

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

103RD Sitting

Wednesday, 5TH December, 2018

Assembly convened at 10.10 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Paper was laid:

The Constitutional Offices (Remuneration of Holders) Order 2018 – No. 45 of 2018.
[Minister of Public Health]

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.

Ms. Manickchand: Your Honour, I see in the House this morning staff from the Ministry of Education. I am very pleased that they have come out to hear me this morning. I welcome them and I thank them because, with all jokes aside, many times we get to boast of projects and deliver services that we would never be able to do if we did not have these persons, who have family themselves, working very hard through the day and night. On behalf of all of Guyana, thank you very much.

Budget 2019 comes at a time when I find it very difficult to stand here and routinely speak of numbers, \$300 billion, \$20 billion, whatever. To speak of numbers, when our country is in a time where we find it acceptable, or the Government finds it acceptable, in 2018, to be practising policies and behaving in a manner that is more suited for a time when oppression and repression were the order of the day. It is not only in this country, but in different countries around the world. We are talking about Budget 2019. A few days after Irfaan Ali was arrested at his home at 4.30 in the morning.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I say this to you and to all Members, the Speaker would not wish to interrupt Members when they are making their statements. We must bear in mind the purpose for which this debate is had and if we deviate from it, the Speaker will feel himself obliged to call the Member back to the purpose for which we have met here. I say that as an advice to all Members including you, Ms. Manickchand. Please proceed.

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, you know that I have great respect for you, but this is my budget presentation and my style. If Your Honour wishes it to be his style, he has to come in these seats and ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I must tell you this, it is your style and your budget presentation, and so is it of every Member, but every Member is answerable to the rules and the directions of the Speaker.

Ms. Manickchand: Right, and I hope I get my time back. There is absolutely no Standing Order I have breached.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that you do not hold yourself above the directions of the Speaker.

Ms. Manickchand: I do not.

Mr. Speaker: Very good. Thank you very much. Please proceed.

Ms. Manickchand: The Speaker is also bound by the rules that are dictated in the Standing Orders. I do not know why the Speaker would object to me saying something that is factual, that I find it difficult to discuss a budget when we live in a time where people are blacklisted at the airport and Members of the Opposition are arrested at their homes at four o'clock in the morning. What is so offensive? If Your Honour finds that offensive, then we should agree that it is offensive to act in that way, not to speak about it. It is offensive for us to act that way. It is hard for me to speak of budget when we live in that kind of time.

The budget has come. I have to say that it was a budget that could have caused excitement, and for me with my naivety, I was excited. Three hundred and eight billion dollars must mean better service for the people of Guyana. It got to mean that our people are going to do better. It got to mean that Guyanese will do well and there will be a better platform left for us when we take office

again. That is what I thought the budget meant. Then as I began to listen to the budget, the budget presentation, as I started listening to the Minister, I realised that the budget was not based in the kind of reality that ordinary Guyanese understand, the kind of reality that we live every day.

The Minister spoke of United States (US) dollar being Guy\$208 Guyanese to US\$1. Your Honour, I will confess now, I broke a rule and I made a call in this House, while the Minister was speaking, to a cambio. On that date, at that moment, it was \$217 to US\$1. If you are going to run the country and plan a budget as though it is \$208, because you want it to be \$208 – sounds nice and sexy to say that you have kept the rates down – then you are going to plan a budget that is not real for our people. If the response is going to be that we are using the Bank of Guyana's rates and we have always done that, the Bank of Guyana rates have never been so far removed from reality as we have right now. You will get into trouble.

We heard of how excited the rice farmers were to seed their fields – to shy paddy – with drones. I am the daughter of a rice farmer who actually owns a drone, but it is not to seed his fields and shy paddy in his fields. The Minister of Agriculture really should address that and tell us where this is happening. The rice farmers are far more interested in finding out whether they can bring their paddy, using dams that need to be rehabilitated, to a mill. They are more interested in drainage and irrigation (D&I), so that they do not have to spend more money on diesel pumping in and pumping out water. They are more interested in tax and duty-free diesel. Those are the kinds of things that are real for those people. Drones to shy paddy sounds nice, but it is not real.

Then that unrealistic thing came, again, in the House, through different speeches. I speak specifically about when Hon. Member Mr. John Adams was speaking. He said that the \$10,000 cash grant was replaced by the five 'B's project – I say that is an excellent programme – and that every single student in Guyana was able to be transported on the bus. He went on, in a written prepared speech, to say that if they are not on the bus it is because they did not want to be on the bus. First of all, as of October 2018, there are 29 buses in the country and there are 187,000 public students. Mr. Speaker, you tell me how that math works. As I posted that on Facebook, people started commenting.

Let us take Region 2. There are two buses in Region 2, the second one it got cost them \$1.5 million already in maintenance, and there are two boats in Region 2. We understand what five 'B's mean.

If that is not misleading the House, I do not know what is. Yet I will not stand here and call for him to go to the Committee of Privileges, because I do not believe in that kind of repressive behaviour. I believe the people of Guyana must decide how they feel about what he said. He came here and said something that is wholly and untrue. We are not calling for him to go to the Committee of Privileges. We are telling the people to judge him when he comes to you. Sending people to the Committee of Privileges based on their interpretation of numbers is repressive and oppressive. It takes away from the freedom of speech this House entitles its Members to.

The budget seems not to be placed in a setting of reality. We are seeing, since this Government took office, a very anaemic economy, needs verve and energy and, certainly, proper financial planning. That comes on the heels of eight years of consecutive positive growth in our economy. I am not sure what kind of planner you have to be, to be able to just, as soon as you take office, plunge us in this kind of way, into growth that you cannot predict, first of all. Then secondly, it is negative, year after year, and filters down to our people too. We keep seeing predictions. For example, we have a 3.8 growth prediction for next year. We know that by next year what is going to happen, what had happened in the last two years. It is going to come down mid-year, and by the end of the third quarter, it is going to come down even more, and the country would not have grown as predicted, and that means people would not get services. It is because that is what a budget is about. What will you do for the people of the country you stood here and swore to serve?

In fact, what we are doing is we are borrowing more than we ever did before in the last 20 years. We are borrowing so much money to try to finance the life that we say we want to give our people, and that is bloated with so much unnecessary, the facts that Irfaan Ali, Member of the Opposition, spoke of. We are borrowing and leaving debts on our children. Rosetta and Gano Sukrah, of Bush Lot, have a daughter, a beautiful little girl named Priyanka. She is not yet one year old. They expect a baby in another few weeks – a productive family. [Ms. Ally: They are very productive.]

They are. If it is to use a figure of Guy\$210 per one US\$1 with a mid-year population of 745,000 people, Rosetta's daughter, Priyanka has a debt on her head for this year alone of \$469,047. Her child, who is being born in a couple of weeks, will be born with a debt on his head because the A Partnership for National Unity and Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government wants to borrow money to sport it out. That is the legacy we are leaving our children – all our children. It is not People's National Congress (PNC) children and People's Progressive Party (PPP) children,

all the children are being left with this debt. If the debt came so that we could make sure that when Priyanka is ready for high school she has all the textbooks that she needs, then that is fine. This debt is coming for parties, sporting, more gas and fuel and jubilee celebrations and things that we need to do, but not things that we need to borrow so much for. We need to manage it better. It extremely important that we manage how we are spending.

10.25 a.m.

The other very worrying thing about the budget, generally, is the depletion of our foreign reserves. Since this Government took office, our foreign reserves have been depleted by 30.7%. That is unspeakable. What is a reserve? It is a savings. You save in your homes so, during hard times, if somebody gets sick or in trouble, you could go and get that savings and use it or, you could take it out to build or invest in something. We are taking it out for parties and sporting. That is what we are taking it out for: the buying of fancy vehicles and having national celebrations that cost us billions of dollars. That is what we are taking our savings out for.

When we hear about the reduction of the Value Added Tax (VAT), who could not celebrate a reduction of VAT. Even me, who is on the Opposition bench, celebrated a reduction of VAT. If VAT is going to come down from 16% to 14%, then that must mean every Guyanese is going to do better. Certainly, that is what it means. Well, that is what it should mean with a Government that wants to see its citizens do better. What has happened? Since VAT has been reduced from 16% to 14%, this Government collected far more money from the people of Guyana. [Ms.

Ally: How much?]

If you want to know, I will tell you. In 2018, \$199.5 billion more was collected. That is \$23 billion more than 2017. In 2019, we are projected to collect \$226 billion. That means it is \$24 billion more than 2018. It is a 64% increase on the collection of VAT.

[**Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon:** What is wrong with that?]

This Hon. Gentleman, is asking what is wrong with that. Let me tell you what is wrong with that. This is what is wrong with that. In a population of 745,000 persons, a family with three children would be paying \$1.49 million in tax for one year. You say that is what they are supposed to pay. You tax the old people's water and light bills and you say that is what they are supposed to pay, while you chuckle and cannot fit in your vehicle because you have so much security protecting you. That is where the money is going. That is why we have to collect VAT to pay for your excesses. The people are not benefitting

from this. I support the reduction of VAT, but it must inure to the benefit of the people of this country. That is not happening right now.

I see that Mr. Greenidge is back. We missed him so much for the past few days. Do you know why you are here, Mr. Greenidge? I think that it is time for us to speak about the things that are relevant to you and the period that you were in office. Let us move to education.

Education as it relates to this budget and I speak specifically to the Ministry of Education and not just money allocated to the Education Fund. A detailed report numbered 10307-GUY, titled: *Guyana from Economic Recovery to Sustained Growth*, was written by the World Bank during the period of Mr. Greenidge's tenure ship. I congratulate him for having it commissioned and written. The report was very comprehensive about the whole country, but it spoke specifically about the Ministry of Education and the state of the Ministry at the time. It stated very clearly, and at that time we had 30% of our primary teachers trained and 29% of our secondary teachers trained, page 96 states:

“...school facilities are dilapidated and very crowded...”

It further states on page 97 that 4.9% of our children in 1984 were likely to write the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) from the cohort. It stated that Guyana had moved from a country that was the third out of seven countries in the Caribbean in terms of its students pass rates, to last. Guyana now ranked last. To sum it up, it stated:

“Daily attendance rates at primary schools are extremely low in Guyana...Attendance rates generally reflect the quality of education offered; poorly trained teacher, limited textbooks and teaching material, overcrowded classes and a poorly developed curriculum...”

This is what the People's National Congress (PNC) Government, many of whom are sitting on the benches of the Government today, sadly, fortunately, they are still alive, but sadly because of age, but many of them are sitting on the benches today and taking us back to that time. I will come to what our figures are now. This is where we were, in a very bad place in 1992. This is not to go back so that we could crow about how well we did. As I read this report back, things they said in 1992 are still relevant now. For example, they said that we should write our own textbooks so that we do not have to pay publishers from London expensive prices third world countries cannot

afford. It is still relevant now, so I really commend this report to the new Minister. [Mr.

Jordan: [*Inaudible*] The Hon. Minister of State says for 23 years we did nothing about it. I will give you three figures. The United Nations (UN) said that we would have attained Universal Primary Education, that means every child in Guyana could attend a primary school. We believe we have the highest... [*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

Sir, am I going to get my time back? If you were ashamed of what you did then that speaks to the level of mismanagement done. You should not be ashamed of it. I am very proud of our stewardship. We would be happy if you brought it up every time you got up to speak. To say we did nothing would be most.... [Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: [*Inaudible*]] You face the nation and say that. [*Interruption*]

This morning, I came into the House, a little earlier than usual, and I had asked my best friend to send to the House a document which I had sent to be printed. It is intituled, *Early childhood education works - it just doesn't reach those most in need.*

I believe the Minister of Education asked for it to be laid over. I am very pleased that everybody in Guyana is going to see it. I actually thought that it was my document because I intend to use it anyway. I did not realise that every Member in the House had it. This report was written by Alice Albright, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). She is a very nice woman. I have spoken to her several times. At that time, we were Directors on the Board of the Global Partnership for Education. I understand that we have lost that now.

In *Stabroek News* of December, 2014, the headline stated: *Global education grants Guyana \$340 million.* At that time, it stated very clearly that the Minister of Education, which at that time was me, and Julia Gillard, Chairperson of the Board of Directors, GPE, had made comments. I wish to quote my particular comments from the newspaper:

“Manickchand said that she expects the grant to allow for the building upon the many gains already made and expects to see vastly improved learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy at the early levels.”

That is what we said in 2014. We had gotten the grant in 2014, which means that planning went into that grant since 2012 and 2013. It would be dishonest for me to stand and say I did it by myself. I could point out, specifically, the professionals at the Ministry of Education and I will name one in particular, Ms. Evelyn Hamilton. An amazing servant of this country who worked to see a dream come through. The dream was to prepare our children in nursery schools better. This is because from experience with my own very young children, I realised the capacity we could give to this very country if we prepared our nursery children better. That was why this grant was prepared. Ms. Hamilton, worked with a young lady named, Hongyu Yang from the World Bank and came up with this programme.

That programme was implemented by an amazing team. In that week,

“Video of the Week: Julia Gillard and Guyana Education Minister Manickchand discuss GPE’s latest grant approvals.”

[*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

That was the grant that we got. A project team led by some fantastic, amazingly talented Guyanese young people, named for example, Quenita Waldron-Lewis, an Early Childhood Subject Specialist; Dana Waithe, who I see in the House this morning, an Early Childhood Subject Specialist; Ray Cranzius; Christina Khan; Nandram Persaud; and Chief Education Officer (CEO), Marcel Hutson, they led that programme through.

We were never afraid to examine where we were. When we did that programme, we learned that there were serious gaps in nursery education. That is what the document that was circulated today tells us. I wish to quote from it. As I said, it is titled: *Early childhood education works - it just doesn't reach those most in need*. It specifically states this:

“Read. Play. Love. No, it’s not a new self-help story, but an innovative programme to encourage parents in Guyana to read to their children. It all started back in 2013, when the education ministry measured the school readiness of children entering first grade in remote areas... Around 60%....”

This is me saying this of myself. I was not afraid to do it. [*Interruption*]

I do not expect the Hon. Minister to understand what I am about to say. We said of ourselves that:

“Around 60% of the children failed to meet the basic prerequisites for reading, fewer than 10% could demonstrate any understanding of text...”

We said that. We accepted that the children we had under our care for 20 years, 60% of them in the hinterland were failing basic requirements. We accepted that. You do not hide it or fail to talk about it. You go and do the research, you find what is wrong and then you find programmes to fix it. That is what we are trying to say here. Ms. Albright goes on to say, “the results are so encouraging”. She said,

“More than 8,000 children in remote areas of Guyana benefitted from this programme. Almost 90% of children now master reading and math skills compared to 37%...”

That is investment in education that works. That is investment that works. Ms. Albright said this:

“Guyana is just one example of the huge shift in emphasis towards pre-school education...The world agrees.”

We in Guyana led this worldwide movement that the United Nations (UN) has adopted to say that, in the sustainable growth programmes, we must look more at early childhood learning. Investment in education must result in numbers. In 2012, we made Rosignol Secondary an A-List school. Region 5, until then, did not have an A-List school. So yes, under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), Region 5 did not have an A-List school. As the Hon. Minister of Communities said, growth and development are not events, there are a number of events that culminate in progress and service to people.

10.40 a.m.

At the time, the school was named an A-List school in 2012, 19% of its students matriculated, that meant they got five passes with at least Mathematics and English.

On the 9th November, 2018, I spoke at that school’s graduation. Seventy-one per cent of its students had matriculated. That is what investment does. Sadly, on the 10th November, and I am not going

to name him, the Ministry sent to all the schools across the country, through the Regional Education Offices, to say, “Tell me who is going to the schools’ graduations to speak. We want to know their names and their curriculum vitae (CVs)”. **[An Hon. Member from the**

Government: [Inaudible]] Sadly, that is the petty leadership we see coming from the Ministry. Instead of us getting together to work for the Guyanese children that is the petty leadership we see coming from the Ministry of Education.

In March of this year, we wrote the Ministry of Education to say that a number of persons - pandits, maulvis, pastors, social activists, teachers, people who were very interested, including Government members would like to do something that Facebook reminds me today we did on the 6th December, 2014. What it was, it was to go into every school and speak on the issue of violence against women and children.

In 2013, when we did it, I was not afraid to call Ms. Volda Lawrence to say that we were doing this programme and could you find members of your party who you believe are capable of delivering this message. Send me where they can speak; send me which schools they can go to. Ms. Lawrence supplied Members of her party and we were not afraid of that. They went into schools and delivered a much-needed message in secondary schools on violence against women. So, on that date, all the schools across this country and all the high school children were hearing about the harmful nature of violence against women, where they could get help and why it must stop - boys and girls together.

This year we wrote, not the PPP, but we wrote as a group of persons trying to do that. We got a letter back from the Ministry stating they would like to see our CVs, you cannot go into schools and speak. These were pastors, pandits and activists who work in this country every single day and it would have been every single Minister because you have people who listen to you more than us. That is the petty leadership that is coming from the Ministry of Education – petty and not serving anybody. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

This year the Ministry of Education is going to be allocated \$21 billion, \$3.7 billion will go towards the capital expenditure in the Ministry. The capital expenditure in the Ministry, again, completes programmes that have been planned and funded before. We are talking about the building of the

La Parfaite Harmonie Secondary - West Minister Secondary, Good Hope Secondary and the Kuru Kururu Secondary. That is an effort to get us closer to a universal secondary education, where all of our secondary aged students could get into a secondary school. That is what we want to do. The Ministry this year is going to be doing that with the money that is allocated. Eighteen billion dollars of it is a good number and so I was very pleased. I was very pleased that the Ministry had seen an increase in the percentage that was allocated to it. It was not that big an increase from the PPP's time, but an increase all the same.

Then we look at what the increase goes towards. The line item for Fuel and Lubricants has been raised by 76%.

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

Ms. Manickchand: Fifty-eight per cent goes towards transportation and cost; 54% towards other goods and services, almost \$1.7 billion increase in operating cost.

This is not going towards buying stuff for children, putting programmes in place, implementing and executing programmes. We learnt from this year's budget that, in 2017, the Ministry returned \$2 billion to the Consolidated Fund. How could you return money and say that there are children in schools without textbooks and their parents cannot afford it and you come here to say that you cannot afford to give \$10,000 to each child. Well we could have given \$15,000 to each child from the \$2 billion you returned. You could have paid the teachers and prevented them from having to go in the streets and march and beg for their salary increase, which is something they deserve, something they are entitled to and something they neutrally negotiated for 10 years prior to that. How could you be sending money back? I have no doubt that I know what the Minister is coming to speak about. She is coming to speak about capital investment; she is coming to speak about curriculum development; she is coming to speak about... *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Could I get my minute back, Sir? I am not going to through what the audit stated, but I am going to say this: The rejection of the audit reports coming out from the Government side... Audit reports are a good tool for management. They tell you where there are gaps and where they should be fixed. When we had queries about our pension system, we called for an audit because I was not

sure what was happening in the system. This is not an Auditor General report that speaks of these textbooks that cannot be accounted for. Well, it was an audit but it came from the Caribbean Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (CAROSI). Those were the people who did it across the Caribbean. The Government of Guyana rejected it, slammed the Auditor General, called him all sorts of names and refuses to accept that there are gaps in the system that, if pugged, could serve our children. That is all we are trying to do.

This is what I would like to see the Minister address, and this is what I would like to see happen in this House. We demand that the Education Bill that was laid in the National Assembly in 2015 be brought back to this House. That is an Education Bill that is...

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

Ms. Manickchand: Thank you Sir. Is that with all the time that was taken up from the shouting and interruptions? The Education Act is over a 100 years old. It does not serve our children anymore; it cannot serve our children anymore. **[Mr. Ramjattan:** Now you know that?]

And you are asking me if now I know that. I laid a bill, that was widely consulted on for 10 years when I was not even Minister of Education, in 2015. We asked that the Commission of Inquiry report be laid in the National Assembly. Mr Harmon, Minister of State, said that he would have done that three years ago, it has not been done as yet. If it was that you do not like it, then toss it out and tell us that you are not using it, but you cannot hide it from the nation.

Continue the Early Childhood Education Programme. That was a good programme that served 8000 children, but those children are now in Grade One. What are we doing for the children who are now going into nursery? You have to continue that. We ask that the five-year plan be put back on the table. It is the first time in history that we have gone without a published five-year sectoral plan. Imagine that. I could not get information because we do not have figures published in ... *[Inaudible]* Mr. Granger would come here and use freely, because it is not something that should be hidden.

I will end on this note. Contrary to what the Minister may believe, I would like to see the Ministry succeed. This is a Ministry that serves Guyana's children, it will determine how we look 10, 20, 30 years from now. There is space for us to work together if the Minister was not so afraid and insecure about hearing other opinions. We used to meet the Opposition in the person of the then

shadow Ministers, Minister Ally and Minister Hughes, once a month. We missed a couple of months every now and then because everybody was busy, to go through what the Opposition at the time thought was good for education. Not a single policy came to this House without them hearing about it and reviewing it first or was announced to the nation.

I thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker, for your attention. *[Applause.]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is not true that it is a better course to address or for the speaker, who is on his/her feet, to address the audience comprising this Assembly. Members are required to address their remarks to the Speaker. It might prove helpful for all other Members who have to speak. Thank you.

Minister of Education [Dr. Henry]: Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I rise to address...

Ms. Teixeira: *[Inaudible]*...for your indulgence for one-minute Sir.

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Williams]: You always do that when we have to speak.

Ms. Teixeira: I am not always doing it and I do not know what you are talking about. Mr. Speaker, I am just asking. Last night and the day before...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I decide whether I give your indulgence or not and no one else. Ms. Teixeira, I am hearing you.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you Sir. I am just asking Sir, that it is very difficult on this side trying to speak, when there is noise in the House. Could you please try to keep the other side down as you try to keep our side down when we heckle their side?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, you will leave me very cautious about granting indulgences to you in future. It is a pity. I do not know what you expect the Speaker to do short of gagging everyone. Members have an obligation to also contain their emotions when they are speaking.

Ms. Teixeira: I appreciate that Sir. I have sat here and heard you caution Members on our side and so I am asking you to caution them on that side.

Mr. Speaker: Please take your seat Ms. Teixeira. Minister, you have the floor.

Dr. Henry: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I trust that I will have my full timing and that does not cut into it.

With your leave, I rise to address this august House as part of the 2019 Budget Debate. Let me place on record my commendation of the stellar and brilliant work done by the Minister of Finance and his team in crafting the 2019 Budget.

I would also like to publicly place on record my appreciation and indebtedness to my own staff in the Ministry of Education for their untiring support and commitment in executing the Ministry's workplan in 2018, I look forward to your continuing support in 2019.

Before, I get into my presentation proper, I would like to take a few minutes to address the queries, concerns and inaccuracies raised by Members on the other side of the House in relation to the education sector. There is no doubt that education plays an important role in any country's pursuit of economic growth and national development. In fact, I am emboldened to say that there is no better predictor of a nation's future than what is currently happening in its classrooms.

I listened with consternation for the past three days as Hon. Members on the other side of the House provided farcical information on book distribution, teachers' strike action, we heard about \$10 cash vouchers and even Guyana's rankings of time back in World Bank Report of 1984. The statistical update of Guyana's country profile for the 2018 Human Development Index (HDI) was made available by the United Nations recently, and I wish to draw the House's attention to the paragraph captioned, "Guyana's HDI value and rank".

Guyana's HDI value for 2017 was 0.654 which represents an increase of 21.5%. Guyana would, therefore, have recorded progress in each of the health and education indicators and the update covered the period 1990-2017. Yet, we have heard how we have retrogress. The data tells a story, a story of hope, a story of growth and a story of encouragement and there is no amount of propaganda that can power-wash that away.

10.55 a.m.

In relation to the teachers' strike action, what we did not hear from the Opposition benches was how the Government had to take care of the debunching mess that was created and left by the PPP/C. It must not escape the minds of the Opposition Members that the debunching issue transcended successive governments and three Presidents to be more specific. I am eternally grateful to my Colleagues on this side of the House and my staff at the Ministry of Education, through whose collective efforts we were able to pay debunching arrears as far back as 2011 and put that issue to rest.

In relation to book distribution queries, it is important to note that the Ministry of Education indicated in writing to the Audit Office of Guyana, that a number of inaccuracies were contained in the draft report for the Book Distribution Unit. However, the Auditor General, notwithstanding the observation made by the Ministry of Education, proceeded to finalise the document and subsequently called same to be laid in this National Assembly.

On the issue of missing vouchers, the findings are certainly inaccurate as some of the vouchers were signed for and even collected by the Auditor General's Office of Guyana and in other instances, the documentation was not even requested. I trust that this matter will be appropriately addressed at the level of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

In so far as the \$10,000 cash voucher is concerned, I rely on the *Stabroek News* newspaper of 21st November, 2014 which aptly summed up this initiative as the relative vulgarity of campaigning by the Government with the 'Because We Care Peoples' \$10,000 Grant'. It was described as an election gimmick and, therefore, not sustainable.

I certainly would not be intimidated or silenced by any heckling, insults, fake news, sexism nor racism. It is my story as much as it is your story. In fact, it is Guyana's story of growth, prosperity and the journey to the 'good life'. We here in the National Assembly are representatives of the people of this country because we believe in a cause that is greater than ourselves. The point made by the Hon. Member, Ms. Pearson-Fredericks, on Monday as to how the two sides could speak on the same issue and talk in the same country in this debate, is instructive, especially since it is difficult to imagine how anyone could be in Government for 23 years and, then in three short years, turn around and paint a picture of doom and gloom, and realistically think that they can be

extricated. In my sector alone, we have spent an inordinate amount of time cleaning up the mess that we have inherited from the last administration.

In less than four years, we have rolled out real programmes such as the 5Bs Initiative; we have expanded school feeding; we have improved school services to include psychosocial support and introduced technology and enable learning in a real way. We are no longer buying computers from barber shops. When this Government came into office in 2015, we took over an education sector that was in a crisis. The performance of the nation's children at the National and Regional Examinations served as a clear indicator. In 2014, the National Grade Six Assessment (NGSA) results were appalling as previous years for which I have seen the data. Twenty-three per cent of our students passed English; 25% of them passed Mathematics; 37% of them passed Social Studies and 23% of them passed Science. In three short years we have seen incremental improvements and this year we were able to record a 60% pass rate in English and similar improvements were recorded in other subject areas.

With regards to attendance at schools, we have seen improvements particularly at the secondary level, while attendance rate in 2014 indicated that 67% of our students attended. In 2018, we have improved to 70% and we will continue to improve. Our drop-out rates are also on the right trajectory.

For the primary level in 2014, 813 of our male students dropped out, but this was reduced in a very short time. This is because in 2016, I would not give you the 2017 and 2018 data, we saw only 368 students drop out, male students, that is. For female students in 2014, 726 students dropped out and we reduced that in 2016 to 279. At the secondary level the story is similar. For the year ended 2014, 1,480 males dropped out of schools in Guyana. We have reduced that in a very short time to 1,202 in 2016. In 2014, we had 1,269 females who dropped out. We also reduced that to 833 in 2016.

We have seen increase in the number and percentage of trained teachers in the public education system which was also recorded during the past three years. Let me say, in 2013, 30-plus years after the PPP/C Government took office, the Ministry of Education measured the school readiness of children entering First Grade in remote areas. That Ministry, which I head now, found that there were few who were equipped to begin learning. In fact, around 60% of the children failed to meet

the basic prerequisites for reading, fewer than 10% could demonstrate any understanding of the text and 40% showed very little or no ability to identify any numbers from one to ten. Today, with less than four years in office the number tells a different story. In fact, an article which was referred to just now and published on 3rd December, 2018 in the *A Political Journal*, which is a global platform that attracts wide readership in education circles around the world, Guyana's story of *turning the tide* in early childhood education is being told and is being recorded. Our current data indicates that 90% of our children now master reading and Math skills, compared to 37% in 2016. This is a story that speaks for itself. Yesterday, we heard a few questions on curriculum reform and I trust that the next few minutes would provide some clarity on the subject of curriculum reform.

If there is anything that we aspire for in education, it is to ensure that each succeeding generation is better prepared and supported to discharge their duties of growth and development. Let me say that since 1976, this is the first time Guyana is undertaking such an extensive reform in the school curriculum. In 2018, the framework for the new curriculum reform process has been completed after extensive consultations. This is a multi-year undertaking in keeping with international best practices and recommendations.

Let me point out that the CARICOM Human Resource Development 2030 Strategy was adopted by Guyana in 2017 and we are on board. However, this cannot be used in *lieu* of curriculum, as was suggested yesterday. It is no secret that a 40-plus year curriculum cannot deliver the breadth of skills required for the 21st Century. I am, therefore, fortified by the wise words of the prolific writer George Orwell who wrote:

“Every generation imagines itself to be more intelligent than the one that went before it and wiser than the one that comes after it”.

I say it to the people of this country your Government will continue on this path of development. In 2019, the Ministry of Education will implement for the first time in Guyana, robotics, coding, and animation in primary schools across this country. This, of course, will leverage the gains we have made with the implementation of smart classrooms, Information Technology (IT) hubs and IT laboratories in 2018. We know that no country can deliver education in this present age without technology-enabled learning. During this year, we celebrated Education Month under the theme:

“Education for a Good Life to Innovation and STEAMS”.

We recognise the importance of implementing exciting and engaging ways to involve students at an early age to consider careers and interests in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Agriculture, Mathematics and Spirituality (STEAMS).

The Mathematics interventions continued in 2018 with the procurement of Math kits to Grades 4 and 5 in all primary schools. Internet connectivity was extended to an additional 175 primary schools; six additional secondary schools were provided with projectors and mobile screens for classroom use. Smart boards were added to the Waramadong and Kato Secondary Schools in the hinterland. Additionally, this programme will continue in 2019.

I wish to say that, through collaboration with the Organization of American States (OAS), we will provide class sets of computing resources to students and teachers in 28 primary schools in Regions 1, 6 and 10. This, of course, is in addition to the IT laboratories that were implemented in five additional primary schools and the upgrading that took place in 25 schools.

I am pleased that the Ministry would have strengthened and expanded the Psychosocial and Counselling Support Services in 2018, with the implementation of mobile services and re-integration of teen-aged mothers into the school system. These interventions will allow for more comprehensive support systems, linking and coordinating existing psychosocial services with other stakeholders, while tending to the diverse needs of our population. The provision of clinical services on wheel is highly recommended as a good practice in developing countries.

School feeding has emerged as a major food security strategy and safety net for children in the schools system. Over 25,000 students benefitted from this intervention in 2018. In 2019, the programme will be further expanded and enhanced to meet the needs of additional students in all 10 Administrative Regions. This initiative has yielded results in attendance, poverty alleviation and according to the Human Rights Framework, the rights to adequate nutritious food and the highest attainable standards of health to reach their full physical potential.

In 2018, the Book Distribution Unit fully transitioned from manual to electronically generated book issue vouchers for all books distributed countrywide. Further, digitalisation and automation

of the system is planned for 2019 to improve efficiency and address long-standing issues related to adequate and timely distribution of books.

A very important part of education delivery is teachers' training, teachers' preparation and teachers' support. In 2018, after a *hiatus* of more than a decade, we commenced the teachers' upgrading programme in Region 8; we introduced technical and vocational education training at the Cyril's Potter College of Education (CPCE); we established a Preservice Teachers' Training Centre at Anna Regina; we piloted special education needs programmes for teachers in Regions 2, 4, 10 and in Georgetown; we have trained hundreds of teachers in the hinterland schools in multi-grade teaching, in Regions 1, 8 and 9; we have also done training on literacy standards and benchmarks, differentiated instructions and good nutrition; and we have also commenced the introduction of the Caribbean Good Practice Guide for Early Childhood Educators.

Music and physical education will continue to be expanded and strengthened in 2019, with the procurement of musical instruments such as pianos, guitars, recorders and steel pan to schools across this country. The Technical and Vocational Education Programmes will also see Practical Instruction Centres and Practical Instruction Departments in Regions 1, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 9 and we would also initiate the process for having the hospitality institute.

11.10 a.m.

The term "good life", means different things to different people and could be misconstrued and misused. I do not know anyone who would think that what I have just described here does not speak to a good life. Special education needs would continue to be prioritised in 2019, with improved training and staffing requirements being addressed. I would be the first to admit that there is a lot more that needs to be done for our special education need students, but my point is: if we had started this 23 years ago, that would have been three years after the People Progressive Party (PPP) got into Government in 1992, we would have been further along the curve.

May I now turn my attention to the University of Guyana (UG). In 2018, the University of Guyana completed new offices, fire escapes and a sanitary block. We also broke ground for the new Mathematics and Science building at Turkeyen. The University signed, also, multiple agreements for technical and financial support for oil and gas, agriculture, forestry, foreign language and the construction of a new library as part of strengthening our international partnership.

In 2018, the University appointed the first set of academic advisors to enhance students' success, improved timeliness of grade submissions, celebrated the successful completion of the first year of operations of the School of Entrepreneurship and Business Innovation (SEBI), fondly referred to as SEBI, and hosted consultations on writing to begin efforts to improve the writing proficiency of students here in Guyana.

In 2019, the University of Guyana would offer new programmes such as an Associate Degree in Petroleum Engineering, Bachelors' Degree in Youth and Community Development and Food Science and Masters' in Psychology and Petroleum Engineering.

We heard, yesterday, from a Hon. Member on the Opposition benches, and I certainly agree with the statement, that there are no quick fixes for the education sector, but let me say that the education revolution, started by this Government in 2015, is alive and well. The sum of \$52.2 billion, allocated to this sector, would be invested in the construction of schools, curriculum reform, psychological and other support services, teachers' preparation and support, including scholarship for teachers, school feeding programmes, territory level education, technical and vocational education, music and physical education.

To the Hon. Member, who spoke yesterday on the one-seat majority of this Government, I wish to offer this poem, which speaks to the importance of one.

“If you want to know the value of one year, just ask a student who failed a course.

If you want to know the value of one month, ask a mother who gave birth to a premature baby.

If you want to know the value of one minute, ask the person who just missed the bus.

And if you want to know the value of one-hundredth of a second, ask the athlete who won a silver medal in the Olympics.”

I wish to add my bit. If you want to know the importance of one seat, ask the PPP. It, therefore, gives me great pleasure in commending this Budget to the honourable House. I thank you.
[Applause]

Mr. Speaker: The next Speaker is the Hon. Bheri Ramsaran. I see Ms. Teixeira has risen.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to tender an excuse for Dr. Ramsaran, who is unavoidably absent today. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

Ms. Bancroft: I rise in support of *Budget 2019*, which was presented to this noble House by the Hon. Minister of Finance, Winston Jordan, with the help of his dedicated staff. The theme of the Budget is “*Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities For the Good Life*”

There is something in this Budget for all, from the baby to the pensioner. Before I get into my Budget debate, I would like to say that *every eye forms its own beauty*. I want to make a comment about what the Hon. Member, Joseph Hamilton, said when he spoke because, as it is, Mahdia is taking the forefront and Mahdia is moving. The dolerite rock that we placed at the centre of the township tells you that Mahdia is solid as a rock and it is there to stay. Mahdia would never be removed.

I would like, also, to make a comment about the Hon. Member, Ms. Pearson-Frederick’s speech. When she spoke, she made a comment about agriculture and the indigenous people not getting the benefits. As I go later down into my speech, you would hear what Region 8 has. So, I now turn to my speech.

Under Regional Administration and Finance, equipment and furniture were purchased for staff quarters and administrative offices within both sub regions. A number of building were rehabilitated. Under line item 6211 - Expenses Specific to the Agency, four Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs) meeting were held, including one that was called specially for budget preparation.

In Sub Region 1, Kato, office and field materials and janitorial supplies were purchased and vehicles were repaired to make the people comfortable. While still on Administration, I want to tell this House that, in my last year’s budget speech, Mahdia being a town was only a concept, but on 25th October, 2018, it became a reality when Mahdia was officially declared a town by His Excellency David Arthur Granger, making it one of the newest towns commissioned under this Government, A Partnership of National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC). This

development has made it possible for the residents of Mahdia town to cast their first ever vote at the recent Local Government Elections (LGEs). So, the good life continues for all. [Mr. Dharamlall: Ms. Amna Ally wrote in that piece for you.] Nobody has to write my speech.

I can safely say that the four bridges that were catered for last year are close to completion. All of the setback was caused because of bad weather. When those bridges are completed, it will bring relief to the residents of Sub Region 1 in Region 8. Also, bridges and carriageways were rehabilitated in both Sub Regions 1 and 2.

I know turn to roads. Never before has Mahdia had concrete road. Under this Government, the township of Mahdia has concrete roads, and that was done through the Ministry of Public Infrastructure along with the APNU/AFC Government. Also, I would like to bring this noble House's attention to the road from Mahdia to Garraway Stream, which is soon to be completed, and the Denham Suspension Bridge which would have new decking in *Budget 2019*. Also, the Cassandra Crossing Bridge is presently under repairs. When that is completed, Regions 7 and 8 would, once again, have direct link and, as such, we would be able to cut out tedious hours of travel, and this Budget will see it through in 2019.

In the health sector, I am pleased to announce that immunisation programmes have been successfully carried out; also, a breast cancer awareness walk was organised and carried out. Regular outreaches and health programmes tackling Tuberculosis (TB) and malaria are being conducted. The Mahdia Hospital has been extended and a new nurses' hostel has been constructed. Mahdia also has a new Regional Health Officer (RHO) and primary healthcare is being taken care of fully.

Before I move to agriculture, I would like to tell you that, as we speak in the National Assembly, the sod was just turned, about three days ago, to construct the new courthouse in Mahdia. You see, when you are born, and you are a baby, you creep before you walk. So, we are now at the stage where would have all the things to make Mahdia and Region 8 a place to stay.

I would like to turn my attention to agriculture. We have had many achievements in the agriculture sector. Some of those being community development projects and the donation of 300 black giant chicken to Kato by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The Regional Agriculture

Commercial Exhibition (RACE) was held in Kurukabaru, where \$3 million worth of produce was bought from local farmers to supply school feeding programmes at Kato and Paramakatoi. There was blood collection from cattle for foot and mouth disease testing. There was introductory bee keeping training sessions for students of Mahdia Primary School.

Also, as I speak, through the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) programme, the women's group of Mahdia has benefited from the New Jersey Black Giant Project, thanks to the Hon. Minister of Social Protection, Ms. Amna Ally. Thank you, Minister. Also, our senior citizens, the pensioners, and the public assistance has seen an increase in this Budget, thanks to the Ministry of Social Protection.

I would like to turn my attention to education in Region 8. In 2018, we have had a change in the Regional Education Officer. The school feeding programme is an ongoing exercise and I would like to tell this noble House that the Kato Secondary School building is now up and running and has a resident population of over 300 students. Paramakatoi Secondary School also has a population of over 200 resident students and so we have to cater for them. A new primary school has been constructed at Itabac and the Regional Administration continues to provide transportation for the students of Sub Region 1, who travel by air each term to attend the school in Mahdia. Added to that, the dorms were rehabilitated in Mahdia to comfortably accommodate the students.

11.25 a.m.

This year, 70 students of Region 8 were transported to Georgetown to participate in the inter-school sports. While we are still on education, it should be noted that, just recently, the Speaker of the National Assembly and a team visited Region 8. In Paramakatoi, Sub Region 1, he spoke to students of all levels of schooling on the functions of Parliament, followed by the distribution of educational supplies. He then went to Sub Region 2 to the Micobie and Mahdia Primary Schools and also the Mahdia Secondary School. That is to say we are not just looking at academics. The young ones, from nursery to secondary, were given a talk, they listened, and they started learning about the workings of Parliament; never before.

Before I take my leave, I probably did not mention the money that was allocated. What I do know is that the \$2.1 billion that was set aside for 2019, all of it will be spent very productively in Region 8. The Speaker of the National Assembly had the opportunity, also, to see the Denham Suspension

Bridge and the monument. The Opposition Members are probably the only people who are seeing what they are seeing.

With that, I bring my presentation to a close. I have no hesitation in commending this Budget for passage so that the good life for all can continue. *[Applause]*

Mr. Mustapha: I rise to make my presentation on *Budget 2019*. Before I get into my main presentation, first of all, I would like to say that the Hon. Minister who spoke just now, the Hon. Minister of Education, used a lot of figures, but as we said, figures do not mislead us. If one looks at the *Global Human Capital Report 2017*, between 2015 to 2017, the country's global ranking on equality of primary education of children aged 0 to 15 years fell by seven places. That is the fact. They are taking the credit, but when they mess it up, they do not want to take credit. Those are the people who have been messing up the country for the last three and a half years. Then, again, the report went on to state that the quality of educational services provided to children from age 15 to 24 declined by 8 points. That is the *Global Human Capital Report 2017*.

Yesterday, we sat in this honourable House and we listened to an Hon. Member from Region 6. When we come to this House, we must be truthful in our discourse. We must not bring misinformation to this honourable House. This House is the highest law-making body in our country, and we must not come here and misinform the House. Yesterday, the Hon. Member, Mr. Charrandass Persaud, said that a new maternity ward is being built at the New Amsterdam Public Hospital. When he said that, he said that there was no ward there and that two pregnant mothers were sleeping on one bed. Since then, I have spoken to a number of persons, who have worked since the establishment of that new hospital in New Amsterdam, and all of them have denied it. That is misinformation that the Hon. Member brought to this House.

The Hon. Member, Charrandass Persaud, went on and said that the cogeneration facility at Skeldon is a *white elephant*. As I am speaking here today, the turbine of that cogeneration plant, which is being powered by bagasse, one is presently working and is producing 12 megawatts (mw) of electricity to the national grid. The two turbines have capacity to produce 30mw to put into the national grid, but because of the incapacity of the Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL Inc.) to handle the load, they cannot work both turbines. That is another piece of misinformation.

Then, the Hon. Member went on and said that, regarding the sugar workers who were fired at Rose Hall, most of them have been rehired. That is far from the truth. The Hon. Member would tell you that any time he sees sugar workers, he tries to hide from them. He is trying to move away because the people are abusing him because he misled them into voting for the Alliance for Change (AFC) and, today, they cannot get a job in the sugar industry. Those are some of the facts that I want to state. **[Mr. Ramjattan: They always voted for you all.]** I will come to you just now, Mr. Ramjattan. I will tell you about the AFC.

The Budget presentation, for me, was a long journey to nowhere, as noted in the time it took. It took over four hours to be presented and was horribly short of substance. What could have caused the Hon. Minister to put himself, us in this honourable House, and the rest of the country through the tedious and unrewarding journey remains a mystery. If it was an intended distraction from the no-confidence motion, then he would have failed twice. The Hon. Minister took over four hours to tell the Guyanese people that there is nothing that could have been conceived or implemented by Government to help improve the lives of Guyanese. This is extremely shocking, given how this Government boasts of bringing a good life to Guyanese. This Budget was a public display of master artistry of deception and proved that in terms of words and time spent, it brings a sum total of zero for Guyanese, as Guyanese locals are saying that the Budget was a long and expensive *gyaff*.

I want to list the deceptions in this Budget. The Hon. Members over that side should listen and learn about what is in this Budget, and if there is anything in this Budget, they should come and tell us. First of all, my Colleague, Ms. Priya Manickchand, stated, just now, that the Hon. Minister stated in the Budget that some rice farmers in Berbice – I live in Berbice – are using drones to sow paddy and fertilise fields. I cannot imagine where the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Agriculture visited those rice farmers. I am not sure, also, if the Hon. Minister is a fan of things flying in the air and decided to capture that in his speech, but I do not know of any drones sowing paddy in Region 6 or Region 5. Maybe, that is a figment of the Minister’s imagination, just as how the AFC felt very politically comfortable at Whim. Whims and fancies, I guess to deceive.

When you look at the entire agricultural sector in our country, when you see the flowery language in the Budget, and you look at the plights of farmers in our country, I think that this Government, as Mr. Damon rightly said, is an “I-Don’t-Care” Government.

Land rental today – the Hon. Member, Hon. Mr. Ramjattan, is from No. 47 and so he should go and find out – for farmers in Black Bush Polder has gone up from \$12,000 to \$45,000 per annum, an almost 300% increase. How are these people expected to survive with such burdens, these burdens that have been placed on the backs of these farmers? To compound the situation, this Government has reduced and stopped the subsidies it had given to the Water Users Association. As a result, all of the secondary canals are being clogged up and blocked. How will the farmers plant?

And the Hon. Member is proud to say that rice production in Region 6 reduced from 62,000 acres to 54,000 acres now, and he is saying why they are planting. When one browses through the heavy-worded Budget of dreams and studies, the reality is that people are suffering, and it is increasing with every passing day. Over the last three and a half years, all the hopes, aspirations and dreams of the Guyanese people have been dashed by this visionless Government.

Two of my colleagues on this side of the House, when they spoke, talked about a masterpiece that was created in Region 6 for the entire country. On page seven of the Budget speech, I noticed that the Ministry of Finance, through the Ministry of Public Health, will be expending \$35.9 billion in the health sector, but are there any moneys in that Budget for the ophthalmology hospital at Port Mourant? The ophthalmology hospital, as I said, was an innovative project of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) to improve the quality of eye care in Guyana, and it proved its worth under our Government. Today, they have left it in ruins. Today, no surgeries are being done there today and the hospital is almost closed. People from across the country - people from Essequibo, people from Region 1 - and even people from outside of Guyana, like Suriname and The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, used to come to that centre. As I said, that was a masterpiece in our country to take care of the eye care of the poor and vulnerable. Today, what is the problem in our country? Because this Government lacks vision, it wants the entire Guyanese population to lack vision and that is the reason they are closing down the ophthalmology hospital. As I said, they lack a lot of vision.

When you hear the Government boasting about the good life, who is getting the good life in our country? Not the people of Guyana, not the poor workers, not the farmers, not the teachers, and not the policemen, but everyone in the Cabinet. Their phone bills, electricity bills, water bills, gardeners and maids are all being taken care of by the State. So, they are enjoying the good life.

Because of that, they have hiked their salaries, also, from 50 to 100 % as well as the number of security personnel. I do not know if they are so afraid of walking the country. This morning, I was at Garnett Street coming through and I saw Minister Ramjattan coming out of Delph Street with his siren. He blew his siren and I had to go in the corner.

11.40 a.m.

He is a 'big man' who is not able to travel in the traffic. That is the powerful man. Let the Government enjoy it while it lasts. It is not long more. They will have to answer again.

Another project I want to touch on is the East Bank Public road project. There is massive corruption taking place with that project. A Government or a party activist is doing the recruitment and the road is not being done according to the Inter-American Development Bank's (IDB) specification and design.

The East Bank Berbice road project: some \$1.2 billion of Guyanese taxpayers' money has been expended or will be expended on that road, and when you travel through that road, even from Tacama Turn to Edinburg has not been completed as yet. Imagine when they will meet the Bermine Turn. The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, is defending the project because he went to Berbice and fooled the people by telling them that the project will be completed within a few months. Today, it is a milking cow or a cash cow for corruption. That is the way of this Government. Corruption is engrained in this Government and in its DNA.

I want to touch briefly on the 2019 Budget for Region 6. The 2019 Budget for Region 6 is expected to increase by \$1 billion. However, of this amount, recurrent expenditure is expected to make up \$882 million or 82%, due to an increase in staff by 106. Of the total increase, under the 2019 Capital Programme, less than 3% or \$7 million have been allocated to the education sector, which deals with the construction, rehabilitation and extension of schools, teachers' quarters, *et cetera*. In other words, on a per capita basis, in 2019, this Government plans to invest, on behalf of every citizen living in Region 6, an additional \$63 to help develop the educational sector. They will spend \$63 more on the people in Region 6.

The fact is that the Ministry of the Presidency, Department of Citizenship and Immigration Services, with a staff count of 141, will be receiving an additional \$14 million in 2019 to spend on

telephone and internet charges. Imagine that. Imagine where the priority of this Government lies. Similarly, less than 0.5% or \$1.5 million of the total increase in the capital budget will be invested in the health services sector. In other words, the Government plans to spend, in 2019, an additional \$13 on behalf of every citizen living in Region 6 to help with the health services.

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

Mr. Mustapha: This Government is tone deaf and believes that it has support in areas where some Ministers are from. They should ask the Hon. Prime Minister to advise them. He and his now defunct Alliance For change (AFC) have fooled the people, especially in Berbice. They made all sorts of promises before 2015 and then realised that they have no influence in the Government to have even one measure realised. Yet, The Hon. Prime Minister is bold enough to turn up in his expensive and fancy vehicles, which costs taxpayers', in Berbice, where the economy has been ravished after the callous closing of the sugar estates.

Berbice, especially Region 6, is reeling from numerous social problems, as a result of the closure of the sugar estates. People who once had jobs now cannot afford to feed their children. I heard a heart-breaking story of a mother who said, publicly, she cannot afford to feed her children. *The Guyana Times* reported her saying that when her children wakes up in the night she has to give them water. After the closure of the sugar estates and the number of workers who were displaced, the Hon. Prime Minister stated, last Friday, that when his staff raised a toast to him, he remarked that payment of the redundancy benefit to sugar workers was his best birthday gift. That is the redundant Prime Minister.

The Government did this to the people and at Whim, where the Prime Minister is from, the people voted and unleashed a tsunami that demolished the Alliance For Change (AFC) and politically banished the Hon. Prime Minister from his place of birth.

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

Mr. Mustapha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister not being welcomed in his home village is the strongest message by the people to say what resounded across the country on the 12th November, 2018 at the Local Government Elections.

Even here in Georgetown, our party, the People's Progressive Party (PPP) and the only national party, has gained five more seats. Where the Government believed it had transport for, it is not so anymore. We are moving, and the party is moving with force.

I cannot support this Budget. When one looks at this Budget and when you look at the theme: "*Transforming the Economy...*", our economy is shattered now; "*Empowering People...*", you are dismissing people. How are you disempowering? "*Building Sustainable Communities For The Good Life,*" but you destroyed Wales, Enmore, Rose Hall and Skeldon estates.

The Budget should have read "Destroying the Economy, Disempowering People, Breaking Communities For a Poor Life".

Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Minister within the Ministry of Public Infrastructure [Ms. Ferguson]: I proudly rise on this side of the house to proffer my contribution, support and endorsement of *Budget 2019*, themed: *Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities For The Good Life.*

I first acknowledge and pay homage to the efforts and sacrifices put forward by staff of the Ministry of Finance, who, with the external support given by other Ministries and stakeholders, worked tirelessly to prepare *Budget 2019*. To my Colleague, Minister Jordan, and team, kudos to you all. *Budget 2019* is another budget from my Government, which is tailored to ensure the ordinary man benefits in numerous ways.

During his presentation on Monday, 26th November, 2018, the Hon. Minister of Finance stated that our Government thought it best not to introduce any new taxes. This means that in excess of \$30 billion will now remain in the hands of the ordinary man. This is but one way in which the ordinary people of this beloved land of ours will benefit.

Sir, I applaud the Private Sector Commission (PSC), the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI), members of the National Commission on Disability and citizens at large, who boldly expressed appreciation to the Government for the many measures contained in *Budget 2019*.

Mr. Speaker, I am cognisant that you and others in this House, more particularly my fellow

Parliamentarians, will agree with me that *Budget 2019* is the Budget that will prepare us for what is and is to come in 2020.

Sir, *those who have eyes to see, let them see and ears to hear, let them hear.* Over the last 48 hours, as I listened to the arguments posited by my colleagues across the aisle, I recognise that their similar attitude and rhetoric, which manifested itself in the 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 Budgets, are being received in *Budget 2019*. There are no new ideas from the Opposition to advance the cause of the Guyanese people, except for those suggestions shared by Hon. Members, Ms. Yvonne Pearson and Dr. Frank Anthony.

Everyone knows that, with the Opposition, talk is cheap and comes with a dangling promise that they are better. It is easier to stand all day and criticise the biggest budget of their lifetime, but it takes real courage to support such a Budget. We stand by *Budget 2019* and we will deliver on everything inked in this Budget.

Throughout the debate, we heard from the Opposition that *Budget 2019* is bluff and fluff, but when you analyse their message in the debate, it is empty with no shadow of hope for the future. So, the real bluff and fluff is the Opposition. We, as the APNU/AFC Government, have offered substance to the Guyanese people by giving them \$300.7 billion reasons how we will deliver the good life in 2019. What did the Opposition deliver to the people? As I said before, empty promises.

Our people are listening, looking and learning, and they all have a sense of appreciation for what this Government is doing. Permit me, Sir, to share an article carried on social media, via *Demerara Waves*, 3rd December, 2018, quoting Hon. Member, Irfaan Ali's description of *Budget 2019*:

“Poor economic performances, increases prices for food, clothing and medicine.”

If the Hon. Member Ali continues to read the wrong literature and continues to feed himself false news, he will one day self-destruct as a victim of intellectual dishonesty. The Hon. Members on the opposite side of the House are unfamiliar with the number of investors that has approached the Government. They do not know how busy the public servants are in every Ministry, working hard and beyond the call of duty, whether it be the Ministry of the Presidency, Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Ministry of Business, Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of Public Telecommunications, Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Communities or any other agency. Rather than understanding the times and

working with this Government to deliver a better, stronger, transformed Guyana to our people, the Opposition is strumming up false information and facts, stirring up dissension and, as usual, has employed its usual choir to sing its chorus. I say to the opposite side, today, Guyana shall rise, our country will be transformed, we shall not be moved.

11.55 p.m.

We shall not be moved and we will overcome all your divisive acts, baseless criticisms and false accusation with the evidence of our hard work. Just remember there is a time and season for everything, and your time has expired.

The presentation by Hon. Members to Budget 2019 is lukewarm and lacks substance. Since they of themselves are aware that Budget 2019 is the real deal. Our performance over the last three years is exceptional and exemplary which can test the time of scrutiny. Therefore the theme for Budget 2019 is apt and the Government must be given its space to ensure the pathway to the “good life” is sustained through community development and empowering of our people.

For the purposes of my contribution to Budget 2019, I will examine a few agencies under my remit within the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, by sharing their performances in 2018 and what will be achieved or accomplished in 2019. My colleague Minister, Hon. David Patterson, will address the other areas within the Ministry.

Infrastructure is critical for the development of a nation. Over the past three years, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure managed to effectively transform the outlook in communities and, by extension, the nation.

I now turn my attention to the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA). Guyana must be proud that two weeks ago it was able to host the first International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) conference on air transport meeting, in which in excess of 40 countries visited Guyana from different parts of the world. The President of ICAO praised Guyana for the progress made in the aviation sector. He said:

“Within the context of our ‘No Country Left Behind Initiative’, and in order for us in Montreal to reach all our member states, and there are 192 member states, we need regional

leaders, and Guyana has proven to be a regional leader, and that is one of the reasons why we believe that Guyana was able to host such an important meeting.”

Under this APNU/AFC Government, Guyana's image on the regional and international planes were significantly capsulated from one as beggars on golden stools to emerging leaders. This is evidence of the APNU/AFC Government's work to brand Guyana in the region and the world over as an aggressive nation state.

Permit me, Mr. Speaker, to highlight some of the key accomplishments within the aviation sector for the year 2018:

- Ten acres of land acquired for new permanent GCAA headquarters at Providence for its operations at a cost of Guy\$25M.
- Development of a modern Civil Aviation Bill which was read in this very honourable House for a third time. This passing of the Bill will lead strength to GCAA's oversight and enforcement capability and to establish independent provisions for accident investigation.
- Aeronautical Surveillance Service - Phase II: The provision of Aeronautical Surveillance Service continued with the establishment of the infrastructure for four ADS-B/VHF stations at Port Kaituma, Kamarang, Kaieteur and Annai during 2018 at a cost of \$380 million. Once finally operated, the stations will significantly improve the management of the lower airspace within those regions as well as improve the safe operations of aircraft flying to those areas.
- Air Navigation Personnel (ANS): ANS trained twenty-one recruits as Aeronautical Information Management Officers (AIMOs) whilst four were trained as Procedural Area Controllers and six as Procedural Aerodrome Controllers and Flight Information Service Officers, using the newly installed simulator. This will indeed improve the human resource capacity to manage the provision of Air Traffic Services Units at the two international airports and the Area Control Centre.
- Aviation Security Annual Oversight: GCAA conducted security oversight of domestic and hinterland operators during 2018. Specifically, GCAA collaborated with US-TSA to conduct security assessments of all air operators flying into USA.

- ICAO-Guyana Safety Compliance: A significant amount of work has been done to achieve safety compliance with ICAO's safety standards. A target of 85% level of compliance is the objective set for 2019.
- Green State Development Strategy: Consistent with the Green State Development Strategy, Guyana has submitted CO2 Emission Action Plan to ICAO which is aimed at a reduction in CO2 emissions from aviation related activities.
- Two new routes were established in the Georgetown Flight Information Region (FIR) linking Panama and Timehri as well as Montevideo and North America. Letters of agreements were amended and signed with adjacent states to facilitate these new routes. This will increase airspace capacity, improve efficiency and allow for significant cost benefits for airlines and environmental benefits throughout significant reductions in carbon emissions.
- Guyana will participate in the Pilot Phase of Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA) commencing in 2021. In 2019 and 2020, Guyana will implement a Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) system to monitor the level of CO2 emissions and provide reports to ICAO. Mechanisms for MRV process are currently being established.

In 2019, with allocations from Budget 2019, the GCAA will implement:

- Digital - Automatic Terminal Information Service: This will indeed provide Air Traffic Controllers and aircrafts with up to date weather conditions to make flight decisions. This will cost us \$60 million.
- Aeronautical Information Exchange & Management Software: This will enable the transition of aeronautical information by the AIS from manual to digital data. At a cost of \$5 million.

The Transport and Harbours Department remains critical to Guyana's development through agriculture, tourism and social activities. With the current fleet of ferry vessels being operated by Transports and Harbours Department, central Government continues to render the necessary financial support to ensure that these vessels remain sea-worthy and are fully operational.

In 2018, \$700 million was appropriated for the rehabilitation of ferry vessels and \$262 million was appropriated for stelling. Stelling are important assets to the Transport and Harbours Department, since it allows for the berthing and mooring of vessels plying different routes in the Essequibo River. In addition, to vessels maintenance, the sum of \$100 million was appropriated for the rehabilitation of Leguan Stelling. This project entails driving of piles and other works, all of which strengthened the integrity of the stelling and saw the northern section of the structure being extended by 19,912 square feet. I would also like to note that on the completion of this particular project, it would cost us in excess of \$400 million.

Notably, the vision of this administration is to ensure that construction of stelling are done in a modernised way. This modernised approach was taken on the ongoing rehabilitation of the Bartica Stelling, Region 7, as phase one. A total sum of \$150 million was allocated in Budget 2018 for phase two, which the northern section of the stelling will be extended by 26,840 square feet to accommodate a floating link-span bridge, steel frame shed, light tower and a heavy-duty vehicle scale.

With the support of budgetary allocation for financial year 2019, the sum of \$190 million has been provided for rehabilitation of the *MV Sabanto* and *Kanawan* in the Essequibo River. On the other hand, for stelling, the sum of \$687 million has been appropriated to effect works on the following stelling: Leguan - \$285 million, Bartica - \$350 million and Parika - \$50 million.

Administratively, the department continues to provide the relevant services under its remit, despite current financial challenges. Nevertheless, the advisory council is working towards addressing this problem to ascertain ways for its financial sustainability.

As I continue to focus on the maritime sector, I now place my attention to the regulatory arm. The Maritime Administration Department (MARAD) continues to ensure that our country's main ports and rivers are monitored and that regulations are enforced when necessary. Despite this entity being a semi-autonomous body, central Government contributes towards the capital expenditure. With the imminent oil and gas sector, the department accomplished the following in 2018:

- Administratively, the International Maritime Organization Audit and International Organization of Standardization Stage 1 Audit were completed.

- Management staff were trained in International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 2015.
- Review of International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code by the US Coast on MARAD in June 2018.

As alluded to earlier, the monitoring of our main waterways, the *MV Setter* was re-commissioned. On the other hand, the acquisition of a new pilot launch was done, at a cost of at least \$200 million.

The Demerara Harbour Bridge is an important structure bridging many regions, Regions 4, 3, 2, 1 and 7. This crucial link has served its commuters over the last four decades. Despite not receiving maximum subvention from central Government in 2018, the management and staff continue to ensure efficient and effective maintenance of this structure.

In 2018, central Government appropriated \$5 million to this entity which was utilised on the fabrication of connecting posts. Apparent from this expenditure, the corporation utilised its generated revenue to execute a number of capital works. Specifically, \$354 million to procure items such as fabricate buoys, maintenance equipment machinery, rehabilitation of main offices and the rehabilitation of pontoons, costing in excess of \$284 million.

12.10 p.m.

It cannot be understated, while this structure has been in operation for more than 40 years, its main revenue is driven from toll. As of 31st October, 2018, revenue collected stood at \$703 million while its current expenditure was \$454 million. For the corresponding period of October, 2017 revenue generated \$389 million, current expenditure \$444 million. The asphalt plant operation is effectively managed by management of the Demerara Harbour Bridge Corporation. Sir, production of asphalt at 31st of October, 2018 stood at 23,067 metric tons as against 23,735 metric tons for corresponding period in 2017, a decrease of 2.8% in reduction. Further, revenue generation for same periods under review were as follows, for 2018 - \$748.4 million, while expending \$672.2 million as against \$891.5 million and expending \$778 million.

Central Government continues to give the necessary support to the Hinterland Electrification Inc., whose mandate is to ensure that electricity systems are established across the hinterland regions,

so as to improve systems operations. To ensure continuity, the support for socio-economic development plan, 2018 the Government allocated the sum of \$233.5 million for the implementation of the following projects: Installation of a 400 kilowatts Solar PV Farm at Mabaruma, Region 1, installation of metal lattice tower to support electricity distribution lines across the Port Kaituma River - \$20 million, extension of the distribution network at Mocomoco and residents within the proximity of the rodeo ground in Region 9, an upgrade distribution for the two will cost \$20 million.

In keeping with the Green State Initiative, under the sustainable energy programme, the Government of Guyana received budgetary support from the Inter-American Development/Grant Facility (IDB/GF) grant funded which realised the implementation of the following projects, installation of micro-grid PV systems in the following ten hinterland communities: Region 1 - Yarikita and Hotoquai, Region 2 - Akawini, Bethany and Kabakaburi, Region 7 - Chinowieng and Philippi, Region 8 - Monkey Mountain and Kurukabaru, and Region 9 - Achiwuib; conducting of geo-technical studies at the Mocomoco hydropower site. Public awareness campaign to promote the benefits of renewable energy and energy efficiency.

The sum of \$159M has been provided for in Budget 2019, the following projects are likely to be effective: Network Expansion to residents within commercial zones in Lethem. This will cost us \$20 million; relocation of network in Lethem to facilitate road expansion, this will cost us another \$35 million.

Maintenance and rehabilitation of hinterland airstrips remains a high priority on Government's agenda. Our government understands the importance of having access to ensuring the provision of goods and services to the hinterland communities and the fact that our Indigenous brothers and sisters along with members of the business community depend on air travel into their respective communities. To this end, Government has provided in Budget 2018 the total sum of \$250 million and the following airstrips were done - Bemichi and Kamana.

For 2019, a total sum of \$2 billion has been allocated for works to be done on the following hinterland airstrips: Port Kaituma - \$50 million and Philippi - \$50 million. To allow for night flights, the sum of \$17 million has been allocated for the procurement of light-emitting diode (LED) lights and charging ports for the following airstrips: Mabaruma, Port Kaituma, Bemichi and Mahdia. Also

\$184 million has been provided in Budget 2018 for the rehabilitation of the Lethem Aerodromes.

In conclusion, while the opposite side, with every word spoken, may try to discredit this APNU/AFC Government, let it be known that Budget 2019, crafted under the theme, *Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities for the Good Life*, is a people's budget and caters for all Guyanese. While many states in the world and right here in the Caribbean region are trying to grapple with the uncertainty of their future, our path here in Guyana remains on the increasing growth trajectory and this budget, as all others presented by our Government, is preparing Guyana for the endless opportunities and possibilities that will come with the expansion in the oil and gas sector.

For all the doubters and naysayers, false witnesses, empty-words people, I will close with the words of the outgoing United States Ambassador Mr. Perry Holloway.

“The resources that Guyana will accrue from oil and gas estimated to be about 300 times its current gross domestic product. This is gigantic. You will be the richest country in the hemisphere and could be the richest in the world on a per capita basis.”

With this being said, I would like to commend Budget 2019 to this House for its passage.

May God richly bless us all. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have reached the stage where we should take the suspension. Sitting is suspended and we will return at twenty minutes after one o' clock.

Sitting suspended at 12. 19 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1. 25 p.m.

Ms. Chandarpal: I join with all of the other Hon. Members who spoke before in thanking the staff of the Ministry of Finance, and other Ministries and agencies, who worked diligently in providing the information needed to craft Budget 2019, which is the penultimate budget of this Government.

I have never heard such a lengthy presentation before and I must congratulate the Minister for his stamina in doing so. Unfortunately, Minister, while the presentation was lengthy it was short in

addressing some of the most pressing issues that are presently affecting the country. Considerable time was spent on providing a framework on what the Government intends to do in the years ahead, but the most repetitive words were “we will”. It reminds me a lot of those conferences where considerable time is spent on coming up with the right words and phrases for the outcome documents, but implementation never happens.

As I read the speech, my mind raced back to the time when the National Development Strategy was being crafted. There was euphoria from all those who were involved in the process, because it provided an opportunity for all Guyanese, from all walks of life, to participate in a process that was intended to put Guyana on the developmental path. We all want the best for Guyana, and we all want to see the transformation of our country.

This desire predates us and perhaps it is opportune to remind ourselves of the early 1950s when our nationalist leaders crafted their manifesto for the election of 1953. That vision and developmental thrust frightened our colonial masters so badly that they felt compelled to remove the democratically elected representatives of the people and installed an interim government hand-picked by the then powers that be. In essence, the desire to develop Guyana is more than half a century ago.

All the lofty measures, which were referred to, are close to our hearts. Both parties in power have sought to improve and enhance the landscape of our country based on their respective vision and priority. One of the Hon. Members of the Government benches asked the question, “How come we, the opposition, do not see anything positive in the budget?” My response to him is that all those policies and measures which benefit the working people and the poor are always welcomed. There is no need to rehash those. It is on that note that I wish to remind the Minister of Finance for his memory lapse in not remembering that more than 7,500 workers who were put on the breadline.

Nothing was said about what the Government intends to do for those whose services were brought to an end. Nothing was said about any initiative by the Government to help those workers. Instead some of the honourable Members on the Government side treat the matter as if it is a big joke. I know the mouth is muzzled by the food it eats, but all those who are on the breadline has families

and bills to take care. It is not a laughing matter, but one that must be treated with a matter of urgency.

The manner in which these workers were treated by the Government and their supporters will not be forgotten, especially when they came to picket the Parliament - it so happens that there is a picket, right now – when they were mocked, harassed and cursed out by the Government organised counter picket. They did not come to seek a handout. They were here requesting their severance which they worked hard for. As we speak, while we heard that the severance will be given, as far as we know, it still has not been given because it has been embroiled in some other matters.

The end of year outcome 2017, which was issued on the 12th April, 2018, referred to the annual real GDP rates by sector. The sugar, rice and bauxite sectors are all critical sectors. No matter what we envisage for the future, the reality is that our economy is still dependent on these three sectors.

1.31 p.m.

They are important historically and at the present moment. There is something important that we must never forget. The abundance of food in our markets is possible because of those who are working in very difficult conditions, in the sun, rain and mud to make it possible. Their hard work speaks for itself and so does their contribution to our economy. Those who look down on them with disdain must be reminded of the saying, “from the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread.”

I wish to turn my attention to the much touted mantra of the coalition Government on accountability and good governance. I believe that they have already forgotten what they said they will do and I just need to jolt their memory a little. The section of your manifesto on good governance states:

“To defend and increase the civil liberties of our people and regulate government’s intervention in political, economic and social issues affecting the people.

To build institutions to eliminate corruption and government waste and improve fairness in the distribution of wealth of the nation.

To ensure that every citizen has equitable access to the resources of the state and the national decision-making process in keeping with Article 13 of our Constitution.”

Minister, I give you credit for the setting up of the Public Procurement Commission. What causes great concern, however, is the great number of corrupt practices and transactions that are going on. I just wish to refer to several of these which were pointed out on page 4 of the Auditor General's report for the fiscal year which ended in December, 2017. He drew our attention to the vacancies within the region, in which he said:

“An analysis of the employment details for Regions 1 to 10 revealed that the Public Service Commission Staff Vacancy Circular, No.2 of 2017, had advertised for a total of 323 vacancies. These staff vacancies included critical posts such as two Regional Health Officers, one Regional Education Officer, three Chief Accountants, four Accountants, four Senior Personnel Officers and six Procurement Officers, among others.”

On the 19 matters highlighted in the Auditor General's report, most were related to the regions. The question is: Why these vacancies were not filled, since these were necessary for checks and balances. Your guess is as good as mine.

Then there is the \$500 million which was expended on the D'Urban Park rehabilitation. According to the report, six payments were made by the relevant Ministry to Homestretch Development Inc. (HDI). However, only documents indicating HDI creditors and Government's proposed payment allocation to the creditors were attached to the payment vouchers.

The Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) is another agency that was mentioned in the report. The report states that a mere 17% of the 105,522 self-employed persons filed income tax returns totalling \$4.9 billion. This represents non-compliance by 83% of the 87,171 of taxpayers in this category.

Another important issue, which was referred to, is the employment cost. It was pointed out that employment cost appeared to have been overbudgeted for in 2017. In this regard, nine out of the ten administrative regions' expenditure amounted to \$14.412 billion for 11,652 staff. According to the national estimate, the total funds available under employment cost totalled \$14.671 billion for a total staff complement of 10,836. This represents 814 staff more than what was budgeted for and \$258.499 million under the budgeted expenditure.

Public account statement refers to the shortfall in expenditure. It is stated that there is was a shortfall of expenditure totalling \$15.650 billion of which \$9.202 billion was for capital expenditure and \$6.448 billion was for current expenditure. The shortfall in capital expenditure was attributed primarily to lower execution rate of many major foreign funded projects, whilst the shortfall of current expenditure was mainly due to unspent allocations of \$1.655 billion, \$1.33 billion and \$1.008 billion under the Ministry of Social Protection and the Ministry of Education and the public debt for servicing of loans respectively.

With respect to follow-up actions on the implementation, 602 recommendations were made in the 2016 Audit Report. Each recommendation was analysed to determine what action, if any, was taken by the respective accounting officers. At the time of reporting, 178 recommendations, or 30%, were partially implemented, while 174, or 28%, of the recommendations were not implemented. The Auditor General concluded his observation with the following statement:

“Overall, I am concern with the lack of action towards the implementation of these recommendations since, 58% of the recommendations have not been fully implemented. In addition, in many instances, recommendations are repeated each year without appropriate action and as a result weaknesses and issues that impacted negatively on Government’s governance and accountability mechanisms continue to occur. Once again, I encourage the Government, through the Ministry of Finance, the Accountant General’s Department and the respective heads of the Budget Agencies to take appropriate actions and put measures in place to address the recommendations made in my prior report and this year as well.”

We also heard about the 54-page feasibility study which was done by a hand-picked contractor for the tune of \$150 million, which costed \$2.5 million per page, which ultimately ended up in the wastepaper basket. We heard about corruption in book distribution, the school feeding programme and the \$138 million which was spent on gas and which could not be accounted for.

The opening batsman of the PPP/C on the economy provided very useful information when he reminded us that the Government had spent more than \$1 trillion since assuming office. He provided statistics to show that large portions of the Government expenditure were channelled into areas that do not stimulate economic growth or do not improve the well-being of the population.

Under the caption, where is the money going? I want to refer to employment cost. For example, from 2014 to 2019, since taking office in 2014, employment cost has increased by more than \$28.9 billion or 69%. In 2019, of the total increase in Government's expenditure, which is pegged at \$30 billion, employment cost represents 39%.

Under field materials, this line item has seen a 62% in allocation or \$709 million since 2014; under print and non-print, this line item has also seen a 53% or \$614 million increase in allocation since 2014; under fuel and lubricant, this allocation item has increased by more than \$561 million or 25% since 2014; rental of building, more than 104% or \$828 million since 2014. In other words, Government is about to rent twice the amount of buildings in 2019 when compared to 2014. Under maintenance of buildings, allocation has increased by more 78% or \$1.6 billion since 2014.

I wish to continue the list to show that in the case of local travel and subsistence, this line item, has seen a 71% or \$1.5 billion increase in allocation since 2014; other transport and travel, by more than 60% or \$523 million; on telephone charges, 51% or \$278 million since 2014; under security, we have seen the increase in allocation by more than 84% or \$2.6 billion since 2014. Critically to note, personal bodyguards for Ministers are paid under this line item. I want to ask, almost all these people are honourable security personal. I wonder who they are afraid of. Then, under national and other event, this line item has seen 141% or \$676 million increase in allocation since 2014. We are noting also the additional \$350 million that is set aside for the Golden Jubilee Celebration. In total, approximately, \$603 million is set aside for the celebration in 2019. I hope he do not have another D'Urban Park fiasco. Under dietary, this line item has seen 58% or \$2.1 billion increase in allocation since 2014. Meals, refreshments for the Ministers and other senior staff are usually funded under this line item. I wonder how they could not find the money to bail out Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) and to pay the sugar workers. Let us continue.

Another critical issue that I wish to draw to attention is that of social cohesion. On page 29 of the budget speech, the Minister of Finance referred to social cohesion, and I wish to quote what he said in light of recent events:

“...before taking office, this Administration recognised the less-than satisfactory state of affairs with respect to cultural and ethnic tension in this land of six peoples. This is why we have continually supported a national drive for improved social cohesion and relations

amongst our citizens. It is incumbent on us to lead the way towards realising a society that is more cohesive...”

Very important words. We are also reminded of the objective of the social cohesion as reflected in the estimates of the public sector.

1.46 p.m.

What does it say? The message by the Hon. Minister of Social Cohesion, Dr. George Norton, on the occasion of Chinese Arrival Day 2017 states, it is to foster...

“...Guyana where diversities are embraced, conflicts are resolved, networks and collaboration with stakeholders strengthened and decision-making processes result in equal opportunities ... for all.”

I wish to reiterate the last words, “...equal opportunities for all.” They sound very pleasing to the ears, but the events which have occurred from day one of the swearing in of the President to this day, have been the complete opposite. The sentiments expressed by two senior Government leaders publicly, point to the intolerance and failure to remember that we are a plural society. From the bottom to the top of the employment ladder, the administration has unleashed its campaign of discrimination, targeting tenure, benefits and allowances of some persons who were employed in the public service.

I have looked at the three indicators of the social cohesion division and one speaks to peaceful co-existence within and across communities. My question to all of you honourable men and women in this National Assembly: How can we have peaceful co-existence in the face of blatant discrimination?

I have perused the budgets agencies. Within the Ministry of the Presidency they are as follows: Social Cohesion, Cultural Preservation and Conservation and the Department of Culture, Youth and Sport. The total sum that is being requested is \$4.2 billion. One hundred and fifty-eight contract workers are expected to be employed within these four agencies, while Policy Development and Administration, has a total of 217 contract employees and the sum being sought is \$2.5 billion. The Ministry of the Presidency alone has 475 contract workers. When in Opposition, these Hon. Members were so much against contract workers and now, one Ministry

alone has so many. The question I wish to posit is whether these positions were chosen by the method as espoused by a high-level Government official.

I have perused the objective of Cultural Preservation and Conservation. Recognising that we have a diverse population with different cultures. I would like to know whether the approach was an inclusive one and whether all ethnic groups were considered.

Similarly, I have looked at the objectives of the agency of youth and would like to know whether urban and rural communities were treated alike and if all regions and communities benefitted. Travelling across the country there is a paucity of sports activities. I am not sure that the grounds are even maintained regularly. I would like to know how many grounds benefitted from the resources that were allocated to that department and whether those activities were held.

When the Ministry of Social Cohesion was set up, we cautioned this National Assembly that it was usurping the work of the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC). This seems to be another ploy to create more jobs and benefits for friends of the party, similar, to what the Ministry of National Mobilisation did. It seems to me that the Ministry of the Presidency has taken over that role. If what I am saying is inaccurate, I wish to be proven incorrect with the provision of the information to show that it is not so.

We cannot have social cohesion in our society if all ethnic groups' traditions and cultures are not considered equally. Numerous building blocks lead to a strong foundation. I know the Minister has been trying his level best, but when other Members of Government throw several spanners in the work, he will have a much more difficult time. It is like one step forward and several steps backward.

I wish to address the promise made by the coalition Government to restore law and order. Criminal activities have seemingly increased. Homes and premises are constantly under threat from bicycle and motor cycle gangs. Citizens are fed up with this scourge of lawlessness. The airline debacle and the recent occurrence at an international conference make us look bad as a people. It is so shameful that this behaviour is embraced by those who are supposed to be the first responders in emergency situations.

We have a number of security experts in the Government and I am pretty sure they can deal with the problem if they want to. In the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change's (APNU/AFC's) coalition manifesto, under the section dealing with crime, it was stated that the Government will confront serious crime, arrest the spread of organised gangs, and improve public and personal security. The question the people are asking is what the Government is doing to bring an end to this criminality which has escalated. Maybe, we should hold a referendum and ask the citizens how they feel about the crime situation.

Under housing, I have listened with amazement as the Minister with responsibility for Housing reported on her stewardship of the housing sector. I can see why the Ministry of Housing was closed down in the early 1980's. The policy reminds me of the saying, "*A Cadillac lifestyle in a donkey cart economy.*" I wish to remind the Minister that the period which was referred to, until 1993 there was no policy in place for land or Housing. It was the People's Progressive Party/Civic, under the stewardship of the late President Jagan that launched the initiative to provide land for those who were desirous of building a home.

I wish to digress a little to refer to history and to show consistency in the policy of the PPP/C Government as it pertains to housing. Ms. Janet Jagan, who held the portfolio of the Minister of Labour, Health and Housing, initiated Operation Housing during the PPP/C tenure in office from 1957 to 1961. Self-help houses, council houses for rent in East and West Ruimveldt, Laing Avenue, La Penitence, and the development of the residential housing area at Wismar, are but a few of the initiatives taken. Much was said about the progress in the housing sector of the PPP/C Government. The transformation, really and truly Hon. Members, is very clear for all to see if they want to.

The housing programme which the Government has adopted is ineffective since only a few persons are benefitting. Corruption, nepotism, and cronyism, will be the order of the day as it was in the past under the People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R) Government.

The Minister of Finance, in his budget presentation, referred to the projected growth of over 30% from all sectors. It is therefore important at this time, to recognise the foresight of former President Ms. Jagan, when she signed the Petroleum Prospective Licence. Budget 2019, is premised on all

dividends. All that promise of what would be made possible because of it, is a testimony to the PPP/C's transformation vision for developing the industry.

Minister, in page 19 of the Budget Speech, you alluded to the potential benefits of the oil money. I wish to quote a section of what you said in your preamble to the agenda for 2019.

“As much as the highly anticipated oil revenues will make many of these dreams possible, they will not be reachable if our institutions and our systems continue to operate with high degrees of inefficiency. It is the strength of our institutions and systems across every single sector that will determine the effectiveness of our programmes and service delivery to our people. While our Government will make additional resources available, this will be done with due diligence, care and regard for their value, scarcity and opportunity cost.”

It is a very important observation Minister, but you will need to ensure that the present discriminatory practice comes to an end, so that all Guyanese will get jobs based on their qualifications and not their party cards or affiliation. This dream that you presented can only materialise when all sections of the country can benefit from the anticipated oil wealth. People are still amazed when we talk about diversity of our country, but, yet, when we go to most Government departments, some groups are invisible. This does not auger well for cohesion in Guyana. This has to change if we truly want peace and cohesion. [Mr. Ramjattan: *[Inaudible]* want the record.] You shut your mouth.

Ms. Chandarpal: Hon. Member, you have five minutes remaining.

Ms. Chandarpal: In an economy where blue collar jobs are hard to come by, especially because of the decline in some sectors, more persons will be turning to the Government sector for white collar jobs. Competition for jobs will become more intense. The children of workers, farmers, miners, and labourers are all desirous of having a decent job. They want to serve their country and have a good life. Job creation in this regard, is a must. It therefore baffles the mind, when instead of creating more jobs, we are making people redundant. Minister, the dream that you referred to will only materialise for your supporters as espoused by your senior functionary. It is incumbent, therefore, to remind your party and Government of the mandate and promise that they made with respect to Constitutional Reform within a system of participatory democracy.

Member of Parliament (MP), Mr. Carrington, spoke about the need for unity and for us to work together. To the Hon. Member, I wish to state that the PPP has always recognised this need since it is the only way that we can move this country forward. For us in the PPP, national unity and cooperation have been the hallmark of our governance structure. I wish to remind you of the period from 1961 to 1964, when the PPP/C Government, had invited Mr. Burnham of the PNC/R to join in the unity Government. That letter was not even acknowledged by Mr. Burnham. Again, in the 1980s, when the PNC/R was in office through rigged elections, the PPP/C offered critical support when the country was under threat. Similarly, in 1990, in preparation for the 1992 Elections, the PPP/C once again took up the issue of a united Government. So, Mr. Carrington, Guyana can only move forward in a positive direction when the people of this country, through their respective leaders and parties are prepared to work for the good. From what I have said, you know that we took the leadership in that regard, where unity is concerned.

The ethnic and political insecurities that come to the floor from time to time, must be confronted. It is my considered view that this be put on the front burner in anticipation of oil revenues...

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

Ms. Chandarpal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The ethnic and political insecurities that come to the floor from time to time, must be confronted. It is my considered view that this be put on the front burner in anticipation of oil revenues being a catalyst for rapid economic development. The people deserve policies that are both inclusive and equitable. The Minister has made a lot of promises, unfortunately, he has not dealt with the most pressing issues confronting the country at this moment. Therefore, I cannot support the budget as presented by the Minister of Finance.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Minister of Social Cohesion with responsibility for Culture, Youth and Sport [Dr. Norton]: Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members of this House, congratulations to the Hon. Member, Mr. Winston De Costa Jordan, Minister of Finance, for preparing a well thought out budget under the theme: *“Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities for The Good Life.”* I submit that Budget 2019 will keep us on that pathway of change and transformation, which started with Budget 2015.

This is our fifth budget in 41 months. This is a true demonstration of the high level of commitment, financial prudence and an understanding of what is required at the local, municipal, regional, national, and international levels to take Guyana forward. Our country is on a trajectory of progress of progress and development as never seen before.

2.01 p.m.

We will continue to see changes for the good of Guyana, in spite of the troubling economic and social indicators this coalition Government inherited. We will scale every hurdle, we will ride every wave and roll with every punch, to continue to develop this country for the benefit of every single Guyanese.

The allocations in this budget will enable the implementation of programmes and initiatives to empower citizens of this country to contribute to their own development and, by extension, to national development. We are creating opportunities for Guyanese, irrespective of our diversities, to live and prosper in a society characterised by mutual respect, trust, acceptance and oneness.

I vow, that this Government will do nothing to propagate a culture of 'divide and rule'. It is our mandate to use the mechanisms established within the Department of Social Cohesion Culture, Youth and Sport to unite the people of Guyana so that we all can prosper. A cohesive society is the foundation for improving quality of life, and by extension, the enjoyment of the 'good life'.

This commitment is evident in training programmes that the Department of Social Cohesion has pursued since its establishment in 2015. To this end, we have conducted 14 intensive two-day Diversity Education and Inclusion training, where 532 persons across the country benefitted. Further to this Sir, as a prerequisite to this training is sensitisation where we would have conducted 30 sessions and over 2,400 persons benefitted countrywide.

The added responsibilities that have come with the Department of Culture, Youth and Sport under my purview, have given us the opportunity to see how effective culture, sport and young people are, when integrated in the social cohesion and harmony processes.

It is unfortunate that one Hon. Member on the other side of the House describes social cohesion as a mockery. The Oxford Dictionary described 'mockery' as an absurd or worthless version of something that happened. We had a complaint of an eight-year-old athlete being prevented from

participating in the National School Athletics Championship. For the purpose of this honourable House, I have a memo from the Secretary of the Guyana Teachers' Union (GTU), stating that the Sports Secretariat was approached on the day of the event seeking to have that particular child added to the list because that child is a relative of a certain political party in Parliament. It is unfortunate, but these championships are governed by rules. As a matter of fact, this athlete was not part of the list that was submitted by District Two. Just make it clear, that list is here all for the House to see.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) did help us for some time in Guyana and supported us and a blue print for the 2017-2021 period to foster social cohesion here in Guyana. The Department is seeing a greater willingness to embrace differences at the level of the citizenry. We will continue along the pathway to ensure that the people of Guyana, in all the regions, are given the opportunity to contribute to the development, while living in peace and harmony. I just want to refer to another athlete, who is not necessarily from Region 4, but he is from Region 1. I refer to champion Ricky Singh, who was brought down to Region 4 in order for him to excel because that is the policy of this Government, of the Department, to give him the best opportunity. Why would we prevent some athletes from participating, if they are qualified to do so?

We realise that cohesion and harmony will not be achieved overnight. Guyana is still healing, even though some persons think that the three years is equivalent to 23 years and that we should have done it already. This is the reason why it is regarded as a process. It would not be achieved either if the people of Guyana do not have an appreciation for our differences. It is against this background that the Ministry deepened the regional training in diversity education in an Inclusion Workshops, which commenced in October 2016. We have also introduced training in Conflict Management and negotiation at the community level.

Training offered through the Department is also designed to facilitate the development of cross-country understanding and help participants to learn about changes and challenges that are associated with our diverse nation.

These workshops are intended to promote and encourage respect for other cultures, by seeking to break down stereotypes, and advocate for good relations within and across communities. We have

taken this training to all the regions of Guyana. The most recent was held in the Parika Façade area in collaboration with the Community Development Councillor just a few weeks ago.

Last year the Department undertook a Regional Exchange Programme, targeting 166 Wapishana and Macushi young people from 23 South Central communities, from 13th -20th August, in Region 9. Young people from – Semonie, Yupukari, Fly Hill, Quatata, Kaicumbay, Shulinab, Quota, Katoka, Parishara and Shiriri for my good friend over there, for all of them to participate.

Because of the response to this initiative, this year during the period 14th 25th August, we repeated this in Region 2. Young people from all nine of the indigenous communities, including Mainstay/Whyaka, from Red Village, Lima Sands and the coast were in attendance. The aim was to expose Guyana's youthful population to the experiences of living, learning skills for life and working together on community projects, and for the good of all. In 2019, this activity is schedule to be held in Region 8 in the village of Kato.

This is a part of the reason why this Department has been established. It had not plucked out of the air. In spite of the fact that external efforts were offered to this country since early 2009, yet it was only in 2015 that it was taken seriously and made into a Ministry. Anyone who has not seen it, is not looking for it. We will continue to undertake such initiatives using our 2019 allocation. With support from corporate Guyana. I am extremely confident that we are on the right path to achieving a cohesive nation.

The Department of Social Cohesion, enabled by Culture, Youth and Sport, will take Guyana to the place where we would be seen as a model for peaceful co-existence, strengthened ties and relations at the community and national levels, where Guyanese display a willingness to contribute to nation building, irrespective of our differences.

The year 2019 would see the Department having a greater role in the schools. We have had collaborative efforts with the Ministry of Education and a number of teachers were trained over the August period to understand differences in order to operate in a more cohesive sensitive manner in the classrooms.

The Department of Social Cohesion wants students to understand the value of being good citizens. The aim is to teach them ways of expressing love, showing respect and imparting knowledge about

our multi-ethnic society and contributions made by our diverse groups. Our overarching objective is to nurture a cadre of children and young people who would have positive attitudes and behaviours to differences.

I can boast today that the Department of Social Cohesion has gone to all 10 administrative regions of Guyana. Our work is not only on the coastland. We have interfaced with the indigenous people at Monkey Mountain, Kamarang, Kato, Nappi, Parishara, Kumu and Quarrie villages. We have been working in Maraikobai, Kabakaburi, Phillipai from the Capoey River and from Amakokopai, to name a few. We go where Guyanese are, because it is my philosophy as Minister of Social Cohesion with responsibility for Culture, Youth and Sport that geographic locations must not be a deterrent to cohesion and integration.

Government's commitment to enhancing the lives of Guyanese through sports is clear and distinct within the sports sector. The aim is to promote and develop competitive and recreational sports across all regions of Guyana. In 2018, the sports movement, partner sectors, institutions, communities, corporate Guyana, athletes, coaches, trainers, administrators and spectators benefitted from planned projects and programmes which positively contributed to citizens, coast land and hinterland.

Of note is the progress made in the multi-year, phased Synthetic Tracks Project. A capital project geared to enhance athletic competitiveness in the track and field disciplines. The project is in a three-phase, with groundwork for the two new synthetic surfaces tendered, contracted and activated in the Regions 6 and 10, areas in Guyana that have and will continue to experience significant benefits for this investment.

Herein, we must note the transformative impact on citizens, whose anticipation and readiness to respond to employment opportunities is empowering. Upgrades in community aesthetics, businesses and entrepreneurial possibilities confirm that sports and sports development is a catalyst for income generation, personally, professionally and at the national level.

Eleven million dollars was spent on upgrades to existing facilities also completed in 2018, with two new hardcourts outfitted with lights, added to the National Gymnasium, for futsal and basketball. Additional amenities, such as paving and hand-bars, were added to accommodate persons with disabilities.

In 2018, \$9 million was spent on several grounds across Guyana which were outfitted with floodlights to facilitate longer time playing. Such areas as the Matakai sub-region in Region 1, at Waramadong in Region 7, Aranaputa Valley in Region 9, Liverpool in Region 6, Paradise and Cotton Tree in Region 5, Beterverwagting, North Ruimveldt and South Sophia in Region 4 and Den Amstel in Region 3.

2.16 p.m.

Yet, one Member of the Opposition described these grounds as having long grasses and infested with snakes. In providing safe space for our citizens to execute recreational, competitive and health related activities aimed at promoting healthy lifestyles, a total of \$70 million was spent to enhance grounds across Guyana. Ground-enhancement will continue within the sport development scheme, including the establishment of a National Standard for Sport Grounds that will facilitate the promotion of structured sports programmes to aid and complement the work being done under the Ground Enhancement Programme. I wish to confirm to the National Assembly that, administratively and organisationally, the Government has honoured its pledge and commitment to the people of Guyana on the matter of sports policy.

The release of the National Sports Policy in draft, honours the administrative principled position on good governance, inviting citizens to contribute to dialogue, projections and the outcome of sports in Guyana, including people from the diaspora, serving as an information source, guidance tool and rallying points for discussion with and amongst stakeholders, national association, athletes, communities and academic institutions. The policy provides the basis for a structured pathway towards incentives, press coverage, international exposure and sports tourism. Only yesterday we remembered a Member of the Opposition calling for sports tourism. They only had to wait to hear about it; as well as issues of clean sports and anti-doping education. Guyana remains World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) compliant.

Fundamentally, the National Sports Policy is an implementation priority for the sector in 2019, programmatically consisting of outreaches, sensitisation sessions, seminars, workshops and wider circulation of documents, including brochures, flyers and, posters. National Sports Policy consultations and sensitisation initiatives will continue towards further growth and development of the sports sector.

Thus far, there are tangible and intangible transformative impacts in communities and institutions. Noteworthy are the initiatives in 2018, in the Anti-Sexual Harassment Outreaches conducted, rising awareness against the perpetration of this behaviour in and out sports. Sports of myriad forms are active in the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. The year 2018 was filled with tournaments in athletics, basketball, boxing, cycling, football, martial arts, rugby, table tennis and swimming. Archery emerged on the national sporting landscape and was included in its roster of activities. The first Level 1 Archery Coaching Course was held in Guyana where 21 participants from Regions 1, 4, 7, 8 and 9 received international certification.

Across the nation, our athletes stepped up to represent their teams, and through this, Guyana re-emerged as a sports-forward country. Workshops and specialised training programmes for teachers and community sports persons are frequently executed so as to bring the best practices to persons working in the various disciplines.

Of significance is the attention being paid to our people with disabilities. The Swim Meet conducted at Colgrain Pool saw a total of 84 athletes competing. Additionally, the Inaugural Special Schools games brought together 635 students and teachers from across the country to participate in three days of competitive indoor and outdoor activities, namely athletics, dominoes for the blind, cricket, futsal, swimming and table tennis.

Capacity building within the Department has been significant as well, with the employ of a Sports Psychologist and a Sports Physiotherapist, as well as certified football and boxing coaches assigned to Regions 1, 6, 7, 8 and 9 to boost the range of services available to sports-inclined citizens. As a staff development initiative, additional training will be facilitated to equip coaches and sports organisers with contemporary methods to operate proficiently within their practice.

The nation's vibrant sports culture was most exceptionally exemplified with a showpiece of global sports, where Guyana's hosting of the International Cricket Council (ICC) World Women's T20 'Stand Alone' Cricket Tournament while thrilling, was indicative of a patriotic, hospitable and prosperous people.

Organisationally, the Government facilitated a process which allowed the sports movement, athletes and the national and global spectator audience the opportunity to partake of and participate in something truly historic for sports in Guyana, addressing gender parity, the woman's role in

sports and facility upgrades. The memories garnered during the associated school visits by the participating teams will remain with the students, teachers and visiting cricketers throughout their lives.

In 2019, sports in Guyana will see an emphasis on improved maintenance, services and security at all national sports facilities, concentrated programmes and initiatives in schools and communities and the provision of logistical and administrative support to sports associations, federations, individuals and teams.

I must refer to this particular area where a Member of the Opposition described the sports institution as being in the state of a “white elephant” by this administration. I want to address the “white elephants” that the Member referred to. The Guyana National Stadium for instance - the Member spoke of that being a world class facility. Today, it has become a “white elephant”. That facility could never have hosted the World Cup cricket that we just had – International Cricket Council (ICC) World Women’s T20 “Stand Alone” Cricket Tournament because it was unfit. We had to fit it with a play screen before that could have happened. Yet, it was described as a world class facility. While the Member wants to boast the facility as being world class, I would like to inform him that the facility fell short of world class standard. It was this Government that started to equip these facilities and to bring them to international standards, to bring them to the so-called world class that they were referred to.

The Guyana National Stadium, Providence has just installed its electronic replay screen which was needed to host the ICC World Cup team. The stadium, in a few weeks, will be fully wi-fi, from the grass mound to the all the stands. Now the stadium is world class and can now hosts ICC events and compete for any such events to be hosted. It could not have done that before.

We referred to the National Aquatic Centre. It is really referred to as the “national a-cracktic centre” because it is all cracked up. The bottom of the pool is cracked. The building is cracked from the bad work and poor construction. The main building has shifted 17 inches which would require constant maintenance to the plumbing and replacement of fittings and constant replacement of pipes. Despite all of this, it is this Government that has now brought this facility to international standards with the installation of electronic touch pads and electronic display board which means any International Federation, recognised by the International Olympic Committee for

Administrating international competition in the water sport (FINA) regional events could now be hosted here in Guyana.

The National Synthetic Track – how could you describe this as a world class opportunity? I want to use this opportunity to show what was used as the synthetic material, to what was supposed to be used, in what we would refer to as a first-class likelihood ... It has been used only two years so far by the schools. We have over \$60 million for the construction of the third stand to bring the Synthetic Track to international standards.

The poor septic system had to be upgraded by this Government. When the Member spoke of the “white elephant”, one has to wonder which facility the Member is speaking about. Certainly, he cannot be speaking of the Leonora Track and Field Centre which has just hosted, for the second consecutive year, the National School Track and Field Meet, which saw over 1,500 students participating from 15 school districts, with over 4,000 fans on a daily basis. This is what this administration has in a world class state.

For the three consecutive years of the Aliann Pompey Invitational, I say this because not so long ago, one of the Members of the Opposition asked for sports tourism. I just want to mention some of the countries that participated in that Aliann Pompey Invitational. For instance, we had Cuba, Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, the United States Virgin Islands, the United States of America (USA), Nigeria, Liberia, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Suriname, Canada, St. Vincent... *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, please reclaim your seat. Hon. Members, I am not quite sure if there is an objective behind Members shouting across the hall.

[Interruption]

Would the Hon. Member, Mr. Neendkumar stand? You are disrupting the proceedings of this House. If you continue in that way, then you would not be allowed to remain there. You will decide. Have a seat.

Mr. Neendkumar: Mr. Speaker, both sides...

Mr. Speaker: Please recover your seat.

Mr. Neendkumar: Both sides, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Proceed, Hon. Minister.

Dr. Norton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I continue with the countries that visited Guyana. We had Bahamas, St. Kitts, Ireland, Antigua, Haiti and Bermuda. It is not only the countries that came, at those Meets, we saw World and Olympic champions – Kim Collins of St. Kitts and Nevis; Jonielle Smith of Jamaica; and our very own Troy Doris, Winston George, Chantoba Bright, Natisha Rupert, to name a few. [*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

The football field at Leonora is now International Football Federation/Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football (FIFA/CONCACAF) and Caribbean Football Union (CFU) certified which means it can now host any regional or international tournament. We have seen this year the games being hosted there. The CFU Women's Under 17 and Lady Jaguars Senior. The Leonora Centre hosted for the first in Guyana's history, the South American under 20 Championships Track and Field, where 19 countries came here and participated.

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

2.31 p.m.

Dr. Norton: The under-23 South American Championship would be hosted here, this year. The Hon. Member did say, in no uncertain terms, that this Administration destroyed the Inter-Guiana Games (IGG), and I take this opportunity to close because I did my research on the Inter-Guyana Games. Gone are those days, under the People Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C), when the IGG was a cash cow for the former Director of Sports. Our athletes never received their full stipend and were accommodated at Star Dust Hotel, a famous short time hotel in the army base, while the Director of Sport and his daughter stayed at a five-star hotel. Gone are the days when athletes were only given US\$10 per day and not the full amount, as was budgeted for in the IGG. Gone are those days like the year our athletes had to protest and refuse to stay at the army base. Gone are those days when the National Sports Commission's (NSC) bus was used to transport vehicles' spare parts for the former Director, his family and his friends. Gone are those days when our cycling

team had to pool their moneys together to stay in a hotel and if they could not find the funds, they had to sleep on benches, desks or floor.

In 2016, Guyana hosted the Inter-Guiana Games, and, for the first time, our athletes were all encamped at a hotel in the city before and during all of the games. The Surinamese athletes were accommodated at the Ramada Georgetown Princess Hotel, so much so that the Surinamese officials commended Guyana and stated:

“Guyana has lifted the bars of these games.”

Suriname reciprocated, in 2017, when the games were hosted in Suriname and all Guyanese athletes and officials were accommodated at the Suriname Marriott Hotel. Thank you very much.
[Applause]

Mr. Charlie: Thank you. *Kaimen and mayarimang ongar kunaikaan iidree enituum.* In my native Wapishanan tongue, I am saying I am so happy to be here. Mr. Speaker and everyone, I bring greetings from the residents of the Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo, Region 9, and from my indigenous brothers and sisters across the length and breadth of the land of many waters.

I had listened attentively, on 26th November, to the Budget presentation which was presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston DaCosta Jordan. I, like the thousands of Guyanese across this land, could only conclude that this Budget is of perceptions. It is a Budget of unrealistic forecast and, once again, we see in *Budget 2019*, like other previous budgets, wasteful spending and extravagance.

Permit me to respond to some utterances that were made, previously, by speakers on that side of the House and I begin with the Hon. Minister of Social Cohesion. I tried to listen attentively, but unfortunately, I was not hearing very clearly what the Hon. Minister was saying because I noted that his face was buried in this speech. To the Hon. Minister, what has been the direct result of this expenditure by your department? Has sportsmen and women converted their participation in sporting activities into making a comfortable living in this country? The answer is blatantly no. To the Hon. Minister, sports success is more than recreation and buildings. It is about becoming world class athletes, and this is the way we have to move forward in showcasing Guyana’s talent on a global stage, be reminded, Hon. Minister.

Regarding my Amerindian brother, who was denied participation at the National Athletics Championship recently, I would like the Hon. Minister to investigate this incident. No Amerindian in this country should be denied. None. We, on this side, call on the Hon. Minister and the Minister of Education to launch a thorough investigation because this athlete had excelled in the categories of events in which he had participated in Region 2 and he was the champion. We would not rest until this matter is investigated. **[Members of Government: What is the child's name?]**
The name is Ravaldo Kanhai.

Kindly allow me the opportunity to thank the residents of Lethem and Region 9, as a whole, the beautiful region I represent in this honourable House, for voting, overwhelmingly, for the People Progressive Party at the recently concluded Local Government Elections, where the PPP took control of Lethem Town Council and moved our number of councillors from three out of 10 to 6 out of 10. In so doing, they rejected the poor governance and leadership of this A Partner For National Unity and Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition Government. As a matter of fact, the AFC got zero seat. While the Government has already signalled its intention to heartlessly punish councillors who voted against them, the PPP is committed to good governance and good representation in the face of any threats.

I have heard from my Colleagues on this side of the House that the Budget lacks vision. I would like to add that, it is not only the Budget that lacks vision, it is the entire Government that lacks vision. A budget is just a means by which a Government implements its vision. Imagine, three and half years in office and there is no developmental strategy. We keep making references to the Green State Development Strategy (GSDS), but a year and half is left in this APNU/AFC Government's term and the strategy is not yet completed.

One of the first things a new Government must do is outline its vision. That is first and foremost. By the time the strategy is completed, the APNU/AFC Government's tenure would be over, and the PPP, more than likely, would scrap it and create a new strategy for the better development of all Guyanese. What is funnier is that all the Hon. Members of the Government, who keep speaking about the Green State Development Strategy, if you ask them what it is and what is the plan, they are clueless, except for it being a vision of the colour green.

We have some very serious questions and challenges facing us as a nation, one of which is energy. The Government's solution is to throw more money at the problem. The Hon. Minister of Finance and the Hon. Minister of Business are just living in a *la la land*, hoping that the fairy godmother would come and present the solution to our energy problem under their pillow while they sleep day and night at the wheel. No one major renewable energy supply facility has been commissioned, but they keep saying that we are going green. The only green we are going is into the green hard guava season.

The PPP knew that hydro was the solution. We pursued the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, which would have seen our cost of energy go down to single digits, with not one penny of debt. If the APNU/AFC did not kill the project, we would have already had electricity there last year. What is worse is that the Government went into office and started off by saying that the project was criminal, only to turn around and say that the Amaila Fall Hydro Project was back on the table. The hypocrisy and deceit are real. It is just like the Marriott Hotel. They wanted to turn into a hospital. Now, many of the Government Ministers wine and dine there.

Recently, we heard there that there would be a gas to power project with ExxonMobil Corporation. Well, lo and behold, the Government has told ExxonMobil Corporation to put a hold on the feasibility study for that very project. So, keep living in *la la land*, Hon. Ministers.

To Hon. Minister, Mr. Gaskin, you are also in *la la land* and you dare to talk about manufacturing when you do not have cheap and reliable energy. I wish you could come to reality. We have serious challenges, but the Government does not know how to address them or just does not care.

Let us address youth education and jobs. Firstly, thousands of kids are leaving school without the basic qualifications and there is no programme to address it. The school cash grant, while it was not enough, helped the families which were most vulnerable and the ones which needed the most help, and the APNU/AFC scrapped it with no notice or signal that the programme would have been scrapped. There was no mention of it in the flowery Manifesto either. What is the plan to address jobs for youths? Nothing. Three and a half years and the youths are unemployed.

Look at the Government. The Government does not even have any young person sitting on that side of the House. To come to a conclusion, this Government has no interest in the youth, except for GOG.

Guyana is bleeding. Guyana is suffering from the visionless APNU/AFC Coalition Government's maladministration. No area has been spared from the economic, social and infrastructural neglect by this Coalition Government. Residents living in the hinterland and riverine communities have seen not only their living standards drop but have also witnessed an assault on their dignity and rights.

Despite the PPP/C Government leaving a budget of US\$10.7 million for the Amerindian Land Titling project, not one single land title has been issued to date. There were billions under the PPP/C-established Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund (GRIF) for indigenous villages and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) development. What has happened? All we see under this Government is dismal performance. Failures.

2.46 p.m.

The 2019 National Budget is a failure, like the previous ones presented by the Coalition. The Budget failed to deliver more jobs, failed to lower the cost of living in our country, failed to cut wasteful spending, failed to cut Government extravagance, failed to focus on crime fighting, and failed to expand the social and economic infrastructure. The APNU/AFC Government has collected billions in new taxes per annum. Yet, it removed the cash grant for the nation's school children and the water and electricity subsidies for pensioners. Yet, it cannot pay the nation's teachers increased wages. Every aspect of the Guyanese life is being taxed, heavily, to support our ever-growing Government, which has more Ministers than any other cabinet in the Caribbean. More departments have been established; more advisors; more wastage and more extravagance.

Guyanese are paying more for less: less services, less healthcare and there is little or no drugs in the hospitals across the country, Hon. Minister of Public Health. Every sector of the economy - sugar, gold, rice, mining, construction, and retail trade in the Rupununi - is crumbling because of neglect, incompetence and mismanagement by those over there in the Coalition Government.

Over 30,000 jobs have been lost. The Budget speaks for itself, with no creation of jobs to get the 30,000 rehired. There are no new investments in the country because we have a Government that is myopic and visionless.

Crime is rampant in every area. No Guyanese is safe; even the Ministers are not safe. We can see two, three, four and five bodyguards opening and closing vehicle doors. They are not safe and yet the Budget does not address the security in our country.

Blatant corruption and mismanagement are costing the nation's taxpayers billions of dollars every year with no returns for them. Incompetent contract negotiations are squandering the resources of our nation.

Hinterland air travel and freight have had value added tax (VAT) added to them. The Indigenous people were robbed of their solar panels. We need answers as to where our solar panels are. We, on this side of the House, call on the Coalition Government to stop the increased massive borrowing and depletion of gold and other reserves. Stop the extravagance and wasteful spending on travel, food, rental, vehicles and other things that do not bring direct benefits to the people of Guyana.

The Indigenous people call on this Coalition Government to act now. Act now and reverse the increased tax burden on Guyanese, which sees the collection of \$60 billion more per annum. Act now and initiate new infrastructural projects, and not only complete projects and visions started under the former PPP/C Administration, for sustainable economic activity. Improve working conditions for all health workers in our country, Hon. Minister of Public Health. Rehire the 1,972 Amerindian service officers now. Fully form the village improvement plans which were developed for Amerindian communities. Do it now. Advance efforts to move the stalled Amerindian Land Titling Programme forward. Expedite the maintenance of interior roads and bridges.

I would like to touch on the presentation of the Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples Affairs, who gave a synopsis of the Hinterland Employment and Youth Service (HEYS) Programme. The Hon. Minister failed to address the unaccountability of that project, \$865 million, according to the Report of the Auditor General. The Minister alluded to the youths now being involved in cattle rearing. I was wondering if the Hon. Minister visited the Minister of Indigenous Peoples Affairs' ranch in the North Rupununi. The Minister failed to recognise that, under the PPP/C – under the tenure of Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo's presidency – we had started the President Youth Choice Initiative (PYCI). To date, the youths across the Rupununi are into cattle rearing.

After the completion of the Hon. Minister's long fairytale, I was left, like many others across here, lukewarm. There was nothing addressing the fundamental issues affecting the Amerindians across this country.

I now turn my attention to the Hon. Mr. John Adams, who spoke about equitable distribution of the bees. The Hon. Member is living in *la la land*. The Hon. Member should be the last in this Government to talk about equitable distribution.

The PPP/C call on the stubborn APNU/AFC Coalition Government to reverse the hardship measures and restore the policies that will improve the lives of the Guyanese people.

With this, I join my Colleagues on this side of the House in objecting to this Budget that will bear no fruit for the Guyanese people to eat and be satisfied. There is no way forward for the Guyanese people with this Budget. Hence, the Guyanese people will not be living the good life until the PPP returns. *[Applause]*

Ms. Wade: Tabled before this National Assembly is *Budget 2019*. It is before us for debate and passage, thereafter authorising the Government to expend these sums in the various sections in the Mahaica/ Berbice region. This region welcomes the early presentation of *Budget 2019*.

Let us commend the Hon. Minister of Finance and his hardworking team for an excellent and comprehensive National Budget, to the tune of \$300.7 billion, that was presented in this honourable House on 26th November, 2018. We owe them a deep sense of gratitude.

A country's budget must be a financial plan of what is to be done to point the economy in the right direction of this transformation that will overcome challenges and bring comfort and happiness to all its people. *Budget 2019* is pointing us in that direction. I say that it is a blessed Budget.

With the recently held Local Government Elections in Guyana - the second since this Government took office - we were able to win Region 5. We won five Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs), whereas the Opposition won four NDCs and there was one tie. I use this forum to profoundly say thank you to Guyanese for their support during that campaign. We are coming back in 2020 to win the 2020 elections.

Like in previous years, the Government expended large sums of money on drainage and irrigation. These sums went towards rehabilitation and maintenance of drains and channels, excavation of outfalls, completion of embankment and impoldering works, construction and rehabilitation of structures, sluices, roads and bridges in all 10 NDCs in Region 5.

The following is a breakdown of funds used in the 10 NDCs – accountability.

Blairmont/Gelderland expenditure to date, \$41,694,611. I want to give a few areas where we did work: upgrading works at Arnold Drive, Ithaca Road, to the tune of \$9,618,752; upgrading works at the Eddie Singh Street for \$2.5 million and construction of Pansy Street in Ithaca, \$4,855,000, just to mention a few.

Rosignol/Zeelust expenditure to date, \$115,673,026. There will be rehabilitation of Tire Shop Street at Cotton Tree Village to the tune of \$10,042,925 and extension of Yankee Dam, Rosignol, \$19,420,000, just to mention a few. I hope the Hon. Mr. Harry Gill is listening.

Bel Air/Woodlands expenditure to date, \$49,680,071. Excavation works at the No. 6 drainage canal, \$7,187,400 and construction of the first street of No. 7 Village, south of the public road, \$3 million, just to mention a few.

Bath/Woodley Park expenditure to date, \$45,101,159. Upgrading works at Cotton Tree – Bath road, \$7,786,000 and excavation and desilting of main drainage Canal in Block D of Bath, \$3 million, just to mention a few.

Union/Naarstigheid expenditure to date, \$193,393,518. We did some work there: rehabilitation works to side line dam at St. John, \$8,518,054 and general rehabilitation of Section Street, Union, south of the public road, \$7 million. This road leads to the Food for the Poor Housing Scheme. It was in a very bad state.

Seafield/Tempie expenditure to date, \$59,436,088. Rehabilitation of Eastern Side Line, south of the public road, at Litchfield, \$11,530,850; rehabilitation at the eastern side of the dam at Jacoba, \$3,159,000; construction of phase one of the NDC Office at Plantation Ross, \$3.8 million, just to mention a few. I want to say something about this NDC Office. I stood over there, in the past, and spoke about the workers needing a washroom, a simple thing like a washroom. When they are working at the NDC Office and they wanted to go to the washroom, they had to lock the office, go

home and then come back, under that previous Administration. Shame on them. Now that we have gotten in power, we have completed phase one of the new NDC Office, placed on Plantation Ross on West Coast, Berbice.

Profit/Rising Sun expenditure to date, \$44,929,388. We did works in sections of the side line dam at Paradise, south of the public road and maintenance work to streets in all of the NDCs, \$4,000,000, just to mention a few.

3.01 p.m.

The Mahaicony/Abary expenditure to date, \$102,306,107; general rehabilitation to the Abary/Dundee side line dam to the tune of \$11,607,997.

Hamlet/Chance expenditure to date, \$36,600,000. We did some renovation works at the Mortise Primary School to the tune of \$2 million; renovation works to Strath Campbell Primary School, \$2.5 million and excavation of drainage canals within the Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC), \$4 million;

Woodlands/Farm expenditure to date, \$109,756,700. We also did renovations to the eastern side line dam at Zealand, East Coast Demerara (ECD) to the tune of \$5,551,000; rehabilitation of the eastern dam of the Fair Weather road, Bygeval and Vevay, Mahaica/Berbice to the tune of \$11.5 million. The kids there are very happy. Gone are the days when they have to hold their footwear in their hands to go to school from that area. The 'good life'.

The total sum expended to date in all 10 NDCs is \$798,670,668. Even the non-support of the Opposition in the region will not hinder the progress at Mahaica/Berbice. Instead, we are fully prepared to execute all works of *Budget 2019*, the same way we did in the previous years. Sir, every street, village and community benefited from *Budget 2018* to the tune of \$3.2 billion. This budgetary allocation in Mahaica/Berbice will benefit from the amount given to the tune of \$3.7 billion, and we did it because we have a very good Regional Executive Officer (REO). The Opposition put a little boy to do a man's job, who cannot perform in the Region and that is the Regional Chairman.

This does not prevent me from saying in this honourable House how the given amount will be spent in 2019. However, we are a Government for the people. Our playfield is levelled, not like

the previous Government who delivered only in chosen villages, and I can testify to that. When they were looking after the street lights on the road, they reached the village before me and stopped looking after the lights, passed the Hon. Member and went on to the other villages. One night, whilst coming home after doing the Lord's work, because I am a licensed Minister in the Anglican Diocese, I encountered a labaria snake that almost bit me. I came in here and spoke about it. The then Minister stepped out, made one phone call and within two hours my sister called to ask me where I wanted the light. I told her that a snake nearly bit me, so I told them to place the street light where I nearly got bitten. It is because of that I had two street lights placed in my village. This is how those people are so devious. *[Interruption]*

[Mr Speaker hit the gavel.]

Let me say to this House that, over the years in Region 5, we worked together while we were in Opposition, but today it is not so. They are not working, but instead they are boycotting and doing everything to ensure that they bring this Government down, but that will not happen. The good is never good enough for them. Everything good is bad for them. I want them to know that the Guyanese people are watching. We are watching. This Government will not, I repeat will not be distracted regardless of anyone's deplorable behavioural pattern. The journey to a good life continues in the regions.

Agriculture - The sum allotted to this sector is \$17.1 million and on page 82, paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3, the Hon. Minister outlined the projections and the transformation of the agriculture sector. This sector will continue to be one of the main pillars of Guyana's economic development. Please note that this Government will ensure that food security and safety are not at risk. Hence, the new state-of-the-art abattoir is slated to be built in 2019 at Onverwagt, West Coast Berbice (WCB). This initiative is very timely, important and wholeheartedly welcomed.

Some of the accomplishments in the agriculture sector are as follows: rehabilitation and upgrading of 14 farm-to-market roads in the sum of \$96 million and drainage and irrigation works across the region to the tune of \$93 million. We also hosted the first Regional Agricultural and Commercial Exhibition (RACE), held at the Paradise Sports Club Ground, and, at that event, businessmen and women from across Guyana eagerly participated. It was a successful venture that will be held, annually, during agriculture month. So, life goes on. In addition, the Ithaca community benefited

from a multimillion dollar project. This project afforded young people from the community the opportunity to be self-employed. They do not have to work in an office to earn money; they are self-employed, thus providing for themselves and family. With grateful hearts, Ithaca says thank you to this caring Government.

Please note that farmers in Region 5 had excellent crop with good yields and prices for their paddy. I want to say this to the Hon. Member, Mr. Gill, who spoke about the Regional Democratic Council (RDC). That farm was leased by the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary Agriculture Authority (MMA/ADA) to the RDC. Hon. Harry Gill, I want you to listen carefully. During that time, the late Barkat Ali, who was the father of Minister Irfaan Ali and the then Regional Chairman, planted coconut trees, black eyed peas and all kinds of other things. That land was leased to the RDC by the MMA/ADA for 50 years, signed under the former Government. I want to say that the big fight in that region...Hon. Mr. Nandlall went there and caused a big fuss with the Regional Executive Officer (REO). We are planting hundreds of plantains, hundreds of bananas, hundreds of coconuts. It is the RDC that is planting. **[An. Hon. Member: It is the REO.]** Why are you saying that it is the REO? It is an RDC project. *Put it in your pipe and smoke it.* Progress will continue.

Infrastructure Works: Infrastructure works in Region 5 is necessary to provide easy access into farmlands and communities. We were able to improve and expand in the region several areas, for example, rehabilitation and upgrading of 25 community access roads to the tune of \$187 million; purchase of a tar tank distributor and a roller to the tune of \$20.9 million, and this will assist in the NDCs for road construction, Hon. Member, Harry Gill; constructed two concrete bridges to the Blairmont Primary School and Hopetown PIC to the tune of \$18 million; in addition, maintained 5 community bridges in the sum of \$12 million; rehabilitated the river bridge at D'Edwards Village, in the sum of \$8.1 million, to protect the community from overtopping during the high tide season.

Works are also being done in various areas by the MMA/ADA. Works are ongoing at the D'Edwards sluice, the all-weather road and weeding and desilting of channels in all areas aided by an excavator from the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA). Works are ongoing at the four sea sluices and at the No. 29 village, Golden Grove, Lovely Lass, Bush Lot and No. 12

Village. On completion, incidents of flood will be minimised, as effectiveness in water management is improved in agricultural areas.

Education delivery: Education paves the way for employment in any country. Thus, all efforts are placed to boost enhanced education through increased budgetary allocation and by introducing programmes. We must emphasise that Government continues to upgrade and expand the education sector in Region 5.

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

Ms. Wade: With the President's hot meal initiative, schools in Belladrum will benefit from the coastland project in 2019. Other schools will also come on board. The welfare and caring for children and every child in school will continue. This Government is a government with vision. Let me proudly state some accomplishments under education delivery: construction of two nursery schools at Calcutta and Perth to the tune of \$56 million; construction of Champagne Primary School, Hopetown Primary School, Cotton Tree Primary School and 11 other primary schools to the sum of \$44 million; and maintenance of schools in the Mahaica/Berbice region to the sum of \$107.6 million.

I want to say that, regarding the Berbice Bridge, it is very important for me to mention and this Government did all it had in its power to ensure that commuters continued to traverse the Berbice Bridge, without undue harassment of burdensome tolls, and was threatened. Region 5, and by extension Region 6 and other persons who traverse, say thank you to the Government for letting them have a free say over the bridge.

Women development and families: Guyanese women are very hardworking and progressive. This view is highly respected by the Government. Hence, great emphasis is placed on the empowerment of women across Region 5. Most women are already involved in skill training programmes.

The Hon. Member spoke about the Hugo Chavez Rehabilitation Centre. I want to say to him: where is the Administrator who was there under your Government? She had to run because of the corruption under that Government. When we inherited the centre, there were eight residents there and now there are 105. We have 30 Nurses, one resident Doctor, a farm with fish, chickens, ducks

and now this Opposition is questioning the administration of the Hugo Chavez Centre. Where is the former Administrator? She had to run. I am telling you.

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

Ms. Wade: Yes, Mr. Speaker. In conclusion, I want to say that Guyanese are looking on and we know that this Budget is ongoing, and they will evaluate everything that is taking place. I want to quote from Proverbs 16:3, my favourite:

“Ask the Lord to bless your plans, and you will be successful in carrying them out.”

I say, without a shadow of a doubt, that this Government is doing just that. We are equipped to overcome obstacles, anointed to prosper and favoured to receive all the blessings. This Budget is a *fit and proper* Budget.

Thank You. *[Applause]*

Mr. Lumumba: I feel blessed to be here today to respond to the Budget of the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, but before I go deep into my presentation, I would like to refute a few untruths by the Hon. Minister, George Norton.

First of all, the Guyana National Stadium was always certified. The World Cup Cricket was played at the Guyana National Stadium. The Guyana National Stadium hosted the World T20 Championship and Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF) Elimination Competition, which included Guyana, for the World Cup qualification. The first time ESPN filmed an activity in Guyana live was at the Guyana National Stadium and it was ALPHA United versus a team from Haiti.

The Guyana National Aquatic Centre was certified for the 50 and 25 metre distances by the International Swimming Federation (FINA). The National Track and Field Centre was certified by the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF). Mr. Speaker, I hope you will take Mr. Norton to the Committee of Privileges for telling these untruths.

I rise to make my comments on *Budget 2019...* **[Mr. Jordan:** I thought you had risen already.] I rise again. ...that has been presented to this House by the Minister of Finance, the Hon. Winston Jordan.

3.16 p.m.

Unfortunately, this budget is parallel to the comments made by the Hon. Minister Volda Lawrence who is also Chairman in the People's National Congress. A country cannot develop if Government implements a programme that only benefits its voting supporters. Its voting supporters will only represent a segmented population that by itself lacks the resources and the will to energise national development. Thus, any form of discrimination will represent the absolute growth. What is so unfortunate is that not a member of the senior executive of the People's National Congress apologised for Ms. Lawrence's statement. I think that is unfortunate. The present circumstance in this country requires racial harmony, political unity and national spirit of working together. The Hon. Member Volda Lawrence, a person I consider a friend and a colleague, has time to withdraw her unprofessional statements and let us move forward.

However, the issue here today is not whether the Government cares about the poor or the overall development of Guyana, it is whether this budget could stimulate growth and eradicate wanton poverty, reduce unemployment and once again provide confidence to investors. A budget is a driving force in a society. A budget is not about numbers; a budget is not a bookkeeping exercise. A budget is a policy and a principle that guarantees growth and development.

The issue here today is not whether the Government cares about the poor or the overall development of Guyana. It is whether this budget can stimulate growth and eradicate poverty. This Government has squandered a booming economy, mismanage the dynamic housing programme, negatively impacted the thriving boom industry, disrupted the growth of small business and cause the population to wonder whether oil and gas industry could pull us back from the present doomsday economy.

The uncreated economic policy has vastly widened the gap between the rich and the poor and has caused a large segment of communities to believe that the racial discrimination, the motive and oppression is at our doorstep.

Let us take a look at the sugar industry. The cruel and inhumane strategy has put 17,000 families to the sword and has spelt doom for doing for dozens of communities that are dependent on those families and the sugar industry as a whole. During the days of apartheid in South Africa, there were several negro leaders who opposed Nelson Mandela and the freedom fighters and worked for

the racial regime for a taste of power and a bit of financial glory. The same position in Guyana lingers in the sugar industry. There are several Members in the Government, who are indigenous to the sugar industry belt, are now collaborators with those who have decided that discrimination in the sugar industry and the economic and social debt of Skeldon, Wales and Enmore Sugar Estates ...position.

I call on my brother Mr. Moses Nagamootoo, Prime Minister, to stand up. I remember working with Mr. Nagamootoo against the oppressive PNC Government, jumping the drains. Mr Nagamootoo did have an old camera and used to say, “*Bai*, I am against the oppression until I die.” What happens to you now, Mr. Nagamootoo? We have jumped a lot of drains together. I remember my brothers Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine and the late Dr. Walter Rodney jumped the trench by Bourda Market, broke Bob Bremmer’s records. What happened to you my brothers? How could you collaborate with them that? I cannot just point my finger at the Government when it comes to the sugar industry. The policy of this Government brings doomsday to all races in all communities. Thus, it is not about race. This Government has declared war against the poor and downtrodden.

I go back to my friend the Hon. Minister Volda Lawrence, against. Minister Lawrence was clearly under pressure by the PNC African-based communities such as Buxton, Belladrum, Anns Grove, Plaisance and Den Amstel and others. Minister Lawrence’s statement is her only acceptance of the fact that the previous APNU/AFC did nothing for the poor and lacked any form of support system to develop these communities. In essence, it is a weak attempt for Minister Lawrence apologise for the misgivings of the APNU Government. In essence, she meant well, but, her format was bad. The Minister did not go far enough because she would have referred to the 50% unemployment in these communities and provide the evidence of wanton poverty in communities such as Linden. The solution is not to divide the crumbs among your supporters, but to implement a five to ten-year plan that would lead to growth and sustainable development in Guyana, in particular on the sugar belt and African-based villages and the Indigenous communities.

Mr. Minister of Finance, where is your plan? The plan cannot be bookkeeping and counting how much millions you give to the different communities. How does it impact growth and development? This budget lacks any plan that could pinpoint growth in poor communities. The budget does not signal to the 1,700 university graduates as to how they would play a role in society and whether there is anything for them other than driving taxi part-time or provide guard service

for a security company. This budget conflicts with the goal and aspirations of His Excellency President David Granger. We all know that His Excellency champions the cause of development of the village economy, especially in the PNC based communities. [Mr. Patterson: Did he tell you that?] He said so.

The past budgets and this 2019 uncreative budget have failed to address issues of economic development in villages. This budget lacks a framework and details of development for a plan to support village infrastructure that could facilitate transportation services, in particular, all weather roads that allow goods and services to flow in and out of the back lands. How will families get their product on the back lands? Are they to trek through the muds or it is to fly them through the air as a kite? Building pump stations here and there is not enough. The days of canoe with a few mangoes with a few dozen coconuts, one bunch of plantain, one bunch of banana do not represent prosperity. The village could only take off by means of large scale farming, combined adequate infrastructure, access to small loads and modernised farming equipment.

In essence, once again another budget has come that fails to provide a plan that would guarantee employment opportunities to African-based communities, residents of the sugar belt and Indigenous communities. Once again, this budget has failed those communities. The absence of opportunities has become more complex and complicated, since the budget fails to provide the incentives which caused entrepreneurs to build factories. If we look of great countries in the world, whether it be in Europe or in America, even in Jamaica, companies are given incentives to open factories in poor communities so that they could create employment. It is not about just giving contractors a big contract. Contractors with a big contract have no commitment to develop a community. If it could encourage the rich or even the middle class or the middle income to go to borrow so that they could establish a factory in a given community, that is progress and that could lead to reducing unemployment. It would encourage economic growth. I am asking the Minister to consider these policies.

The Minister needs to amend this budget and provide the private sector communities an opportunity in the manufacturing industry which will lead to guarantee large scale employment. [Mr. Patterson: Wildlife Unit.] That is a good idea.

The Government speaks and seem to be excited that the public servants will receive \$50,000 increase in December, bonus which will be made available for the Christmas spending spree. What about a proper monthly salary? This budget does not address the low grade salary to hard working teachers, committed nurses, soldiers that defend our borders and police our officers who are forced to work for \$70,000 per month.

The Government speak the need to improve education but failure to acknowledge it is a nexus between salaries and performance. They have been no improvement in the education standard if this does not happen. If proper compensation and compensatory factors are not addressed. More students should be encouraged to participate in the education programme in the University of Guyana. The university programme should offer a joint diploma with the Cyril Potter College of Education with special salary to be provided. This programme should emphasise mathematics, physics and English Language.

The budget itself is a contradiction to the human development and economic growth. The gold industry in particular, as it relates to small miners, has always been a foundation of the villages. Many of our grandfathers or our great uncles bought their houses or their back dam land because of their earnings from the gold industry as *porkknockers*. Today, the small gold mines have been wiped out. Minister Charles-Broomes knows this very much, that is why she created the special department that she is working towards. The small miners can no longer compete. The small miners have to pay taxes. The small miners cannot buy a Hymac and cannot buy a bulldozer. What we have here today is that small miners have disappeared. The benefit of the small miners years ago is that they did not have to pay taxes. Now, they have to pay taxes.

The gold industry is particular, as it relates to small miners, has been the foundation of major villages and communities such as Buxton, Beterverwagting, Anns Grove, Mahaica, Mahaicony, West Coast Berbice and Linden. The earnings from that industry allowed villagers to purchase back dam lands, build houses and send their children to school abroad. Mr. Speaker, I am sure that you are aware of those days and you probably were a recipient of such benefits. Today the gold earnings have dried up and the small miners in that community cannot even repair a banister on their house. The removal of these concessions represents an unfriendly tax regime. It has almost eliminated the small miners and forced those who remain to join the gold smuggling clique. This has led to the further weakening of the economy that the reduction revenue collected by the

Government. I call on the Minister Winston Jordan to energise the small gold mining sector by eliminating all taxes and duties for miners for the period of ten years.

This budget, and previous budgets, lacks a long-term strategy as it relates to employment of the poor and narrowing the gap between the rich and poor. It lacks incentives to encourage private investment. It lacks the specifics that could lead to the mobilisation of the small business sector. The Government need to speak to our future roads and bridges to use this strategy. I do not have a problem with building new roads and new bridges. This would only help large contractors to become richer. It would not cause communities such as Albouystown and Agricola to become modern areas. I am sure the Government has received from Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) the official results of the recent local government elections. It should be clear to them that the rejection of the polls is because they fail to implement programmes that will reduce unemployment and they broke the appropriate campaigned promises on increased salaries and improve standard of living. The Government needs to ask itself, why only 21% of the people of Linden came out to vote and 25% of the people of south Georgetown?

3.31 p.m.

Is it because the masses understand that this is not a caring Government but one of many words and few actions? While construction is good for the country and good for the economy and makes sense in many years, it is a known fact that the industry is controlled by the rich. The poor in these industries work for \$5,000 per day which represents a meagre survival rate for a family of four.

We ask this Government, in particular the Ministry of Finance, why is he unable to put together a five to ten-year plan on the oil and gas revenue. What is he waiting for? Is he waiting for 2020? ExxonMobil has just announced another oil find which will guarantee Guyana \$5 billion of oil. Minister, what is your problem? What are you afraid of? Give the poor hope. Lay out a plan that includes infrastructure development, tax-free incentives for the investors, a living salary for the public sector workers, small industries for the villages and community such as Linden, upgrading of the social infrastructure of the Indigenous communities, revitalisation of the sugar industry, construction of a water harbour, implementation of large scale agriculture farm, cultural centres in every region, modern sports hall in every region, high-tech high schools in every region. Mr. Minister, you are the Minister, and it is not me. I am giving you enough answer to bring this budget

the Special Select Committee. I am suggesting that you bring us to the Special Select Committee and let us work together as one in this National Assembly.

I know that this Minister has a lot of capacity, a lot of capabilities, but this budget represents a bookkeeping exercise. There is nothing about this budget that plans for the future. If a young person who is out of the University of Guyana looks at this budget, he or she sees no hope. Supporters in south Georgetown cannot find anything in this budget that can make them vote for you in 2020. You will have to carry on and do your thing again in 2020. You cannot win an election in 2020 by not giving people hope.

[Mr. Patterson: Are you advising us?] I

am advising you because I want you to give this country hope. I want you to realise that you are in Government and you are supposed to govern for all of us. I do not want to go down the road by arguing with you about how much money you put for bridges and buildings.

My position is that there is no concept. This budget has no concept. This budget does not represent an implementation programme. This budget does not represent a commitment by you. This budget was not put together by you. Someone gives you this budget to read. It lacks creativity; it lacks innovation and it is a failure. I am asking you - it has never been not before - to bring this budget to Special Select Committee and let us have a bipartisan approach to resolving this problem, because we do have a problem. I am suggesting that if we have a budget that can work and can be brought forward by the Opposition and the Government, the people of Guyana will see hope and will see a better future for our country.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Holder]: The agriculture sector is one of the pillars of the Guyanese economy. Budget 2019 is, indeed, a transformational one for the economy and the citizens of Guyana. I join with the rest of my colleagues in congratulating the Hon. Minister of Finance for a budget well delivered.

In 2019, agriculture will continue to contribute 16% to the economy through inputs in the areas of livestock, fisheries, crops, drainage and irrigation, education, hydrometeorology, pesticide management and marketing. I must add that agriculture has received over \$17.1 billion in 2019.

Food security and agriculture-led growth hinge on a combination of institutions, policies, and infrastructure to deliver market access, all-encompassing economic growth and food security and nutrition, especially now that first oil is expected in 2020. Agriculture contributes US\$378 million in foreign exchange to Guyana. However, our food import bill is US\$252 million. Therefore our diversification strategy focuses on import substitution and export promotion.

With an investment of over US\$60 million in agriculture over the past decade, the Ministry of Agriculture has been addressing all areas of food security, including the reorganisation of the support systems, legislative upgrades, enhancing production and the implementation of new standards. Current projects such as the Sustainable Agricultural Development Project (SADP) and the Rural Agriculture Infrastructure Development (RAID) Project among others, all have a component to support the implementation of food safety standards, quality control and traceability in the production process. These actions are not only geared towards ensuring that Guyana can secure external markets for its agricultural products, but also securing our own food supply.

Furthermore, to build our institutions, policies and infrastructure, there is need for more efficient service delivery in our extension system. In 2019 we will review and strengthen this area of activity. We will continue our efforts in building our database for decision making for the agricultural sector via the agricultural census with the Bureau of Statistics and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture.

We, at the Ministry of Agriculture, are pleased with the amendments to the Customs Duty and Value Added Tax Act, specifically for the exemption of pesticides and limestone used in the agricultural sector. The exemption from VAT and waiver on import duty for boats will also be beneficial to the farmers in rural and riverain areas.

The year 2018 is the first year in which the sugar industry's production has been restricted to three operating factories Albion Sugar Estate, Blairmont Sugar Estate and Uitvlugt Sugar Estate. Production from these has been significantly stronger than that achieved in 2017, when their combined output was 88,000 tons of sugar. As of today, we are confident that we will surpass the target of 98,000 tons and have revised our 2018 production target to 103,000 tons of sugar. In 2018, yielding the estates were able to improve productivity with a resultant increase in overall

sugar production as a result of good agricultural practices and improved timing of operations and in-field inputs and attention to detail and engineering support to the factories.

The Sugar Industry Strategic Plan 2018–2021 anticipates production of 113,262 tons in 2019, 131,812 tons by 2020 and 143,341 tons by 2021. To achieve these estimates the requisite capital investments of over \$17 billion will be required in the next three years in a timely manner to ensure security of production, reducing cost and maximising the quality of the end-product. The initiation of a project for construction of a cogeneration facility at the Albion Sugar Factory is also planned during this period. Further, Plantation White Sugar is planned to commence at Albion by 2021.

I am pleased to report that our caring Government, having invested \$1 billion per month for the survival of the sugar industry since 2015, over \$37 billion, has paid severance to all employees who were severed at the end of 2017, which was done on 30th November. The Wales Sugar Estate workers have not been paid and hopefully they might be paid before the end of this week. The reason for that is this: The Wales Sugar Estate is a different kettle of fish. They were severed at the end of 2016 and some of them were offered employment. Those who were not needed were severed and received their severance. Those who were offered employment to Uitvlugt Sugar Estate, approximately half of those accepted and were taken from Wales Sugar Estate to Uitvlugt Sugar Estate every day. The others did not accept the offer. It went to court and it was to decide whether having offered a person employment when he or she can still opt to have severance. Circumstances overtook that situation at the end of 2017 when the Wales Sugar Estate along with Rose Hall, Enmore and Skeldon Sugar Estates was divested in National Industrial and Commercial Investment Limited (NICIL). Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), therefore, no longer owned Wales Sugar Estate and could no longer raise the issue that it is offering persons employment and they continue to working at Wales Sugar Estate. We decided to settle. This afternoon I think at three o' clock Justice Kissoon is supposed to rule on the matter and I think that the matter is basically on the severance, 6%, 4% or whatever. It is the severance with interest. By this afternoon we will know and hopefully before this weekend they will be paid.

In 2018, rice production is projected to increase by 1.9% to 642,210 metric tons. This increase is due to improvements in yields and transferring better agronomic and management practices to our rice farmers. As of November, paddy production figures were 959,739 metric tons with farmers receiving as much as \$3,300 per bag in Regions 4 and 5.

In 2019, rice production is expected to increase by 1% to 648,456 tons. Whilst exports are projected at 530,000 metric tons. Exports of rice and rice by-products currently reach 34 countries in Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the European Union, Latin America and West Africa. I am also pleased to report that in 2018 we expanded our export markets to West Africa, Abidjan, Benin and the Ivory Coast and will introduce at least two new export markets in 2019.

In 2018 the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB) released a new high yielding variety 'GRDB 15', with approximately 2,497 hectares sown for the second crop of 2018 and 3,180 hectares, thus far, for the first crop of 2019. The national yield has generally increased to about 91 bags per hectare or 37 bags per acre. Additionally, in 2019 we aim to produce a salt tolerant variety.

Through the Malaysia Rice Production Reverse Linkage Project, the industry will be producing high quality seed of internationally acceptable quality by establishing a national seed certification programme, and produce three new varieties, one aromatic and two hybrid, along with the development of downstream rice related products to enhance the supply chain.

As we strive to transform the economy, we are targeting the value addition of rice in new products such as wheat composite flour, utilising 20% rice flour blended with 80% wheat flour. We will target its use in bakeries in 2019 to further expand the production of gluten free products.

The GRDB continues with their exemplary transfer of technology. We have produced and made accessible to rice farmers 27,617 bags of high quality seeds from the rice research station. Further, in keeping with the green agenda, to address the challenges of climate change, GRDB has started focusing on best practices for climate smart agriculture focusing on soil health management, zero burning of rice straw, minimising the usage of pesticides, balanced agronomic nutrition and integrated pest management.

Through our Green State Development Strategy, our nation has determined that we would adopt a green solution to our agricultural development and, in so doing, expand agricultural production inland where the effects of climate change and flooding would be minimal and deforestation will not be necessary. The Intermediate and Rupununi Savannahs, which are predominantly grasslands, are the prime locations for the expansion of selected crops and livestock production. It is envisaged that a sustainable integrated farming production system would be employed.

Since this Government took office in 2015, we have clearly detailed our vision for the agricultural development in the Intermediate Savannahs. We have actively pursued an integrated approach to agricultural development utilising private-public partnerships.

3.46 p.m.

In 2019, the Mano Julio Group from Brazil is scheduled to commence phase one of a 50,000-hectare mega farm, targeting corn and soybean in the first 5,000 hectares. Phases two and three entail producing animal feed and bio-ethanol. This project will ultimately create 4,000 jobs and is expected to earn US\$50 million of foreign currency annually. More so, to ensure the realisation of the area's agricultural potential, we will commence the development of the \$220 million Ebini Agricultural Research Facilities. We will commence research programmes in cassava, peanuts, orchards and livestock, cattle and small ruminants, in 2019.

In 2019, the Hinterland Environmentally Sustainable Agricultural Development Project (HESAD) will see investments in 40 communities in Regions 9 and 1. It targets ongoing production of cassava by-products, cattle, fruits and fruit juices, cashew nuts, honey in Region 9, while in Region 1, there are ongoing programmes in ginger, turmeric, coffee, cassava, cocoa and honey.

In terms of addressing our water needs, the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority, drawing on the achievements of the rain harvesting works in Region 9, will invest \$40 million in Region 8 for the development of irrigation systems in Paramakatoi, Kato, Bamboo Creek and other areas. South Rupununi will also see rain harvesting works to the value of \$20 million.

The other crops sector has shown consistent growth rates over the past three years. In 2019, the sector is projected to grow by, at least, 4%. Significant growth is expected in coconut, plantain, pepper, spice and pineapple production.

In 2019, emphasis will be placed on increasing crop production/productivity, enhancing diversification, promoting green agricultural practices, transferring appropriate and relevant technologies, farmer's training, improving accessibility to soil and land use information, hinterland agricultural development, safeguarding Guyana's agriculture and mangrove management/restoration. The imports of carrots, onion, garlic, cauliflower, broccoli, turmeric, ginger and potato in 2017 was \$2.7 billion. We will assiduously pursue these lucrative domestic

markets for our local farmers. Potato imports represented about 50% of this value at \$1.3 billion. As such, National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI), in the next few years, will ensure the regular availability of planting material using the newly acquired potato seed storage facility, which will ensure the regular availability of planting material. With respect to onions, it is projected that by 2020, about 50% of local demands would be satisfied.

Regarding e-agriculture, a land resource assessment for agricultural production in Guyana will commence. The main objective will be to create land suitability maps for crops at scales 1 and 100,000 and larger for available agricultural lands in Guyana. The results of the assessment are to be used in user-friendly, geo-spatial downloadable applications that are compatible with hand-held devices namely smartphones and tablets. This will enable users in the field, to have access and to identify soil types, land suitability for specified crops, soil limitations, and amendments needed for successful agricultural production.

E-agriculture is on the rise. Currently, drones are being used in Jamaica and Brazil for pest control and fertilisation, and in China, the use of drones for seeding is on the rise. I am advised that a locally registered firm, Agri Drone Solutions, will be commencing operations in the first quarter of 2019. The company will be offering pest control and liquid fertilisation services. I should also mention that drones are presently used extensively throughout this hemisphere for field inspection to discover problems in a timely manner.

The Government has been actively pursuing the revitalisation of the coconut industry through NAREI and the Hope Coconut Estate. The National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute has been working very closely with estate owners to ensure that coconut production is maximised through improved agronomic practices as well as for the supply of planting material. The Hope Estate has established its own coconut germplasm and a coconut demonstration plot, moving its seedling production from 1,500 per annum in 2016, to 100,000 per annum in 2018. The Hope Estate will act as a springboard for the development and expansion of the coconut sector making it both more commercialised and productive for the benefit of all.

The Guyana Livestock Development Authority (GLDA) has been diligently pursuing the adoption of appropriate technology, improved support services, and infrastructural development to stimulate increased productivity. As a result, in 2018, livestock production is projected to increase by 21.1%,

one of the largest end of year growth rates in recent times. In 2019, we will maintain these development strategies to ensure that the full potential of livestock is exploited, as such the 2019 livestock production target is an increase of 2.3%.

Guyana is self-sufficient in livestock products, with the exception of milk and other dairy products. Thus, the livestock subsector plays a vital role in improving and sustaining the nation's food and nutrition security, by producing safe and wholesome livestock products. With regard to milk and other dairy products, while plans are underway for the establishment of a private milk plant, the GLDA has been supporting dairy farmers with the necessary breeding stock and practices to develop the national herd. Livestock imports showed a decline in the quantity of livestock products from 12,856 metric tons in 2015, to 8,533 metric tons in 2017. The value of livestock products imported was quite high, some \$5 billion. Hence, our policies are geared towards self-sufficiency, particularly, in milk and other dairy products to increase our production base.

Our animal health programmes are aimed at limiting the impact of disease on animal production, through disease monitoring, veterinary investigation and legislation, public health and meat inspection. The Veterinary Service Laboratory broke new ground in 2018 by diagnosing bovine rabies. This was a first for the laboratory and as a result eliminates the need to seek assistance from elsewhere to confirm the status of this disease. Additionally, the laboratory quality management system continues to be developed to facilitate early certification.

Food safety and the production of wholesome food would always be of concern to the GLDA, and the nation as a whole. In this regard, we are working assiduously to ensure that we improve the slaughter and processing facilities for meat and meat products. We will commence the building of a state-of-the-art abattoir in 2019 at Onverwagt in Region 5, at the completion of which, we would be in a position to not only export meat, but more importantly, to meet the food health standards that are requisite for the supply of beef to the hospitality and some other sectors in Guyana.

In order to maintain our status of being self-sufficient in meat and enhance food security, the GLDA continues to offer toll hatching services to the duck farming community. To date, we have been responsible for assisting the duck rearing community by hatching approximately 250,000 ducklings for farmers and made available for sale 103,000 ducklings from our own flock. Thus, assisting in ensuring that enough duck meat is available for the consuming public.

Furthermore, regarding our Black Giant Poultry Programme, as at November 2018, GLDA produced approximately 27,484 black giant eggs, from which a total of 15,277 healthy chicks were hatched. Approximately, 3,000 were distributed to hinterland communities in Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9. Additionally, approximately, 12,000 chicks were sold to over 200 poultry farmers from the coastal communities in Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10. In 2019, GLDA is expected to produce as much as 24,000 chicks to satisfy the demand of the coastal poultry farmers, and an additional 6,000 chicks for the hinterland communities.

The fisheries sector is made up of three primary components: marine fishery, inshore artisanal fishery and the aquaculture and inland fishery. The offshore industrial fishery consists of 114 trawlers, eight fish/shrimp processing plants and numerous wharves and dry-docking facilities. The inshore artisanal fishery consists of approximately 1,315 vessels and there are about 4,500 small-scaled fishermen. Therefore activities, such as increased monitoring, control and surveillance of fishing vessels, are ongoing and continues to ensure that they are licensed and are adhering to sustainable harvesting practices. The use of a global positioning system (GPS) vessel monitoring system is expected to be utilised by all vessels in the future to ensure safety and tracking at sea and to control illegal, unregulated and unreported activities. For 2019, we anticipate a 1.9% growth due to the better fishing conditions, compliance with standards to access external markets and an increase in the number of vessels. Thus far, in 2018, we have harvested just about 32,000 metric tons of seafood and we exported 18,561 metric tons valued at \$12,370,181,000.

After working assiduously with The Guyana Association of Trawler Owners and Seafood Processors (GATOSP) over the years, we are closer to acquiring the Marine Stewardship Certificate for our seabob. The Fisheries Management Plan 2018- 2023, the Seabob Management Plan and Captain Code of Conduct for Trawlers are expected to be finalised and approved by my Ministry in the first half of 2019.

Aquaponics was introduced to seven secondary schools across coastal regions and one in Linden. Technical assistance was offered to the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs in Mabaruma in Region 1, Kopinang in Region 8, and Cashew Island in Region 6. Aquaponics demonstration units will be developed in Regions 1, 8 and 9. Research on the development of local fish feeds will be enhanced with the recent purchase of a feed machine and further training of farmers and villages in the hinterland will continue.

In 2019, the development of aquaculture regulations would facilitate exports. The development of local feed should reduce the cost of production, thereby, making farmed fish more competitive. The use of other species of fish and shrimp will be accelerated to allow a wide diversity of farmed fish available to the public. However, the development of our deep-sea fishery will remain a priority and it is expected that more local companies will be licensed to participate in this part of the industry.

In the area of agriculture business development, the Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC) conducted many visits to create linkages between agro-processors and prospective buyers. Continuous training will be provided to agro-processors to ensure that these products are marketed and advertised effectively. In 2019, GMC will continue to work along with agro-processors to ensure that they have improved labelling and packaging through the availability of nutritional facts and labels. In 2018, the GMC trained approximately 376 individuals in areas such as marketing, agriculture business development, labelling and packaging, cost of production analysis, post-harvest management, among others. One of the main constraints to development for the agro-processing industry is the lack of finance. In this regard, we are extremely happy that agro-processors can access \$100 million available from the Small Business Bureau for 2019. Further, with our partnership and consultation with the commercial banks, in 2019, the Guyana Marketing Corporation will be issuing letters of recommendation to selected commercial banks to assist in adding leverage to agro-processors or farmers applications for loans for financing their businesses. There are 14 Guyana Shop Corners nationally, with three new corners established to date in 2018, namely in Cotton Tree, New Amsterdam and Supenaam. This initiative will continue in 2019. Further, a market study will be undertaken in Canada with the aim of having, at least, one Guyana Shop Corner extra-regionally and to have an agent to market the corporation's plantain chips. To date, in 2018, non-traditional agricultural exports are recorded as, 9,362 metric tons, valuing US\$13 million. There was a 27% increase in ginger exports, a 19.6% increase in the export of limes, an increase of 17.9% in watermelons and a 13.1% increase in pumpkins when compared with the corresponding period last year.

4.01 p.m.

Notably, regional exports increased by 23% during the period January to October, 2018 when compared to the same period in 2017. The National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA)

continues to plan and implement systems to adapt to highly vulnerable and high-risk areas of the country to the effects of climate change, while developing new areas for agricultural purposes.

For us to be able to cope with unpredictable and extreme weather conditions, the existing 1.5 inches of rainfall in 24 hours drainage capacity is insufficient and there is need to increase that value to at least 3.5 inches in 24 hours. However, the higher the drainage coefficient, the greater the capital investment required. This target is a major driving force in NDIA's development plans. Areas such as Buxton, Herstelling and Mocha, which received significant capital investments in 2018, will exceed the 3.5 inches target.

With the 2019 overall budget of \$7.5 billion, vulnerable areas such as Pomeroon and Friendship on the East Bank Demerara will receive over \$30 million each for rehabilitation works to reduce flooding.

The NDIA currently directly oversees the operation of 134 drainage pumps in Guyana. In 2019, the NDIA will add 10 new fixed pumps, three new mobile pumps and rehabilitate eight pump stations to the Drainage and Irrigation (D&I) network. This will benefit approximately 39,000 acres of rice and cash crop cultivation, and cattle, in addition to the close by villages. Residents in Hampton Court and Devonshire Castle in Region 2, Den Amstel in Region 3, Hope and Nooten Zuil in Region 4, Trafalgar and Mora Point in Region 5, and Rose Hall in Region 6, will soon benefit from the placement of the fixed pumps within their communities which will help to restrict flooding.

In Georgetown, NDIA will partner with the Mayor and City Council (M&CC) for the rehabilitation and operation and maintenance of the primary drainage system. In 2019, NDIA will be responsible for 51,300 meters of main drainage canals in Georgetown, including, the Downer, Liliendaal, South Road, North & South Ruimveldt Pump Stations, among others. An allocation of \$274 million will be spent on Georgetown drainage during 2019. Three high capacity mobile drainage pumps will be installed in the City to reduce the occurrence of flooding at Church Street, Sussex Street and Ruimveldt.

In 2019, agricultural expansion areas totalling 3000 acres in Fryish, Region 6, Free and Easy and La Harmony in Region 3, and Mahaica Creek in Region 5, will be developed with the rehabilitation

of the D&I system. In 2018, 5000 acres of infrastructural works were completed in Buxton, Mocha and Hope in Region 4 and Friendly Farmers in Region 6, among other areas.

Mr. Speaker, \$2.7 billion worth of maintenance, covering 2,500 miles of drainage and irrigation channels will be done in 2019. We will give greater emphasis on manual monthly maintenance as it has the potential of creating employment for over 2000 workers.

The 2019 budget for the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary Agriculture Development Authority (MMA\ADA) caters for the continued construction of the sluice at De Edward on the West Bank Berbice River. It is expected to improve the drainage of over 5000 acres of agricultural land. In 2018, the MMA-ADA rehabilitated 42 miles of drains and canals and resuscitated sluices to the sum of \$40.8 million in Number 28, Number 29, Lovely Lass, Golden Grove and Bush Lot villages. Further details were very well presented by the Hon. Member, Ms. Jennifer Wade, who is a member on the Board of Directors on the MMA-ADA.

The long-term objective of the Rural Agricultural Infrastructure Development (RAID) Project is to improve the drainage and irrigation systems and access dams in selected rural farming communities of Buxton, Mocha and Triumph in Region 4 and Ithaca in Region 5. In 2018, we have constructed a pump/sluice station at Herstelling/Mocha, 75 Kilometres (km) of canals and drains with new and rehabilitated structures, 20 kilometres of fair weather dams and cleared approximately 150 acres of land for cultivation.

The Hydrometeorological Service's general responsibility includes the monitoring and evaluating of the weather and water resources in Guyana and to actively support the Government in Disaster Risk Management (DRM). In 2018, the Hydrometeorological Service successfully completed the construction of its first National Water Quality Laboratory (NWQL). The facility will perform chemical, biological, and physical testing of water samples from all of Guyana's waters – be it ground or surface water. This, is a landmark achievement for the Hydrometeorological Service in water resources management, as under the Water & Sewerage Act (2002) the first function of the Department is to:

“(a) establish, manage and operate national systems, to monitor the availability, quality, and use of surface water and ground water”

Additionally, the Department continued to expand its rainfall monitoring network to a total of 167 stations across the country. The number of Climatological Stations has also increased with a new station being established at Annai, North Rupununi bringing the total of Climatological Stations across the country to eight. The number of Automatic Weather Stations (AWS) has also increased to 24, with three being specifically configured for agricultural meteorological data collection.

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

Mr. Holder: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2019, we will spend \$24 million to upgrade our satellite receiving system to the new generation of weather-related satellites. This will provide our forecasters with a direct relay of state-of-the-art weather-related data and technology to enhance our country's forecasting capabilities.

Additionally, the service will install another 20 Automatic Weather Stations in 2019 as part of a grant. These stations will further strengthen and expand the country's hydrometeorological network and provide valuable data for disaster risk reduction, agricultural development, energy generation and engineering studies and designs.

In 2018, the Guyana School of Agriculture (GSA) graduated 97 students in the five programmes offered. The school implemented a reformed curriculum in the 2018-2019 academic year and facilitated the placement of 83 unsponsored graduates on short term assignments. They constructed a 4,200 square feet shade house which will serve as a useful model to provide training in protected agriculture; upgraded the Agro-Processing Unit with a pasteuriser, chiller, oven, and refractometers, and furnished the livestock farm with new equipment and new textbooks for the library.

In 2019, GSA will further strengthen the Agro-Processing Unit at the Mon Repos Campus to provide a wider range of teaching and business incubating services. The establishment of an agro-processing facility costing \$37.5 million at the Essequibo campus will provide training for students and small agro-processors in agro-processing in Region 2 and adjoining regions. This facility will also serve as a business incubation centre for small agro-processors.

As we move to the digital age, the school will also provide online programmes across the length and breadth of Guyana and beyond through the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Sound chemicals management is an integral part of sustainable development in any country, more importantly to us here in Guyana. As we promote sustainability and shape a greener agricultural sector and society, we are promoting the registration of lesser toxic pesticides such as bio-pesticides, encouraging the reduction of and dependency on chemical pesticides and the introduction and implementation of integrated pest and vector management initiatives.

The Pesticides and Toxic Chemicals Control Board (PTCCB) continues to reduce the transboundary movement of illegal hazardous chemicals through the monitoring of our ports of entry. To date, 2546 import licenses have been issued, coupled with inspections of imported materials at ports of entry. Enforcement activities have also resulted in the confiscation of approximately two tonnes of illegal pesticides and toxic chemicals.

The Board contributes to ensuring food safety through monitoring the use patterns and practices of chemicals by examining pesticides residues in agricultural produce. This ensures food safety...

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

Mr. Holder: Thank you. Supports trading of locally produced agricultural commodities. Formulated product analysis also allows for monitoring the quality of pesticides imported for use in Guyana. The newly expanded facility laboratory will also allow for the monitoring of the quality of fertilisers used by the Agriculture Sector. Certification and accreditation of the laboratory will enhance the revenue generation capacity of the Board to achieve its mandate.

In closing, with the implementation of all the initiatives that we will be pursuing in 2019, and over the next three years, the Ministry of Agriculture will ensure that we are actively “*Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building sustainable communities for the Good Life*”. I, therefore, commend this budget to this house for its approval. [*Applause*]

Bishop Edghill: I rise to make my contribution in this ongoing debate. Please permit me before I get into the substance of my debate to make representation on two matters. Firstly, I have been contacted by workers at the Georgetown Mayor and City Council (GM&CC). Today is the 5th of

November and workers at the Georgetown Major and City Council have not been paid with the exceptions of the grades one and two workers who are represented by the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers' Union (GAWU). I am asking the Hon. Minister of Communities to look into that.

Secondly, it was over a month ago this House was assured, when we examined Financial Paper No. 3/2018, and a specific question was asked of the Minister about severance for the workers from the Wales Sugar Estate if the appropriated sum included the money for the workers. The answer was yes. Weeks have passed, and they had to come here today and asked for their voices to be heard in this Chamber. I do so make representation on their behalf, that the Wales Sugar Estate workers be paid their severance and the appropriate interest that is entitled for the long delay. I make that call, as I begin today, for the workers from the Georgetown Mayor and City Council and the Wales Sugar Estate.

The Minister of Finance, when he presented Budget 2019, indicated that it was being presented in a particular environment. Number one - he said it was the penultimate budget before the 2020 General and Regional Elections. He said that it was the budget that comes the year before first oil and he also said that it was the budget that comes the year before the Jubilee celebrations of our Republic.

In rebutting Budget 2019 – the Minister said, the environment in which he premised this budget - we are debating this budget also in a particular environment. The environment in which we are debating this budget is where there is increase fear of ethnic discrimination in this country. We are debating this budget in that context. We are debating this budget in an environment where there is real or perceived, whichever one you may wish to use, political persecution of political opponents by the Government. We are debating this budget in an environment where more than 63% of the people of this country has just rejected this Government and its policies by saying, “Change your programmes and policies, we are unhappy with them.” When we discussed this budget, we have to discuss this budget in that context. May I also say that this budget is being discussed in a context where the Leader of Opposition has laid a no-confidence motion in this National Assembly to be debated. This no-confidence motion came at a time when the people of Guyana have expressed their concerns about the level of incompetence, mal-administration, mismanagement, and corruption.

I was reminded not so long ago about the advertisement that the people of Guyana listened to and it was played for me. I want to ask Members of the Government if they remember these words, “Vote APNU/AFC. Stop corruption. For transparency and accountability and good governance, vote APNU/AFC.” What has happened to that? All of a sudden these words are no longer used in this House by the Hon. Members of Government. They cannot discuss corruption, accountability, and transparency. They cannot discuss accountability anymore. I just thought that I would remind us of the context.

4.16 p.m.

In an environment where the Government is touting a policy of social cohesion and that seems to be on the front burner, not one rebuke, correction or statement has come from any senior Member of this Government as it relates to the improper statements that were made by at least two senior Ministers which interfere with the very fabric of this society, when it comes to ethnic unity and social cohesion.

The Minister said, in his budget speech, at paragraph 1.10, how he consulted with very many organisations, private sector bodies, governmental organisations, civic groups and ordinary citizens. Well, if you consult with more of the same people, you would just hear the same thing. The party that represents the largest group of people in this country, which is the People’s Progressive Party/Civic was not consulted. Even when we offered our suggestion by way of public discourse, it was not included in the budget.

So, this budget does not reflect the views of the majority of the people of Guyana. If I am to describe this budget, I would simply say it is routine. We are here for a routine and this is all about routine. It is unrealistic and very questionable, and I would show the House why? It is filled with wastage and extravagance, and it is a lost cause. This budget is unimpressive, it evoked no admiration, it is monotonous, mundane and it is fatiguing. I had to sit and listen for all of those hours to endure much of nothing.

Let me get to some specifics, so that we could deal with this in the context. I know the Minister of Public Infrastructure is coming after me and so I want him to answer some specific questions. In this budget, a call is being on the Consolidated Fund for us to provide \$100 million to support feasibility studies for the new Demerara Harbour Bridge. We all know in this House, because there

is a report from the Public Procurement Commission (PPC), that this Minister breached our Procurement Laws and the entire Cabinet breached the Constitution and the Procurement laws, when they took an unsolicited bid to Cabinet and Cabinet approved it. What is worse is that the payment for that feasibility came from an extra budgetary account that is the Asphalt Plant of the new Demerara Harbour Bridge. So, I have expressed a lot of interest in what is happening there, and my research will indicate something that the Minister should answer.

In the Public Procurement Commission Report, we were told that on the 25th November, 2016, Cabinet approved a \$161,514,420 to pay for the study. In December, 2016, the General Manager of the bridge, who was also named Project Manager, signed a contract without the approval of the Board and I will show just now... The Minister seems not to like to have boards in his institution because one of the agencies that is spending the most money in that sector, the Guyana Power and Light (GPL), do not have a board and we are coming to that just now.

I have information, that reveals that, in 2017, the Asphalt Plant of the Demerara Harbour Bridge paid a \$153,250,385 on this feasibility study. I also have information that proves that, in January of 2018, a further \$14,728,000 was expended, and in February another \$59,340,000 was expended. When you add all of these figures together, we are talking about \$227 million. We were told that the Dutch company only got a \$148 million. Where did the rest of the money go? We want to know today, not later on, not we will get the information to you. Get it to us today because you went into an extra budgetary account, took money illegally, paid for a feasibility that was an unsolicited bid, and for the people of Guyana to understand, an unsolicited bid is an underhand arrangement. How did the company know that you wanted a deal? A backroom discussion resulted in a paper that went to Cabinet, which the Cabinet approved. Even the accounting of the money from the Asphalt Plant of the Demerara Harbour Bridge is not accurate. How much did you spend? Please tell the honourable House this afternoon because you are asking for another \$100 million for the Demerara Harbour Bridge from the budget.

What is the reality of this budget? A little earlier, I said that this budget is routine, monotonous and mundane. Listen to the capital expenditure, the Minister said that he is ramping up expenditure in Public Infrastructure and we would have all of these new projects. Well, the reality is nothing new. Listen to the figures, in 2017 the capital budget of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure was \$29,364,822,000; in 2018 it was \$24,438,337,000; in 2019 where the Minister of Finance said he

is ramping up expenditure with this \$300 billion budget, they are spending \$26,212,032,000. Let me tell you why that is happening, and I would go the Auditor General's Report.

The Auditor General's Report on Public Infrastructure, let me read some of the comments

“Implementation of Lot A works were slower than anticipated; Lot B works had to be retendered.

Delays in approval in selecting four hinterland communities for solar projects.”

This is on Sustainable Energy Programme. Everything is slow or not moving.

“Delay in the implementation of work under Lot A since residual project activities were merged with PUUP Lot A works.”

On the Electrification Programme, page 148 of the Auditor General's report. I want to go again say, this is an underperforming Ministry. That is the point I am making. So, how could you ramp up expenditure on capital works in infrastructure, when you are not moving? The Highway Improvement Programme, listen to the Auditor General's comments, “Pace of works were delayed due to availability of the removal of utilities.”; Road Network and Expansion Programme – “Delay in award of Sheriff Street project”; Sea Defences – “Delay in tendering and award of contracts...”; Road Improvement and Rehab Programme; Miscellaneous Roads – “Multiyear contract rollover”. Everything is slowing up and terrible.

Mr. Speaker, if you want to understand the reality of the APNU/AFC Government, it is in one paragraph of the Auditor General's Report, paragraph 11,

“Other examinations revealed, eight instances in Region 6 where the contract sum was the same as the engineer's estimate. In addition, each item on the contractor's bill of quantities was identical to that of the engineer's bill of quantities. All eight of these contracts were awarded by the Regional Tender Board, of which, four were awarded at one sitting. It should be noted that all eight contracts were awarded to the same contractor.”

We have been talking about this all the time, but now the evidence is out. It is no longer the PPP/C saying it, this is the independent office of the Auditor General of Guyana. We have been representing that he should get more money to do more research to ensure that the corruption, lack

of transparency, cronyism and all that taking place should be exposed. This is the reality of what is taking place in our country.

So, we are debating here, Sir. Let me talk about the capital budget for the Ministry of the Presidency. Some people will definitely wake up now. In 2017, the capital budget for the Ministry of the Presidency was \$1,162,633,000; in 2018 it was \$1,679,810,000; and in 2019 the capital budget for the Ministry is a whopping \$3,336,239,000. Listen to the story about the priorities. Remember the Minister said his budget is context in an environment which is the penultimate year before first oil. I would have thought that the Department of Energy would have received a significant allocation to help prepare Guyana for first oil. Guyana, hear what the Department of Energy got - \$333,273. Listen to what the Department of Citizenship got, and all of us in Guyana know what is going on in the Department of Citizenship. We heard the report yesterday and all of us know. The man in the street, hairdressing salon, barbershops, people at the airport, taxi and minibus drivers and everybody know what is going on at the Department of Citizenship - \$802 million. Could you imagine a country preparing for first oil giving to the Department of Energy \$333 million, but to the Department of Citizenship that is looking after the people coming in and passing through, the trafficking, the trading, the birth certificates, the padding and all the rest of it. That everybody knows about the cost, the middle men who are doing the *runnings* - everybody knows the story. They got \$802 million.

What is the priority of this Government? We are seeing it very clear in Budget 2019. If one thinks that is bad, then let us go to the Department of Social Cohesion. I was the first to declare in this House that the Department of Social Cohesion is the exact duplicate of the Ministry of National Mobilisation - \$350 million. Do not get fool that this is for the preparation of venues, because I researched the budget. They give a paltry \$53 million to fixup the stands at the National Park and that is not in the \$350 million. Do you know what they have done? They plan to spend more money on Durban Park, but this time they are not putting it through the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, they have put it is under the National Sports Commission (NSC). Do you know why they could not have put it under the Ministry of Public Infrastructure? It is because of what the Auditor General said, and I will read it for the House now,

“The sum of \$500 million was expended on Durban Park Rehabilitation. The Audit office wrote the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Infrastructure on the 19th July, 2018, requesting documentation detailing the works done.”

4.31 p.m.

“Supervisory checks of the said works, as well as certification of works were satisfactorily completed. Six payments by the Ministry to Homestretch Development, Inc. (HDI) were submitted. However, only documents indicating HDI’s creditors and Government’s proposed payment allocation to the creditors were attached to the Payment Vouchers (PVs).”

What the Auditor General asked for from the Durban Park he has not gotten it as yet. They plan to spend more money on Durban Park, so it is what you call a switch. You switch from the Ministry of Public Infrastructure and you put it under the National Sports Commission. Shame, shame, shame! “*Vote APNU/AFC for accountability and transparency*”. The people of Guyana are remembering; they do not have short memory.

I want to come now to the Guyana Power and Light, Inc. (GPL), the Public Utility Upgrade Programme. This is perhaps the project where the largest allocation of capital funds is being invested. The Minister must tell this House tonight, why, since January, 2018, there has been no Chairman of the Board. I have called to enquire if Board meetings were being held, and who was chairing those Board meetings. I have called to enquire, in the absence of the Board, who was managing the tender process with all of these huge sums that are being expended. This is because the Act requires a governing board and in the absence of the Board, the power is the Minister. It is in the Minister’s interest, if he wants transparency and accountability, to ensure that there is a board. If there is no board, and he is taking the place of the board, then we have to ask where really is the accountability and transparency.

Do you remember when the General Manager from Jamaica came, he was not introduced to the nation by way of a press conference. It was a high-priced cocktail reception at the Pegasus Hotel to introduce a General Manager. I would have thought by now that GPL, Inc. would have gone leaps and bounds, and I am coming to that. When it comes to community power, we are offering more than \$300 million a year to Kwakwani for community power. I am glad that they are getting

it, but why are the people in Kwakwani being rationed? Between 6 a.m. and 10.00 a.m., everyday, there is no electricity. They used to have 24-hour electricity, all of a sudden there is rationing. As a matter of fact, I have spent nights in Kwakwani in the lead up to the Local Government Elections (LGE) and there was no power for the entire night.

We are spending \$2.2 billion a year for community power in Linden. That is a subject that the APNU/AFC Government does not want to touch at all. Even in Linden, where \$2.2 billion is being spent for community power, there is blackout from 3.00 p.m. to 11.00 p.m. The Hon. Minister who lives in Linden did not even talk about that in her budget speech. The people are calling me in Georgetown to find out what is going on. This is one of the most mismanaged sectors.

I want to indicate that, while we are hearing about all of the investments in electricity, in the Budget Speech, paragraph 4.108, the Minister of Finance laments the dependency on fossil fuel for power generation. The Minister in Budget 2019 is saying that we still depend on fossil fuel.

They forgot that it was the APNU/AFC that killed the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. If they killed the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, what do they expect? In paragraph 4.109, the Minister addressed the Power Utility Upgrade Programme and he said that this has to do with line losses. The sad reality, and the Minister of Public Infrastructure must tell the nation tonight why this is so, the largest Loss Reduction Programme is being undertaken currently by GPL, Inc. When GPL, Inc. went to the Public Utilities Commission (PUC), this is what they reported:

“Overall loses at the end of 2014 – 28.65%”. By the end of 2016, it had increased to 29.2%. At the end of 2017, it was 29.6%.”

Rather than reducing we are going up and we are spending billions. Do you know why? One of the recommendations that was made years ago was to publish, by geographical locations, who was *thieving* the current - where the line losses occur. I remember that there was one such publication and it revealed a lot. It was quite telling. I dare the Minister of Public Infrastructure to follow the recommendations and start publishing for the nation to see, where the electricity theft is taking place. Now you are in Government, they are the people that you talk to, they are the people that you claim you represent. Why do you not get them to get on board?

We have this situation where you hear wind farm, solar, and wind farm and solar. Listen to the joke. In all of our energy needs, lighting only accounts for about 10%. All the solar farm and wind that you are talking about is just for lights. Real energy for manufacturing and industrialisation and so on are not coming from that. All that we are talking about are street light, house light and store light.

This country needs a developmental model that will see our energy needs being addressed. Even though the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has funded and has presented to the Government the energy mix matrix, it is still not yet brought to this House or made public. Why are they hiding it?

When we look at Budgets 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018, they are over \$953 billion, almost a \$1,000 billion or \$1 trillion. With Budget 2019 \$300.7 billion, we would have seen the APNU/AFC Government spending \$1.3 trillion. There are two questions that the Guyanese people have asked me: Where did they get the money from and where is it going? I am prepared to stand by my figures anytime. Where is the money coming from: No. 1 - taxation – the increase in taxation; No. 2 - a depletion of our foreign reserves; No. 3 - borrowing. So, we have taxed the people more, we have depleted our foreign reserves and we are borrowing more.

If you are going to spend all that money, at least tell me where it is going. Let us talk about where it is going. Let me tell the people of Guyana why we cannot support such a budget. I have both books here because people like the Hon. Attorney General Senior Counsel get my numbers right. I am getting them from the Minister's book.

Rental of buildings – in 2014, when the PPP/C left office, we spent \$794,948,000 for rental of buildings. In 2019, the people of Guyana must hear that the APNU/AFC Government proposes to spend \$1,622,842,000, an increase of \$827 million. This is where the people's money is going.

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

Bishop Edghill: Maintenance of buildings – in 2014, they spent \$2,081,000,000. In 2019, the budget is \$3.7 billion, an increase of \$1.7 billion just for the maintenance of buildings. I could go on and on, but I want to touch on another area where the people's money is going.

Security - In 2014, when we were in office, we spent \$3,122,000,000. In 2019, listen to what the APNU/AFC is spending - \$5,739,242,000, an increase of \$2.6 billion more. By the way, while they are spending all of that money, on Saturdays and Sundays I am getting calls from security guards in Regions 1 and 8 who have not yet been paid and they are spending \$2.6 billion. This is where the money is going.

Quickly, the Minister went to his budget measures and he outlined all of the benefits that he is giving to the budget through the measures. This is what he said in paragraph 6.33:

“Altogether these measures will result in a net loss of revenue of \$3.5 billion, which will clearly rebound to the benefit of taxpayers.”

The Minister did not tell the nation that he took an additional \$16 billion just in VAT – one tax area. Sixteen billion dollars more in VAT with its reduction to 14%. I had to tell the people not so long ago that you have taken \$1.2 billion in revenue from the people in Region 1, you gave them a concrete road for \$200 million and you told them that you are giving them something. What you have done is that you have taken \$1 billion from the people. You have not given them anything. All of your fancy foot works...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member...

Bishop Edghill: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: You have two minutes remaining.

Bishop Edghill: Thank you. With all of your fancy foot works, which is good for a dancehall and not for a budget, you have not given the people anything. You have taken from them.

Mr. Speaker, I want to close by saying to you what the people of Guyana asked me to demand of this National Assembly. They said to take VAT off of electricity and water; they said support the young people who want to pursue higher education as they prepare for an oil economy; they said provide support for communities affected by the closure of the sugar estates, just like we did for Linden; they said create incentives for foreign direct investment to come so that they could have job creation; they have told me to ask you to reverse all of the punitive tax measures that have slowed down the economy and is causing this country to move backwards; they have asked me to

ensure the safety and security of our citizens; and they have asked me to ensure that the sugar workers, who deserve their severance, get paid immediately.

Here, as I close, they have said to tell the Parliament to ensure any future negotiations on oil must be done in Guyana's interest and all the moneys collected must go to the Consolidated Fund. They want a country where there is transparency, accountability, support, good governance and that is what we stand for.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

4.46 p.m.

Minister of Public Infrastructure [Mr. Patterson]: Mr. Speaker, Colleague Ministers, Hon. Members of this House, I, like my Colleagues who spoke before me, would like to congratulate the Hon. Winston Jordan, Minister of Finance, and his efficient and committed team for a remarkable job in, once again, presenting an early Budget, *Budget 2019*, in November, before the close of the 2018 financial year.

I want to, before my time runs out, which has happened before, take this opportunity, even before I get into my debate, to say to the staff of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure a heartfelt thank you for the work that they have done and would do in 2018 and onwards. They are an awesome team to work with and I look forward to working with them in 2019. Nothing that the Hon. Gentleman, who spoke just before me, said has to do anything to do with you. I would deal with that. So, do not be disheartened by how far he departed from the truth during his speech.

Under the infrastructure sector, there is an essential and growing demand for infrastructure to address critical issues such as climate change, organisation, trade competitiveness and the future social upliftment of our society. To satisfy these demands, effectively, and to deliver lasting economic and social development, comparable to the emerging economies of Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, our Government would continue to provide the qualities and financial resources to build a modern, efficient and robust public infrastructure.

The planning, designing and implementation of many of these multiyear projects began in 2018, and are currently in varying stages of development. Barring any substantial environmental or social constraints, our Government would launch and later deliver to the people of Guyana approximately

125 kilometres of paved road between Linden and Mabura Hills, a new bridge across the Demerara River at Houston and Versailles and an alternative road link between Ogle on the East Coast of Demerara and Diamond on the East Bank of Demerara.

The \$35.32 billion of our 2019 estimate which is allocated to support infrastructure for integration, will result in improve movement of people and goods, both nationally and internationally, enhance resilience in coastal and riverine communities and improve efficiency in services delivered to the citizens of Guyana. Thus, we would continue to build on the foundation laid since our ascension to office in May, 2015, in keeping with the Budget themed, *Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities For the Good Life*.

Permit me to clarify and comment on some enormous and misguided statements which were made in the presentations of a few Hon. Members on the other side of this honourable House. Firstly, the Hon. Member, Irfaan Ali, made merry about the number of studies that this Government is undertaking, prior to construction. We are guilty of doing a lot of studies. But let me enlighten this House about - and I want the Hon. Members, Bishop Edghill and Irfaan Ali to keep count with me - projects executed by the People Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) with no feasibility study. There is the Skeldon Factory – US\$200 million; the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) renovations – \$138 million and no feasibility study. The Hon. Robeson Benn came and said that some goodly gentlemen from China gave him the money and he took it. For two years, they sat on it before they could have even have had a feasibility study. The speciality hospital that they came for, there was no feasibility studies and that is a \$125 million; the fibre optic cable - no feasibility study, absolutely none.

Regarding the East Coast of Demerara bypass that we are now doing, the Former President, Mr. Ramotar, went one trip, and a man said, “here is \$50 million; he said yes, thank you.” He was asked what he was going to do with it and he gave it to the Hon. Member, Irfaan Ali who drew a plan saying that they would link this to here. There was no feasibility study. The Berbice River Bridge - no feasibility study. [Mr. Ali: I will bring a feasibility study.] You could bring it and lay it here, and I would apologise to you in public if you bring a feasibility study that was done before you collected the money. And that is \$50 million. The Berbice River Bridge, \$40 million. We are up to \$558 million. Of course, my favourite, what I always talk about, the

Amaila Falls Road, US\$45 million and not a single feasibility study. That is US\$608 million down the drain because they did not even want to take the time to do feasibility studies.

While I am on the Amaila Falls road, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition has been in the press, several times, saying that Mr. Patterson should bring the Tender Board Evaluation Report. I know how it is whenever he is asked about the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. I checked my entire Ministry, top to bottom, and there is no evaluation report. We could have been delinquent. We went to the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) and checked. NPTAB wrote back and said it had no evaluation report.

Thinking maybe it was destroyed in the flood or some force of God, I even went to the consultant SRKN'gineering and Associates (SRKN) and there was none. But then, I start thinking that, maybe, this could be one of those operation...I sent my staff to the archives and found the advertisement for the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. Do you know what it is? It went to National Industrial & Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL). It did not go through NPTAB. All they are talking about procurement and those things like that, NICIL awarded – do not worry. I did some research - the design of the road to Fip Motilall and Chairman of NICIL. They took it straight from NICIL to Cabinet. So, when they keep talking about bringing the evaluation report, they wrote their own specification. They did no evaluation report. They went straight to Cabinet and awarded a contract for \$15.4 million and ended up paying \$45 million.

The Hon. Members, Irfaan Ali and Bishop Edghill, in their speeches, spoke about how slow projects are and those things. I do not know. Maybe, I am seeing wrong. The Sheriff Street/Mandela Avenue loan, which we are talking about, do you know when that loan was signed?

[**Mr. Jordan:** It was signed in 2012.] It was signed March, 2010. Do you know when the contract was signed? It was signed in December, 2017. It was seven years, including having to turn back because of fraud under their Government.

Please, I have to get to my speech, gentlemen.

Six persons from that side of the honourable House from Regions 5 and 6 spoke and not a single word...They had to wait until Hon. Member, Jennifer Wade got up to speak about the Berbice River Bridge. Not a single word on the one single activity that could decimate the entire Regions 5 and 6, there was not a single word from that side of the House. I had to send Hon. Member, Mr.

Charrandass Persaud, this afternoon, to ensure that I am not locked up for keeping that bridge and keeping the people, who you say are yours, affordable and [inaudible]. Not a single word. Do not worry with that.

The Hon. Member, Bishop Juan Edghill, made mention about payments for the asphalt plant and he called out some numbers. I would like to say to him - my staff wrote something, which I cannot say because it is unparliamentary - but what I could say is that the profession that the Hon. Member is in considers it inappropriate to not speak the truth. I do not know, but I thought he would have adhered because I still adhere to the professional code of my profession. What you are saying is absolutely untrue.

There is one last thing before I continue; be careful what you ask for. Electricity theft. Let me enlighten the Hon. Member. Residential theft, which implies that people are stealing, is only about 10 or 12% of the Guyana Power and Light (GPL). The rest is commercial theft. It is the big users. Do you know who the big users were empowered by? Be careful. When you ask me to go and publish names, you know who you are going after. Be careful what you ask for.

Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members, the Hon. Minister of Finance has touched on several projects in relation to the performance of my Ministry in 2018 and projection for 2019. I would now provide according details. The overall budget and expenditure for 2018, as at 30th November, 2018, we are currently at 89% current side, and we are over 70% on the capital side. In *Budget 2019*, there is \$35.32 billion of which \$8.70 billion is current and \$26.6 billion is capital. Therefore, this is representative of 11.75% of the national *Budget 2019* of \$300.7 billion.

The sea defence department: In 2018, the sea defence programme was allocated funds, which were used to construct and rehabilitate several areas across the region. These projects were executed to assist the alleviation of flooding from spring tide to protect our low-lying coastlands from flooding. Works, during 2018, were executed in Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10. A total sum of \$1.87 billion was allocated in 2018. To date, 22 kilometres were executed, at a cost of \$1.296 billion, across these six regions.

Our sea and river defence infrastructure would further be strengthened, in 2019, with the implementation of work contracts for the construction of approximately 3.1 kilometres of critical sections of sea defence in Regions 2,3,4,5 and 6. It must be noted that a consultancy service, under

a European Union (UN) funded programme, has completed the first draft of merging the two sea defence Acts. Several sections of the Act have been completed, which would enable the Ministry to deal with issues such as climate change and increase in fines for breaches committed by persons.

Studies, Hon. Member, Irfaan Ali, for infrastructure projects: We have the Waterfront Development Project, which you heard about. It is funded by the United Kingdom (UK) SWIFT, Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) loan and that is for works between Kingston and Ogle. We have the Transport Sector Enhancement Project, which is the upgrade of the Lethem Aerodrome to a regional airport. An upgrade from an aerodrome to a regional airport is not just putting in one computer; it is doing a lot more. We have the new Demerara river crossing at a cost of \$100 million and it would be done. We have, also, studies for the upgrade of the stelling. We have studies for the repair to Linden/Soesdyke Highway, one of the necessary projects.

5.01 p.m.

We would be doing these things so that we do not ever fall into the trap into which the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) fell.

Road Network Upgrade and Expansion Programme - Sheriff Street/Mandela Avenue Roadway Expansion Programme. Funding is provided under an Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) Loan. The Road Network Upgrade and Expansion Programme forms component 2 of the reformulated loan programme. Component 1 is a housing sector development project to be undertaken by the Ministry of Communities, and I am sure Minister Bulkan will explain more in his presentation. The contractor is presently working from the Rupert Craig Highway to David Street, constructing drains. *Budget 2019* has a provision of \$1.8 billion for continuation of works. While we have met some challenges, which were poor traffic management plans by the contractor and the non-availability of equipment, the anticipated completion date remains 2020.

The East Coast Demerara Public Road Widening and Improvement Project from Better Hope to Belfield Village: The Ministry of Public of Infrastructure and China Railway First Group Co. Ltd. signed a contract on 30th December, 2014 for the East Coast Demerara Public Road Widening and Improvement Project from Better Hope village to Belfield village for the cost of \$US46.9 million. The civil works will see the upgrade of the road, inclusive of widening, extension, reconstruction of bridges and improvement of the drainage system. The project will include the installation of

traffic signals and lights, road markings, sidewalks and street lights. By December, 2018, it is expected that the improvement to the first seven and a half kilometers (km) for this corridor, which are from Better Hope to Annandale, will be 80% completed, weather permitting. There were some challenges with this programme, obviously the environmental problem, which was dust, as was complained about by the residents. The contractor is now using tankers to continuously wet the road while he is working. We do apologise for the traffic management issues. We are in collaboration with the police and the Ministry of Public Security, and traffic diversions are now being enforced and monitored.

As at 30th November, 2018, expenditure was \$2 billion. *Budget 2019* has a provision of \$2.2 billion. It should be noted that the Government intends to complete the section from Belfield to Rosignol and has approached the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development to fund the studies for the design of this section. They have agreed to so do, and it goes to the Board this month. So, we will not only be doing that, but we will be continuing.

Consultancy for the construction of the East Coast/East Bank Road Linkage - Diamond to Ogle. The Government of Guyana, through a loan provided by the Government of India, has entered into an agreement for the East Bank to East Coast Road Linkage Project. For this project, the feasibility design has been awarded for a sum of US\$1.3 million. The final detailed report is expected to be submitted in April, 2019. This design will allow for a new alignment, approximately 15 km long, which will connect the East Coast of Demerara to the East Bank of Demerara at its limits. It will allow, also, for the integration with the existing road network *via* several connecting roads, a total length of 9.62 km. The connecting roads will be from Aubrey Barker Road, Haag Bosch Road, Mocha/Arcadia Road and Diamond Access Road. Later, when the new bridge is constructed, there will be a connecting road from Houston as well.

The proposed design for the main alignment comprises of three sections. Between the Rupert Craig Highway and the Railway embankment, there will be four lanes with a cycle lane on each side and a covered concrete drain that will be used as a sidewalk. Between the Railway Embankment and the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) compound, a similar design will be expanded on the cane field area, which will have four lanes with 40 meters reserved to separate the direction of traffic. It is our intention, in that 40 meters reserve, to have a light rail there as well. All deliverables will be submitted in 2019. In 2019, we will commence, also, the survey and design to extend this

road southwards towards the Linden/Soesdyke Highway. *Budget 2019* has a provision of \$2.229 billion for this.

The Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) Expansion Project: Works on the CJIA Expansion Project continued in 2018 and the project is nearing completion. The actual expenditure, to date, as of 30th November, 2018, is US\$3.85 million. The budgeted amount will be completely expended by the end of December, 2018.

Budget 2019 has provisions of \$1.13 billion for the following: Under existing projects, there is a contract for the extension of the CJIA, contract for consultancy and construction of a law enforcement building. Under new projects, when the terminal and the runway are finished, we have several other innovative and transformative construction works to do at that airport. We will be doing a new airside perimeter fence, new access roads – you know that there is a roundabout from the airport – landscaping, rehabilitation of the sewage system and sewage treatment plant, construction of land side shops – we would like to have concessions – and the construction of a new VIP lounge. Those will all be done in 2019.

Under the Hinterland Programme, 454.9 km of work was completed in the Hinterland Regions of 1, 7, 8 and 9. The total expenditure as of 30th November, 2018 was \$1,127,058,000. *Budget 2019* has provisions of \$2 billion for continuation of works.

In 2019, it is expected, Hon. Mr. Lumumba, that the Parika to Goshen Project will commence. The feasibility studies have been completed and the economic analysis shows that there will be a 12% plus rate of return. The procurement process will commence in 2019. This project will see the increase of farming on the East Bank of the Essequibo River and access, *via* road part, for the transportation of goods. This work will also provide an additional link to the mining communities in the Hinterland.

Under the Miscellaneous and Urban Roads Programme, in 2018, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, through the Work Services Group, has been constructing and rehabilitating roads in Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 – all regions, under the Miscellaneous and Urban Roads Programme. A budgeted amount of \$2 million has been allocated under the Miscellaneous and Urban Roads Programme for 2018. For miscellaneous roads, the sum of \$338 million was used for road construction, rehabilitation on 10 new and existing roads in Regions 2 to 6, and the balance for the

completion of multi-year programmes. One such project is the East Bank Berbice Road Project, which is 80% completed. Hon. Member, Mr. Mustapha, I would like to tell you that expenditure, to date, is \$844 million. It is expected to be completed early in 2019. What I will tell you is that, by the end of 2018, before Christmas, at least the entire first paving would be done. There are two lifts of paving to be done, and the entire stretch will be paved with the first lift at least.

Under the Miscellaneous and Urban Roads Programme, approximately \$541 million was used to construct and rehabilitate 20 new and existing roads in Regions 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9 and 10, while the remaining funds are mainly for the completion of multiyear projects. As of 30th November, 2018, expenditure on the miscellaneous roads stood at \$809 million, while the urban roads figure was \$603 million.

For 2019, the Ministry will be rehabilitating a number of miscellaneous and urban roads throughout the region. *Budget 2019* has provisions for miscellaneous and urban roads drainage to the tune of \$2.9 billion.

I cannot list all, but I promised I would list some. I was asked on Facebook, so I will tell you. On the East Coast, roads will be done in Buxton: Middlewalk and Company Path South. In Vigilance, we are doing Brusche Dam, phase 1. We are doing Ann's Grove front. We are doing Melanie. We are doing Better Hope.

On the East Bank, we will be doing the Kuru Kuru main road. We will be doing Alliance Road, phase 1 in Timehri; Barnwell North, that long forgotten place; we will be doing Barnwell North; Soesdyke.

In Region 5, it will be Union/Naarstigheid, Paradise, Hopetown, Mahaicony, and we will be going to Ithaca. I am only calling a representative sample.

In Region 6, I am particularly pleased to announce that we will be doing the roads in Angoy's Avenue. Not one, not two, but we will be doing three roads in Angoy's Avenue. It is long overdue. We will be doing roads in Glasgow, Fyrish, Lancaster and Manchester. We would be doing roads in all three of the townships. In association with the Ministry of Communities, we will be doing roads in a place called Little Africa. Yes, we are going to the long-neglected communities.

In Georgetown, it will be the South Ruimveldt Gardens and South Ruimveldt Park, Lodge, East and West Ruimveldt, Agricola, Albouystown and Meadow Brook Gardens.

In Region 3, we are going to Belle Vue - phase 2; Bagotsville - Unity Street; La Parfaite Harmonie, in association with the Ministry of Communities; Den Amstel and Philadelphia.

In Region 2, there is Lima Sands and there is Suddie.

In Region 10 - there are a lot of roads in Region 10 - Block 22, Amelia's Ward and Watooka.

Of course, we will continue doing works in the other townships - Bartica, Mahdia, Lethem and Mabaruma. All 10, Sir. We will be putting roads everywhere.

In the Special Projects Unit under the Ministry, the primary function of this Unit is to ensure the continuous maintenance of our road network, thus protecting our capital investment. Under Maintenance of Roads, *Budget 2018* had \$1.578 billion. Maintenance works were carried out in all regions, save and except Region 1. Expenditure was \$1.26 billion. In 2019, there is an increased provision of \$1.6 billion for continued maintenance of our capital stock.

Under Bridges, \$187 million was budgeted for 2018 and bridges were completed in Regions 3, 4, 6 and 9. I was particularly pleased that the bridge in Free and Easy was rehabilitated. That was requested by the farmers there. It should be noted, and the Hon. Member would know, that the completion of the Bagotsville bridge pleased the residents of Region 3. The team is working on the completion and design of the Puruni Bridge in Region 1 and construction will commence in 2019.

Hon. Ms. Campbell-Sukhai, the construction of the Moruca Bridge in Region 1, which commenced in 2018, is about 50% complete. It will be completed in the very first quarter of 2019.

Budget 2019 has a provision of \$176.8 million. For infrastructural development, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, in its continuing efforts to enhance safety and security of the city countrywide, has made several interventions towards realising its safety mandate. The budget for 2018 was \$113 million, with the focus on installation of light-emitting diode (LED) highway lights and the completion of geometric improvements to the railway embankment in the vicinity of the

Giftland Mall and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat. LED lights were installed in sections of public roads in Regions 2, 3 and 6.

5.16 p.m.

The total cost of those projects, which were administered in three lots, was \$66.1 million. These projects saw the installation of approximately 333 LED lights.

I am quite pleased to announce that, in 2019, Hunter Street will be redone, and we would be widening the road to put in concrete drains. We expect that will be a new gateway.

The Guyana Energy Agency's (GEA) objectives are directed towards energy transformation in accordance with the Green State Development Strategy (GSDS) and are actionable through the conducting of energy audits and replacement of inefficient street lights in a public, residential and commercial building, to reduce energy consumption, continuation of public education and awareness programmes and reduction on the dependency on fossil fuel for energy generation.

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

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Sir. Some of the key accomplishments under this agency is that 90 buildings were fitted with solar photovoltaic (PV) panels and 10,000 LED lights and in excess of 1,000 occupational sensors were installed.

In 2019, the Budget, with a provision of \$525 million, will be for the flagship project, which is the supply and installation of 1.184 megawatts of solar photovoltaic systems in 80 public buildings in all 10 Administrative Regions in Guyana, at an estimated cost of \$375 million. One hundred million dollars is budgeted for the supply and installation of 400 stand-alone solar lights in all 10 Administrative Regions.

The Government will be piloting the use of electric vehicles as means to inform, research, develop and promote energy diversification. An electric vehicle, with accompanied solar panels and energy storing system, will be bought in 2019. During 2019 and 2020, under a foreign loan, a series of solar farms totalling 5.2 megawatts are planned for Bartica, Lethem, Mahdia, Port Kaituma, Kwakwani and Matthew's Ridge.

The Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL) - The sum of \$3.6 billion is earmarked for the GPL. I would like to highlight that by the end of 2018, GPL would have completed upgrade of the generating facilities in Canefield and Anna Regina, and ongoing installation upgrades for Bartica. The generating set at Canefield, Berbice, \$5.5 million was commissioned for it in 2018.

Readiness for the Christmas season - I am pleased to note that planned maintenance activities for the transmission and distribution network will continue up to 15th December, 2018 and will be restricted during the holiday season. The Guyana Power and Light Incorporated is therefore working to ensure that there is sufficient generating and reserve capacity in the Demerara Berbice Interconnected System (DBIS) system for the holidays. Bartica, Essequibo, Leguan and Wakenaam will have sufficient capacity to satisfy demands, even in any unexpected events during the Christmas season.

In conclusion, it is a little over three and half years since the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition took office. In this relatively short time, much has been achieved, but there is still much more to be done. With the impending oil and gas first oil in 2020, we will continue to work assiduously together in order to ensure the improvement of the quality of life of all Guyanese. In this regard, I would, therefore, like to urge the Hon. Members on the other side of this honourable House to support this Budget, since working together, greater strides can be made for the benefits of all Guyanese.

Finally, I wish to end with an Arabic proverb:

“What is coming is better than what is gone”

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Mr. Ali, would you like the floor?

Mr. Ali: Yes, Sir. The Hon. Minister Patterson, in his presentation, said there exists no feasibility study for the East Bank/East Coast Road Linkage Project. He further went on to say that if the Hon. Irfaan Ali could produce that feasibility study, he will apologise to me publicly. I have with me here the complete feasibility study. I have shown this to the Clerk of the National Assembly. I can hand this over to the Minister. I have here a 2014 document...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Ali, just a moment.

[Interruption]

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have given Mr. Ali the floor. You should allow him to speak. Please proceed, Mr. Ali.

Mr. Ali: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have here a Government of Guyana, Central Housing and Planning Authority document 2014 titled East Bank/East Coast Road Linkage Feasibility Study. The complete document is here. The Hon. Minister said there exists no feasibility study. I am saying to this honourable House that this feasibility study exists, and the Minister should do the honourable thing, as he had suggested, at this time. That is what I am saying. There exists a feasibility study. You lied to the National Assembly. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I am amazed at the sudden change that has arisen from a matter of this nature, and at the very end of our day's proceedings. Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, would you like the floor?

Mr. Patterson: No, Sir. I would not even bother because I have in my hand a Bible.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, if you are addressing the Chair, if even for a syllable, you must stand.

Mr. Patterson: I was going to address but having something waving in one's hand is not proof of anything; so, I do not think I need to add anything else.

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that the Hon. Members, Mr. Ali and the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Mr. Patterson, can solve whatever difference they have and not have us all try to solve it for them.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. Members, we have had a very trying day. This has brought us to the end of our business for today. I will ask the Hon. Vice-President to move the adjournment.

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: I move the adjournment of this House to tomorrow, Thursday, 6th December, 2018 at 10.00 a.m. Thank you.

Adjourned accordingly at 5.26 p.m.