berbice River Bridge, which has failed to pay return on its investment to this date.

I can also remind the Opposition of the aggressive action taken against two decent former employees of the New Building Society (NBS), who being professionals, were placed before the Court on false criminal charges in an apparent retaliation for their refusal to use shareholders' money without the shareholders' permission in the Berbice River Bridge Project, a project which was championed by the principal at the time. It took an appeal to the Ombudsman, to release those men from the ill effects of false charges.

We can also recall the missing \$100 million which was borrowed from the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB) by a certain Member of this House, who allegedly signed for it but cannot repay to this date. Those were a waste of Government funds which could have been better utilised for development. These are a few of the improprieties by the past Government. How dare they now clothe themselves with moral authority to lecture us on good governance?

The Hon. Member, Mr. Damon, said that the ExxonMobil Corporation is corrupt. **[Mr. Damon: Yes, I said so.]** Yes. May I remind you that the PPP/C signed the first contract in 1999? I hope you drew the analogy from that statement, if you are capable. *[Interruption.]*

The ExxonMobil Corporation is Guyana's partner for a new future and they are calling it corrupt. This is another feral blast, which we are accustomed to from the other side. I am hearing Mr. Bharrat, he sounds by name and nature, like Dr. Doom. He opposes everything - drivers' license, passports and studies, just like Dr. Doom. Dr. Doom does not like studies and that is why there were so many failed projects. Having no studies nor development of thought, cannot bring good results for any project, they must fail. So, many speakers from the Opposition have spoken, and all that they are saying is that the sugar workers should be paid. Apparently, they are unaware that payments were effected to the sugar workers.

The Department of Citizenship and Immigration continues to build on past achievements and transform the manner in which immigration and passport services and the registration of births are delivered to the public.

In the previous budget presentations, I had alluded to the need to decentralise the passport service. This year, I am happy to report that two buildings have been completed in New Amsterdam and Linden and will be put into use, immediately, after connectivity issues are sorted out by mid-December, 2018. In this regard, our gratitude and thanks must be extended to the Management of the National Insurance Scheme for accommodating the staff from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration and the public, for close to two years, to start up the process of decentralisation. It is also my duty to commend the important role that the late great Ms. Sandra Adams played in identifying NIS in Linden as a temporary area of operations for the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. Given the technical issues to be solved, both buildings would be in use to both Berbicians and Lindeners come 1st January, 2019.

In Budget 2019, I have been allocated a sum of \$20 million to construct a passport office in Lethem. **[Mr. Damon: The Ministry...]** Yes, it is the Ministry. I will take what I can get, until I get what I want. The procurement process has commenced. There are several passport and birth registration need in that remote community. It is my wish that, in the operationalising of the buildings, both needs be addressed.

This year will also bear witness to the improvements in the production of passports. There is the introduction of the new ePassport Issuing and Control System (ePICS). With this change of technology, there would be a concomitant re-design and enhancement of the Guyanese Passport to an electronic passport, the ePassport. Therefore, all related equipment must be changed and replaced with modern technology. This means, this country would be migrating from the current machine-readable passport to the ePassport.

An ePassport, is a machine-readable passport that contains an electronic chip and, as such, provides enhanced security. The chip holds the same information that is printed on the passport's data page - the holder's name, date of birth and other biographic information would be on the electronic chip. An ePassport would also contain biometric identifiers, such as the digital photograph of the holder. The biographic and biometric data contained in the electronic chip could be compared with the

traveller and the document being presented, thereby providing incremental security and making the books much more difficult to duplicate and alter.

The extra layer of security has been proven to inspire greater confidence in, and acceptance of, the country's travel documents. In addition, ePassports reduce the risk of tampering and identity fraud. It contains a digital signature that is unique to the issuing authority. This mechanism helps border authorities ensure that the passport is authentic and enables automated border processing and interaction with Automated Passport Control (APC) kiosks. **[Mr. Damon: Where are the**

agents?] You find them. These alterations and modifications, would make Guyana join other countries in the world already using the ePassport system in the Caribbean. Bahamas, Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Antigua and Barbuda and St. Kitts and Nevis have already put this system into use. In other words, our passport issuing system would be overhauled, necessitating the replacement of all soft and hardware systems.

In addition, our Border Management System (BMS), located at all ports of entry, would receive similar reviews. This change would offer a wider range of functionality and integrate the BMS with the proposed ePICS. The ePICS would enable Government to effectively monitor its borders by aiding in the prevention and detection of passport fraud, overstays and the presence of criminal elements attempting to arrive in Guyana through both air and land ports of entry. There are other useful tools associated with this improvement and upgrade of our Border Management System. For example, new technologies included in this system. There would be 10 Automated Passport Control APC kiosks, which would be deployed at the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA).

4.29 p.m.

These kiosks will allow authorised travellers, for example Guyanese nationals or potentially small groups of foreign countries with e-passports, to insert their passports, have their photo taken and biometrically matched with their passport or e-passport and submit their customs declarations. The travellers are then provided with a receipt containing either an approved or refer to secondary code, which they show to an Immigration Officer monitoring the kiosks, prior to entry into the country. These are some of the improvements, which will, in 2019, advance the work of the immigration and passport services. But these do not exhaust the list.

In 2019, there will be the introduction of a 48-page passport with a 10-year life span at a cost of \$10,000. Therefore, there will be two streams to acquire the passport. There will be the 32-page issue and the 48- page, targeting frequent flyers, Members of the Judiciary, businessmen, Parliamentarians and senior public servants. There will also be a system to accommodate those persons who desire their passports expedited.

With effect from the 1st January 2019, persons who desire their passport applications expedited will have this done within 24-hours at a cost of \$20,000. This facility will not be available to persons who have either lost or damaged their passports.

During 2018, the Passport Office was very busy. Locally, the Central Immigration and Passport Office issued 59,079 passports. The diaspora, a total of 30 countries, received 17,310 passports. The Department sought to reach out to communities in its efforts at decentralisation in Regions 6 and 10, where 6,143 passports were delivered. Another system of delivery was also employed. Persons who applied for passports in Georgetown were redirected to a particular date and time in their regions to collect their passports, particularly Regions 2, 3, 6, 7, 9 and 10. The Department of Citizenship registered 298 foreign nationals who received... [Mr. Dharamlall: How many Haitians?] All you know. Who received Guyanese citizenship through marriage, descent and ordinary residence. Additionally, the Department processed foreign nationals for extensions of stay and work permits, as shown hereunder.

Listen to this now, you want to hear about Haitians? Cubans 225, Chinese 175, Americans 165, Indians 120, Filipinos 70, Venezuelans 75, British 59, Dominican Republic 45, Trinidadian 30, Surinamese 15, a total of 979. Take that and swallow it.

This activity will come under greater scrutiny in the new year because of the need to ensure that Guyanese get their fair share of employment opportunities becoming available as a result of investment opportunities expected to open up shortly. The Department requires all perspective employers to publish vacancies in one of the dailies for over a three-month period to give Guyanese a chance to compete for these employment opportunities. The Department also notice certain unhealthy employment practices which we intend to curb by joining forces with the Department of Labour and further I say not.

Birth registration has become an important feature to this Government's activities because of the need to protect the rights of the children. In the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF's), passport to birth registration, birth registration is the official recording of a child's birth by the State. It is a permanent and official record of the child's existence. It is part of an effective civil registration system that acknowledges the person's existence before the law, establishes family ties and traps major events of an individual's life from birth to death.

While Guyana has been making efforts to achieve 100% birth registration and several outreach activities were conducted during the year, as a result of challenges to residents in the hinterland communities affected by distance and opportunity to register with a cost of acquisition of a certificate, adding to that burden. During this year, with the assistance of UNICEF, the staff from the Guyana Registration Office (GRO) made three visits to Region 1, two visits to Region 8 and one to Region 9. These resulted in the processing of 1188 late registration and the processing of 590 applications. During this year, and the year 2019, these outreaches will continue, but action would be taken to review the pertinent legislation to bring them in line with the current best practices observed internationally. These include ensuring that all children, who are born in Guyana, shall be entitled to and receive a birth certificate; ensuring that all children from 0-18 years have a birth certificate; and that the State must ensure the registration of all children born in Guyana.

Removing the bar on late registration from one year, up to 11 years. In other words, we are going to move up the late registration. After one year, we will go to 11... [Ms. Teixeira: It has to be amended.] The law will be amended. Ensuring that all hospitals and relevant persons with responsibility for the registration of births shall be held accountable in having to provide written explanations to the Registrar for any and all failures to register birth or births.

In January, 2020, all birth certificates shall be in a digitised format and, thus, be typewritten. The fees for birth certificates shall be free of cost for children up to 18 years. It is intended that these actions be taken in 2019 to aid in ensuring that the births of children are registered and that they get birth certificates. However, the Department is continuing its work to digitise all deaths, births, marriage and adoption certificates. Of the three million records, which were to be digitised, only 12% of these records remain to be digitised. This is expected to be completed by August, 2019. Thereafter, the Department would proceed to produce a printed birth certificate and launch into

the feasibility of issuing a unique identity system, which I have spoken about from the time we enter Parliament. It is now becoming a reality and we will soon be working on establishing a unique identity system for all Guyanese from birth to death.

During this year, this country was faced with a Venezuelan crisis. The United Nations Commissioner on Human Rights reached out to territories in the region imploring upon them the need to treat the migrant Venezuelans humanely and not to criminalise them and return them to their countries. We have been doing that, incurring expenses which were unanticipated. In order to ensure that our migratory or immigration laws were not breached, we had deployed roving immigration officers to detect migrant Venezuelans. We are working in conjunction with UNICEF and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the development of programmes to aid us in controlling this in-flow and be able to detect Venezuelans in Guyana. This came at a cost both to the Civil Defence Commission (CDC) and to the Ministry of Public Health. The Ministry of Public Health has expended over \$23 million in vaccines and operational expenses.

Meanwhile, the Civil Defence Commission has expended over \$6 million in charters, hand and power tools, food and accommodation. The international agencies have been assisting greatly with food and non-food items. In conjunction with Government agencies, we have been supplying the needs of the Venezuelan migrants who are mainly in various parts of Regions 1 and 7 and to some extent Region 9. This is a commitment which we have... [Mr. Damon: What happened to Region 2?] Yes. The PPP got them lockup in Region 2. We know that. Tell the Regional Chairman, again so that we could get it done.

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

This Venezuelan migrant issue would take us through for a long time. This is not a problem that we can anticipate ending shortly and, as such, we will be designing programmes with the assistance of the UNHCR to ensure that we stay within the law and that we treat the Venezuelans humanely. We also engage in the Department of Citizenship, we have just taken over the Remigration Scheme. We are reviewing that scheme to ensure that we capture all the persons and issues which need to be properly regulated to administer the scheme.

During the budgetary presentations of Winston Da Costa Jordan, we have heard of salary increases, we have heard about the raising of the income tax threshold. I posit that these are all issues from which the Guyanese public would benefit. This is not one of my friend, Mr. Ali's, *sweet lies*. They had *sweet lies*. We are working on a foundation...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, let us leave that out. I am sure you can find another way. Those were the misfortunes of yesterday. Let us now deal with today and the future.

Mr. Felix: Very well, Sir. I follow your guidance. I now wish to commend this budget and to seek its passage through Parliament.

Thank you. *[Applause]*.

Mr. Gill: Mr. Speaker, what is the point of having the biggest budget in our nation's history, if it cannot improve the wellbeing of our ordinary Guyanese. A good budget should ensure the 'good life for everyone.

4.44 p.m.

The opportunity to get a good education; find a good job; live in a safe and secure environment; put food on the table; have affordable and quality health care; save for retirement; and, maybe, have a little left over for rainy days.

For those of you who are sitting at home looking at this debate and wondering whether there is anything in this budget that will allow you to have that elusive 'good life' the Government keeps promising you, do not count on it. The odds of you winning the lottery are much better than getting this tone-deaf administration to listen to the cries of its people.

The APNU/AFC coalition has been in power now for over three and a half years and it has not lived up to the expectations they have created for themselves. They have failed miserably to deliver goods and services that are important to the average Guyanese. The severe blows they received at the just concluded Local Government Elections was also a vote of no-confidence in this Government.

We recognise the importance of Math in our classroom. For years, our teachers have been struggling to get these grades up. Maybe, this explains the reason why the Hon Minister of Finance

is having difficulties projecting the growth rate of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) year after year. Why not? They actually thought that they could do better.

Coming after eight consecutive years of economic growth, averaging 4.5% under the PPP/C administration, the obstructionist APNU/AFC Opposition used their one-seat majority in the National Assembly to block major transformational development projects like the Amaila Falls Hydro-Project and the Specialty Hospital and voted against paying Government workers; voted to cut the capital budgets of the Ministries of Public Works and Amerindian Affairs and voted to cut other essential services.

Now, under the stewardship of the APNU/AFC, the country is in disarray. In the 2015 the APNU/AFC Manifesto, they projected growing the GDP by at least 7%. They never got close.

Kaieteur News newspaper, dated 12th June, 2018:

“In the 2016 Budget, the economy was projected to grow by 4.0%. The Half-Year Report by the Bank of Guyana shows that Real Gross Domestic Product grew by only 2.0 percent during the first half of 2016. The final growth rate was 3.3%. In the 2017 Estimates, the economy was projected to grow by 3.8%. This was later adjusted downwards to 3.1%, then to 2.9%. The final figures show the Guyana economy grew by a dismal 2.1% in 2017. Now we come to the 2018 Estimates that forecast the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) will grow at a rate of 3.8 %. This was decreased to 3.4 %, then to 4.5% in August, when the Mid-Year Report was presented to the National Assembly.”

Now we are hearing that the projected growth rate for 2018 will only be 3.4 %. I can wager you, when all the figures are known, it is very likely that the economy will end up with a much lower growth rate than is projected. This has been the kind of fuzzy Math coming from the Ministry of Finance, year after year. It is not likely to change anytime soon. If you think there is incompetence at the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Public Security takes the grand prize.

Mr. Speaker, despite statistics released by the Guyana Police Force, (GPF), which include a 30% increase in robbery with guns in Berbice, we all know that criminal activities in Guyana have now reached a critical level with serious crimes, such as murder and armed robbery, being very common.

The *2018 Overseas Security Advisory Council on Guyana's Crime and Safety Report* released by the United States (U.S) State Department in May of this year, reported that:

“Corruption is widely perceived to be commonplace within many government agencies...”

Did you hear that Mr. Speaker? This report states: “Corruption, is widely perceived to be commonplace within many government agencies.”

It goes on to state:

“Police officers often are reportedly paid off by criminal elements and are alleged to work with criminals by either assisting or protecting them.”

That report was featured in the *Kaieteur News* on 18th May, 2018.

What is the Minister doing about this? Instead of giving the Guyana Police Force the resources necessary to wage an effective war on these criminal elements, billions are mis-appropriated to the Special Organised Crime Unit to continue the political witch-hunt of former PPP Ministers, a vindictive act by this Government.

Now, instead of focusing his priorities on keeping our citizens safe, our Minister of Public Security occupies his time on trivial matters, closing bars and night clubs at 2.00 a.m., even as we approach the festive season of Christmas, and seizing audio equipment from persons playing loud music.

While I am pleased to see moneys allocated to the renovation of police stations and to improve accommodations for police ranks, \$400 million is not enough. They need much more than that. Judging from the high demands for police presence and the lack of transportation in the hinterlands, the allocation of \$200 million for vehicles and boats are also inadequate.

While in opposition, the APNU/AFC promised to reduce crime, a task the Minister of Public Security has proven incapable of. The People's Progressive Party supports every effort to put an end to this crime wave; to get illegal weapons off the streets; and to use SOCU to go after real money-launderers and drug dealers as that agency was established to do.

There is nothing in this budget that offers the ‘good life’ to our men and women in uniform. We expect our police officers to keep us safe and we demand much of them. Government needs to recognise that police officers have families that also demand much of them. For that reason, we support better salaries, incentives and working conditions for our law-enforcement.

We call on Government to honour its campaign promise and to give them the 20% increase in salaries that they were promised. We also urge this non-caring Government to restore the one-month Christmas bonus the Joint Services once enjoyed and relied upon, under the People’s Progressive Party. Please, do not wait for the 2020 Elections Budget, do it now.

On 9th June, 2017, the Georgetown Prison went up in a blazing inferno. The entire prison was burnt to the ground. One and a half years later, the Minister wants to rebuild that prison at its present location, in the heart of the city that has always been a security risk to the residents of Georgetown. Now, amidst that tragedy, an opportunity presents itself to move this eyesore from the City of Georgetown and replace it with a modern, high-rise professional building of some sort.

The Georgetown Prison sits on prime real estate in the heart of the business district, land that could be easily sold or leased at a premium price to investors. Why not use this opportunity to relocate the prison to a more isolated location that would allow for a secured, supervised perimeter outside the prison walls to prevent escapees, while, at the same time, enhancing the security of those who live and work in Georgetown. It is bad enough for Government to have misdirected priorities and it is even worse to be visionless.

In his presentation of the budget, the Hon Minister of Finance mentioned two infirmaries now in operation at the Palms Geriatric Home and the Hugo Chavez Centre for Rehabilitation. I wonder if the Hon. Minister is aware of the corruption and abuse that is taking place at the Hugo Chavez Centre, something I have written about extensively and nothing is being done. While it is a noble thing for Government to assist the most vulnerable among us, it is also incumbent upon them to ensure that the accommodation is safe and that residents are not extorted and abused. I am calling for a forensic audit of the Hugo Chavez Centre and the removal of the person who runs it.

Region 5 is the largest agricultural area of any region. It is the largest rice producing and cattle-rearing area as well, but Region 5 is prone to flooding. The rainy season is fast approaching and many of the drains in villages throughout the region are still clogged. For two consecutive years,

the region has been requesting the purchase of two long-boom excavators to alleviate this problem and for two consecutive years these excavators have be struck off the regional budget. Yet, \$35 million of taxpayers' money was wasted this year on a pet project of the Regional Executive Office (REO), a model-farm built on 45 acres of land that was illegally obtained by evicting 45 cash-crop farmers from land they occupied for many years and bulldozing their crops.

Quite frankly, I am disgusted to see an allocation for an additional \$15 million being made available to this project in 2019, which will benefit no one else except the REO, who now spend days at his farm, away from his office and the job he was employed to do. Another misdirected priority of Government. Where is the justification for this wasteful expenditure?

The health sector in Region 5, also has major problems like the rest of the country. Regular shortages of basic drugs and the lack of essential services are adversely affecting the quality of care provided to the people of the region.

4.59 p.m.

As it is, the Fort Wellington Hospital is unable to provide x-rays and ultrasound services, which are so essential for identifying medical issues and restoring good health. For the past two months, residents, who visited the dental department, have been without adequate service.

For those Guyanese living in parts of the Caribbean, Canada, Europe or the good old United States of America (USA), this Budget would make it more difficult for them to return home and invest in their country of their birth. Apart from the World Bank Report, published a month ago, which shows that Guyana dropped eight places in the ease of doing business here ranking, ranking 134 out of 190 countries, this Government is now shamelessly targeting re-migrants. It is estimated that there is more Guyanese living in foreign countries than those residing here at home. A high percentage of those are better off financially, more educated with skills and expertise needed here to reduce our dependency on foreigners.

The re-migrant scheme may have been flawed or abused by some unscrupulous characters, but instead of fixing the problem, this Budget would now punish and discourage every Guyanese who wants to return home by taking away the duty-free concession on vehicles and replacing it with a \$5 million tax credit. This is another devious scheme to rake in more taxes. Let me give you an

example, Hon. Minister. Let us say that a re-migrant brings back his two-year old vehicle with an engine capacity of 2,500 cc, which is normal in the USA, valued at \$4 million. He would have to pay the following: custom duty – 45%, excise tax -110% and Value Added-Tax (VAT) – 14%, which adds up to import duty of \$9,885,000,000. Under this new re-migrant scheme, instead of getting his vehicle tax free, the Government gives him a tax credit of \$5 million and he is left with a bill for a whopping \$4,885,000 to pay the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) before he gets his vehicle released from customs, and I challenge the Hon. Minister to dispute this figure.

In the beginning, Government officials travelled throughout the diaspora begging Guyanese to return home, promising investment opportunities and incentives. Instead, we see incentives being taken away and irresponsible remarks being made by the People's National Congress (PNC) Chairperson, Hon. Minister, Volda Lawrence, that drive fears in Guyanese, who now believe that this PNC-led Government is once again embarking on a policy of State-sponsored nepotism and racism. As a re-migrant myself, I could assure you that these policies would only discourage Guyanese from coming back here.

In conclusion, this Budget creates the illusion that Government is providing the good life, when, in reality, it is a misconception and deception they have been propagating for years. Apart from a shameless \$1,000 increase in old age pension and public assistance, there is nothing much in this Budget for public servants, sugar workers, rice farmers and nothing more for any group of people in Guyana.

This Budget could best be described as fluff on steroids, window dressing to hide the precipitous decline in the economy in the three and a half years of the APNU/AFC Government. I am afraid that we cannot support this Budget in its present form.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this is the time when we would take the suspension. We would return at five minutes after 6 o'clock.

Sitting suspended at 5.03 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 6.13 p.m.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you. I stand resolute to join my Colleagues before me, those on this side of the house and those on the Opposition benches, who covertly and in confident silence, support this developmental and transmogrifying Budget. A Budget whose theme, “*Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities For the Good Life*”, reaffirms the vision and continued commitment of His Excellency and his Administration towards the transformation and development of this country and its people, with a focused aim of providing a good life for all Guyanese. It is, therefore, incumbent on me to extend my unwavering congratulations and commendations to our eminent scholar, financial guru and the most experienced Minister of Finance my generation has witnessed.

Much thanks and gratitude are also extended to his competent staff at the Ministry whose judicious efforts beyond the call of duty to put together this very important document, which informs and give impetus to Government’s policies and plans for a better Guyana in all of its many facets, is most noteworthy.

They are many things of significant importance that command my unwavering support for this year’s far-sighted Budget. I am of the firm conviction that *Budget 2019* far supersedes, in my humble opinion, other budgets passed. I am persuaded that the policies contained therein would positively affect this nation way beyond 2020, and the people of Guyana would continue to see and experience an even greater degree of the good life guaranteed by the Granger Administration.

Having been summoned by the constant stare of my Chief Whip and being forced to battle with my innate desire to leave the seat, having listened to the many ramblings of Opposition speakers, I am compelled to say several things. Firstly, Mr. Speaker, I put it to you, and I am persuaded that *all and sundry* would agree that, in a serious Parliament with a responsible opposition, the government presents its policies and the opposition presents its alternatives and not just criticisms. Sadly, but, as was expected, this has not happened; 90% of the Opposition Members who presented, thus far, have failed to do so. Their *hullabaloo* presentations were nothing but a cabaret show, a gladiatorial circus, having all the trappings of legislative infamy and political rascality. We have all seen their weak political dividends.

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, if I heard you correctly, you employed language that is not acceptable in this House. I would advise that you withdraw it and then proceed.

Mr. Figueira: I withdraw it.

Mr. Speaker: But are you aware of the language you used, Hon. Member?

Mr. Figueira: Very much so.

Mr. Speaker: I beg you a pardon?

Mr. Figueira: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: And you have withdrawn that language.

Mr. Figueira: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I would ask Hon. Members to lift the approach. Please proceed.

Mr. Figueira: I am reminded of interesting comments made by the Hon. Member, Mr. Joseph Hamilton, who, in his description of the monument at Mahdia, had a sexual undertone. I do not know if he was having a moment, but he posited that the headstone is a symbol of this Government. I put it to the Hon. Member that he is correct. It is symbolic of Government's *upness* and solid stewardship of this Administration and country.

I noted, also, the quotes about unemployment and the education sector by the PPP's point man on economics. In light of same, I wish to put into context those comments. Let me first congratulate the Government on its efforts in allowing the statistics department to inform the nation about the true unemployment figure, the first time in decades, because these were all estimated under the PPP.

Secondly, not everything you inherit bears the fruit you want. To this end, I wish to ask Hon. Member, Mr. Irfaan Ali, and the PPP if they still relish the no child left behind education policy of the then Government, where a child got promoted if he or she failed or passed and whether or not he or she could have written his or her name. My point is that those are some of the policies of the PPP that presently affect unemployment and a generation of Guyanese today.

It is because of these realities that Government is continually fixing the plethora of problems and issues like these. With the largest provision in the 2019 Budget for the education sector, this is testament to the Government's commitment to the development of our youth, our people and this nation.

I have also noted many instances, during this debate, where the PPP poked shades at utterances reportedly linked to our Hon. Minister of Public Health on the issue of a preference for jobs for party supporters. I, however, salute my Comrade for her courage to observe that an error in judgement had occurred, and it is reported that the Hon. Minister has apologised.

With that said, it must be noted, also, that no one in the PPP was remorseful or apologetic for the sustained public attacks on the employment of an ethnic group that the PPP felt was so concentrated either in Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM), the military or whom they say were not qualified to be ambassadors under the PPP Government.

Budget 2019 is a concoction of experiences, suggestions, recommendations and views garnered from Government Ministers and Members of Parliament (MPs) who traverse the nooks and crannies of our geographical landscape. It captures the views of religious bodies, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), the private sector, civil society, youth and the ordinary citizens. To say that this Budget is visionless and tone-deaf shows how disrespectful the leaders of the Opposition view the views of the people of this country they claim to represent. What kind of leaders would insult their people and ask for their support at the same time?

The pantagruelian benefits that punctuate *Budget 2019* is a brilliant showcase of the Hon. Minister's skilful and prudent management of the State's resources, in such a short time, to deliver us out of the economic quagmire we inherited as a Government.

Region 10, the heartland region of Guyana, is most pleased with its 12% increase to the tune of \$3.9 billion. This sum would aid us to continue the development in several sectors to enhance the lives of our people. The continued upgrade of all levels of schools, health centres and Government buildings in the region will continue in 2019.

6.23 p.m.

The infrastructural upgrade of road networks within the communities of Wisroc, Silver City, Karakara, Block 22 and Christianburg will provide better accessibility to road users. Thousands of people will benefit from these roads.

The allocation of \$218 million to the Linden Enterprise Network Inc. (LEN) Revolving Fund will aid and continue to stimulate economic growth within the township by providing financial support to business ventures, manufacturing, agriculture and housing initiatives. The people of Linden, and more specifically our young entrepreneurs, now have an alternative lending institution, which is more friendly and flexible, to support their business ventures and ideas. The Linden Enterprise Network Inc. is aiding to promote employers and job opportunities for the unemployed within our community.

The Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) programme: In our region, several communities and countless individuals were able to benefit from skill training and employment opportunities under the SLED programmes under the Minister of Social Protection. The Blueberry Hill community block making factory has been able to provide training and employment for several residents of that community, but more importantly, it provides affordable blocks for residents and businesses. The Speighland shade house project and the Silver Hill chicken farm are aiding in providing not only job opportunities for some residents but food security in the township.

With the \$0000000250 million allocated, in 2019, for the continuation of this programme, under the stewardship of this action-oriented Minister, the Hon. Ms. Amna Ally, I am confident that more communities in our township and region will benefit even more. Minister Ally has tirelessly demonstrated her willingness to help the poor and downtrodden to be independent and self-sufficient. This reward will certainly aid her in providing more assistance to our people.

Agriculture in the region had not, over the years, been able to germinate to its true potential. Sadly, more than 60% of the food that feed our people come from outside of the region, despite an abundance of fertile lands. However, the construction of the road at Millie's Hideout, in 2019, will make easy access to farm lands to aid farmers with the production of more food to address this anomaly. Additionally, the allocation of the \$220 million agricultural facility in Ebini, up the

Berbice river, will also play a significant role in training and capacity building and will aid the region to achieve food security.

The Government, having recognised the important role that information technology plays in world affairs, has embarked on a multiplicity of programmes and projects to provide training and opportunities for people, be it in the hinterland or the coastland.

My region has benefited from the introduction of several Information and Communications Technology (ICT) hubs with 24 hours Wi-Fi service placed across various communities, and they are all accessible to our people. The sizable allocation to this Ministry will see the region benefitting from more hubs in 2019.

Housing: The distribution of countless house lots and the continued construction of houses in 2015, being undertaken by the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CHPA), under the watchful eyes of Minister Patterson-Yearwood, is most welcomed in the region. The new approach for housing in 2018 will see the creation of countless jobs for varying skillsets of people. This Ministry will be the catalyst for a multiplicity of job opportunities.

Tourism: With the expected \$31.4 billion to be garnered from tourism in 2019, we believe that Region 10's uniqueness of being the Hilly Sand and Clay Region and being blessed with insurmountable creeks, lakes, hills and valleys, mined out pits, and historic buildings, to name a few, is well positioned to benefit from this possibility. With a glimpse at our region's indigenous tourism products, we believe we possess the flora, fauna, ecological make up, and much more to be a tourism destination. Tourists would be most pleased.

It is therefore most appreciated that the call I made in the 2018's Budget debate for my region to benefit from the concession rates for excise taxes on overland transportation, imported for tourism, is being made a reality, and it is most noteworthy. On behalf of our people, we thank the Minister of Finance for this consideration.

Furthermore, the developmental works on the Linden to Lethem super highway, to be done in 2019, provides an enormity of possibilities and opportunities, not only for our residents but all Guyanese. We are cognisant of the fact that the township of Linden is well positioned...

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Mr. Figueira, please reclaim your seat. Hon. Members, I hope that this is the only occasion on which I would interrupt the speaker to remind Members that they should, at least, if they cannot keep quiet, which is what is required under the Standing Orders, be more restrained in their crosstalk. That crosstalk ought not to reach the ears of the Speaker, and that crosstalk does. Please proceed, Mr. Figueira.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are cognisant of the fact that the township of Linden is well positioned to benefit tremendously from this development.

As the former Prime Minister of Jamaica, Mr. PJ Patterson, posited, “The road to development is the building of roads.”

In conclusion, it would be remiss of me to not, once again, extend thanks to the Hon. Minister of Finance on behalf of the residents of Region 10, and more specifically, the families of Ron Somerset, Shemroy Bouyea and Allan Lewis, our Linden martyrs, for the budgetary allocation for the construction of a monument in their honour and memory.

The economic genocide, brutality, barbaric, tyrannical and inhumane imprints of the PPP/C’s cabal that the people of Linden endured and experienced has eternally scared our psyche and left an indelible mark on our memories. Is this a Government in waiting? The people of Linden will always express no confidence in this grouping. This monument will stand as a constant reminder of the indomitable spirit and revolutionary mindset of our people, who stood up against an oppressive, discriminatory and colonial-style rule administration. The ultimate price of those innocent lives will never be forgotten.

Budget 2019 has answered the call for continued development of our nation's infrastructure, the continued promotion of better education, health and social welfare services, the promotion of businesses, tourism, youth entrepreneurship, the catering for our indigenous peoples, the differently abled and our senior citizens. This Budget is a *forward ever, backward never* Budget. Its presentation and passage are the equivalent of a confidence motion, and I support all of its measures for passage in this House. *[Applause]*

Ms. Selman: I rise to offer my contribution to the 2019 Budget Debate. The Budget was presented under the theme *“Transforming the Economy, Empowering the People, Building Sustainable Communities for the Good Life.”*

Quite a lot of things stood out when I listened to the Hon. Minister of Finance’s presentation two Mondays ago. While beating his chest at the total amount given so far to our senior citizens since taking office, Government has decided that old age pension would be increased by \$1,000. For argument’s sake, let us admit that the pension, since the exit of the PPP/C Administration from office, has increased. In the midst of such increases, however, how can a Government justify a \$1,000 increase in 2019? This meagre increase has raised the money that would be available to pensioners to \$20,500. Is this livable, taking into considerable the rising cost of living?

Mr. Speaker, I am asking you this for those pensioners who have no other means of income. Can a person who has utility bills to pay, probably medical bills, and still has to feed, clothe and house himself, survive on that? Can I or any other Member of this House survive on this amount of money? This is just disrespectful and an insult to the senior citizens of this country. One thousand dollars is the cost for a return taxi fare in the city. One thousand dollars can buy three loaves of bread only. One thousand dollars can buy two packets of milk only. One thousand dollars cannot even buy a whole chicken. Twenty thousand, five hundred dollars in this day and age is grossly inadequate.

I wish to implore the Hon. Minister of Finance, through you, Sir, to consider the plight of our senior citizens and restore the water and electricity subvention which the pensioners enjoyed under the PPP/C Administration.

During his presentation, the Hon. Minister said:

“The Government has embarked upon the preparation of a National Policy on Aging, which is expected to facilitate societal integration and allow for added participation of this group in the development process.”

There is no doubt that millions will be spent on creating this policy, after which it will take months, or even years, to be made public, and then another lengthy time before it is implemented. What is so important, at this stage, about developing such a policy for the elderly? I do not understand that

concept, and I am sure the elderly themselves do not get where the Government plans to go with this. What our senior citizens need is more money in their pockets, easy access to proper healthcare, and the ability to enjoy their remaining years on this earth in a secure and comfortable environment. They, too, want to get in on the good life.

It would be remiss of me if I did not focus my attention on the youths of Guyana. Some \$1.7 billion is being proposed for various youth initiatives in 2019. The Coalition Government says, boldly, that youth are our future. On page 73 of his presentation, the Hon. Minister of Finance stated:

“we have crafted a holistic programme to accentuate their independence and patriotism, and to empower them to use their creativity, ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit.”

It is a fact that youths everywhere are complaining about the lack of jobs. Nowhere in his Budget presentation did the Minister of Finance allude to this and how the Government intends to effectively deal with this. Not all youths possess the entrepreneurial spirit, and as such, this Coalition Government has to tell us how it intends to make this happen.

6.38 p.m.

The Hon. Minister spoke about the Youth Innovation Project of Guyana, which is aimed at fostering a green economy. The mere fact, as stated by him, that 271 proposals for project implementation were received speaks volumes. It is either this area is not of much interest to young people or only a selected few are being engaged. Out of this number, only 30 have qualified to receive funding totalling \$45 million, which in itself is even more telling.

My question to the Hon. Minister is: what has happened to the 241 remaining proposals? Would it not be wise to create more projects in other areas of interest, so that more youths can have access to funding? After all, Guyana does not have several hundreds of youths. There are tens of thousands, most of whom do have a desire to contribute to the development of Guyana.

I would now like to focus my attention on Government’s plans for “Destination Guyana” and, to a lesser extent, some aspects of the education sector. Earlier this year, there was encouraging news that Guyana had recorded the highest increased growth rate in the tourism sector in the Caribbean region during the first half of 2018. According to the 6th October, 2018 edition of *the Guyana Chronicle*, Secretary-General of the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO), during a conference

in Bahamas, disclosed that Guyana had recorded 18.3% growth, followed by Belize at 17.1% and the Cayman Islands at 15.9%. Twenty-two reporting destinations were assessed and out of this number, 13, including Guyana, registered increases in growth, the newspaper reported.

The Hon. Minister with Responsibility for Tourism yesterday came before this House and provided data which suggests that this growth has decreased. He came with a lot of fluff and attempted to paint a glowing image of a striving tourism sector. The Hon. Minister stated:

“Visitor arrivals have been rising steadily over the years with the figures for up to September of this year showing an increase of 17% over the same period last year.”

This means that, instead of a steady rise, Guyana is facing a decline in the number of visitors. Interestingly, the decline occurred during what one would describe as “the peak season”.

The Minister claims that the additional arrival of some 30,000 visitors this year have pumped approximately US\$15 million into the economy. He said too that, in total, tourism will bring in around US\$150 million this year. This figure is a joke, compared to countries that have managed to successfully tap into the tourism market.

Figures out of Jamaica showed that, in 2016 alone, the island welcomed close to four million visitors with a visitor expenditure of over US\$2.5 billion. Barbados receives approximately one million visitors annually and is said to be the number one destination in the region for visitors from the United Kingdom (UK). According to the Barbados Tourism Investment Incorporated, the islands’ tourism product will receive an injection of over US\$1billion in tourism investment through to 2019. These are impressive figures.

According to the 24th August, 2018 edition of *the Kaieteur News*, almost 11,000 Trinidadians departed Guyana up to the end of July, making them the top regional visitors to Guyana for the first half of 2018. I would like to see the figures for those visitors coming from the UK, North America, South America and even Asia. That is how we will be able to measure our success rate in promoting “Destination Guyana”. I call on the Hon. Minister to convince us that behind gold and rice, tourism brings in the highest amount of foreign earning.

Backpedal to last Monday, when the Hon. Minister of Finance, in his budget presentation, dedicated four paragraphs to tourism. For 2019, a total of \$398 million is being set aside for

tourism, \$305 million for the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA) and \$93 million for the Department of Business, which is a part of the Ministry of Business.

According to the Hon. Minister, there will be (1) the introduction of a tax credit equal to 75% of income and corporate taxes payable on profits from tourism activities for persons investing in Region's 1, 7, 8, 9 and 10; (2) hotels in these same regions would benefit from the proposed amendments to the Income Tax Act and the Income Tax (In Aid of Industry) Act; that will allow the grant of wear and tear and initial allowances on hotel buildings; (3) exemption from the payment of import duties and excise taxes, motor buses with 12 or more seats, not exceeding four years old, purchased and used exclusively for the transportation of tourists anywhere in Guyana. According to the 1st December, 2018 edition of *the Stabroek News*, Ram & McRae, rightly so, in its analysis of the 2019 National Budget, was not impressed with the measures outlined by the Hon. Minister. Ram & McRae made it clear that there was no rationale for adding Region 10 to those listed to benefit from tax credit other than:

“...it being a politically beneficial move...”

Additionally, it was said that this measure does not attract new investments in the tourism industry. The review also pointed out the absence of the qualifying conditions for this tax.

Hon. Minister, I call on you to clarify these issues and, also, to tell us how these proposals are expected to make Guyana a rival to Jamaica, Barbados, the Bahamas or the other top Caribbean tourist spots.

First off, motor buses are not the only mode of transportation for visitors. There are trips which will require boats, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and land rovers. Some tourists may want to bike around the city, looking at various spots, or ride along a trail at a resort. It would be more thoughtful for Government to make proposals for all modes of transportation so that all categories of tourist operators can benefit.

In 2020, Guyana is expected to pump first oil. As that time approaches, many conferences, workshops, meetings and other oil-related forums are being held in Guyana, mostly in the city. Why not tap into this group? One expects that Government will collaborate with the organisers of these forums to get participants to Kaieteur Falls, into the Savannahs in Region 9, to the creeks

along the Linden/Soesdyke Highway, the blue lakes in Linden, birdwatching or a day trip up the Essequibo River. All of these will, no doubt, promote “Destination Guyana”.

Guyana has the potential for destination weddings, food tourism, sports tourism, adventure tourism and the development of the bird watching industry, given its ideal geographic placement, beautiful scenery and an atmosphere of adventure, calm and relaxation.

There are many small tour operators who need assistance to develop their ideas. This Budget does not offer any help to them. Also, there is need for development of the hospitality industry. Top of the line customer service is a key ingredient to tourism. No tourist wants to encounter a rude waitress or an untidy looking tour operator or even reckless bus operators. I must stress that first impression counts. I would suggest that Government provides support to the hospitality industry, whether it is hotels, restaurants or those companies offering tours, to polish up the skills of employees. Unless the Coalition Administration adopts a serious approach to tourism in all its forms, treating it like a business and a key contributor to the development of this country, Guyana will always be ten steps behind.

I now turn my attention to education. I wish to state that I concur with a statement made by the Hon. Minister of Finance on page 68 of his presentation:

“Mr. Speaker, education is not only about the past and present, but it is also the bridge that connects us to the future.

For this reason, Mr. Speaker, we will intensify the revision of our schools’ curricula, from Nursery to Grade 9, while addressing teacher training.”

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

Ms. Selman: Thank you, Sir. I wish to ask, through you, Sir: what does the Hon. Minister mean by intensifying the revision of our school’s curricula? I would like the Hon. Minister to provide clarity, with specifics. Being cognisant of the fact that education is an important vehicle for the success of any nation, I wish to ask, through you, Sir: when will the first draft be available? I ask the Hon. Minister these questions even against the background that education is not a quick fix, but, at the same time, as a teacher of long standing, I would like the Guyanese children to be spared

the long wait for envisioned modern curricula. I wish to suggest that the Hon. Minister considers adopting the Caribbean Community's (CARICOM) Human Resource Development Strategy.

I wish to focus a little of my attention on teachers' training at the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE). The quality of teachers entering the profession needs to be critically assessed as there is need for improvement in this regard. If this is to be realised, then the current problems experienced by teacher trainees must be seriously addressed. Top most on the list of concerns, according to reports from teachers who are in training, is non-attendance of lecturers, which will, no doubt, hamper the professional development of these trainees.

Another area of concern among the students is the unavailability of the relevant support learning materials, for example, modules, which can serve as a back up to knowledge. It is my view that the Cyril Potter College of Education must use every means necessary to inspire the teachers under its wings to strive for higher ideals, in terms of knowledge, character development and dissemination of knowledge. This should be a prime hallmark of the College.

It is clear that, if our teachers are not adequately trained to function in a professional manner within the classroom, then quality learning will not take place.

The Hon. Minister of Finance on page 69 of the Budget presentation stated:

“The performance of our children in the public school system must improve substantially, if we are to truly build a nation of productive and cohesive communities.”

It is my opinion that there needs to be a stronger link between the Ministry of Education and the schools. There is need for a stronger and more committed cadre of education officials who are seriously desirous of transforming the lives of our young people, and who are prepared to support teachers in every way possible. Teachers must not be subjected to countless workshops which take away valuable class time from their students.

The Ministry of Education is, rightly so, conducting a number of diagnostic tests with the aim of identifying the weaknesses and challenges of pupils in literacy and numeracy. However, individual weaknesses within schools in particular regions are not known because analyses are very vague, and, as such, proper intervention cannot be made.

In concluding, I wish to state that Guyana has the potential to become a superpower. Investing heavily in the sectors that will put Guyana on a path that will make this a reality is a must. Government cannot afford shortcomings in these areas. Mistakes are being made repeatedly and rigid efforts must be made now to correct them before it is too late.

First oil presents an opportunity for Guyana to blossom and I can only hope and pray that this Coalition Government does not squander this golden opportunity. There is no time for making reckless statements which will cause division and tension. Instead, senior Members of this Government should be spending their time constructively and, in so doing, come up with ideas that would transform Guyana into the country that we all want it to be.

We all want to experience the good life.

I thank you. *[Applause]*

6.53 p.m.

Mr. Allen: It is a great privilege in order to be able to support Budget 2019. Budget 2019 displays the coalition Government's willingness and dedication to the improvement in quality life for all of Guyana. This budget expresses equality and includes fair distribution of resources allocated to all Guyanese.

In Budget 2018, we would have seen the region received just over \$2.6 billion. Here in Budget 2019, we are seeing Region 1 receiving just over \$3.4 billion. I would like us to look at some of the benefits, including in Budget 2019. Before I do so, please permit me to take this House a little down memory lane.

In 2012-2013, Government Information Agency (GINA) quoted a Minister, then, who is a sitting Member in this House, as saying, "it is going to be a very good day for the village". This was quoted by the Minister. That Minister was the Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs. Minister Garrido-Lowe yesterday, in her presentation, did cite to the *hassar* fish farm in Region 1. What Minister did not say to us was the fish farm that was established, as GINA put it, by one Minister, was carrying out in Region 1, and that fish farm was to be established in place by the Tobago Hill.

Under the National Secure Livelihood Project, Region 1, GINA quoted the Hon. Member as saying that the farm would have been ready by the month of July to harvest. This project was a project that had some \$88 million which was extracted to it. I heard persons here keep shouting about the Auditor General's office. I would like to ask in this House, where was the Auditor General's office at that time? Was it not functional?

I heard today where Dr. Frank Anthony was saying that residents and citizens have to be waiting at the GPHC where it does not have beds and people doubling up. I would like to say to this House that there are persons in this National Assembly here who I used to be calling in 2012 and 2013. I stayed and called while persons were sitting in chairs waiting because they do not have beds. That is not a now something. It is something which was inherited from the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) administrator. [Mr. Nandlall: Change it.] We are working to change it, but you are trying to say it is now happening. It never happened under your administration. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Allen, you must address your remarks to the Speaker and to no one else in the room.

Mr. Allen: I know that all the works and the projects that the APNU/AFC Government has been executing since we took office, we would hear that the Opposition going around saying to persons, "we had those projects in mind, those are our projects they are executing." I am not hearing them claiming the five 'B's. Budget 2018 we took down the ladder of what Region 1 would have gained from it. No more do people have to complain about bad roads and protest about bad roads. They now have concrete roads for the first time. Still I could have persons from this Assembly, from the Opposition, who are going around and saying to persons we had that. One Member quoted to persons saying, "*Wha you gon do with concrete road?*" That will help them not to complain no more and it will live out your lifetime. The concrete road will live out your lifetime.

We have had situations in Region 1 where \$16 million was given by the administration. There is one Member of Parliament here who was the Permanent Secretary and a Member of Parliament here who was the Minister at that time. Where was the Audit Office? Nothing such as that never came up. The Auditor General did not see nothing coming up about that. The Baramita residents are now breathing with a sigh of relief. Who brought about this? It is the coalition Government.

They are driving freely within one hour from Matthews Ridge to Baramita. This was done by the APNU/AFC Government.

The health sector at Baramita, which had never been taken care of by the previous administration, that health facility, has two doctors, while it had none. They were trained by and using Guyanese taxpayers' money. They were not trained by you, Member Dharamlall. At the Mabaruma Regional District Hospital, we now have specialist doctors stationed there which saves the region and the nation, as a whole, large sums of money, because we do not have to do medevac so often. People do not have to travel to Georgetown, where they do not have relatives to look after them, to stay long in surgeries. These minor surgeries are done right in the region because we are now housing specialist doctors. This is caring by the Government.

I will now spend some time to look at Budget 2019. Coming out of Budget 2019, we would see the establishment of a radio station. This radio station would increase community coverage and even as Radio Mabaruma was established and the regional administration of the PPP/C colleagues said to the people not go to the opening because it had nothing for them. They do not want the people to be educated. We are going to establish projects and programmes through our radio station, so we keep them informed.

We will look at public infrastructure - with electricity. Coming out of Budget 2019, we will see the expansion and upgrading of distribution network, provision for underground cables. We have the aged long bridge at Moruka which will be done under public infrastructure, central Government. We cannot leave it under the region because nothing will be done. This bridge will improve accessibility for the residents of Moruka. We would see several roads across the region completed, construction of new roads and rehabilitation to community roads and also municipality roads. Provision for our community organised for restoration, the environment and the employment of youths will also being done under public infrastructure.

Under Ministry of Communities, we have seen water... [Mr. Dharamlall: A large local government election defeat.] Yes. You have the defeat, but, what are you going to do? It is to stifle projects. That is what you are going to do. We have now seen water through taps in the Matarkai subregion which never happened before. I remember in 2012 when I asked the then Minister responsible for water in this House, while he spoke about the amount of money he spent

on water, if he would have gone downstairs and used the water from the tap down there, there was annoyance. I am saying now that we have residents who could go to tap and drink that water without having a problem.

7.08 p.m.

This is done through the coalition Government for the first time. This is what we see as improve health and conditions for the people.

Under public health, we will see a new programme of intervention for human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) which will be planned. When I looked at this, what the Ministry plans to do with tuberculosis, it reminds me of the same area of that village where the *hassar* farm was to be established, the doctors refused to go there to look at the people because they said that they would have caught tuberculosis, so the then Minister, Minister Ramsaran had to go into the region and direct them that they must go.

We will see better dental care. We inherit a situation, imagine that, that we have Health Centres which do not have a measuring board for youths. Dental cares at facilities, we inherit none. We will now have those things in place, sterilisers, compressors, x-ray machines and measuring boards all to be distributed in Region 1 after Budget 2019. We would also see the completion of major works at the new hospital, construction and of the nurses' quarters which will be completed because we have got rid of those contractors that Mr. Hamilton would have had with us.

With this, I would like to commend this budget to this House for a safe passage.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member for his statement. Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today. I would like to thank you for your cooperation and assistance and for the restrained manner in which you presented your statements today. It is my hope that this will be the basis in which we will continue to communicate throughout this debate and the consideration of the estimates.

Prime Minister, I will now ask you to move the adjournment.

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: I move that this House be adjourned until tomorrow Wednesday, 5th December at 10.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: The House stands adjourned until tomorrow Wednesday, 5th December at 10.00a.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 7.13 p.m.