

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

104TH Sitting

Thursday, 6TH December, 2018

Assembly convened at 10.17 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

The following Reports were laid:

- (i) Fourth Periodic Report of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Natural Resources for the period ended March 16, 2012 to January 29, 2014.
- (ii) Fifth Periodic Report of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Natural Resources for the period ended September 9, 2015 to March 1, 2017.
- (iii) Sixth Periodic Report of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Natural Resources for the period ended March 22, 2017 to April 12, 2018.

[Dr. Anthony]

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 further provision in respect of finance. [*Minister of Finance*]

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Mr. Seeraj: Good morning to colleagues. Sir, I am certain that you will agree with me that this budget is a disappointment to most. The Minister of Finance is not getting better. As a matter of fact, as the years go by, one would have expected that, from 2015 to now, gaining experiences in presenting budget after budget, the Minister would have become better at the job. Sadly, a Minister with the technical background is becoming more and more political in his presentation and that is why the quality of the budgets are really deteriorating.

This particular budget, it would appear that the Minister cannot really make up his mind whether he wants to pursue the Green State Development Strategy, a vision that has been outlined by no less than His Excellency, or whether the Minister is on a different path to fuel

our economy by extraction offshore. There are some talks in the budget about the Green State Development Strategy. In the measure, the Minister is looking for oil for solutions and to provide a boost to our economy. It is this fact that creates inherent conflicts in the budget itself. There is the philosophy of moving towards renewable and moving towards a Green State Development Strategy, but there are the contradictions about measures that are supposed to be in keeping with this vision, but the measures that are outlined in our budget are a far away from going green or being renewable.

In order for a country to pursue a green part of development, there are a number of development options that must be looked at. Going green does not mean painting buildings green as some seem to think or putting on green attire. It is much more than that, Sir. It has to do with environmental issues. In the world there is the environment performance index which is a gauge of how good or bad a country is doing, in terms of achieving this noble goal of renewable source of energy as we go along.

Environmental health is a vital component of this part of development, ecosystem vitality. Given the Minister's state of mind that is reflected in this budget, I would recommend that he seeks out an audience with Dr. Bhiro Harry's clinic, because the Minister seems confused in articulating his position in the budget. It is not easy to switch from a green path of development to extraction of billions of barrels of fuel. It is easy to switch a shirt from green to yellow. I know the Hon. Prime Minister - he is not here - has perfected that art of switching easily. With a budget it is a quite different matter and quite difficult. It is not easy to do those switches. You have to decide what it is that you want. It is whether in the short-term we want to use the extractive industries to fuel our development and put on the back burner this issue of renewable energy and going green or whether we want to put that on the back burner. The Minister seems to want to have his cake and to eat it. I do not know who he thinks he is fooling. It is whether he is playing up to Norway to get more funds for our Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), which is an excellent strategy, or whether he is caught between a rock and a hard place with ExxonMobil and our need for budgetary support and otherwise.

After his long presentation, I am convinced that the Minister was not trying to get Members of the National Assembly to buy into his budget as a priority. I think in the first instance the Minister was trying to convince himself that this budget really makes sense and that is why he went on and on.

In his presentation, page 2, let me quote what the Minister have to say:

“We are poised for rapid economic expansion, and our Government is committed to pursuing economic and social policies conducive to equitable, sustainable and environmentally-friendly growth.”

Well said, Sir. Where in this document are we addressing issues of economically-friendly growth when the budget presentation is repeated with mentions of oil, petroleum industries, extraction and fossil fuel, and all of that? I think the Minister, as I said, should make up his mind. Further, same page 2, the Minister continues.

“...we will ensure that the appreciable economic growth that is expected, is felt at all levels, especially among disadvantaged, vulnerable and underprivileged groups and communities.”

Again, there is nothing wrong with that. Where are the measures in this budget to address the communities and groups identified in this particular sentence or part of a sentence? It is totally missing. Whilst it sounds good, there is nothing tangible in the budget itself to really speak to aspiring or to attaining the aspiration of what this is all about.

The Hon. Minister of Finance spoke about the contraction about the sugar industry. On page 8, he stated clearly that the sugar industry will experience a severe contraction of 25.2%. What are the reasons? What are we doing to address the reasons of this contraction? I wish to posit that the reasons for this contraction after the presentation of the Budget 2016 when the Minister spoke globally about the performance of Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), he did not mention, at that time, that the performance of GuySuCo was actually based on the investments made in 2012, 2013 and 2014. From a position of speaking globally about the performance of sugar of GuySuCo in 2016, the Minister is talking now about severe contraction. We need to examine the reason. I will say it clearly that the blame for the contraction and the dismal performance of GuySuCo and the sugar industry lies squarely at the feet of the Government.

We now have a situation where one Minister does not know what the other Minister is doing about sugar. The Hon. Minister of Agriculture was quoted in the press of saying he does not know anything about loan that was given to the agricultural sector. It appears that the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing and the confusion that is showing is causing this dismal performance of sugar itself. There is the Special Purpose Unit (SPU) now fighting with GuySuCo. I noticed in the press now is a lot of quarrel over a glorified rum shop at La Bonne Intention (LBI) that is called a sports bar, or something such as that. It is in the newspapers.

Apparently, the SPU has different priorities than GuySuCo. The training centre is now converted to a glorified rum shop and it is having pool parties and barbeques. When GuySuCo personnel tried to intervene, I think the Hon. Minister of Agriculture would have liked those things to discontinue, because I am certain that his priority is sugar.

10.32 p.m.

Unlike this Special Purpose Unit, it is talking now about giving access for people to go and sport at the poolside and have drinks at this glorified rum shop, training centre now turn sports bar. These confusions lend to employees and workers in the sugar industry, itself, having a very poor view, dim vision, of the management of GuySuCo by this Government.

Sir, the dismissal of 7,000 workers is not helping the cause, especially where yesterday, right here, in front of the National Assembly, after this Parliament would have approved millions towards the severance pay of those sugar workers, we noticed scores of workers, most of them from the Wales Sugar Estate coming to protest for their severance. That is a legal entitlement. They are against the confusion in the Government camp. One Minister is saying that GuySuCo has the money, another Minister is saying that he is not sure whether the money is there, and another section of the operations is saying that they do not know who to pay, how to pay, and all of that - confusion. Ultimately the hatchet falls on the sugar workers when management should absorb the blame for the dismal performance.

Sir, they were promised good things. The manifesto of the A Partnership for National Unit/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) speaks volume about promises to the sugar industry, 20% increase and even when that was not possible, they were promised land, training, and all of that, when they would have been terminated. The Government has gone silent on these promises.

Yesterday, I remember clearly when my colleague, the Hon. Member Juan Edghill, was talking about a radio advertisement, the Prime Minister said, "it worked". He was very happy in pronouncing that it worked in 2015. I do not think that it would work again in 2020 because they cannot go back to the people and say we will give 20% increase to the workers. They cannot go to the rice farmers to speak about \$6,000 a bag per paddy. They cannot go to the public servant and speak about it is time to end this and to do this. All of those things are totally forgotten. The manifesto that was supposed to be the contract between this APNU/AFC Government and the people of this country seems to be cast in the dustbin or gathering dust on

shelf somewhere. We just cannot throw away the lives or people like that but as Comrade Damon said, we do not care. It is a “we-do-not-care Government”, and one cannot expect better if you do not care.

I must admit that the Hon. Minister continues to speak well about the rice industry. Indeed, the rice industry has a solid foundation. It took us almost two decades to lay that foundation in place. It is rock solid. That is why it is sustaining so far, the mismanagement of this Government, largely because the producers are more in the private sector as against under Government control. Aspects of the industry that falls under Government control seems to be in confusion also as in the rice industry. Sir, markets were promised and once we increase export value came down. Our farmers are being punished for producing more. In 2014, 5,100 tons exported valued US\$249.5 million, that came down in 2017, in which 539,000 tons exported for US\$201 million, US\$48 million less, once we exported 38,000 tons more. Where are the markets that were promised and the prices subsequently came down, that is US\$125 less, when this Government promised more?

The market for Panama there was a fiasco earlier in this year which points to the management of that aspect of the industry by the Government. Even that contract it mismanaged to such an extent that that market, our best market right now, is in jeopardy. The Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB), a Government agency, is the contracted party to Panama. The rice board purchased from millers; it certified the equality; it does inspections, the fumigation of the containers; it issued the certificate for those containers before they could travel, before customs could give the approval. More than 30 containers of not a less quality rice, but a totally different type of rice arrived in Panama and the Panamanians had to send it back. This happened a few months ago. Why should I be ashamed? The Rice Producers Association (RPA), which by law, should have representatives on the board, and in 2015, I mentioned it again, the Hon. Minister of Agriculture - I must give him credit - spoke to me about naming representatives. That was in the 2015. In 2018, 6th December, I am still awaiting acknowledgement from the Ministry of Agriculture that the Rice Producers Association that is legally entitled to have representatives on the board of the GRDB to have those representatives in place. It is no wonder that what is happening there is happening today.

At the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority, the Act that established this agency also provides for two representatives from the RPA. The RPA was established in 1946, 14th September, long before the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) and definitely long before the

People's National Congress (PNC). As a matter of fact, it was the British Guiana Rice Producers Association. There is no politics there. It has to do with the promotion, the protection and advancement of the rice industry. If you remove the association, Sir, you will face the consequences of that removal. Today the farmers of Essequibo, by a drop in yield, only lost over \$1 billion in this last season, neither the Minister of Finance nor the Minister of Agriculture addressed that matter. It is only in a reduction of yield that has happened. The cost for production is going up, compliments of the Government, \$15, 000 per rate, of drainage and irrigation (D&I) charges and land rent, up from \$3,500. We must talk about it. Five thousand dollars at Hope Estate has gone up to \$15,000. These are farmers who are facing lower prices and now being tasked to produce more in an environment when they are getting less and when the Government, itself, is contributing to the increase in cost of production. The farmers are paying.

This year for the two crops, first crop and, second crop, traditionally mentioned, spring crop, in the purchase of fuel alone, the farming section of the industry would have contributed close to \$3 billion in taxes. It is only by the purchase of fuel that would have contributed to our revenues just over \$3 billion in taxes. That is not the value of the fuel. That is only the value of the taxes that they are paying. They need to be given support so that they can produce and compete because we are operating in a global environment, in a global village that is becoming increasingly smaller. This Government seems not to have an appreciation for that. Once the whole world is given support to agriculture, this Government is actually penalising agriculture by way of these increase in taxes.

The rice board is being moved to La Bonne Intention (LBI). I do not think the management of rice board want to be close to that glorified rum shop or the poolside. It is being closed to LBI. It will have to do renovations. It might cost \$100 million, but what will happen to the property at Cowan Street? I do not know if any one of these Ministers..., or I would ask Hon. Minister Ramjattan to do some investigations, whether someone is already lined up to take care of that property. We have to look at that.

The loss that the farmers at Region 2 would have experienced, \$357 bags of paddy, that is equivalent to \$1 billion at the lower price of \$3,000. It is just because of a factor that could have been avoided, insect, pest and disease control. A specialised unit was established, I think, in 2013 to deal with paddy bug infestation and was given the necessary resources. In 2015, that specialised unit was disbanded and we were told that its work now will be incorporated in the

overall research and extension programme. A specialised unit was established in recognition of the devastating economic impact this particular pest can have on rice. In one season, one region, a small region, just 3,500 acres, it lost \$1 billion because of reduction in yield due to that particular pest and another fungal infection called 'Blast'.

The Hon. Member Rajkumar spoke about it, but I do not know whether he was restricted or constrained in his presentation to let known the impact. He spoke just on the periphery about - *top-top*, as we would say - the impact. He knows the impact that is affecting the farmers at Essequibo, right now. Machines are being seized, houses are under threat of being taken back because they are unable to meet commitments to bank institutions. The Minister is aware. I must say that the Minister had a talk with the farmers when he went to commission the pumps at Three Friends. That commissioning would have cost \$3 million. There were eight farmers in the audience, and, on the other side, there were 50 farmers protesting to draw the Minister's attention to what is happening there. Almost 50 persons were taken from Georgetown to make up the crowd. Apparently, it was all the people who are employed there. **[Mr.**

Ramjattan: You said that there was eight.] I said eight farmers. If you listen, you will learn. My primary schoolteacher always used to say a good listener is a good learner. This group has taken over 50 persons to make up the crowd. Apparently, they are employed, but they do not have much to do.

Whilst the General Manager and senior personnel find it difficult to travel to Region 2 to interact with farmers, there is no difficulty with them going to Asia. Travelling for what? We are not there, we are not told but the travelling has increased. You can see it reflected in the budget, although this is an agency, that if you add this to the agency it is \$1.2 billion increase and local traveling will go up significantly.

The Minister of Finance also spoke about cooperation with Malaysia. We are told that we are having cooperation with some institute. That is commendable. Right here in Guyana, I read on a Department of Public Information (DPI) release where the General Manager spoke about yields and said that the average yield in Guyana is about 6.1 tons per hectare. In 1993, it was about three tons and by 2014, it was 6 tons per hectare, so I know that those figures are current. In some areas, the General Manager said – It is not me, Sir. This is according to DPI April 10 - that in some areas we are having yields of 7.1 metric tons per hectare.

10.47 a.m.

We are now entering into cooperation with Malaysia to bring in varieties that we are told that are high yielding. The Malaysian average yield is 4.1 tons per hectare and we are establishing cooperation when our average yield is 6.1 metric tons, but in some areas, Essequibo being one of them, it is 7.1 tons. There is nothing wrong with establishing relationships, it should be promoted and encouraged, but we also have to choose who we are entering cooperation with. Malaysia would like to benefit, and we should allow it to benefit from our expertise, so that it can bring its yields up from 4.1 metric tons per hectare to 7.1 that that we have existing. Whilst I commend the move, I think the Government, again, displayed a lack of understanding of the industry and how it operates and prioritises itself.

In that release too, I saw that export of paddy to Mexico, I think from 2016 to May 2017. The export of paddy to Mexico was somewhere in the vicinity of 174,000 tons. This is the raw material. This Government, in its manifesto to the people of Guyana, particularly the farmers, promised value added. It has actually increased the export of the raw material to Mexico at lower prices. How much more backward can we get, when we are talking about value added, value chain and all of that? Again, in the budget presentation, the words are there - value chain, value added and value this and that. The reality is a totally different situation. The RPA is not even recognised although the law states that he should be recognised. Do you want to blame the RPA for that?

When the GRDB was given the mandate to develop seeds in 1995, which was, hitherto, at National Agricultural Research Extension Institute (NAREI). Within a matter of time, from 1995 to 2015, it had developed 15 new varieties. It is doing well. The technical staff improved. Training was provided and money was being provided for that. There are a lot of people with their first and second degrees and their Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). I would venture to say that on a *per capita* basis, sector wise, the rice industry has more qualified people than other sectors because of investments that were made in human capital. Back in those days, we did not just talk about it, we did it. Today, we are saying one thing and we are doing something else. That is why I said that the yields could have increased from three tons to six tons by then.

The Hon. Minister spoke about increase in the livestock sector – predicting an increase in the sector. The question is: How? What measures are we going to put in place? Whilst we are talking about value added and the manifesto, I just made a note here. Today, as we speak, 40,000 acres of rice in Region 6, is under threat because of irrigation. Whilst we are talking

about drones and all of that, and the Minister seems to be a fan – he certainly was droning yesterday – we cannot even get irrigation water to the farmers who need it.

What are our support? We want to put in an abattoir and we are talking about increasing the livestock sector. Again, commendable, but how are we supporting the farmers? A few months or a few years ago, not so long ago, the rental for pasture land, lease land, that is provided with no service, experienced a 700% increase. The livestock farmers might very well have to sell out their herds of cattle to only pay the lease. Then, what will be the use of the abattoir? We are putting the cart before the horse. Up to our production, the abattoir is, of course, important, but we need to give tremendous amount of support to our farmers. We cannot support them by increasing their leases and the cost of those leases by 700%.

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

Mr. Seeraj: Sir, I noticed the Order Paper states Private Members Day. Are we allowed additional time on this Private Members Day?

Dairy value chain, we have to go through that. The largest concentration of cattle in our country is in Region 5. A lot of people may want to think that it is Region 9. It is not Region 9. It is Region 5. In our dairy value-added chain projections in the budget, our Minister is talking about a milk plant in Diamond. Diamond is on the East Bank of Demerara in Region 4, far removed from where the cows are. I do not know how it is. I understand that he has not even done the study as yet, but we are putting up the milk plant. How feasible will it be when we are asked to compete with subsidised milk that is on the shelves in our supermarkets? This Government is refusing to give support to our farmers in the dairy sector. Our livestock rearers and dairy rearers will be asked now to compete with subsidised milk and in an environment where they are penalised. I can tell you. I buy milk from the milkman every Wednesday and Saturday – fresh milk – and one pint of milk that is untreated, the price is equivalent to the treated milk in the shop. If we are going to go into dairy value chain and all of that, we need to support it. The cost of energy is a big deterrent.

The Minister is talking about census. The Auditor General spoke about the census. This time is really not adequate to address these matters. The Minister spoke for nearly five hours and then you are giving... What the Minister had to say about the census, “According to the Appropriation Accounts”, and I am quoting from the Auditor General, an amount of \$257 million was a shortfall.” Moneys were already allocated since 2017 for this census. Now, again,

in Budget 2019, we are being told about a census, \$257 million could not be spent. Agro-processing, the fisheries sector, all of these are sectors that are not getting any support and we are expected to perform. Central Government's expenditure is going up and revenue associated expenditure is going through the roof. Revenue associated expenditure is not going to give you anything. It is not an investment to produce something more. It is just an expenditure. That is where we are having more and more expenditure going. It is not in investments that are supposed to bring about returns.

In closing, we are demanding a few things that this Government should do to give essence to the label of this document. First and foremost, we should have a reduction in the tax for fuel. This will stimulate every single sector across the board. Restore, for our children's sake, the We Care \$10,000 per child programme. Our pensioners, restore their light and water subsidies. Provide support for our terminated sugar workers, remove the value added tax (VAT) on education, water and electricity, remove the increase in rental for drainage and irrigation and land rent, provide support to the farmers of Region 2, remove the ban on used tyres, and I am asking that you should increase the age restriction on the importation of vehicles. These measures are affecting people and the people affected will fully appreciate what the Hon. Minister so eloquently quoted about the value of time.

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

Mr. Seeraj: Mr. Speaker, let me just take one second to say that those people recognise the value of the one-seat majority and those will speak in 2020.

Thank you very much, Sir. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will work on the basis that when your time is up, unfortunately, it is up. A Member must be prepared to yield the floor immediately as he or she is told that his or her time is up.

Minister of Public Affairs [Ms. Hastings-Williams]: Budget 2019 seeks to strengthen growth in every sector while providing tangible benefits to every citizen of Guyana. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, if you had perused the budget estimates and had listened to the budget delivery made by the Minister of Finance, the Hon. Winston Jordan, you would have seen that there is a package for everyone in this country. When I say everyone, Budget 2019 is gender sensitive. There is a package for every boy, girl, man, woman, aged and even the differently abled. The ultimate goal is that every person is safe and can afford a healthy sustainable lifestyle.

At this time, I would like to congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance Winston Jordan and his hardworking team at the Ministry of Finance for putting together such an economic masterpiece as Budget 2019 which seeks to transform the economy, empower Guyanese people and build sustainable communities to guarantee the “good life” to all those who inhabit this beautiful country.

As per norm, the Members of the Opposition, in their right to offer their perspective on Budget 2019, presented by this coalition Government, all described this budget in all different descriptive words. You would have heard words such as “bluff and fluff”, “incompetent” and fancy words such as “lubricant” and “oil”. This Government is aiming towards transitioning to nearly 100% renewable energy from the country’s natural wealth. Therefore, [Mr. Dharamlall: What about public affairs?] Public affairs, if you do not know the meaning my Comrade, Mr. Speaker, through you, involves almost everything. I am at liberty to talk on water, road and social welfare. I have that liberty to address what is in the budget.

There is a saying that goes, “good things are never cheap and cheap things are never good.” Therefore this coalition Government will embark on doing feasibility studies. We will continue to do feasibility studies in order to find renewable sources, whether it be for renewable sources of energy, our input into our feasibility studies will determine the outcomes.

11.02 a.m.

What are the outcomes? Lest we go down the same road as the Members on the Opposition benches, who, perhaps because of their improper feasibility studies, if there were any, what was the results? It was a flip and flop Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. Because of improper feasibility studies, what was the results of one of the projects – the wharf at Charity that drifted away. Because of the improper feasibility studies, what about the Skeldon Factory – a big white elephant. Because of improper feasibility studies, the East Bank Demerara and the East Coast Demerara Road, the contract was signed in 2010 and it was this coalition Government that only began works in 2016. I can go on. Because of improper feasibility studies, what about the Fibre Optic Cable Project – that also flipped and flopped. Because of improper feasibility studies, what happened to the Kato Secondary School – it came cracking down. This coalition Government is not going down that same road.

What I can assure Guyanese is that, as a result of our input, our outcomes would be a proper Parika to Georgetown Road. We will have a proper Linden to Lethem Road; a proper Bartica

Stelling; a proper Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA). I could go on, but Guyanese must know the truth. We must stop disseminating false information... [Ms. Wade: Fake news.] And fake news to our supporters and nation as a whole.

A few days ago, an Hon. Member on the other side of the House argued that Budget 2019 is a façade, since it is lengthy in pages and its delivery took approximately five hours. I said this during last year's Budget Speech and I will repeat it again, the Members on the other side of the House continue to revolve around misleading information. The number of pages and time it takes to deliver, are not the valid criteria to measure the effectiveness of any national budget. While embezzlement, incompetence and neglect face the advances this coalition Government is doing to make Guyana a productive and developed nation, fallacies are used as a masquerade to hide past failures. Such mass will fall each time the truth and evidence continue to reveal themselves.

Another correction, the coalition Government is in power since 2015, not 2014. I know it seems like an eternity for the Members sitting on the other side of this House, but let me remind them, we came into power in 2015. I am aware that it is not easy for them to have been in power for 23 years doing as they please and, when it was least expected, they lost access to all their comforts and benefits. I say this because a certain Hon. Member went about diffusing false data on national television by adding Budget 2014 narrative as part of the coalition Administration's period in order to inflate data.

Let me tell you what that is. Their objective is to deceive viewers nationwide. That is where the 'fluff' and 'bluff' are. The Hon. Member was given one of the most pivotal Ministries to oversee - that was the Ministry of Education. We all know that the Member went on the national television to say that 2019 comes at a time when we do not know how the country is positioned and we do not know what the plan is for the country. In case the other side of the House did not know how the country is positioned, this data will come in handy. According to the Global Prosperity Index - Legatum Prosperity Index:

“In the Prosperity Pillar rankings, Guyana performs best on Social Capital and Governance.”

It ranked 44th and 63rd, respectively.

“The biggest positive change, compared to last year, came in Governance increasing by 7 places...”

The Hon. Member said, also, that, during their 23 years in Government, Guyana was able to move from a low-income country to a middle-income country. We saw Guyana cut poverty by a half. Let me make some corrections right here and I will quote the World Bank:

“As of July 1, 2016, the South American CARICOM nation of Guyana no longer is classified as a low-income economy. Instead, using the World Bank Atlas method, Guyana is now classified as an upper middle-income economy with a gross national income (GNI) per capita of between US\$4,036...”

Again I say, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) was not in power in 2016. They should not take credit for accomplishments that belong to the coalition Government. It is highly irresponsible to disseminate false data to their supporters. Budget 2019, like other budgets, presented by the Hon. Minister, focuses not only on satisfying the present needs of the populace, but plans for the prosperous future of the nation to ensure the ‘good life’ for every Guyanese.

At this time, it is noteworthy to mention that the Green State Development Strategy (GSDS) has been made available to the general public for them to be acquainted with the future plans of this Government and that is being put in place for the growth and development of Guyana. The aforementioned document, the Framework of the Guyana Green State Development Strategy and Financing Mechanisms lays out:

“His Excellency President David A. Granger and the new Coalition Government’s principle foundations for inclusive green economic and social growth, provide a roadmap for achieving sustainable development goals and related targets, and outlines a long-term vision for a prosperous and equitable future.”

I will now touch on some of the measures that we have for the Green State Development Strategy. The Green State Development Strategy is a national strategic plan that aims to improve the life of every Guyanese. Therefore, companies utilising alternate energy technologies, renewable energy options and harnessing renewable energy either through wind, solar or water, will qualify for the write-off of capital expense of the Wear and Tear Schedule of the Income Tax within two years and waive import duties and Value Added Tax (VAT) on new equipment. With the creation of these tax incentives, the creation of individual wealth will increase while protecting the environment. That is what the Green State Development Strategy is all about.

During my presentation for the region which I represent as a Parliamentarian, I am going to talk more about the measures that support our Green Development Agenda. Let me now concentrate on Region 7 - Cuyuni/Mazaruni Region. Guyana's hinterland is a rich terrain with great potential for the development of tourism, agriculture, fishing, forestry, livestock, extractive industries, and manufacturing. Its people are very hardworking, dedicated, and talented, but sad to say, it has not been able to develop its full potential due to the lack of opportunities in the hinterland areas which stemmed from the underinvestment that went on for 23 years under the previous Administration. The hijacking of Local Government Elections (LGE) for nearly 3 decades held decentralised power captive, impeding local and regional growth and development. Given the aforementioned, the coalition Government in 2019, allocated the sum of \$375 million to equip 20 hinterland communities with Information and Communication Technology (ICT) hubs. You would have heard this before from my Hon. Colleague Catherine Hughes. Let me tell you where these ICT hubs *via* satellite will be placed. They will benefit more than 3,500 persons from Kaikan, Jawalla, Philippi, Paruima and of course Kako. They will all benefit from this initiative.

Since the coalition Government came in to power in 2015, it has made humongous efforts to compensate the state of stagnated development the hinterland area has suffered.

Now I will mention the public works. In the Public Works Sector, I want you to listen carefully, under the PPP/C, the Cuyuni/Mazaruni Region's average percentage investment was -3.9% In other words, the monetary allocations made to this region decreased considerably. On the other hand, the average percentage investment for the Cuyuni/Mazaruni Region in the Public Works Sector, under this Government, for the period 2015 to 2018, has been 8.7%.

Projects in the region such as the rehabilitation of roads from Kako to Waramadong and from Waramadong to Kamarang, will be of great benefit to the community since the road will link communities making easy access for students attending the D.C. Caesar Fox Secondary School. Easy access will be given to persons from Kamarang, Kako and Waramadong, who occupied over 300 acres doing farming. It will reduce the cost of transportation by at least 50%.

11.17 a.m.

Kamarang, is the main trans-shipment area in the Upper Mazaruni Region, and so, rehabilitation of roads and bridges, which will be undertaken this year, will allow persons to travel and access the other communities in reasonable time and using reasonable funds for

transportation. Many projects that started under the previous Administration, what happened to them? They failed and so Kako Road was no exception. Many years ago, the roads were not far gone, but there was no proper feasibility study. I walked that road and so I know where the swamps and creeks are, and with the cooperation of the engineers from the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, we are going to build a good road.

The rehabilitation of the Bartica/Potaro Roadway will bring great relief to vehicle owners and residents surrounding this area. Also, access roads heading to Dagg Point and Agatash, are roads that would be undertaken in this year's budget. At last Region 7 is beginning to have roads and when I say roads, real roads, good roads, proper roads and added to that, they got streetlights. This coalition Government will not embark on projects as elections roads or elections lights to gain votes. We look at our people in a better way.

The rehabilitation of the bridges at Kaburi and Kamarang, as mentioned before, the Kaburi Timber bridge which measures a distance of 1,000 feet and is one of two access used by students and residents to access school and other Governmental buildings, will also be undertaken in Budget 2019.

To talk more about our Green Agenda, let me tell you what more we have. We have put aside \$50 million allocated for the Philippi Airstrip. Those who travel the length and breadth of Guyana will know how difficult it is to access this community when the water is low. The only alternative means is by flying into Phillip, and so we are going to look after the airstrips in Budget2019.

What else do we have for the other communities? We have a photovoltaic mini-grids that would be placed at Chinowieng, another community that is difficult to access and also the community of Philippi.

Let me com to the health sector in this region. The average increased expenditure during the period 2011-2014 was 10%. Under the period 2015-2018, it is 13.4%. Improved working conditions in the hinterland region is a factor that this coalition Government has decided to work on in order to increase retention and work performance, improve service delivery and the quality of life of the employees who are serving in our hinterland areas. The Opposition, instead of being happy for the improved working and living conditions provided to Governmental employees located in hinterland communities, they create the overspending smoke screen argument to justify being the Opposition. Crumbling buildings, deteriorated bathrooms, no

proper accommodation facilities, lack of transportation resources, the absence of office equipment to complete daily duties, among others, are some of the challenges employees in the interior would face due to the underinvestment in those areas during the 23 years. The coalition Government, however, now in power, is trying to change this fact and an irresponsible Opposition's criticism will not halt the course this Administration has taken to guarantee the 'good life' to everyone.

The construction of living quarters in Kamarang to accommodate medical specialists. At least two medical specialists, their accommodations will be undertaken in this year. We will have an Obstetrician and a Paediatrician who will be stationed at the Kamarang District Hospital. This has never happened before. We will also have a doctors' quarters at Kaikan, which we all know, if you did not know, is critical now that the situation is further compound with the recent remigration of Guyanese due to the hardship in Venezuela. The Ministry of Public Health is committed to sending a doctor once the accommodation is available. The Kamarang District Hospital will have its extension to accommodate x-rays and other things. We will be bringing these services to the people in the Upper Mazaruni.

The Education Sector in the Cuyuni/Mazaruni Region. I believe that education is the path towards success, especially for the development of a nation. This is a core vision shared throughout the coalition Government, and, therefore, a special education needs building will be constructed in Bartica to cater for our special needs' children. New primary schools will be constructed in Imbaimadai and Waramadong. We will be renovating and maintaining all the other schools that we have so that our children...

If you want to know what is new? Ever since I became a Member of Parliament (MP) in the Opposition, I was asking the previous Government to have a science laboratory at the lone Waramadong Secondary school which is now the D. C. Caesar Fox Secondary School. The good news is that we will build a science lab at the Waramadong Secondary school. The other good news is that this school, presently, has what we call a smart classroom. That is the good news for the people of Cuyuni. Region 7.

Let me now turn my attention to the Water Sector which I had responsibility for. I must mention that the Water Sector in Guyana has grown. I will speak about the new things that are happening at the Guyana Water Incorporated Inc. (GWI). We have the sum of \$2.5 billion to provide improved services, new services to more than 241,000 persons across Guyana. This is in

addition to the approximate \$150 million which will be derived from the waiver of tax for the purchase of chemicals and spares.

The reliable potable water supply and distribution translates into healthy happy residents. Therefore, what is new at GWI? They have budgeted money to put or to buy a new water rig that will dig additional wells throughout the hinterland areas of our country. This had never happened in 23 years. Persons that are now residing in new housing schemes or areas which have been regularised will be provided with potable water. Areas such as, to name them, Barnwell North- East Bank - Region 4; Friendship - East Bank; Land of Canaan; Waimakabra; Kuru Kururu; Great Diamond; Timehri North; Parika and Ruby Backdam in Region 3; Capoey and Mainstay; Murphy Dam; Rosignol, Ithaca Village; Phoenix Street; Catherine Street; Farm Dam; and I could go on and on. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

In conclusion, Budget 2019 has delivered policies, strategies and plans in fundamental sectors of the Guyanese society that needs to be improved for the development and progress of this nation, ensuring the ‘good life’ all Guyanese deserve, including the Members of the Opposition.

If my friends on the other side had lost the Local Government Elections miserably, do you know what would have been their cry? They would have cried that we rigged the elections. What I do know is that the only rig...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have 30 minutes remaining.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I do know is that the only rigs that the Guyanese are becoming accustomed to are the new water rigs that GWI is going to procure in 2019 and the oil rig that we have out in the Stabroek Block. With its production of thousands of barrels of oil in 2020, the Guyanese, the entire populace, are aimed to benefit from the oil rig. So, they are not interested in the rigging of elections, they are interested in the oil rig that is bound to bring *[Inaudible]*.

So, in 2020, we have no doubt, and I have no doubt, with all these developmental projects mentioned by myself and my Colleagues who spoke before me, allow me to say that there is no doubt that, in 2020, the APNU/AFC Government will be victorious.

I end with this, APNU/AFCCoalition#fullconfidence.

I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Anamayah: Good morning to the entire House. As I rise to make my contribution to these debates, I must first endorse all that my Colleagues on this side of the House have so eloquently and so passionately espouse. At the same time, I must note my observation that the majority of the speakers from the Government benches read from prepared speeches. It was evident that, for some of them, it was the first time they were reading the speeches. There were some uncharacteristic grammatical errors and mispronunciation, so it is evident to us here. From their body language and the robotic delivery, it lacked conviction for us. It is evident that they have clearly conceded this debate already.

I am questioning as to whether I heard correctly. I just heard the Hon. Member, Dawn Hastings-Williams, concede that the APNU/AFC coalition Government lost the Local Government Elections miserably. Those were her words.

11.32 a.m.

We hear from this Hon. Member once a year it seems, Mr. Speaker. We are still, after hearing that exposition, clueless as to what the Minister is responsible for - the Minister responsible for Publicity and Public Affairs. It should be renamed something else, maybe the 'Department of Propaganda and Fake News'. Let me remind the Hon Member of an undisputed historical fact. The PPP/C took over a bankrupt country in 1992, the poorest country in the western hemisphere. We left you in 2015 with a robust vibrant economy. You must take credit for the abysmal state it is in at present. That is your legacy. You own that.

As my Colleague, Mr. Seeraj said:

“It is our expectation that this being the fifth budget of the coalition Government they would finally get it right.”

Alas, Mr. Speaker, we were again disappointed. The entire nation was astounded. We, sitting here in the Opposition benches were at a loss for any clue of any vision or policy that would make a difference. If Budget 2019 is really the instrument by which the coalition Government's policies are to be translated into action, then we are in deep trouble in this country.

I am so happy that the Hon. Minister of Public Infrastructure raised the issue of the Berbice River Bridge. As a matter of fact, yesterday afternoon, the Hon. Minister lamented the fact that our MPs from Region 6 did not mention the Bridge. He acknowledged the tremendous

importance of that Bridge to Regions 5 and 6. I am so happy about that. Need I remind the Minister that this bridge was a PPP project, executed and delivered. It was delivered under the leadership and the stewardship of President Bharrat Jagdeo. It is our bridge, we built it and we are proud of that achievement. It came at zero cost to the taxpayers and the national coffers. We are proud of what we have achieved through that public/private partnership.

The Hon. Minister has not recovered from this election gimmick that was orchestrated by the Chairman of the Board, who happens to be an AFC Member - the election gimmick that backfired spectacularly. This puerile attempt to again fool Berbicians and to drive fear into them that the bridge tolls would be raised come 12th November, 2018. Look at the date for the bridge tolls, it was the date the next Local Government Election were to be held. The tolls would have been raised by over 300% odd. That never happened. It was a gimmick, it backfired. It was a grenade thrown back into their lap and it exploded and they were dealing with the after-effect. The Hon. Minister was not given this opportunity to rush in like a knight in shining armour and save the Berbicians. They saw through that ploy, that gimmick and they rejected it. Like they rejected the Hon. Prime Minister and Hon. Minister Ramjattan in Berbice. They rejected it.

Now that the Government has rushed in and nationalised that bridge, they must tell us now what are the plans. I see the Hon. Gentleman is leaving the House, how sad. I did not hear from the Hon. Minister, what are the plans? I did not hear a word about the Berbice River Bridge in the Budget Presentation, so we are left in the dark as to the day to day management, what will happen. Are they going to pay the investors the premium price for their shares, as they did with another investor – Demerara Distillers Limited (DDL)? Is that going to happen? When is it going to happen?

Look at what they have done to investors' confidence. We may never have such a public/private partnership again because they have shattered that relationship, that confidence, that any investor will have in our country. I am so happy that the Hon. Minister raised it. Now, a bad situation could become worse because the matter is now in Court. I trust that the Minister will do the sensible thing and will not have the Attorney General's Chambers represent him in this matter in Court. Because of the Chambers dubious track record, that would spell disaster. We or the citizens will have to pay for that for the national coffers again, particularly given the fact that what the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) has said in a judgement recently about the

performance or the lack of performance or incompetency of that Ministry, when dealing with legal matters in representing the State.

It was our fervent hope and the hope of the Private Sector, the business community, small and large businesses, farmers, contractors, labourers, you name it, every hard-working Guyanese across the length and breadth of Guyana hoped that they would have seen a reversal of the most oppressive tax regime imaginable imposed through the last four budgets on the citizens of this country. It was hoped that we would have seen a people-friendly budget, a budget that would have stimulated growth, investors' confidence, consumers' confidence and employment for the over 30,000 persons that the coalition have rendered jobless or unemployed. Again, Mr. Speaker, that was not to be. Instead, another \$30 billion more would be sucked out of the economy from the pockets of the Guyanese in taxes by the measures implemented in this budget when it is passed. There would be less money in circulation and less money in the hands of consumers.

The Private Sector, in particular the business community, has been particularly hard-hit. Whether they are in Regent Street here in Georgetown, Pitt Street in New Amsterdam or where ever they are in the country, it is the same. Let me give you a particular instance. There is a businessman in New Amsterdam, who in 2015, when the PPP was in power, could employ, did employ 29 persons. Now, a mere three and a half years later, do you have any idea how many persons he has on his payroll? The number has shrunk to 12 – from 29 to 12. Why and what has that changed? The Government has changed. That is all that changed. We have had three and a half years of APNU/AFC and the sales of all these businesses have plummeted by more than 50%. Under the PPP/C, this very businessman, at Christmas time, had to close his doors on his customers. He was so overwhelmed with business and with sales. Now, the sales have dropped by more than 50%. Christmas has been postponed particularly in Berbice. If the businesses have not invested to stock their stores, they have no confidence in the Government or in the economy to do so.

Conversely, the consumers are not spending. They are holding on to whatever little they have left after all the taxes are collected. The towns – New Amsterdam, Rose Hall and Corriverton are flat. Something has to give. We cannot continue in this vein. What is also assisting or helping the major impediment crippling the businesses is the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) and the Customs Department and what goes on. The actions and the operations of the Customs Department are major impediments to commerce and the importation of goods. We

have seen a drastic reduction in the importation of good. That means less revenue. I cannot understand how the Hon. Members on the other side cannot get it.

If you have a robust importation and the businessmen are bringing in hundreds of containers as they did in the past, certainly you will get more revenue from that. That is the fundamental difficulty that we have. The Hon. Members on the other side do not grasp that simple concept; they cannot grasp that simple concept. Instead of bringing in 100 containers, a businessman is bringing in 10 now. Look at the loss of revenue. In Berbice alone it translates to billions of dollars in losses.

The other impediment to progress and to commerce is the Compliance Section at the GRA departments throughout this country and particularly in Berbice. It takes months to get a Certificate of Compliance issued to go ahead and do a Sale of Property. The files have to leave Berbice and come to Georgetown. Why is that so? Before it happened ... This is preventing the department from collecting revenue. They are delaying the collection of revenue by their inefficiencies and incompetency.

My Colleague, Mr. Seeraj, spoke at length about what is happening in the agriculture sector. I will not repeat what he has said, but just to point out that if agriculture and in general rice, was important or high on the coalition's agenda, how come there are no direct tangible measures in this document? There are no measures addressing the sector. There is nothing here in terms of measures to alleviate the plight as the Hon. Member, Mr. Seeraj spoke about – the hardship the rice industry is facing.

The Hon. Minister spoke about farm to market roads. Where are those roads going to be built? This is because we know that as a direct result of the Government's inaction and refusal to build those roads or maintain the roads in Berbice, thousands of acres of rice could not have been harvested. There are tremendous losses that the rice farmer suffered. The farmers then sought a meeting with the Hon. Minister. They were told that the APNU/AFC coalition will not spoil rice farmers as the PPP/C did. Is putting in necessary infrastructure to...

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

Mr. Anamayah: ...to have the farmers bring out their produce, spoiling rice farmers, Mr. Speaker? That was a sad statement. It shows how interested they are in agriculture in general, and rice in particular.

11.47 a.m.

As to one measure in the budget here, the measures in support of persons living with disabilities, on the face of it, it is very commendable that the Government has recognised that more needs to be done. It is commendable, but I question who this would benefit. These are genuine concerns. Was there any consultation done? Did the Ministry actually go out and find out from any of these organisations what they needed and did those organisations respond and say that they wanted duty free concession? I cannot believe that; that would never happen. They have other more important priorities. Before you even give them vehicles, help them to read so that they could get driver's licences to drive the vehicles. Implement a holistic plan for our school children. There is no plan that the Coalition Government, in three and half years, has implemented for children with disabilities who are attending schools. There is no plan whatsoever. There is nothing in the school system.

One year ago, I had a conversation with a nice young lady from the Department of Education in New Amsterdam. She was dealing with disabilities. She was waiting for a grant from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). That was one year ago. That never materialised. All I am saying is that the resources would be better utilised if they were put directly in schools. Train the specialists, the therapists and the people who could teach these children and give them one-on-one attention. That would benefit these children and people with disabilities as a whole.

In conclusion, in the field of psychology, there is what is referred to as the Dunning–Kruger Effect. It is a cognitive bias in which unskilled people or poor performers make poor decisions and reach erroneous conclusions and their incompetence denies them the metacognitive ability to recognise their mistakes.

Let me break it down for the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan. The people who are incompetent at something are incapable of recognising their own incompetence. It is illusory superiority and it is a disease that is afflicting the entire Coalition Government *en bloc*. So, Mr. Seeraj was correct when he said that they need to seek help from Dr. Bhiro Harry. They may need several specialists.

This Government has shown that it is impervious to reasoning. They would not listen to us here. We understand that. That is okay if they do not want to listen to us, but ignoring the cries of the masses, ignoring the electorate and ignoring the shellacking that they received at the just

concluded Local Government Elections would be their undoing. The Guyanese people would have their final say in 2020. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I am advised that, if the House wishes, we could have lunch at this time. So, my suggestion to the House is that we take the suspension now and return at five minutes to 1 o'clock.

Minister of Public Infrastructure [Mr. Patterson]: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to take this opportunity to acknowledge a report which was received from the Clerk. We have been looking for this report for quite some while. It is a report, not on a bypass road, but a report on how to build a road for one's friends and family. So, I thank you. We have been looking for it for quite a while. Thank you, Hon. Member, Irfaan Ali. I will explain to the press in a minute. I do thank you and I do acknowledge receiving it.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I thank you, but unless it is related to a matter which is before the House today...

Mr. Patterson: No, it is not.

Mr. Speaker: Then if it is not, I must say thank you very much, but we cannot take it beyond that.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we would take the suspension now. Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, do you have a comment to make?

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I wish to remind you that the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, had stated that were the feasibility study to be produced, he would apologise since he had made a statement that there had been no feasibility study done. The comment by the Hon. Minister does not reflect what he said yesterday.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have said that whatever was there yesterday, we would not import into today. I certainly will not.

Ms. Teixeira: Well, then could you please ask him to withdraw his comments?

Mr. Speaker: We would now take the suspension.

Sitting suspended at 11.53 a.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.07 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: We continue our debate on the Budget.

Minister of Public Health [Ms. Lawrence]: I wish to offer congratulations to the Hon. Minister Winston Jordan and his hardworking team for the presentation of the national *Budget 2019*, once again, ahead of time, thereby attesting to the solid resolve of the A Partnership for National Unity and Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition’s Manifesto to keep the Guyanese nation apprised of policies, programmes and projects in the Government’s development agenda in pursuit of the good life.

The national *Budget 2019* themed, “*Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities For the Good Life*” is crafted to provide the overall improvement in the quality of life for the Guyanese nation. And it against this backdrop that I stand in this honourable House to share with the Hon. Members the Ministry of Public Health’s achievements in 2018, for which health accounted for 12.5% of the national budget, and the way forward for the health sector in 2019.

World leaders, recognising the plethora of health issues challenging countries globally, selected as their theme for this year, *Universal Health Coverage, Everyone Everywhere*, advocating that, globally, people should be able to access essential quality health services without facing financial hardship. Cognisant of this focus, the Ministry of Public Health sought to impact positively and effectively on the health sector, forging ahead and prioritising the enhancement of the delivery of health services throughout all 10 Administrative Regions.

The Ministry of Public Health has had its gamut of issues, but we have kept the momentum, coordinating our efforts to fill those gaps, so that our movement along the continuum to universal health coverage could be accelerated. The Ministry of Finance, witnessing the great strides that the Ministry of Public Health has been making, awarded the Ministry with budgetary allocations to the tune of \$35.9 billion, some 11.9% of the national Budget.

I wish to highlight to the honourable House some of the significant milestones that have been achieved for the year under review. Health Exposition 2018 – this was the first ever health fair of such magnitude, attracting more than 20,000 persons, hosted at the Sophia Exhibition Centre under the theme, *Reaching for a better life with good health*. Health Exposition 2018 brought the whole issue of healthcare into sharp focus and sensitised the public to the many services offered by the Ministry of Public Health.

The National Tobacco Control Act was assented to in 2017 and, in 2018, the Ministry of Public Health received the World No Tobacco Day Award Regional Office for the Americas. This accolade positions Guyana at the highest level of adherence to three of the four tobacco control best buys. In 2019, the Ministry of Public Health is poised to achieve the fourth best buy practice within the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC), since the Hon. Minister of Finance has introduced a new regime for taxing tobacco, consisting of a combination of ad valorem and specific taxes as follows: the imposition of a specific tax of \$2,500 per 100,000 sticks, together with custom duty and Value Added Tax (VAT) of 14%.

The Government Health Information System (GHIS) features a single electrical medical record platform that would capture pertinent patients' information, such as demographic, medical history, clinical treatment data, upon entry to, transfer from or within a facility via this system; thus, eliminating the need for paper-based documentation. Our East La Patience Health Centre is being used, presently, as the pilot to roll out Guyana's first paperless health facility and the New Amsterdam Hospital is 80% completed. I just do not know whether the Hon. Member, Dr. Mahadeo, had a bout of amnesia. In 2019, a pharmacy inventory model, an integral component of the GHIS, directly link to the essential drug medicine list, will be rolled out. This would aid doctors in the prescription of drugs and ensure accountability.

Our human resources – In 2018, the Ministry of Public Health continued to build human resource capacity, especially in the field of nursing. This has resulted in a boost of 448 qualified nurses in the health system. For the first time, the Governments of Guyana and Brazil have jointly sponsored a Masters' and Doctoral programme in nursing. Eight students are benefiting from the Masters, while five are pursuing the Doctorate in Nursing. We would be the first country in this Caribbean to have nursing with a doctorate degree. This would further enhance our human resource capacity and provide the platform for the building of sustainable healthy communities.

I would now focus on our tertiary institution, the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC). In 2018, the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation continued to function as the country's leading health teaching and research institution, hosting both medical students from the University of Guyana (UG) and private medical schools during their period of clinical rotations.

1.15 p.m.

The GPHC continued to offer postgraduate training in a number of specialised areas. Some 39 graduates benefitted from these specialised programmes, which includes Masters in Anesthesia and Intensive Care, Emergency Medicine, Emergency Nurse Residency Programme, Family Medicine, Paediatric Medicine, Psychiatry and Surgery among the list. It is important to note that the postgraduate training of doctors in Family Medicine has boosted our primary healthcare system, allowing for earlier diagnosis and better treatment of pregnant women, especially high-risk mothers.

In 2018, the overseas missions continued to impact significantly on our health system. Seven successful kidney transplants were completed. Additionally, Guyana's first ever paired kidney transplant was successfully done right here in Guyana. Fifteen successful corrective cardiac surgeries were performed and there were 18 other medical interventions by two baby heart missions to Guyana.

The Health and Education Relief Organization (HERO) completed its medical mission in Guyana with 66 surgeries.

Operation Walk Maryland conducted over 50 joint replacements during its first mission here in October.

The Paediatric Care Cardiac Centre - In July, Guyana's first Pediatric Critical Care Unit was commissioned through collaborations between the Ministry of Public Health and the International Children's Heart Foundation. This unit offers treatment to critically ill children under the age of 13 years. It houses 16 high-dependency beds and a four-bed intensive care unit, which caters to the medical needs of children with congenital heart diseases. To date, 1,960 children have benefitted from the various medical services, which include general, cardiac, neonatal, nephrology, and neurology among others.

The GPHC procured and installed one 64-slice computed tomography (CT) scanner machine, which became operational during the second quarter of this year. To date, 2,214 scans have been executed through advanced imaging, and these scans have significantly reduced the timeline in which doctors are able to diagnose the cause of illnesses.

A new facility, housing an Oncology Department and the Institute of Health Sciences Education, was built at a cost of \$48.8 million. The staff are smiling because they are no longer placed in a very cramped area to operate. This new and improved facility provides a more treatment-friendly atmosphere to approximately 100 cancer patients who seek treatment at the

GPHC on a monthly basis. The new accommodation for the Institute of Health Science Education provides improved teaching facilities, four doctors and nurses pursuing postgraduate medical education, training or seeking to specialise in a particular area of medical science.

I wish to emphasise that, despite our constraints, our tertiary institution, the GPHC, with its targeted interventions, is well positioned to make an impact on the lives of Guyanese.

In 2018, the Personnel Department made strides to establish a Human Resource Department. The Ministry approached PAHO and secured the services of a consultant, who provided a number of recommendations. The Ministry established a committee to peruse the consultant's recommendations and to advise the Ministry on the way forward. In 2019, the Human Resources Department will be established and will function under the guidance of this consultant.

The Procurement Department - The Ministry established a Procurement Department in 2017. I reiterate: The Ministry established a Procurement Department in 2017. This is still a work-in-progress. In 2018, the Ministry of Public Health's procurement staff was involved in two training sessions, one hosted by the Ministry of Finance's National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) and another by the Public Procurement Commission (PPC). The staff was provided with the requisite knowledge and procurement procedures, in keeping with the Procurement Act. **[Mr. Dharamlall: *[Inaudible]*]** We will use a chain again on you. Presently, a consultant from USAID is in Guyana to assess the current operating structure of the Ministry of Public Health's Procurement Unit, providing hands on coaching support with national procurement planning and contract management and assisting with terms of references (TORs) for a procurement tracking system.

I will now highlight the major achievements for family healthcare services in 2018. Maternal and child health: In Region 3, the Leonora health facility was upgraded to accommodate a 24-bed maternity ward, which will provide services for high-risk mothers, especially those from the riverine areas. There was training and equipping of 20 community health workers in Region 9. I am so happy to inform this honourable House that, to date, this has impacted, significantly, for we have had no maternal deaths in Region 9.

Maintaining Guyana's status of being free from yellow fever, measles, diphtheria and polio is as a result of our continuous vaccination activities in bordering regions of both Guyana and Venezuela. Kudos to our medical personnel.

There was the provision of contraceptive implants to 900 women in Regions 1 through 9. Mr. Damon, do you hear? There was also training in zero maternal deaths by hemorrhaging, alarms training for medical personnel and continuous quality improvement and postnatal care for health workers. Further, the development of an action plan for the elimination of mother to child transmission of the human immuno-deficiency virus (HIV) and Syphilis for certification has been complete. There was the distribution of refrigerators for hospitals for the introduction of hepatitis birth dose, which is in keeping with the country moving towards the elimination of Hepatitis B. This was also completed.

Most of all, we have now begun to implement the Perinatal Information System (SIP), specifically for pregnant women and neonates. Hon. Mr. Mahadeo, the New Amsterdam Public Hospital will be one of the hospitals where the SIP will be introduced to create the environment for the improvement of neonatal services.

Dental Health - The dental health programme was extended. Two new dental clinics, one at the President's College and the other at Maraikobai, were established. A periodontal specialist was recruited at the Cheddi Jagan Dental School to treat gum diseases and disorders.

National Blood Transfusion Services (NBTS) - The National Blood Transfusion Service must be commended. They have collected 4,881 units of blood, to date, and estimates over 5,000 units by the end of 2018. The National Blood Transfusion Services was boosted by the acquisition of the apheresis machine. Originally, it was necessary to have some 264 donors to provide 44 oxygenated platelets. With the apheresis machine, only 22 donors are needed to provide the same output. The platelets generated from the apheresis machine are of a higher quality and quantity and, notably, the leukemia patients are already benefitting significantly from the purchase of this machine.

Projections for 2019. In 2019... [Mr. Gill: What about drug shortages?] ...wait, I am coming. In 2019, \$524.6 million has been budgeted under the GPHC. Let me just highlight a few of the projects that will take place.

We will complete the furnishing of the Waterloo Street staff quarters that was left to rot by the previous Administration.

We will commence works to rehabilitate and extend the pre and postnatal wards at the Maternity Unit. There would be the renovation of the Mental Health Unit and transformation to a mental health ward.

There will be the construction of a four-storey building in the GPHC compound to relocate the main pharmacy and the Medical Records Department, including rest areas for the doctors and nurses. Upgrading of the Guyana Health Information System (GHIS) at the GPHC will allow the Corporation to commence and roll out the health management information systems across the hospital. There was the procurement of a new conditioned reflex (CR) machine to assist in orthopedics and neurology surgeries, among many others.

In 2019, in order to eliminate the inadequacies of the 18-bed Emergency Unit that exists at the GPHC, there would be the construction of a state-of-the-art Trauma Centre in an effort to control patient flows and to accommodate more patients seeking medical attention. The construction of the Trauma Centre will see an increase in the number of in-patient ward space, with the number of beds increasing from 483 to 1,000; more out-patient clinic space and an increase in the number of theatres from five to 12, including two separate theatres for obstetrics and gynecology.

The Ministry of Public Health's projections: I will list a few. We are going to see the completion of phase 1 of the Head Office Complex. We are going to see the construction of the Food and Drug Laboratory and Entomological Laboratory. We are going to see the rehabilitation of C.C. Nicholson Hospital and the Lethem maternity waiting home. We are going to see the construction and equipping of a mortuary building at the New Amsterdam Public Hospital. Let me just say to the Hon. Dr. Mahadeo that we do not build mortuaries next to kitchens. There would be the rehabilitation of Festival City to a poly clinic, where preventative and curative services will be offered. There will be the completion of ophthalmology operating rooms at the Linden Hospital Complex. And, of course, we will see the construction of the three primary health care facilities at West Demerara, Suddie and Bartica.

1.30 p.m.

The Phoenix Recovery Project - We are coming from an era when drug lords were embraced in our society by the previous Administration, an act for which we, as a nation, are now paying dearly. We know that we cannot fight this battle of substance abuse alone. Hence, a subsidy to the tune of \$6.5 million is provided to the Phoenix Recovery Project to aid in its rehabilitation programmes.

EyeCare Guyana Programme - A sum of \$9.23 million will be injected into the EyeCare Guyana programme, not only to keep the programme afloat after donor funds were curtailed, but to ensure that the Guyanese people could access and benefit from affordable eye care.

We have heard much about disability from the other side, but just let me inform the Members on the other side that this Government has an interest in all people. In this Budget, we have allocated some \$18.6 million more to the Commission's programmes and plans for 2019.

In 2019, the Ministry's legislation agenda will address the following: The Nurses and Midwives Bill, Health Protection and Promotion Bill, regulations for the use of radiation sources and for the management of the associated radioactive waste and amendment to Licensing of Health Facilities Act.

We have heard much criticism from the other side of the honourable House about the health sector. Allow me to respond to the Hon. Member, Dr. Mahadeo, and to quote from an article in the *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper, dated 10th December, 2017, the very next day after Dr. Mahadeo would have spoken in this House. It reads:

“Dr. Mahadeo during his budget presentation had pointed to region-wide shortage of drugs and non-functioning operating theatres at the New Amsterdam Hospital, as well as the non-use of a CT scan machine donated to the Hospital more than a year ago.

However, during an all-day tour of the region, the health minister was able to see first-hand that all three operating theatres of the hospital were in working condition.

During the tour, media operatives were able to get verification from staff that the facilities are all in working condition. Acting Medical Superintendent Vinashri Khirodar, said one of the theatres was briefly out of commission due to a faulty light, but that was since remedied.

Two of the three theatres are used for general surgery, while the other is used mainly for ophthalmology operations.

As for the CT scan machine, media operatives were told that the room to house the machine next to one of the theatres is currently being used by the laboratory staff.

A new building is being erected to house the increase in demand for the lab services.”

The Hon. Member never mentioned that that building is now complete, and that the laboratory is housed in that new building. Neither did the Member inform this honourable House that he was at the New Amsterdam Public Hospital and enquired what was going on in the space where the laboratory existed. He witnessed the installation of the CT scan machine, but he did not come to this House to tell us that.

The Hon. Dr. Mahadeo spoke about one Counsellor/Tester in Region 6. So, immediately some of the staff sent to ask me whether he resides in that region because what he purposely did not mention is that the Ministry of Public Health is working in partnership with several Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) such as the Family Awareness Consciousness Togetherness (FACT), United Bricklayers, Comforting Hearts, just to name a few. Do you know any of these? Let me utilise my time. The Hon. Member also mentioned that there are several vacancies at the various health facilities. There are 27 health facilities in operation in the region and in every one of those health facilities there are doctors assigned. The only drugs that are short are those for people who interfere with people's girl children.

Further in this article, as I continue, the Minister was assured by pharmacy officials that the supply of drugs is fairly good but noted that there is a shortage of septrin and the topical ointment for pain, which is due to increase in prescription for this item.

May I say to the Hon. Dr. Mahadeo, please, you are a member of this noble profession. Do not just use your time in this National Assembly to come and speak of negatives and untruths, but rather, bring recommendations for your region if you are so interested in the people of Region 6.

Allow me to turn my attention to the Hon. Member, Dr. Anthony, whose presentation focused on procurement, rental, pricing and overpayment, among others Negative and even more negative. I will say this to him. Hon. Member, Dr. Frank Anthony, when you *live in glass house, do not throw stones*.

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

Ms. Lawrence: Really? I will quote from an article of *the Kaieteur News* dated 20th January, 2013 titled:

“Drugs purchases scandal.... Billion dollars paid to New GPC upfront.”

It reads:

“Ministry of Health officials, testifying before Public Accounts Committee of Parliament about its 2010 deals, last week disclosed that it paid hundreds of millions of dollars in full and in advance to New GPC for deliveries. They even continued the same arrangement in 2011. This was despite the fact that New GPC may not have delivered \$222 million in drugs ordered in 2010.”

I am moving on.

“Health officials testified before the PAC that between late 2007 and December 2012, New GPC was paid more than \$90 million to store drugs...”

This is not the \$100 million they were paid before.

“In early 2010, the Cabinet under the Jagdeo Administration decided that New GPC would be the sole supplier of drugs.”

I wish to repeat:

“In early 2010, the Cabinet under the Jagdeo Administration decided that New GPC would be the sole supplier of drugs.”

The article further stated:

“Drug purchases have accounted for a large chunk of the Ministry of Health with New GPC in 2011 being awarded almost 80 per cent of the \$13 billion expended.”

There are many more articles to be read, but I want to move to that statement by the Hon. Member, who spoke about the overpayment, and to say to the Hon. Member that *this time nah long time, we do not sweep things under the carpet* and those persons who have breached the Procurement Act were written to since in October. We did not keep it at the Ministry; we copied the Finance Secretary (FS) and the Auditor General (AG) so that action can be taken.

Let me wrap up. I think that I have been able to lay my case. In concluding, I wish to remind this honourable House that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Government (APNU/AFC) Government ensured, early in its Administration, that the Public Procurement Commission, which was thrown into the doldrums, was established in order to provide oversight and scrutiny of all Government contracts.

I rest my case. I wish to take this opportunity to thank my staff who have given service but all they received was a set of negatives. I wish to commend Minister Jordan and his team at the Ministry of Finance and encourage them, as well as all the other Ministries, to keep focused on the theme of the national *Budget 2019* as we transform the economy, empower our people and build sustainable communities for the good life.

I fully endorse *Budget 2019*. [*Applause*]

Dr. Persaud: Today, many things have been said in this National Assembly, but I think the nation always deserves truth. When Members of this side of the House read from the Report of the Auditor General, it is an independent body that scrutinises every Ministry. Much of what was said in the Budget with regard to the Ministry of Public Health was quoted from the Report of the Auditor General, previously, by Members on this side of the House.

The obstreperous behaviour that emanates from time to time from that side of the House makes me wonder if there is a more sinister reason for cutting the Auditor General's budget. If everything is above scrutiny and can withstand analysis, then there should be fear of nothing coming to light.

I would like to say thank you to all the members of staff of the various Ministries that would have worked on the various budgets. All of them. It is work and it requires countless hours and tireless work. We say thank you to you. I am sure, even sitting and listening, they must have been astounded at the defence that was advanced just now in the face of the flagrant flouting of procurement regulations. The registration of those companies that supply the Ministry was asked for by Dr. Frank Anthony. We are still waiting on those to date.

While there has been an increase in services and specialist services...and I am happy about it because I worked in the public sector for many years as a Doctor and we know the frustration that we see when things are not available.

1.45 p.m.

Whilst strides are being made in specialist fields, to date, one year, hip and knee replacements cannot be done because there is no saw to cut the human bone. That is a basic thing. Much of what was told to this House about shortages, machines unavailable, are not working and basic shortages of things, such as insulin, which we all know are integrated to the management of a chronic non-communicable disease such as diabetes.

How did we discover these things? The Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services visited all of these hospitals. These things were not plugged out of thin air. The sector committee also had not only Members of the Opposition, Members of the Government, including the junior Minister of Health and she acted surprised, as if she did not know these things were happening. Also, because at that time, I was chairing that Committee I want to say clearly, I ensure the media was there, so you actually saw what was happening on the ground. No one should forget that I was almost stopped by a Member of the Government from entering the bond at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation because things were supposed to remain hidden. These are things that are facts. These are not things that are fabricated and made up.

There is talk about the Accident and Emergency Unit. I worked in trauma and the Department of Surgery for a number of years at that hospital. I know that it is needed. I like that it is being talked about. When we read the budget, it is just discussions. Is it that this would be another mirage? I do not know.

We talked about dentistry. What is happening in Region 2 at the Suddie Hospital? There is no dental chair and that is why the services cannot happen. The thing about it, the Hon. Member John Adams, a Member of this Committee, did not make the time to visit when we did a lot of those visits. Hon. Member John Adams went before to put some medications and to say that things were all right at superficial level. Health is not something that any of us should put politics into. It deals with the life of our people. Every life is important. To try to defend things that have gone wrong is not the way. Rather the better way is to accept what has gone wrong and try to correct it for the betterment of people. The driver's seat is occupied by this Minister of Health. It lies with her to fix it. The buck stops there.

When we think of what has been happening in the Ministry of Public Health throughout this country, we only have to read the newspaper. It gives an insight into what is happening. Look at the death of the twins born to a teenage mother in Region 3. What could we say about that? That is a high-risk pregnancy right there. A teenager delivering, not one baby, but two babies died. No investigation. Nothing has come out of it. What happens to the mom and the family? It is the angst and the trauma that mother must be going through. Let us not buried our heads in the sand and think that everything is all right in health. It is not. I see patients and all the doctors who still have a clinical practice will be seeing patients and they will tell you we cannot find this, we cannot afford to buy that and we cannot control our illnesses, because things are

too hard. VAT is still on health services and things that were once zero-rated. That has not been removed.

I could say more. I could read and quote extensively from the Auditor General's report. I think Dr. Frank Anthony did an excellent job doing that. Maybe that is why it is hurting so much today and the kind of defence, the bellicose defence, that has been mounted is an attempt to cover what has been happening. Things do not remain hidden forever. They are revealed and will continue to be revealed because everyone listening today to this budget debate knows the reality that they are facing.

The Budget 2019 could be described as *Much Ado About Nothing*. Those of you who know Shakespeare would know exactly what I am speaking about. It is contrived; it is vapid, and it is not what the Minister of Finance said in page one of the budget speech, "A budget that guarantees equality and inclusivity in resource allocation for all Guyanese." Who are the people that have been marginalised? It is women, the sugar workers and unemployed youth. Nothing has been mentioned in this 106-page document. People continue to be frustrated by entities, such as National Insurance Scheme (NIS), and nothing is mentioned in the budget. The vulnerable and poor are marginalised remain just as that. They are trying, every day, to climb that social ladder, to grapple with the inequalities that exist out there when it comes to income, wealth distribution, access to opportunities and services. It is the reality that is out there. Maybe this Government has entrapped itself in an economic bubble, maybe, that is being carried by a drone above the current and harsh reality of the Guyanese people.

What do we see? We see it in black and white, the figures do not lie. Most of the sectors have contracted and the small growth rate that is projected is based on the areas such as livestock. No study has been done to determine how that could be assessed. It is also based on the construction area and there has been vacillation because items that were used and are used in the construction area have been targeted by VAT. How is this possible? There has been a rewind, reverse sort of mechanism, impose and reverse. If you want to call it that. VAT put on this year; VAT removed this year; VAT put on and increased this year; VAT reduced this year. What are we really doing? It is lots of total absolute confusion. How could you say that removing the VAT on concrete blocks would benefit the consumer when the input tax would not have been looked into, cement and sand, and all of the things. The consumer will still feel the burden. How is that going to expand the construction sector?

There is a lot of talk about the upcoming oil. Everybody is talking about oil. Talk is cheap. What we need to see on the track record has really left us in dismay because the stench of lack of accountability still persists, even today. We still do not know where the money is – the signing bonus. There is no infrastructure, there is no proper development of human resources, but, oil is coming. The conversation needs to start with us. When this oil money comes, how will the Government spend it on the sectors outside of oil so that they could be a trickle-down effect to the people out there? That is the conversation that needs to happen.

The country continues to be pressurised and burdened by taxes. It is as if every time we get our pay cheque, there is one tax or another. Why am I saying that? It is because the Government has perhaps been going back in time to those - is it a decade, colleagues? -the decade that was lost. Is it going back to the time where we bore a hole to fill a hole? Yes, it is. It is called, in parlance, living above your means - *putting your hat where your hand cannot reach*. That is what it is called. What has been happening is incessive borrowing to fill a hole of debt. Is it narrowing that deficit? It is not narrowing that deficit. It is because spending is wanton, reckless, extravagant, “avoidable” you call all the words. I will tell you the figures. Why do we need more monuments and arches and another D’Urban Park? People need to eat, to afford health care and jobs. Women need to have programmes that could develop them, that could earn them financial independence. I am sure if you ask any of the single mothers in this National Assembly, it is a struggle. What I could say is that this Government is disconnected from the reality that exists out there. This budget is disconnected in everything that it says.

In 2019, because of the Government’s policy of increasing tax revenues, we will see a widening of the deficient from \$41,000,300 to \$52 million. My honourable colleague, Minister Jordan, will know what I am saying when I say our tax capacity is not inexhaustible. It is a well-known financial term.

Look at what is happening to small businesses. Small businesses are shutting down. Just take a look at many of the areas of business in this country. New businesses cannot start. What is happening when people go to the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) and the customs? They submit their documentation and astronomical sums are giving to them to pay as their goods are accessed. Is there any wonder why containers are left on the wharves and businesses are closing down? The poor and the middle class continue to be dashed against an unrelenting tax wall and instead of providing relief, and alleviating tax burden, we continue to be in a stranglehold of tax and more tax. Mr. Speaker, how much tax am I talking about? I will tell you. The

Government collected more than \$7 million in taxes from tax amnesty. **[Bishop Edghill: \$7 billion.]** It \$7 billion in taxes. The pressure continued.

We will be squeezed in 2019 because VAT will increase tax revenue by 13.8%. I am not speaking about evasion of taxes. I believe we should pay our taxes. I pay mine. I also submit my form for the Integrity Commission. What I would like to see is that the taxes move down to something that is reasonable so that people could look at disposable income, in that you have more money in your pockets to spend. If you want to buy something for your child, you could do it. If you want to do something to your home, you could do it. Value added excise taxes alone will increase to 11.8%.

Imagine someone looking at the increase of the threshold to \$64,500 and that person is earning just under \$200,000 that person will not benefit from this, especially if there is an increase NIS or something that that person will have to pay. In fact, that person will be taking home less, in terms of that person salary. I am sure many of the pensioners would be happy for the tax free 'false teeth.' I think maybe the Government is looking after its own, because as many of 70% of them will benefit from tax free dentures. What about the pensioners? There are some things that puzzle me.

I would read from this book that have become very famous at the Parliament, the Auditor General's 'book.' What does it state? It states that moneys over \$1 billion... I will tell you how much. "An unspent amount of \$1.654 billion in expenditure was returned was returned by the Ministry of Social Protection, including the amount of \$1.654 billion is a shortfall of \$1.613 billion" in the Ministry of Social Services. Mr. Speaker, do you mean to say that the Ministry could not find it in this money, that was returned, that was unspent, to give more than \$264 for Public Assistance per day or \$674 for pension per day? What is this? How do you equate what is happening? The elderly and the indigent in our country deserve some dignity too.

2.00 p.m.

I am wondering how come so much of this money was unspent. Was it an inflated pensioners list? I do not know.

The measures for those who are challenged, disabled, are welcomed measures, but the reality, can they afford a vehicle with all of this equipment to aid them getting in and out and having a comfortable journey in the vehicle? Hon. Minister Jordan, I chat with him from time to time and I make my points known. I am noted to do that. I say: Why is it that the benefits are not

benefiting a wider cross section of the country? Why not? Why is it only confined to very small groups of people? **[Mr. Patterson: Small businesses.]** Yes, small

businesses, but you are shutting them down. Think of the energy. Energy is a problem in this country. We still have redundant energy and businesses cannot grapple with this exorbitant cost.

The Ram and McRae analysis which I have great respect for noted also that included in pension cost is an amount of \$3.875 million for pension increases or 20.5 % of total pensions and social assistance budget, given - this is not me, this is that analysis - the modest salary increases announced by the Minister, this provision requires more explanation. What bothers me and what is bizarre in the whole budget, the lengthy four and a half hours budget presentation, is that pensioners, women, children, youth, the sugar workers have zero to miniscule allocations in it, but compare that to these sums, \$713.6 million just for provision of furniture and equipment under Citizenship and Immigration Services. Adding \$5,000 to the pension would be half of this amount. Three hundred and fifty million for the provision of jubilee republic initiative, under the Ministry of Social Cohesion. Where is the social cohesion? Do you see it happening? I certainly do not. No doubt, we must celebrate, but should we do that by more frenzy than unnecessary spending at the cost of the taxpayers? I do not think so. I think taxpayers want to have some money in their pocket. They will forego an arch or two. They will definitely forego another monstrosity that is there called D'Urban Park. What does this do? None of these expenses contribute to the growth and development of our economy, but they are stark reminders of waste, extravagance, ostentation and the reality of economic instability and stagnation.

What has the Ministry of Social Cohesion achieved? Fifty-seven point eight million represents provision for buildings, security, lights, ceiling, windows for office and resident of the Presidency. Listen to this one: \$95 million for the provision - this is under the Ministry of the Presidency - "for developmental, humanitarian and other activities." What is this vague provision? A whole \$95 million, is this money for clandestine political work? I need to know. Of course, myself and all of Guyana need to know.

The incidence of child and sexual abuse is alarming. We cannot be immune to the paedophilia that occurs and we read about in the newspapers, over 4,000 cases of child sexual abuse were reported in 2017 for this year alone in the first six months, 481 cases, how long will we wait? Is it until it gets to 1,000 before comprehensive programme is rolled out? The Minister did not

mention it in her last budget speech. It is a very thin document. I sound like a broken record. I rather be a broken record asking for the right things than doing the wrong things. Every year I have asked for counsellors in school. Every year I have asked for specialist to provide therapy for children who are suffering from post-trauma disorders of abuse and sexual abuse, by the Minister of Social Protection's admission, the Hon. Minister, there is one psychologist in the country. There are 88 case workers that service the children's homes and centres. [Ms.

Ally: Who told you that?] It is your honourable self that told me that in response to my questions. I could submit it back to you.

Every year \$15 million is allocated for scholarships and training. Who has been trained? We are not seeing them back in the country. Is it a phantom operation? I do not know. It is being spent. Moneys have been spent. This year, 19 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) will receive \$200,000 each. Two hard-working organisations will receive \$12 million each. That is good. My question is that I see mushrooming a number of these organisations that we have never heard of in our whole life. The question is: Are they registered? Where did they come from? The Ram and McRae analysis say this, not me, "It appears that subsidies and contributions are being used to favour particular interest and without any rational consideration."

When we speak about the Ministry of Social Protection, when money is returned, it implies that projects were not executed. Programmes did not happen. It means that the Ministry continues to have its hallmark, its signature of underperformance and failure. This is not the first Minister. It is as a deck of cards being shuffled. This is the third Minister of Social Protection in just about three years. Yet, again, I do not know what has happened, maybe it has got progressively worse.

Clearly, the Child Care and Protection Agency, as was exposed at a recent meeting, needs more financing. What is the money being used for? I will tell you worst. The money is being used for fences and the Child Care and Protection Agency's capital budget has been slashed by 50%. Is this how we take care of our children? This is sick, disturbing and horrifying. Mr. Speaker, this Government has a penchant, to borrow your word, for paint and fences. That is all that I can say. I believe that the Minister did not represent her staff. I believe the staff in that Ministry would like for things to work because they have seen the years of progress. They have seen programmes implemented, seen the growth of programmes, and they want more. I know a lot of them. I cannot fault them, but maybe your leadership needs to change.

All of the ten million dollars funded by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) for the social protection strategy remains unspent. No technical assistance was spent on. Does it mean no vision, no plans or nothing? Probably. Guyana's Women Leadership Institute has been a breeding ground for many of our dynamic leaders in this country, a lot of who sit in the Parliament. I see Mrs. Bancroft, Mrs. Burton-Persaud, all of these persons are from the Guyana Women's Leadership Institute, a white elephant, nothing is happening there. Hon. Minister, nothing is there either. There is nothing for women. Once again, one of the largest percentages of this population, people who vote too, has been ignored and dismissed.

I looked at SLED, this is the Sustainable Livelihood Entrepreneurial Development Programme. In 2017, \$100 million budgeted, \$95 million spent, only 20 groups benefited. In a response to questions I asked in this honourable House, the Minister said that these things were never publicly advertised. How did these people know of these things? Why is it that Region 6, where there is a large percentage of sugar workers without jobs and a breadline, cannot benefit from SLED? Two hundred and fifty million dollars, in 2018, was budgeted and still all that I can sense from the people who picketed this honourable House was anguished. One elderly man, who worked in the Sugar Industry for 33 years, said to me, "*Why them ah punish we. A we raise everybody with sugar*" that is true. All of us benefited from sugar. Why can they not get something at least from SLED?

It is disgraceful; it is shameful. There is no defence that could be mounted for ignoring and dismissal of sugar workers, thousands of them, not ten of them. Severance pay with hell, even though that severance pay was approved in this National Assembly and by the court with interest. It is a shame that they have to picket for what is legally their own entitlement.

I am wondering when this disconnect will end. When would it end? The Minister of Social Protection said, "We will continue to work to give the unemployed youth the skills to find decent jobs. We will give the single mother the support she needs to go out and work to start a small business". The reality is this, assessment based on the 2017, Global Human Capital Index, between 2016 and 2017, Guyana slipped by more than four positions in unemployment rate, age group 25 to 54, seven positions for 55 to 64 and another nine positions globally with respect for unemployment for youth. That is what you are giving youths - nothing.

I can say a lot. I have said a lot, but I would hope that this not be taken in the wrong way, but it be seen as something that can benefit the Ministry, what is happening out there - what is happening with people. What is happening with women, children, young people. All of those

who have children here, grandchildren here, none of you could say that you have not been approached by a young person with a University of Guyana (UG) certificate in hand or Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) certificate in hand or 'A' levels certificates and asked for jobs. We all have. Where are the jobs? Are they phantom jobs? We keep hearing about the creation of thousands of jobs, where are they? Who are benefiting? Who is getting these jobs? A senior Minister told us how and who will get the jobs. I say nothing more.

The health sector is caught in the prose of mismanagement. There are crippling shortages that paralysed the health sector. Deficiency health facilities across the country and lack of transparency dogged this Ministry and will continue to dog this Ministry. Why would you want a procurement department in your Ministry? There is a national procurement body that you should have adhere to in the first place. Putting a plaster on a festering sore does not make it right, does not erase it. It is just as words have the power to haunt, these things have the power to harm and they come right back at you.

It is the Ram and McRae analysis that make this comment, and I quote.

“This violation of law by tainted procurements raises the serious possibility that the 2019 Budget, potentially the last full year budget before the 2020 Elections will be used for discriminatory employment practices and other spending, not only Ms. Lawrence’s Ministry, but in the Government as a whole. It therefore raises the further question about the extent to which this budget may disguise political spending.”

It is in the *Stabroek News*, anyone can read and read more.

There was an increase in drug use, I am sure Minister of Public Security, Mr. Ramjattan, would have taken cognisance of this, crimes are being committed by young men and women, men in particular, under the influence of drugs. Where is the comprehensive strategy to tackle this problem? The Guyana Secondary School Drug Prevalent Survey Project, which was done in 2013 and launched in 2015 stated that - this is what the PPP Government left - that was, up to now, not acted upon.

2.15 p.m.

The Minister said in his press conference that, “We are yet to work out what to do”. I am quoting from your speech, Minister. How long must we continue to hold our breath while we await the transforming of words into action, especially, considering 2019 is a few weeks away?

I have not yet mentioned something that bothers me and should bother everyone, all the feasibility studies that amounted to \$6 billion, millions of dollars per page. This is a mirage. Feasibility studies, as everyone would know, do not necessarily mean that this would translate into a reality, yet, billions of dollars are spent on things which may never ever happen. I want to put that out there.

Guyanese are looking for practical measures in this budget that will impact on them, their family, their environment, their businesses, their security. The budget is a big fat zero. Children's education is a problem, health care is a problem. I would like to borrow from a sitting Member of this House, I hope I can find it, the Hon. Mr. Carl Greenidge, who said,

“A budget could be the largest it ever is”. In other words, it has taken all the gross domestic product (GDP) which means, in fact, when this budget gets larger and larger, it is taking a larger share of the income that one earns.”

That is what is happening. All we do is to give. What do we receive? It is nothing much.

The Hon. Minister has not provided palpable benefits to all of Guyana. He has not. The Hon. Minister has danced around, adding frills and fripperies, instead of substance to what it should have been. Our treasury continues to be haemorrhaged and there is a problem with accountability and transparency. Corruption is the order of the day. I can say that without fear. All the successive generations born will be born with a tax debt, with a debt on their heads. Generations are being marred in debt because of this Government's proclivity to borrow and coupled with mismanagement and misappropriation, we are in for nothing but trouble. The daily struggle to make ends meet is real with the escalating cost of living, just look at inflation, the paucity of jobs, unemployment and unconscionable taxes. As you know, Mr. Speaker, I have great faith in the public. There will come a time when they will say enough is enough. The masses will speak. The masses have spoken in various strikes – the teachers have, for the parking meters, all of these people have spoken. I believe people are hoping for something different. The stench is too much.

Mr. Speaker, I will tell you this: I cannot, in all honour and honesty, support a budget that is anti-cohort and filled with all of this.

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

Minister of Social Protection [Ms. Ally]: Mr. Speaker, Members of the National Assembly, permit me to express gratitude to the Hon. Minister of Finance and his staff of the Ministry for Budget 2019, under the theme, *Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities for a Good Life*.

The optics for the development of our country has indeed changed. This I posit is geared to transform Guyana from a state of malaise, self-development and corrupt practices under the PPP's stewardship to one of vision, development and benefits for the people of Guyana under the leadership of the coalition Government.

Our investment of \$300.7 billion will certainly move Guyana closer for all to enjoy the "good life" proffered by His Excellency David Arthur Granger. This administration has a clear vision and that is why, in this budget, the Government is prioritising those investments that will rebuild the critical social and physical infrastructure in Guyana. Budget 2019 is our attempt to achieve the greatest possibilities for the good of this country. This is a budget for the people.

I refer to the Hon. Member Nigel Dharamlall who said that this was the last budget of the Government. I wish to let the Hon. Member know that this coalition Government stands on firm ground because of its achievements and projections. The electorate is happy because they have begun to enjoy the "good life" and they look forward to even better days under the APNU/AFC.

The Ministry of Social Protection, through our numerous policies and programmes, will continue to reform our social services system to deliver better results in Guyana. The year 2018 saw measurable progress and increased visibility of the Ministry of Social Protection in executing its mandate. Permit me to share some of our solid achievements and outlook for 2019.

The Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) programme saw over 277 households and an estimated 1,264 persons benefiting from projects that support income generating activities for sustainable livelihoods. Women, youths and entrepreneurs have benefited from this programme. In 2018 - I hope my honourable Comrade is listening from where she is - \$150 million was budgeted and 33 projects were identified in various regions. Areas of business include poultry rearing, pig rearing, farming, garment construction, manufacturing outlets, preservation of fruits, making of jams and jellies, salted fish processing, shade house cultivation, women's empowerment training, block making and leather craft

production. [An Hon. Member (Opposition): Where?] If you want to know where, ask a proper question.

The Ministry looks forward to expanding this programme in 2019 with the allocation of \$250 million. We are investing more into this initiative because of the positive impact that the programme is having on households as well as communities as a whole. We are transforming people's lives. Many who could not sustain themselves and families can now do so. The figures and the evidence are clear.

The Hon. Member Ms. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks asked about where the development took place in Amerindian communities. Let me, with pride, educate you my Comrade. Under the Ministry of Social Protection, alone, via SLED, we have empowered people in Akawini, in Pomeroun, in Chenapau, in Hiawa, in Mocomoco, in Aranaputa and in Aishalton, and many to which I have not mentioned. On the side of providing services for access to education via the David G's five 'B's programme, the Northwest District, Pomeroun, Lower Pomeroun, Mahdia, Lethem, North and South Rupununi have all benefited from this programme. Colleagues, before we alluded to the many other programmes in Indigenous communities we would continue to traverse the road of development, because we believe in being a government for all the people and not a few cronies.

The SLED programme and the Women of Worth (WOW) and People of Worth Entrepreneurial Resources (POWER) loan programmes will continue to provide opportunities for funding for target beneficiaries for various business ventures in the ten administrative regions of Guyana. Our goal is to have these programmes: SLED, WOW, POWER, to assist in reducing dependency on the social safety network.

The Ministry of Social Protection recognises the importance of having effective social services. Hence, we have benefited from a technical cooperation programme titled, *Institutional Strengthening to Guyana Safety Net*. This certainly will enhance essential services delivery to the populace.

This Government attaches significant importance to the welfare of older persons in the nation. Since this administration came into office in 2015, we have increased old-aged pension by 55%.

2.30 p.m.

In 2014, Old Age Pension stood at \$13,125, and as of January 2019, it will increase to \$20,500. While public assistance has increased by 53%, such significant increases within three years must be applauded. The Palms Geriatric Institution continues to be a place of refuge and solace for the elderly indigent population, providing accommodation, meals, and medical services to its residents. In addition to these essential services, the Ministry is committed to improving the quality of life of the residents.

In 2018, over \$66 million was expended to maintain and rehabilitate the Palms Geriatric Institution. Works were done to the Palms Geriatric Institution and the buildings look as good as new. In addition, the following have been implemented: a health and fitness exercise programme for able-bodied residents; operationalisation of lifts in Blocks A, B and C, I will take you to see; we have established an infirmary, staffed by a Gerontologist to provide immediate basic health care for residents; and residents are benefitting from wheelchair-accessible bus services. Older persons can now be confident that their future is in good hands, that their future is in the hands of the coalition Government that cares and will never neglect their needs and interests.

The Night Shelter and Hugo Chavez Rehabilitation and Reintegration Centre - in addition to providing temporary shelter and meals to the homeless in 2019, these shelters will continue to provide clients with referrals and information of community programmes as needed. If necessary, residents will be provided with mental and medical health referrals, support groups, and other referrals that will enable them to overcome the issues that would have led to their homelessness and help them to live with independence and dignity.

We believe in rehabilitation. When persons are down and out, we do not give up on them. Regardless of their circumstances, we have shown time and time that we will work with them so that they can have a better life. For 2018, the Hugo Chavez Rehabilitation and Reintegration Centre has reintegrated 23 persons of which 20 of them have become gainfully employed. Over 100 persons are at this centre at the moment. We had a mouthful from the Hon. Member, Mr. Harry Gill, who I do not see here this afternoon. I want to say to Mr. Gill that we are pleased with the administration at the Hugo Chavez Rehabilitation and Reintegration Centre. Regardless of what he proffered, the administration is there to stay.

It is unfortunate that my good friend, the Hon. Sheila Veerasammy, feels that the Hon. Minister of Finance not once mentioned "woman" in the budget, what a thing. What is it with a word? *Actions speak louder than words.* Our programmes cater for domestic violence victims, for

children and gender affairs, among others. I encourage the Hon. Member to examine our programmes, you worked with this Ministry before, and we know that you want to come back to work with this Ministry. Let me remind you my Friend that it was during this Government's tenure that we have built a new home for children at Sophia with modern amenities. It is during this Government's tenure that we have established domestic violence centres at Whim and Onderneeming where we protect and provide essential services to abused women.

Now I will go further into details about numerous programmes we have implemented to empower our women.

National Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Policy - promoting gender equality is now globally accepted as a development strategy for reducing poverty levels among women and men. In this regard, the National Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Policy provides the conceptual framework that will guide the implementation of appropriate mechanisms, policies, and protocols to address issues of gender inequality and social exclusion, this has been concluded.

As Guyana seeks to meet the Sustainable Development Goal 5 - Gender Equality, the Caribbean Development Bank will support the implementation of this policy.

Sexual and Domestic Violence - addressing all forms of violence against women and girls is central to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. I wish to note that there will be continuity with some of our programmes such as awareness and sensitisation sessions, which includes the annual observance of 16 days of activism. While new initiatives will be introduced, key among these are: the operationalisation of a shelter in Region 10, a programme of support for perpetrators and the introduction of the *Hands are not made for hitting* initiative among school children, in collaboration with the Childcare and Protection Agency (CPA) and the intensification of the Community Advocates Programme.

Guyana Women's Leadership Institute - I hope that my dear Comrade, Hon. Vindya Persaud, will pay careful attention to this. This is not the time when women in Guyana use to make only bedsheets and handtowels at the women's institute. Through the Guyana Women's Leadership Institute, the Ministry has hosted workshops in all the regions on Gender and Local Government: female decision makers geared to promote a platform to equip women with the requisite skills and knowledge to improve their individual and institutional competence within their communities and at the different sectoral areas, throughout the various stages of any

community undertaking. I am proud to report that a total of 460 women have benefitted from that training to date. *[Interruption]*

In addition to that, several women have completed courses on fruits and vegetable preservation and are now in the process of forming themselves into coops. We are indeed transforming and building economically sustainable communities by empowering our women folk.

Human Trafficking - Guyana continues to maintain its ranking on Tier 1 for the second consecutive year. Do you hear that, for the second consecutive year. This ranking means that Guyana continues to fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of Trafficking In Persons (TIP) by demonstrating serious and sustained efforts. This Ministry will continue to partner with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to regulate the procedures and provide ways to assist and protect victims of human trafficking. Further assistance will be provided for the development of a TIP Case Management Database under an IOM Grant Agreement - technical assistance to combat trafficking in persons.

Child Care and Protection Agency - I do not like to hear certain people's voices because, if I was the Minister of Social Protection in those years, child abuse...Our children are Guyana's most treasured and valuable resources and we will continue to work to ensure that their rights are protected. I must say that I concur with Hon. Minister Jordan where he stated on page 75 of the Budget Speech 2019:

“We believe that positive socialisation and development of our children will mould our human resources for the future.”

We believe that the numerous programmes that we have invested in for 2018 will bring us one step closer to realising this goal. Sir, permit me to share some of those achievements. The CPA hosted individual family conferences for the prevention of separation of children. The Special Capacity Building Parenting Programme continued in 2018, but with more involvement of community groups, including faith-based organisations. Parenting programmes were held across the regions, including the hinterland regions. Three hundred forty parents benefitted to date, and 1853 children were prevented from being separated from their parents. A caring Government, we look after our children.

The National Early Childhood Development Programme - this was introduced to the various health facilities and, so far, the toddlers reading programme benefitted 2641 children across the regions.

2.45 p.m.

The introduction of the Child Abuse Registry was launched in 2018. This will ensure that information will be readily available to determine if a person who will provide care or have unsupervised access to children is known to have been involved in abusing a child. Did you hear that Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall?

Teen Pregnancy Prevention Empowerment Programme to date has reached teens from Regions 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 10. The successful National Multimedia Child Abuse Awareness Campaign intensified in 2018 and resulted in a steady increase in reports of child abuse and more children being rescued from abuse. A national programme is expected to be launched in 2019 for parents, caregivers and care providers of children under the age of five years.

Early Childhood development - construction of the new drop-in centre in Sophia is currently in its final stage of completion, **[Mr. Damon: Give her some water.]** Hon. Member Damon, when you return the money to the Post Office, then you are permitted to speak. My apologies Sir. It will replace the previous one that was destroyed by fire in 2016. This new accommodation will be a processing centre for children and families in difficult circumstances. We are indeed proud of this achievement Sir.

Juvenile Justice Services - I wish to remind the National Assembly that it was during this Government's tenure that the Juvenile Justice Bill was tabled and passed. Our efforts will now be focused on rehabilitative measures rather than detention for youths who come into contact with the law.

New Opportunity Corps (NOC) - Since the NOC came under the purview of the Ministry of Social Protection efforts have been directed at improving the physical facilities and its security. I wish to note for the record that it was under this Government that the Ministry engaged a Cognitive Development Specialist to review and revise the NOC curriculum in accordance with the Ministry of Education standards.

In addition to that, we have implemented a two-year technical and vocational programme and remedial programmes in Math and English. These programmes will transform the lives of at-risk youths by effectively facilitating their reintegration into society.

Conclusion - Over the past four days, we have heard from the Opposition a lot about the results of the Local Government Elections. Sir, I want to place on record the following and this is not propaganda, it is facts. Those who can read over there can check the *Official Gazette*

The APNU/AFC won five out of the 10 major towns that have significant population. So, I will deduce a 50% win of the towns. In 2016, after not allowing the electorate their right to democracy for 22 years, in 2016, the PPP/C carted off 125,845 votes...

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

Ms. Ally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For Local Government Elections, while in 2018, their take was 122,622 votes. If they are so powerful, why was their win reduced instead of increase? My dear Comrades, you cannot only be talking about win, it got to be that you are passing wind.

Thirdly — A hue and cry of a no-confidence motion, but I have to tell you Hon. Members on the opposite side, bring it on. The APNU/AFC has a solid 33, you have an indecisive 32.

The Ministry of Social Protection has been a service centre for our children, single parent women, the homeless, less fortunate, the disabled, the elderly and many other vulnerable persons within our society.

This Ministry has developed relevant and essential programmes which addressed these most important areas. They however, are not exhaustive. We look to the future with much anticipation, eagerness and passion to improve our own efforts to upgrade our facilities, to uplift the living standards of our people, so that they can enjoy the 'good life'.

Finally, Sir, I wish to commend Budget 2019 to this honourable House and urge for its passage.

God bless Guyana and God bless the people of this nation.

I thank you. *[Applause]*

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: I wish to provide appreciation to the staff of the Ministry of Finance for their effort in putting together the budget document and, of course, one must make mention of the Minister of Finance who spent four and a half hours reading the document. That is an achievement, I must say.

The Budget Theme - *Transforming the Economy, Empowering people, Building Sustainable communities for the Good Life*. The budget is an absolute disappointment, large as it is, hours

of reading that we were put under pressure to sit here. The budget does not allow for any confidence to the Guyanese nation that will have or give them any evidence that they are moving any closer to the 'good life' and this is a fact. It is a fact so much that, in the last Local Government Elections just held a couple of weeks ago, the Guyanese population spoke to the APNU/AFC coalition Government. It spoke to them saying, "Look Government, we are fed up with the way you are charting the course of our country, the beloved Guyana, which just got some blessings from the speaker before me". As they sit in the Government's seat, I suppose that they believe that forever the Guyanese nation will fall under the spell of sweet words, fancy dreams which seem to be coming from their side.

The budget is replete with ongoing projects that have already arrived at their limit with respect to the engagement employment of the team working on those projects. Ongoing projects do not offer much additional employment in the next year, which is 2019. The budget is also replete with proposed projects, where millions are put towards feasibility studies. While that is laudable that in 2019 there is going to be some proposed projects coming on stream, let us not fool ourselves. This is because those projects will only create jobs for the consultancy teams, they will not be creating jobs for the wider cross section of Guyanese in 2019. When one looks, also, at the annual maintenance programme proposed by the Government, those programmes are a mirror of the maintenance programme of the previous years.

Again, annual maintenance programmes will only provide the level of jobs and employment of the previous year with little or no increase. So, the vast majority of unemployed people in this country, which I have heard a number of figures being bandied around like 33,000, there is no hope for those unemployed people outside there who are looking at all of us, including our side to make representation to create the incentive and innovative projects that will be executed in this country to provide jobs for them.

Speaking about the young people and not only young people who graduated out of the University, but I want to speak particularly to those young people. You are spending five years at University with the hope that when you graduate from your programme the Government would have been preparing the foundation and the groundwork so that when you got out of University, when you get on the job market and you are looking for a work that the possibility and the opportunity is there. It is not there for those young people.

Many of the older Guyanese coming out of the University are very fortunate that some of them are enhancing their professional and academic skills because some of them do have a job. I am

sure that they too are worried about the young people because many of them going to the University have children who are also starting programmes while they are there enhancing their qualifications. So, this talk about creating employment, business opportunity and a 'good life' for our people is not going to happen in 2019 or it did not happen in 2016, 2017, 2018, and it will not happen next year. That is why I started my presentation on the basis that the Guyanese people have told you in the Government seat that we are not happy, and we do not see that 'good life' closer to us.

3.00 p.m.

I want to turn my attention to the mining sector. The Budget Speech made reference that our mining and forestry sector do not exist in isolation. You could find this reference on page 37.

When you go through Budget 2019 and the proposals made for addressing the mining sector, there is little or no incentive for those in the mining sector, whether large or small miners. I want to zero - in on a little bit on the small miners. Their plight is being ignored. Small miners are our local investors too in the mining sector. It is not only about the service sector and other businesses. The small miners in the mining sector are also our home-grown investors.

There is no incentive for small Miners. What the APNU/AFC Government sought to do over the last two years, in the first instance, they applied some increased taxes. The next year they were forced to step backwards and to remove some of the taxes. What they did not do, and which is affecting small miners was to remove the Value-Added Tax (VAT) on mining equipment and goods that are used in the mining sector.

The non-removal of VAT in the mining sector has affected many small miners. Today, they are slowly being eroded out of a stable livelihood. I want to also mention that in this pocket of small miners and many women who are being eroded every day by the high cost of fuel, high cost of goods and services and the high cost spares for their mining equipment.

I want to talk about the mining syndicate - the mining syndicate in the first instance was a novel idea. I think many small miners agreed with the position taken by those who are initiating the mining syndicate. Today, the mining syndicate is no longer part of the solution. They have now become part of the problem again. I will tell you why, Mr. Speaker. The mining syndicate Heads are now adopting the posture of large claim holders. There is a number of members in the mining syndicates who today are slowly again, being eroded by their own. Mr. Speaker, you know the posture of large claim holders when they rent their lands to small miners and gold

is discovered, what occurs? They usually slide them out maybe quietly, but sometimes viciously and without any compensation or any assistance for them to get to another place. Right now, a few mining syndicates Heads are adopting that posture and it is not good for the small miners. We must not push these things under the parapet. We must be able to deal with it so that the small mining community will find a place of their own in this very big vicious sector.

I also want to say that small miners in Bartica and in Mahdia are facing very difficult times. When they are awarded lands, they are not being assisted with investment to open roads or make the areas that they are awarded, even the 120 that were awarded in your time and even the mining syndicate... Investments in roads for small miners need to be addressed. I hear a lot of chuckling and grumbling on the other side, but this is real and, therefore, this is something that the Hon. Member on the other side should take a keen look into and recommend that access to these areas are opened for small miners.

I worked in Region 8, definitely, I will ask the Minister to look into the case of those small miners who are located in the Black Water area where they cannot access the areas that are assigned to them. This is real, and I believe that it is in this place, outside of this, that the responsibility of the sector or those responsible in the sector, should continue to find solutions to these matters. We also expect that, in the budget, these are the matters that will catch the attention of the policy makers to ensure that these matters are addressed.

I also want to mention the investment in the Regulatory Commission, which is the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC). I have noticed that the allocation is for them to advance and to improve their core functions. This is laudable. I do not have a problem with that, it is necessary. However, I have great difficulty agreeing with the current approach that exists and I think that some of the investment should go towards empowering, educating and ensuring that the regulators, the monitors and so on, understand the complexity of the sector a little bit more.

Just a few weeks gone by, we have seen the heavy stick being used by the Regulatory Commission. Miners in Mahdia need to see the Government or the Commission as a body and as a Government that wants to help them. Instead, what happened? The miners were forced to go and protest in front of the GGMC's office in Mahdia. These small miners were faced with camps being burnt, equipment being seized, and sluice boxes being destroyed. Do you know what is even more hard and hurtful for these Miners? They are then charged hefty fees to

recover damaged equipment. When they do the regulatory policing monetary work, they do not take care of the miners' equipment. They drag them, they drop them, and they throw them anyhow. It does not stop at legal fees or charges or fines, it also extends to extortion. This must be investigated and stopped.

I am standing here today, and I had discussions with some of those small miners. That protest was long in coming. That is why I am making a plea, as we debate this budget, that investments to ensure that small miners are allowed to be empowered and that more sensitisation is carried out. These small miners cannot afford to do it on their own. You just cannot educate only those who must police them. You must be able to educate, empower and sensitise those who are working and making a living in the sector.

Mr. Speaker, you may want to say that I should stick or I heard comments that I should stick with Indigenous matters. Many of these small miners are indigenous miners. The issue of mining and how they treat small miners do not only confine itself to Bartica or to Mahdia. It also extends to mining in the Amerindian areas. If you look at the protest which went viral, it was the Tosaos of the Campbell Town Village that took the forefront and appealed to this Government to stop this pressure and to stop the backlash on people who are trying to earn a decent honest living.

I also want to talk about what is happening in other areas. I have also perused the budget as it relates to the allocation for Indigenous development. There is a chapter which speaks to hinterland development. In reading it, I picked up this line:

“Advancing the pace of development in hinterland regions.”

I wish to quote an additional line, which speaks to:

“...emphasis on empowering our Indigenous people and providing business and investment opportunities...”

You can find these on page 79 of the Budget Speech. I took my time to peruse the budget, including the other associated documents and the Estimates of Expenditure, but I have not discovered where the funding is in the budget that will deal with what it speaks to, that “emphasise on empowering our Indigenous people and providing business and investment opportunities”. Was the Hon. Minister speaking about the Amerindian Development Project which forms part of the Capital Expenditure of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples Affairs?

That is a routine allocation. Was the Minister speaking about the Amerindian Development Fund (ADF), which was funded by the funds from the agreement which the PPP Civic Government made with the Kingdom of Norway under this strategy of the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS)? That project is coming to an end on 31st December, 2018.

3.15 p.m.

Was the Minister speaking about Capital Expenditure because the Capital Expenditure caters for basic capital equipment requested by village councils, to bolster village council administration, support for sustaining subsistence agriculture in many villages and support for transportation for residents and school children, *et cetera*. That capital budget is a routine allocation. Therefore, I would be quite happy to see where is this significant sum that would bolster, empower and create business and investment opportunities for indigenous people.

I have already heard about the five projects in five communities across the hinterland - crab, cassava, honey and tomatoes projects. These are only a handful of projects that would not simulate this transformational kind of expectation, which those who spoke before me are trying to convey to the indigenous people. These five projects, I would say, are expected to be done by the Ministry, but it would not cause this transformation which the Government is speaking about.

In this debate, I wish to recommend that, before the 33 Hon. Members on that side of the House pass the Budget through this honourable House, they make sure that allocations are made, in a significant way, to assist in creating the businesses that they are speaking about and to propel investment prospect for indigenous people. The Budget is not yet approved and so it could be done. No longer will I accept lip service to indigenous people by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government, who, in their Manifesto, offered indigenous people a development way out, which, today, they have failed to deliver.

I also want to say that, if Government is having hinterland development and wants to simulate hinterland development, I wish for someone to explain or identify where the hinterland plan is. At paragraph K on page 79, it speaks to hinterland development, but there is no plan. Where is the plan? I went through all the projects; they are normal routine projects; there is no plan. We have some time with which the Ministry could partner with all the other ministries or agencies to develop a plan for the hinterland. It is the responsibility of the Ministry of the Indigenous Peoples' Affairs to make the development of the indigenous people and, at the same time,

support the cause for hinterland residents. Today, we are speaking about hinterland development, but there is no plan.

I wish to draw to your attention that the Hon. Minister of the Indigenous Peoples' Affairs had a 10-point plan posted on the walls of his office. It was a 10-point plan of action. I want to remind the Hon. Minister that, going on four years today, this 10-point plan of action has just been wallpaper. It is because I have looked in the past budgets, I have looked in these documents and these volumes, and there is nothing, no funding to engineer the movement of this plan of action. I am sure by now that the plan of action must have been taken down from the office.

I want to draw to your attention one point of this plan of action. In fact, I would like to do all 10, but I do not have the time. Here is what I want to say:

“Hinterland Infrastructure Extension Programme- This initiative is intended to bridge the gap between the standards of living on the coastlands and the hinterland. We want economic development for you. We want to see rapid economic conversion between the two zones - the hinterland and the coastland. In order to achieve this conversion, we must improve the physical infrastructure within the hinterland where the vast majority of our indigenous people reside...”

I want to read on:

“This programme will be led by the paving of the road between Linden and Lethem, followed by better bridges, aerodromes, stelling, roads, ferries and other forms of transportation.”

When I look at the programme they have for hinterland's physical infrastructure, again, it is a study. This feasibility study for the Linden to Lethem road has been recorded in *Budget 2016*, *Budget 2017* and *Budget 2018*. It also misled the Hon. Minister of Indigenous Peoples Affairs to shout out loudly, last year, that we would have a paved road and a bridge across the Kurupukari. My Colleague, Ms. Yonne Pearson, is still waiting to buy some precious stone earrings from Monkey Mountain. I am still waiting to ride on and cross over the Kurupukari bridge, which was so happily announced by the Hon. Minister.

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

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: I want to bring to the House's attention that, as we are speaking here today, 31st December, 2018 is upon us and the indigenous children have not yet received their school uniform for the September term. I travel as a Member of Parliament (MP) across the hinterland. I do not sit at committee meetings or come to Parliament only, but I do my work in the hinterland. As of today, they still have not received any supply of school uniform at the Ministry, much less have it delivered to the children. The 31st December, 2018 is upon us. I would like this matter to be addressed. We have all the big Ministers and all those in authority. They should provide some oversight to this Ministry.

The Hon. Head of State of this country, in 2016, at the National Toshias' Council (NTC) Conference, which I attended, referred to the problem of implementation in that Ministry. This was as early as 2016. All of you on that side continue to turn a blind eye to support the Ministry in its implementation of the small programme with which it is saddled. It is not a huge programme. It is a programme that deals with a capital of less than a \$1 billion. In fact, the capital budget for this year for the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples Affairs has been vastly reduced by \$317 million. The Amerindian Development Fund is a mere \$702 million, approximately \$200 million less than 2018 and approximately \$400 million less than 2017. We cannot have a top-heavy Ministry. There are two Ministers and five special advisers behaving like mini ministers and they cannot represent the indigenous people. Shame. I will spend my last five minutes appealing to those on the other side to seriously address these issues that I am raising in this National Assembly.

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

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: The Amerindian Act: Long before the Hon. Members were sitting on that side, they always babbled about amending the Amerindian Act. "We are going to do it as soon as we come in". On their campaign trail, they went to Region 7, telling them, "we are going to change it". We are at the end of 2018 and they have not moved. The moneys that are allocated - I am sorry that the Hon. Minister of Finance is outside, but I hope he is listening - for the amendment of the Amerindian Act is another fete shop. Do you know what they are doing to the leaders? They are sending late notices. The leaders are coming at short notice and having not had time to discuss any matter. Do you know what happened at the Region 7 consultation? The leader said to those who came in, "we are unable to provide our opinion and contributions because there was no time for us to discuss this amendment matter with our people as yet, and you would have to come back". Region 2's cluster of Toshias told them the

same thing. That is why I am terming this matter as another feting event. It is \$210 million for sporting. Those moneys that we have in this Budget for festivities should go to really addressing the plight of lack of business investment in the indigenous people areas and locations.

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

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Minister of State [Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon]: I rise to commend the Hon. Winston Jordan, Minister of Finance, for presenting what would arguably go down in the annals of this Assembly as one of the most people-centred Budgets ever presented, *Budget 2019*. This Budget provides one of those rear moments when vision ably, if not exceptionally, meets fiscal management. I wish to draw attention to pages 21 to 24 of this brilliant Budget, the pages that deal with the *Green State Development Strategy: Vision 2040*.

3.30 p.m.

[Ms. Teixeira: Where is it?] Just so that we understand, a green state is not a figment of our imagination. Let me take you back to the third stanza of our National Anthem, which states:

“Green land of Guyana, our heroes of yore,
Both bondsmen and free, laid their bones on your shore.”

This is not painting green; this is not ‘Granger green’; this is something that has been the aspiration of our people since 1966.

Let me, first of all, commend this Budget. Just in the event that I run out of time, let me say that I want to commend this Budget to this House for its passage. I say so because of a number of reasons. But first of all, let me deal with some issues that arose from the other side.

There seems to be, on the other side, an underlying current which says that we are afraid of this no-confidence motion that they have filed and, therefore, that has allowed for us to act in a certain way. But, as Minister Ally said, 32 can never be more than 33. Therefore, all you are trying to do is spoil people’s Christmas. That is all you are trying to do. You are like the Grinch; you want to steal Christmas. You want a debate before Christmas, and you know you are going

to lose. This is just fluff because you know that, at the end of the day, what matters is the vote. First of all, I want to say that. That is the first underlying feature.

The second, is this question about this cash grant. It is coming up all over, in everybody's speech - this \$10,000 cash grant. The *Hansard*, dated Friday, 21st August, 2015, recorded Minister Trotman as speaking to this matter. It basically stated that there was a subcommittee meeting of the Cabinet in the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) time, in 2015, and the decision was made that to carry on with the cash grant, was unsustainable. In 2015, even before we came into office, it was stopped. So, regarding this question about bringing back the cash grant, why are you asking for something that you yourself stopped? What are you doing? This is all that we have to offer on this matter with respect to education, in the face of a stellar performance by the Minister of Education in managing the education sector of this country.

The no-confidence motion came up. I like Minister William-Hasting's term, "#confidence." I like that.

The third one has to do with the matter that was just raised by the last speaker. She spoke about us not giving the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs the support which it requires, and, in the same breath, bemoaning the fact that there are two Ministers and several advisers. What else do you want? If you are saying that the Ministry does not have the support, then you must show me that the Ministry has not been given Ministers, advisers and the capacity to deal with these issues. But do not make this noise and try to sound good, and then leave. [Ms. Manickchand: *[Inaudible]*] They are not waste. They are honest, hardworking Ministers. They do not create bogus titles and give the indigenous people bogus titles that are not good. [Mr. Ali: We both know that is not true.] It is true. I have seen it.

The final statement I want to make with respect to my friends on the other side is that this is the first Budget, since 2015 and since we are over here, that we have seen the Opposition so dishevelled. They are firing scatter shots. Everybody is coming up with their own thing; it is as if there is no central direction. One man wants to take the Budget back to a select committee and the other one does not want to say anything about it. The time runs short, so he says nothing. On several positions that are taken, I can see no consistent pattern that say, "These are our proposals. These are our ideas about this Budget." What has happened is that the Budget is so good that they cannot find anything. Everybody is screeching and searching and looking all over. Scatter shots.

I need to speak today about the Green State Development Strategy (GSDS), because sometimes a vision is difficult to be able to be seen by people who do not have 20/20 sight. So, I believe I have to speak a little bit to that vision. So, we are going to GSDS 101. We are going back to school.

The world is recognising the threat posed by climate change and has embarked on a multilateral international climate change policy... [Hon. Member: *[Inaudible]*] Listen; this is the background. This is history. This is the part which you have failed. Since 1988, there was the establishment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). In May 1992, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was adopted in the United Nations. On 11th December, 1997, the Kyoto Protocol was adopted. This was the world's first greenhouse gas emission reduction treaty, and it was subsequently entered into force on 16th February, 2005. On 12th December, 2015, 195 nations adopted the historic Paris Agreement, which brought all nations into common cause, based on this historic current and future responsibilities.

As stated in the preamble of the Paris Agreement, climate change is a common concern for all humankind. It is, among other things, the direct result of human activities that are profoundly affecting our planet's ecosystem as well as the fundamental human rights of its people. Climate change, undoubtedly, represents one of the greatest threats to sustainable development. The Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change, in its *Climate Change: 2014 Synthesis Report*, stated that surface temperature is projected to rise over the 21st century under all assessed emissions scenario. It is very likely that heatwaves will occur more often and last longer and that extreme precipitation events will become more intense and frequent in many regions. The oceans will continue to warm and acidify and cause global mean sea levels to rise.

I have posited the aforementioned to establish that it has long been concluded that our planet faces an existential peril in the form of climate change. It is therefore imperative that everything we do as a Government, due to our geographic and demographic configuration, which places Guyana among the low-lying coastal states, must be guided by this consideration in service of the supreme interest. The *Green State Development Strategy: Vision 2040* is best understood in that scenario.

I will submit that a philosophical underpinning of *Budget 2019* is the GSDS. The *Green State Development Strategy: Vision 2040* is Guyana's 20-year national development policy that reflects the guiding vision and principles for the establishment of the green state. There are

those who may want to submit that this is just another document, or it is simply a feasibility study, that there are a lot of feasibility studies here today, or lack thereof, or even suggest that it is politically platitudinous. Those voices find themselves at the opposite end of truth, in light of the concrete, clear measures already taken and that are being taken by our Government with regard to this vision.

Minister Hastings-Williams has treated with the concrete measures, in this regard, that are in the 2019 Budget, and so I will not go much more into that. These measures rubbish any suggestion that the Government is *paying lip service* to this issue. The Government has already matched rhetoric on the GSDS with solid action. Therefore, this vision is already actively moving from conception to policy to implementation at a rapidly developing pace. We are getting into the meat, Hon. Member Ali. [Mr. Ali: I am listening.] He is the first bencher in the class. The GSDS is development that provides a better quality of life for all Guyanese, based on the sustainable exploitation of our country's natural resources and the protection of our environment. It presents priorities for Guyana's development that includes, but are not limited to, three core areas, and I will address those three core areas.

Firstly, there is the sustainable management of our natural resources, through such mechanisms as the Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF) that will protect our prosperity and pave a pathway to long-term growth and sustained priority. The fund is envisaged to be in line with the Santiago Principles and Practices, which covers practices and principles in three key areas. One, is the legal framework: objectives and coordination with macroeconomic policies. Two, is the institutional framework and the governance structures. Three, is the investment and risk management framework. That is the first core area.

The second core area is about supporting economic, environmental and infrastructural resilience through green and inclusive economic diversification, the transition to renewable energy and the establishment of resilient infrastructure. In this regard, agricultural producers will be assisting to overcome persistent barriers and to switch to more lucrative and sustainable techniques, such as organic farming, while expanding into processing and value-added activities.

3.45 p.m.

The Green State Development Strategy will assess the case ... [Mr. Dharamlall: Do not do that to us.] That is alright. I have to rate this student. It will assess the case

for coordinative support schemes, such as technology parks, improve the operating environment for businesses and build resilient infrastructure, green towns and urban and rural public spaces.

The Green State Development Strategy is also expected to build greater economic resilience by diversifying production, reducing the country's dependence on fossil fuel, generating renewable energy and emphasising low carbon manufacturing. If you have not heard about all of these things already in the various presentations, you are sleeping. [Mr. Ali: Tell us about the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS)] We will come to the LCDS. What are you so bothered about? I will deal with the LCDS, my dear Friend.

The third is building of human capital by promoting the development of a healthy, educated and socially cohesive population. This will be achieved by diversifying and tailoring our health and education systems to meet the expectations and developmental needs of our people, and to ensure that our health services and quality of education are improved across our regions. I think we have heard a lot about the health and education services improvement all across our country. [Ms. Teixeira: That is why you are all going to Ireland.] You wish if you could go there. We are not going for diarrhoea, though, and charter any plane for that.

It is envisaged that improvement in our education system will be achieved through the increased use of information and communication technology, particularly the use of smart classrooms throughout the country to connect students and teachers in hinterland and coastal locations, and to ensure that the quality of education delivery is the same across the nation.

The Green State Development Strategy also proposes the sustainable management of land resources as a principal undertaking that will secure and safeguard our national patrimony for future generations from a land use planning perspective. The most important objective of this recommended national land policy is to articulate priorities as they relate to alternative uses of land and to define the criteria for determining best use.

The GSDS is a comprehensive document of strategic actions, policies and programmes to guide our development trajectory over the next 20 years. The object is broader than Guyana's first development strategies and captures a more realistic view of social, economic and environmental wellbeing, which is in line with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Green State Development Strategy is built upon existing and prior national strategies such as the National Development Strategy, the Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Low Carbon Development Strategy, the Social Cohesion Strategy and the Cultural Policy, among others. The principles of which are still relevant today.

The Green State Development Strategy was developed from a multi-layered... [Ms. **Teixeira:** We have not seen it.] Wait and have some patience, student. Mr. Speaker, your anxious students. I will mark you when I am finished. The Green State Development Strategy was developed from a multi-layered national stakeholder consultation process, which began in 2017 and involved 1,700 participants from 200 communities across Guyana. Expert groups, comprising of 130 professionals from the public and private sector and civil society, which were brought together by our strategy team, met frequently from January to June, 2018 to determine the policies and priorities of the strategy.

The strategy team made two separate presentations to the Cabinet of Guyana and received the views of Cabinet. It is expected that, by January, 2019, the strategy will be put in the public domain for further comment and review. The strategy will then be laid in the National Assembly and we anticipate having the entire process completed during 2019.

The Green State Development Strategy is a living document that will be subjected to continuous review at every point up to 2040. This is what we call planning for now and the future. Every Guyanese will have his or her say in this strategy, from the child in the classroom to the adult. The Guyanese people in the diaspora have been and will continue to be encouraged to give their input as well.

After all of this, this is what our Hon. Leader of the Opposition said. "I will scrap the GSDS". Well, of course, there is one precondition and that precondition is that I do not believe the Hon. Leader of the Opposition did, in fact, read the Caribbean Court of Justice's (CCJ) judgement in the third term application case. I do not know if maybe the Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall, did not share the Court's decision with him. It is because the Hon. Leader of the Opposition is behaving and performing as if, in the unlikely event of there being a change in Government, he is going to be there. I do not know what is going on.

The Hon. Leader of the Opposition, basically, has said, in his documentation, that he prefers the Low Carbon Development Strategy, which was introduced under his watch as an economic strategy which earned revenue. Then, of course, there is a constant referring of my Friend, the

Hon. Irfaan Ali, who said that there is no plan. Yet, of course, other than references to the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), he himself cannot point to a plan by the former People's Progressive Party (PPP) Government. He himself cannot point to it. [Mr. Ali: What? I gave you LCDS.] So, he jumps straight over from the LCDS and from Bharrat Jagdeo straight to now. So, an entire Administration has been obliterated in the process in which he served as a Minister.

Mr. Speaker, permit me, please, to examine this crazy plan by the Leader of the Opposition to scrap the Green State Development Strategy and to go back to a single-sourced LCDS. [Mr. Ali: What?] Single sourced is what I call it.

Immediately after this Low Carbon Development Strategy was launched, on 8th June, 2009, at the Convention Centre, which it was called at that time but now it is called the Arthur Chung Conference Centre, there was a report which was produced by Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD-Monitor), dated 12th June, 2009, written by Chris Lang. This is what he said about the Low Carbon Development Strategy at that time when it was just launched. Firstly, he states:

“President Jagdeo has drawn up the Low Carbon Development Strategy without the benefit of a discussion within the country first. The Office of Climate Change will be close to his centre of power – within his own office, in fact. How can Guyanese citizens ensure that their President will be transparent and equitable in the implementation of the climate plans?”

A “REDD Secretariat” has been established within the Guyana Forestry Commission, funded by Conservation International. Two Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are represented on the country's REDD Advisory Committee...”

Then, it goes on to quote a *Kaieteur News* article. The *Kaieteur News* interviewed Cabinet Secretary, Roger Luncheon and reported that:

“Amerindian communities in Guyana, which own 14 percent of the country's land, will not benefit from any special treatment in the consultations that will lead to the adoption of the Government's Low Carbon Development Strategy.”

So, here it was, the Champion of the Earth, was launching this strategy and did not consult with the Guyanese people and his Cabinet Secretary was saying that the three months consultations

which he asked for, later on, did not have to consider the indigenous people. My Hon. Friend, Ms. Pauline Sukhai, you were there, and all the other champions of the indigenous people were there. I will come to the indigenous people's rights as well as the LCDS. I will come to that too.

Questions remain about the reliability of the McKenzie Group's calculation. That group was actually employed to do his calculations regarding if the forest is cut down, what it will cost and, therefore, place a price on that. So, everywhere President Jagdeo went they were with him, all around the world. That is the consultation that was taking place. It was overseas. The people who were in Guyana got no consultation and you are telling us about consultation now.

The Report speaks also about there being no independent Procurement Board to oversee and scrutinise government's procurement procedures for externally funded construction contracts.

“REDD funders run the risk that their financing could end up in the pockets of the government's business cronies.”

This is what it said.

When we are talking about what the LCDS is, it is a single-sourced transaction. It is not a development strategy. It was a way of getting money from overseas to pay for the carbon credits that were here in Guyana. That was it. What we are talking about, now, is a broader policy that deals with all of Guyana and not just a transactional matter. This is what it was; it was transactional in nature.

Let us deal with the other issues. In an article titled: APA/FPP 2014, that is the Amerindian Peoples' Association/Forest Peoples' Programme, Indigenous Peoples Rights, Forest and Climate Policies in Guyana... [Ms. Teixeira: It is a United Kingdom (UK) group]

This is not a UK group; this is Jean Rose. She is not from the UK group, but she wrote about the Indigenous People and Low Carbon Development Policies in Guyana. Only the UK group wrote it first. What disrespect are you making?

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

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Thank you very much, Sir. That is why I said before that I endorse the Budget. The indigenous peoples said that the key issues with the Low Carbon Development Strategy were that it did not ensure effective participation and failed to meet core safeguard

indicators on the Indigenous peoples' rights including land rights, yet corrective actions have still not been put in place. It states:

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“LCDS policies, including a proposed opt-in procedure for Amerindian villages, confine respect for Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) to titled Amerindian lands and do not extend this core standard to untitled communities and customary lands, thereby violating Guyana’s international obligations.”

There are several other recommendations that are here which speaks to the way in which our Indigenous people were dissatisfied with the LCDS.

Let me try to quickly wrap up. I wish to iterate that the outdated LCDS was premised on a single focus to procure international finance and has as its main focus hydrocarbon and hydro energy. Guyana now has a great opportunity to join the ranks of nations that have taken the green approach. Let me quickly identify two. There is an organisation called the Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE). Guyana is part of that organisation, and two examples, one of Ghana and the other is of Peru. Countries that have the same kind of resources as us but were in a bad state and when they adopted this Green State Development Strategy approach and their GDP’s rose significantly. That was the case of Ghana and the case of Peru. Permit me also to allude to the fact that the Green State Development Strategy and the path to development for Guyana. Guyana is ensuring that we join this movement throughout the establishment of the green state. If only we could set aside tribalism, racism, pardons and interest and political obstinacy, massive developments and sustainable prosperity awaits Guyana in a green state.

In conclusion, I wish to submit that the Green State Development Strategy Vision 20/40 is a superlative blueprint for the development of our country and I invite the Opposition to come on board to ensure the economy is transformed, the people are empowered and sustainable communities built, so that all of our citizens could have that “good life.”

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

Ms. Teixeira: Having listened to Minister Harmon just now, I wondered if I was in the wrong debate, because the LCDS belongs to the People’s Progressive Part/Civic (PPP/C) Government which was abandoned by this new Government. I was wondering why he was going into all of

that because what we wanted to hear was about the GSDS. All we got as usual was platitudes. I think Minister Harmon got confused and thought he was still on the Opposition arguing against the LCDS.

We are going through Budget 2019 and the interesting thing about the Budget 2019, and I have listened to my friend across there, Mr. Harmon, about all the great things they will do, I have some simple issues to raise. This is the fifth budget of the APNU/AFC Government. By the end, when this budget is approved, the amount of money that would have been allocated from the resources of Guyana would have been \$1.3 trillion. In the first four budgets, we reached almost a trillion. One could think about in the last many years, whether it is under Forbes Burnham or Desmond Hoyte or Cheddi Jagan or Janet Jagan or Bharrat Jagdeo, what would our country have benefited from a trillion dollars in a short period of three and half years? We have never spent that kind of money in such a short period of time. Where is the proof of the pudding? Where do we see the progress? Where would be the big transformation projects? Where is it that we could say as Guyanese that we are going somewhere - that the country is moving forward?

We have heard Ministers get up with prepared speeches, some of whom had to have it so close to their faces to read that we have not been able to see their faces. Ministers have also been *hard ears* to what has been said, not only by us on this side of the House, but we have been pointing out problems, concerns, but the people out there who hear us. The business community have commented on this budget. The trade union movement has commented on this budget. You have been *hard ears* to respond to anything that they said. We have brought here in the House some of the concerns of people of this country and you have been *hard ears* to them. You have come into this House with *bullyism*, this big braggart behaviour that nobody counts except you.

One of the most critical things was the excise tax on fuel. The price of fuel went down, yet this Government made no change in the excise budget and the excise tax, knowing that this would impact on every ordinary Guyanese who have to use fuel, whether it is catching mini-bus, taxi, motorcycle, the cost of food and the cost of producing. You did not do it and you knew and yet you come here and say that Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL) made a profit. That profit could have been shared with ordinary people in this country to make their lives a bit better and you come and dare to talk about the “good life”. Are you serious?

One point three trillion dollars by the end of 2019 will be expended. Almost one trillion by the end of this year. We have heard about this being the “good life”, but I want to ask the Ministers, on a personal human level, do you not see what is going on in the streets of our country? Do you not see the increase in the beggars? Do you not see the number of young people and women who are at traffic lights cleaning windscreens and selling water to make a living? Is that the jobs you are talking about creating in this country? Have you not seen that one of the biggest industries of your Government is selling dog food on the streets of Sheriff Street, Railway Embankment, south on the East Bank of Demerara? Is that the new economy you are proposing for ordinary people - dog food? I did not see it mentioned in all your big things.

Mr. Speaker, do you not see that our people are suffering? Do you not see? Do you not hear? Have you talked to taxi drivers? Have you talked to minibus drivers? Have you talked to the boatmen at Parika who talk about the drop in service in business going on in this country? Have you gone to walk in Water Street and Regent Street and ask the business people, ask the vendors in the market, what is happening to business in this country? You do not. You drive around in your big fancy Landcruisers with all your security and you do not talk to ordinary people.
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira, please reclaim your seat for a moment. Hon. Members, I must ask you to, put it frankly, make less noise in the chamber. Please proceed, Ms. Teixeira.

Ms. Teixeira: For the Ministers, you go to barbers, you go to hairdressers, you go to nail craft people, do you ever notice that the business is less, that their earnings are less? Do you not notice or are you blind to see what is going on this country? Yet you come here, and you talk about the “good life”. Are you blind that you do not see when you go to Parika what is happening to the boat men there, what is happening to the business community? The vendors in the market, you take them and then you moved them here and then you moved them there, 400 people, a lot of them are women. Go out to the Merriman's Mall. You moved out a whole lot of people from Merriman's Mall. Ask what is going on.

Ask the miners.

Minister Jordan's midterm report last year July showed that this economy was bolstered by gold. It was the main thing in the productive sector that was keeping this country afloat and you went and brought more taxes, more problems on the miners, seizing their equipment, doing

all sorts of crazy things to ordinary small people. Yet you come here - gold, the one thing that is holding us up, is now going to be going down. You admitted that in your midterm report, in July this year, Mr. Jordan, and you admitted that in the budget. Yet you do not see that what you need to do is to reverse some of your policies, reverse some of the taxes. Do not worry about whether you like our LCDS or not. You are in Government. Where is your Green State Development Strategy? You talk about it, but you do not do anything about it. How could we have a dialogue when we do not know what it states. There is no draft; there is no initial skeleton; there are no guidelines. There is nothing.

When I was a little child there used to be a song that used to come on the radio. [Mr. Jordan: That is long time ago.] Yes, it is a long time ago, but I do not look as bad as you, and I am older. There used to be a song by Danny Kaye and it was the *Emperor's New Clothes*. In the song the *Emperor's New Clothes* is that the Emperor was supposed to have these brand new clothes and he paraded it through the streets and everyone said, "How wonderful, how beautiful the clothes". The little boy blurted it out - because out of the mouth of babes come the truth - "But he is naked, he is naked as the day he is born." It is as this budget. You are naked as the day you are born. There is nothing in this budget, and yet you go around to the people, as the emperor's beautiful clothes that there is the "good life", everything is improving. We are doing great in health. We are doing so great in health that ordinary poor people go to the emergency room, who need to be in the wards, and they would have spent two days, in the emergency room, sitting in wheelchairs and chairs with their intravenous therapy (IV) stuck in their hand, because there are no beds, no facilities for them and you come and tell us about the improvement in the health sector? Women are dying from maternal mortality and nobody's heart is hurting. You come here and tell us about improvement and, but nobody's heart is hurting that women in the twenty-first century, in 2018, in Guyana are dying because of callousness, lack of equipment, lack of jobs and lack of anybody who cares.

It is because some of my colleagues on that side do not walk around the street, do not go in the market, do not go and talk to people... You do not have to go far, as you know. I bet if you walk around this Parliament Office or just ask the security guards, ask the cleaners, ask the staff, "what is life like?", they will give you some information. You are frightened to go out there and walk the street because you have your security around you all the time, as if somebody wants to hurt you. I do not need security and I never had one.

When we look at the budget, as my colleague, Mr. Irfaan Ali said, when he spoke at the opening, that total revenue collection by the end of the year will increase to \$217 billion. Whereas tax revenues intended to increase to \$199 billion, \$28.3 billion more than what was projected, and that is expected to be coming to an increase \$5.7 billion to \$46.1 billion. Let us translate this into some real things, because people who are hearing these figures do not totally appreciate them. I am not sure if this side of the House totally appreciates them either. Let us take those figures. Every single Guyanese would be required to pay an excess of \$265,500 in tax for the year 2018. [Mr. Rohee: *Per capita*] *Per capita*, it is every Guyanese head – child, old people, young people, everybody.

4.15 p.m.

Take that figure and divide it by the number of people in Guyana, that every Guyanese will be paying \$265,500 in tax this year, we are not going to next year as yet. That means a child who is just born is going to pay that. It not just me, at my age, or someone who is in their 90s. That is tax.

Let us talk about purchasing power, because what drives the economy is people's ability to spend. What is Government's role in stimulating the economy so that people have more to spend. In 2019, the total spending is expected to reduce by 18% or \$77 billion when compared to 2014. That is \$462,000 less will be spent at the household level now. The first figure you gave was individual. This is now household level *per capita*, \$462,000 less per annum for every household in Guyana. Can understand when we say that this cannot be the "good life"? When you are taking away from people's households \$462,000 per annum, they have to buy their children's shoes, their children's books and uniforms. They have to get the children to go to school. A lunch kit has to be packed for them. They have to be able to take care of their families, to pay rent in some cases, to pay mortgage, to catch bus, to use a bicycle, and you are taking away \$462,000 from each household in Guyana. I am just translating figures because we can go on and talk about these macro figures and people do not quite comprehend. When you take away this amount of money, that is what I mean, that your purchasing power drops. What it means is that people spend less. They have less to spend. They go to the market, may buy less chicken, a smaller quantity of chicken or a smaller quantity of fish because they are stretching the dollars.

If you listen to some of the programme "The Man in the Street", the things that some of the newspapers have done... There is the National Communications Network (NCN), which is

quite an expensive operation, send it to do “The Man in the Street”. Let it talk to the vendors about when they are bringing out their supplies, what used to be used up in two days is taking a week to be used up by the consumers to come and buy from them. When they talk about the number of fish and chicken vendors who are selling less, it is not because all of a sudden people became vegetarians. It is because people have less money to spend. When the Hon. Minister spoke about their sectors, I understand that you have to boost up your sector. You are working hard, I assume, but then we have to deal with another aspect of this budget and then is when we get into some other issues.

I really believe that many of us on this side of the honourable House felt that 2018 is probably a landmark year in the period of this Government. The year 2019, you are talking about republic, that is a historic event. We have made our own historic event in 2018, Comrades, and that is 12th November, 2018. There was a historic event that took place in this country where there was a local government elections where the people of this country, in 80 local authorities, dismissed you. They rejected you. It was a referendum on you. It is on you, the APNU/AFC Government, not you personally, of course. The issue is that the people of this country... This was a midterm election for the APNU/AFC Government. In 2015, when you won Government, you won it with 4,526 votes. It is less than 1% difference between us. Assuming that at some point the election petition will be heard, almost four years now, that nevertheless, we will continue to recognise that the President is the President. We will continue to wait for our case to be heard in court and we will continue to say that the 4,526 votes you had to put you in Government was a hair’s breadth. On top of that, you have only three of ten Regional Democratic Councils. You are sitting on a pinnacle with no base at all. In 2016, we got 28,000 votes more than you.

In 2018, with all of your good works and almost a trillion dollar budget, that you said you spent for the betterment of our people. What happened on 12th November, 2018 is that you got decimated. The PPP/C ran all 80 local authorities. This is a Government which could not even run all 80 local authorities, not even eighty. You could not even have contested all 80 local authorities, and you are the Government. You should have been able to do that. You said you are standing on the people’s backs. Eighty local authorities voted. In some place there were no elections at all because there was nobody to contest the PPP/C. We won. We are acclaimed. The thing is, 45,000 votes more than the Government were given to the PPP/C and we received 113,000 more than the AFC – ‘Lord’, poor AFC.

You are now sitting on quicksand. You are now on quicksand. What do you mean? In Linden it is called ‘sucking’ sand, when you step it in, it starts to come around your waist. Therefore what is interesting about this budget is that you, as the Government, which, in the beginning, was sitting on 4,526 votes, which is not even a seat in this Parliament. A seat in this Parliament is approximately 7,000 voters, but you could not have half of any of us, so you had to get the whole seat. The thing is that, you got three of the 10 regions and twice you are being told by the people, more so on 12th November, 2018, that your performance is bad and they do not want you there. Mr. Speaker, one would have thought that the Government would have gone into some retrospection and introspection and say, “Boy, we better buck up and improve ourselves.” [Mr. Nandlall: They do not care about that.] It is all about “*it is awe dese time, we in power, we fuss.*” [Ms. Wade: We are in power.] We understand. We know. The whole country knows that you want to hold on to power. That is understandable that you want to hold on to power. You are in Government. However, when you are in Government, you are not in Government for yourselves, you are not in Government for people who support you. The transition from when you are sworn in to when you actually took the mantles of Government, has to do with representing all the people, all the time.

Article 14 makes it very clear about the responsibility of participatory democracy, of inclusive governance. It is at least to try. Put on some attempt to try. You all try. What have you done? We have been subjected... we heard about inclusion, but where is the inclusion? Where is it? There are 98 boards of which 65 % is of one ethnic group, 30% is of another ethnic group and the others are mixed up. Let me tell you something: Even if we take up every seat, which is only 30 of the 98 boards, it would not change the demographics that I am talking about.

You spoke about inclusion, but you have excluded. You talk about Indigenous people and Amerindians, but you fired, within the first six weeks of your office, 1,972 Community Support Officers. You removed from the community the village economies of those areas where those people came from \$700 million which they would have earned over the years to develop and take care of their 10,000 dependents. You came in with revenge in your hearts. You wanted retribution. You did not want to build national unity. That is a saying; that is just a slogan.

We have seen Executive abuse and lawlessness. We have seen the erosion of our Constitution and the statutes of Guyana. We have brought motions in this House on innocuous things, such as suicide, and you defeated it. We brought proposals on that motion on how to deal with suicide and you threw it out. We brought motions on the interior roads of our country that is

hurting the economy, miners, Bartica and all of these interior villages. You threw them out. Yet the Minister in the budget speech referred to the problems with the roads in the interior which are affecting the gold economy. You put it in the midyear reports of 2017 and 2018 about the interior roads. You reject that. We brought a motion that made sure that we all, as Members of Parliament, all of us, provide the last ten years of our declarations of income tax and Integrity Commission Reports. You took that out and tried to amend it and said in April, 2016 would have been the new deadline. The Integrity Commission was put up in 2018. Let us see how many you have sent in. We cleared all of ours.

We brought a motion here in October, 2017, a motion on proposals to stimulate the economy, reduce poverty and hardships in Budget 2018. It was not allowed on the floor of this House - a hundred-odd measures. We have said it verbally, in press conferences and yes, we repeat *ad nauseam* that the zero-rated VAT items must be restored, which was removed in 2016. We will say that it is a mantra, because it has to be done. You wanted to reduce 16% to 14% VAT, that is good, but what you did when you did that? You then added VAT on a set of essential items that were never there before. You gave with one hand and took away with another hand. In this budget, \$3.1 billion is in concessions for taxation and yet you have now increase taxation. In 2019, it will be \$18 billion more in taxation that you are taking from the Guyanese people. You give \$3.1 billion and you are taking \$88 billion. It is unconscionable. Does your conscience not bother you? How do you sleep at nights?

We tried by all means to put forward the measures that could help. You do not understand, Minister Jordan, by coming up with these measures of how to improve the budget, how to stimulate the economy, we were taking a political risk as a party, which also hopes to be in Government, because were you to have implemented this, we may have trouble getting into Government in 2020. Thanks to this and what you are doing now, we will get into Government in 2020.

You have abandoned many projects when you came in and, as I said, with revenge and retribution. I was not being facetious with that. I really mean it. One of the things about democracy, when you look at the advanced democratic countries, the United Kingdom, Europe, United States of America, governments change, presidents change, but the institutional memory remains. That is the power of long developed institutional democratic states. We had an embryonic one, not old at all, and yet what have you done? You fired key institutional

memories in every single Ministry. People who are qualified, technical people, who were professional, you fired almost all of them. You lost your institutional memory.

4.30 p.m.

That is why sometimes when Ministers say that they cannot find documents, I do not doubt them because they do not know where to look. They are there. Nobody knows because they are bringing a whole set of new people who do not know anything. You removed Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), Regional Executive Officers (REOs), Permanent Secretaries (PSs), Town Clerks, Overseers, middle management, all sorts of technical people at different levels, and then you have a problem with execution. Then there is my dear friend, Mr. Harmon, who was saying at the Love and Unity Rally, “no more Mr. Nice Time.” Well, I do know when you were ever “Nice Time”. I do not think you were ever “Nice Time” because you have been removing people from the service who wanted to stay in Guyana and to serve their country and were willing to work with you, the APNU/AFC Government. They did not say that they did not want to work you. They wanted a job and they wanted to serve their country and you got rid of all of them.

Transformative projects were already in the making and they were abandoned because, as my mother always said, do not throw out the baby with bath water. What you did was you threw out everything – baby and bathwater. The projects that were in the making, the specialty hospital, Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, the Lethem-Linden Road with the Brazilians and the hydropower project with Brazilians. The deep-water harbour was already in discussions and negotiations. [Mr. Jordan: The deep-water what?] The deep-water harbour, in case you did not hear. These were programmes that were in the making, negotiations were going on and investors being looked at.

Yesterday, when Minister Patterson said that there was no feasibility study, and so on, I wanted to refer him... because he may not have paid attention. In fact, I believe that, for all Ministers, this should be compulsory reading for you. I want to suggest, because Mr. Harmon was teaching Mr. Ali a bit of something. I am wanting to say to you, that I think that this should be your mandatory reading during the Christmas holidays, and that is the Auditor General’s report which is a bombshell. I have never read a report like this coming from the Auditor General’s office. Every single Ministry is consumed with breaches of procurement, of scandals, of money that cannot be accounted for and documents that cannot be accounted for. Therefore I hope my recommendation will be taken seriously.

Minister Patterson, let us go to page 150 of the Auditor General's report, paragraph 375. It shows a number of \$4.2 billion, under programme two where there was shortfall because of the following, which, now, included the loans from China, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), and including East Bank-East Coast Demerara road linkage, the loan from India and the comment is, "delay in sourcing design consultant". There was a feasibility and now you are going to design it.

Let us go to paragraph 384 which states:

"On 16 March 2016, the Government of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and Export-Import Bank of India signed an agreement for the provision by Exim Bank of a Credit to the borrower up to an aggregate sum of US\$50M for the purpose of financing the East Bank East Coast Road Linkage Project. The sum of \$81M was allotted for the design and construction of the bypass road from Ogle to Great Diamond in order to: (i) improve access; (ii) reduced traffic congestion; and (iii) reduced travel time. However, according to the Appropriation Accounts, there was no expenditure during the year, resulting in a shortfall of the full amount."

Paragraph 385:

"However, on 10 January 2018, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure entered into an agreement with a consultant from India to provide consultancy services for the preparation of detailed project report for construction of the East Bank – East Coast Road Linkage Project at a total cost of US\$1.321M."

That was January, 2018. It is now the 6th December 2018 and it is just a design consultant you are talking about. You are sitting on US\$50 million.

We are happy that you are, again, talking back with the Brazilians about the Lethem-Linden Road. [Mr. Greenidge: [Inaudible]] Well, that is what the newspapers says, Mr. Greenidge, I do not know. You did not say it. One of your other Ministers said it.

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

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you Mr. Speaker. The projects that were in the making with negotiations and there are records, yet, you have abandoned all of these.

Comrades, Ministers and colleagues in this House, can you imagine that were we to not have been so small-minded in 2015, and allowed the specialty hospital to proceed, to have allowed the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project to proceed, to have allowed the negotiations on the deep-water harbour to proceed, to have allowed the negotiations with Lethem-Linden Brazilian discussions, where we would be three and a half years later? Do you realise my dear friends, the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project would have been finished and we would have now been connecting the transmissions? The specialty hospital would have been finished by this year. For example, the deep-water harbour we would have finished at some point, making sure that we had an agreement with somebody to build it. Therefore the abandonment of these projects has set us back decades.

When a country loses opportunities, it is very difficult to gain them back. Time at the individual level and time at the Government and nation levels are two different things, two different concepts. The time at the Government and the nation level is about opportunity and doing the correct thing at the right time. These things were in the making. You have abandoned them all because they are PPP. “Who wants PPP? Get rid of them. They are no good.”

I just have three questions to ask the Minister: Where is the \$30 billion GuySuCo loan catered for in the budget? There is no record of it anywhere. Therefore, how is it reflected that we are paying back at an interest rate of over 4% on a loan that has not been put to use of any kind and should it not have been used to save the entire industry? We are paying for \$15 billion, which we have received, and we have not done anything with it.

Second question, the Berbice Bridge takeover that we cannot find and maybe you will advise us on where the moneys are in the budget to help support the continued use of it. There is no money that we can find.

Third question, US\$18 million signature bonus, signed in June, 2016. It is still not put in the Consolidated Fund. Could you please advise us where it is in the Consolidated Fund because there is no record of that? Again, it is a violation of the Constitution. Neither is the \$788 million which was part of the US\$18 million, which we approved in this House in May, 2018 in the second supplementary financial paper, for Guyana in terms of its representation to the International Court of Justice to do with our border issue. The commitment made, on that day, in this House, was that the \$788 million would be reflected in the Consolidated Fund (because different things were being taken out from here and putting there and so on) anyway, it is

nowhere. The \$788 million is not reflected in budget in the figures nor is the US\$18 million total.

My colleague said, yesterday, that this budget is one that was destroying the economy and disempowering people and breaking communities for a poor life. I want to say that we have lost a golden opportunity as a country, as a nation and as a Parliament to have done much better in this National Assembly and in this budget, to have come out with a budget that would have saved our nation, stimulate the economy, improve the quality of life of our people. This budget will not do that, unfortunately. This budget will take our country further back. The Government is on borrowed time.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Minister of Finance [Mr. Jordan]: Mr. Speaker, I did not want to interrupt the Hon. Member, but I believe that you made a ruling as it relates to the signing bonus, since this matter is before the Hon. Chief Justice. You did say that it should not be referenced in the National Assembly. The Hon. Member asked a question: Why was the US\$18 million put into the Consolidated Fund? This is the very question that the Hon. Chief Justice has been asked to rule on. I am asking you again to please remind the House that matters before the court are not to be discussed.

Minister within the Ministry of Natural Resources [Ms. Charles-Broomes]: I, as my colleagues, rise to make my contribution to Budget 2019. From the outset, let me congratulate the Minister of Finance and his team on behalf of myself and Minister Trotman.

Before I move into my presentation, allow me to please deal with a few matters that were just mentioned before I took the floor. To sit here, in this National Assembly, and hear the Hon. Member, who cannot face the facts, talking about how did you sleep and how do you sleep at nights? What is wrong with women? Where was this honourable woman when people were murdered and people's boy children were slaughtered in the streets? Where was this woman? How did she sleep? How did she sleep when women were exploited, raped, murdered and trafficked? How did she sleep? I will continue to address some of the matters raised on my name, as I go forward. Let me ask my honourable friend Ms. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai to relax and smile a while and give her face a rest and allow me to inform you of what is happening in the extractive sector.

The Ministry of Natural Resources went through some structural changes, meaning that the portfolio of petroleum is now with the Ministry of Presidency. As such, the Ministry, at this time, is looking at policy development and administration and natural resources management. I would have thought that since I am in this House, twice before at the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Natural Resources, we went through the syndicate initiatives, that at this time, since the Hon. Member, who is a Member of that Committee, would have been more informed. It seems to me that the Hon. Member, while smiling, did not sap in the facts and information.

I want to present on what we inherit, where we are at now and where we are going. From the outset, the extractive industry was in a mess, between miners of themselves, the exploitation and the fight, women, men, big miners and small miners, all over the place, no level of transparency. Where we are now, it is that all of these miners have come together and are negotiating with the Government and even formed themselves into a group called 'the mob.' That is to show where the sector was, where it is at and where it is heading. Let me also mention that the national syndicate, the Guyana Women Miners Association (GWMA) and the Guyana Gold and Diamond Miners Association (GGDMA) have seats on the board where they make decisions in the extractive sector, never before.

This matter keeps coming up about concessions and persons used to be getting duty-free under the PPP. The smaller miners are as everyone else, the amount of money they had to pay they had to pay it thrice. You had to pay at the place where it is first written up, the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC); you had to pay at the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA), and you had to pay at the Ministry. That was the amount of money you had to spend because those were the days of corruption and bribe. It was more than the taxes that you would have had to pay. It is under this Government that the Minister of Finance has ensured that an Investment Development Agreement (IDA) – listen Ms. Campbell-Sukhai – is signed at all levels. It was never before.

4.45 p.m.

The persons who benefitted from those concessions were the large-scale people who just did it, even if it was prospecting, getting vehicles, fuel, and a host of things. That has changed Hon. Member, Ms. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai, small miners are happy. The Syndicate Initiative addressed the problem of *landlorism*, exploitation, *bullyism*, *theifism*, *corruptism* and all the *isms* that you can talk about. It means now that the smaller miners have formed themselves into groups.

May I mention that in Mahdia there are two syndicates because of the number of small miners who are in that area. Yesterday, I heard the Hon. Member Lumumba talking about, “Oh, you know those villages that depended on mining like Berbice and Buxton...” Today in the House, you have the national bodies. You have the Berbice Mining Syndicate and not so long ago we went to Buxton. The Syndicate Initiative is not about taking this land to put in your pocket like that Hon. Members thought when they came here asking to see who have land like they were going to catch somebody. Transparency is what this Government is all about.

We are happy that, where we were before, where the small miners were punishing, today they have a voice. They are mobilised, the Government is working with them, and we will continue to work with them. They have benefitted from everything in the sector. Transparency is what you call that Hon. Member, Ms. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai.

We would have recognised that our Regulations and Acts do have some loopholes and, as such, in the new year, the Ministry will be looking at a full review of all these Acts, the Mining Regulations, Guyana Gold Board Act, and the Forest Act. We will be looking at these Acts to see how we could better manage the extractive sector and to look at these loopholes so that, in terms of transparency and better governance, we have it from the end of our Acts and Policies. Within the new year, those Bills and Acts will be coming to the House.

It seems to me that corruption is becoming a song. The people who know about corruption, well the only thing they could talk about is corruption. It is under this Government that the Ministry of Natural Resources and this Government became a candidate to the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI). We are not running, we are trying to clean up your corruption.

[Mr. Dharamlall: [Nobody...*Inaudible*] It is okay Hon. cousin Dharamlall, you are lonely in the corner, but that is fine. For 23 years, this Opposition came to the House to make it seem as if... This is a Government of three years, I am no economist, but how could you measure 23 with three? Could you imagine? When they could talk about the amount of progress that this Government has been making for the three years, it unbelievable. Where were we when we came in, in terms of our natural resources and minerals? We were nowhere. In fact, there were exploration projects that were done, billions of dollars were expended, but, when we took office, the information was missing. I do not know what you call that. That is not stealing. That is taking away things without permission. It was nowhere there.

Now, in the 21st Century, it is this Government that is looking at our natural resources to know where the minerals are, the quantities there and to have information. We are talking

transparency. We have a country that is full of wealth and we do not even know what minerals we have and where they are and we are talking about governance. Come and learn Hon. Members, what is governance.

This Government, by 2020 will be able to say to the world where our minerals are. The minerals that I am talking about Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall - because you do not know – it is not only gold and diamond. It is all other rare-earth that we have so many, more than 40 odd rare-earths. This should be encouraging to all of us since the development of Guyana should be the top on our agenda.

The Ministry of Natural Resources have gotten the blessings from the Cabinet and is looking at restructuring the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC). We have recognised that the services, the time in which we are providing services, the areas, and the level of management need to be strengthened. As such, the Cabinet has given its blessings. The advertisements were out in the press for consultants. Those are now in and will be looked at. In the new year, you could look forward to the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission being restructured and where we would be able to provide the type of service and the governance in the extractive sector.

Under the Environment, while we will be looking at the phasing out of mercury, it is not a big stick approach as you will hear about shortly. The Government, through the Ministry of Natural Resources and GGMC, will be working with miners at all levels to look at the alternative for mercury, how to do the level of training and give support to the smaller miners so that they would be able to access the types of equipment.

On that note, we are looking at the environment, how to reclaim and fill these pits that were all over the country when we took Office. There were big open pits all over the place from bauxite to mining. There were sand, loam and quarry, all over the place. In Budget 2019, the Ministry of Natural Resources with the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission would be looking at land reclamation and revegetation. We are not only looking at it from the miners' standpoint, but we will be looking at the communities where mining takes place nearby. We will be looking at nurseries, working with women and youths in these communities and planting of trees, and they would be part of this process, that we will ensure that, after mining, the livelihoods of our people are well protected.

The project that we have been looking at and mapping out, as I mentioned in my last budget presentation, I would like to add that we would be looking also at diamond. That is a new addition to the project with the Geological Services Division.

As I turn my attention to Land Management, what did we inherit? We inherited a Commission where persons got land. But, where are they, what are their names and how many of them? There was no system. Billions of dollars were spent to put in some system with information technology (IT) to get data and all of that. But do you know what happened? The data in the system was against what was on the map, as against what was in a file. It was confusion, bad management, and the favourite word that they want to talk about, 'corruption'. The Land Management Division had to by hand, look at over 9000 applications and files with prospecting, 9000 advertisements with mining permits and the list goes on to correct the wrongs. Now, we have a system at the Land Management Division where you will be able to have accurate information and also to make your application for land online. It is technology like never before.

It is okay *Auntie*, I am ensuring that all the Guyanese... I am speaking to miners, so I have to speak for them to hear me. Do not shut me up. Guyana and the whole world must know.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am sure that if you were addressing the last remarks to any Member in this House, you would wish to address them properly.

Ms. Charles-Broomes: Yes, Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member, *Auntie*. At the Land Management Division, there are major improvements. In 2019, we will be looking at the time in which one makes an application as against the time one gets their results, along with the finding of that application. Improved services under Land Management is one of the areas that Guyana can look forward to in 2019.

At the Mines Division at the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission, again it was another division that, when we took office, persons who have claims since 1980 and 1990, at today's date, they do not know if they are valid or not. In most cases, it is only when the persons go on a property, bore some gold, an investigation comes out, and then they know the property does not belong to persons. Since in the 1960s persons would have been paying. I am pleased to announce that within 2018, the Mines Division has put in place a data. It was tested and of 2019, the information and the processing of licences, ensuring that you have Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates and all of that is something that we will be focusing on. The whole

idea as a nation and as a Commission, is that we should be able to speak to land ownership in the extractive industry.

We heard a lot about roads and, indeed, the Hon. Minister of Finance mentioned in his presentation the difficulties that miners face in terms of our targets not being met. I would also like to add the situation at the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission, again what we have inherited. We have inherited this little compound where we have the Guyana Gold Board, GGMC, labs and everything in one. That was like a ticking bomb, but we have passed that hurdle and that is one of the reasons. In Budget 2019, a \$1 billion is set aside to look at roads in the extractive industry. We will also be looking at new roads at Matthews's Ridge, Port Kaituma to Baramita; Buck Hall to the Waini River; Grey Hope, Tapir, Aranka and Angoy's Avenue, starting from the Buck Hall to Tapir. In Region 7, a new road linking Puruni to the Cuyuni River; there is a road to Issano from Troy Resources and Konawaruk. We are looking at the pontoon crossing at Butakari, Mahdia, Eagle Mountain, Konawaruk, you name them. We will also be looking at the road from Lethem to Monkey Mountain. For example, places like Black Water where the Hon. Member had concerns about the condition of the road, that also. We will be extending all over. This Government is on the drive for major infrastructure development. You do not have to worry.

I want to send a clear message to all the miners in Guyana that this Government will ensure that the type of infrastructure that is needed will be delivered to its people. I was pleased and I want to thank the Hon. Minister Patterson again because he mentioned that a feasibility study has been done for the Puruni Bridge. That is a dream come through for miners. As we speak, they are pulling over the pontoon with a rope. You get there some days and for days you cannot cross over because the pontoon is not working with that rope. For days miners are suffering, I am happy that this Government is making history, bridging ridges. I want to say to the Hon. Ms. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai that it is linking the hinterland with the coastland.

Let me look at the health of our miners, all miners. We heard about the small miners – small miners die from a snake bite if there is not a company with some medex that they could go to. Before the PPP/C took Office, there were all these army bases in Konawaruk and so on, you use to get healthcare from those medex. All of that disappeared under the PPP/C.

5.00 p.m.

In Budget 2019, I am pleased to announce that a health post will be at the Puruni Landing. To our women who died, my good friend Donna, of pressure, this Government is looking into the health of our people. How dare some persons come into this House to lecture on mining? No half an hour, this is a debate that I am willing to take up the entire Opposition on, mining and small miners. A half an hour would not permit me.

Let me divert to the Compliance Division. The Compliance Division is a new arm at the Ministry of Natural Resources. It is not to take away from the GGMC or the Guyana Forestry Commission, it is to enhance. His Excellency in traversing the hinterland, recognised the need for support in the extractive industry, and as such... [*Interruption*] ...Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member did not hear Minister Hastings-Williams say that there were things for persons with disability. The Compliance Division in 2019 will see over 30 wardens out in the fields, two prefab houses will set up and they would be in the field enhancing and supporting the work of the Commission, the Guyana Forestry Commission and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

On the note of safety, what have we inherited as soon as we took office? On the day that His Excellency was sworn in, there was a pit cave-in where 10 persons died. In my 30 years, in the mining sector, I have seen and witnessed first-hand pit cave-ins, but it was never addressed.

I would like to say to all that in terms of safety, we are looking at prevention because one death is one too many. As such, within 2019, not only the engineers and scientists - the previous Government took the engineers and put them in an office in Georgetown - they would be in the fields, but, also, there are some areas, for example in Konawaruk, where there are 200-300 feet depths. Even the persons who own this property, the Commission will be looking because we cannot have the land owner give permission to a miner who has an operation that cannot manage that level and type of mining. This is being looked at in a holistic fashion. The Compliance Division has been going through training at the mining school to support and to enhance. The message is 'every and each life for this Government is equally important'.

We used to be looking at the report and I am happy that the Hon. Member, Amna Ally, dealt with the issue of TIP. I am pleased to add that it is not even the major focus with the United States in Guyana anymore, as it was before, since this Government is making every effort. In the GGMC there is a special unit that will be working and supporting the task force at the Ministry of Social Protection and all inter-agency collaboration.

On that note, please at this time allow me to correct something that was said in this House by the Hon. Member Gillian Burton-Persaud, that innocent business people tried to help out children by giving them jobs, not knowing that it was labour trafficking. Ignorance of the Law is no excuse. Exploitation of our children and trafficking will not be tolerated by this Government and not under the watch of His Excellency David Granger. I want to make that clear. It is a wrong message to send from the National Assembly. There is no help in exploitation

The Forest Carbon Partnership Facility Project (FCFPF), at the Guyana Forestry Commission, the Ministry of Natural Resources, we continue to look at the Project to Reduce Emissions from Deforestations and Forest Degradation (REDD+). There are some changes in that project, but it is ongoing. The Guyana Forestry Commission had a shift in its production chain since we have seen the closure of Bai Shan Lin Forest Developers Inc. and the Barama Company Limited. At this time the smaller miners have lift the bar and we have not drop in our target for this year, since 80% of the revenue generated was from the small miners. In the past, 70-80% of those revenues came in from the larger company, but this time there is a shift. I am also pleased to announce that 40% of that target is women and youth.

Under better management, I would like to thank all the staff under the Ministry and more so the Guyana Forestry Commission, this year, we recorded its lowest deforestation since the Norway Partnership Agreement, to 0.04%. We did not have to shut down the small miners; did they have to go picket and shut down Bartica to say that we have a right to tell them six months before a tree is cut – better governance.

This year, the Guyana Forestry Commission will be looking at how areas are zoned since they would be mapping out the forest. Looking at where our species are, not only our trees, but also our wildlife. So, if we have our wildlife in an area, the Guyana Forestry Commission would not be looking at giving permission because we will preserve our wildlife, so there is inter-agency and inter-Ministry collaboration in this regard. Also, the Guyana Forestry Commission will be looking at community development so in communities where forestry is taking place. The Guyana Forestry Commission have their stations to have persons in those areas benefit from these small associations.

I am pleased to announce that we have 69 community associations and they employ close to 6,000 persons. So far, we have allocated 500,000 hectares of forest land to those categories of our small foresters. So, it is not only in mining that we are looking at our small miners, but also

in forestry. I am pleased to report to the House that the training school at the Guyana Forestry Commission have just won an international award and that training school will be doing online training, not only within Guyana, but internationally – never before. We are looking at value-added training with public/private partnership and in that public/private partnership is how we are looking to train from each community and region in Guyana. In that training, we will be looking at targeting value-added. [Mr. Dharamlall: Are you going to that school?]

There is a bench there for you, Hon. Member.

I would turn my attention to the Gold Board. The Hon. Minister of Finance did mention that we had a drop in the gold declaration. The problem at the Gold Board is known and, also, the movements of the Gold Board. I am pleased to announce that, our target for next year, we are going to ensure that our miners and all that will be injected in the roads in the sector, that we will meet our targets.

Also, in Budget 2019, the Gold Board will be looking at its own safehouse. It will be no more in the compound of the GGMC. I must mention that the deficit we inherited, under prudent management, that deficit is going down.

It is time we as the Government face facts. I am hearing all about the Local Government Elections, how much we lost, and how we should walk and hear the people. It is this Government that brings governance to the ground. I want to put the Opposition on notice that the Opposition will remain Opposition because this APNU/AFC Government are ready, we are mobilised, and we are in order. This time I can promise we would not have a one-seat majority. Energy to the fullest.

On this note, I want to say to the Hon. Member, Mdm. Teixeira, you do not have sorry for us because by the next election, the only thing that would happening is that the Opposition bench will have some changes but in the same place. So, you do not have to be worry for us, we are ready and able because we will deliver. There is an Hon. Member, the only man I ever see a fertility test did not work with and he should shut his mouth.

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

Ms. Charles-Broomes: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. At this time, I would like to make a declaration in this House. Philippines 1.6 in the King James Version, ‘He who began the good work in the APNU/AFC Government is well able to complete it’. We will do it again and again. With these few words, I commend Budget 2019 in this House for passage.

I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will take the suspension at this time. Before we do, there are two announcements I must make. The first is to remind Hon. Members, who are Members of the Business Sub-Committee to meet with me in Chambers today. I believe the more appropriate time would be after Members would have had the chance to eat, so that we could meet at a 5.45 p.m. to discuss matters pertaining to the Estimates.

The second announcement is that, as a result of approaches made to the Speaker and discussions which have taken place, if one would turn to the 'Speakers' line-up' for Friday, the last three speakers on that list will each be allowed at least an hour and a half to speak. Any extension would be subject to the discretion of the Speaker.

I thank you. Those are the announcements I wish to make. We will return at 6.15 p.m. For Members of the Business Sub-Committee, at 5.45 p.m. you can meet with me in my Chambers.

Sitting suspended at 5.13 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 7.17 p.m.

Mr. Rohee: After three years of the APNU/AFC in Government, we have been treated to another presentation by the Minister that was long on words, but short on substance.

7.19 p.m.

In a few words I could say that "the mountain has laboured and brought forth a mouse". This is the long and short of the three years of the AAPNU/AFC Administration.

I want to touch briefly in passing on this question of infrastructure, particularly roads which have been mentioned by a number of speakers on the Government side. Just to say that \$4.5 billion have been allocated for roads in various parts of the country. There is one thing that is certain about all this talk about such huge amounts of money allocated for roads and that is, people cannot eat roads and bridges. You have a situation in this country where, almost, on a daily basis, people are sliding more and more into poverty. Only yesterday, we saw a large number of sugar workers protesting for their daily bread, which had been denied them by this Administration.

Even if we were to be generous and to say that there was something, however small it may be, in this budget for the common man and woman, the fact of the matter is, people have become

so disillusioned and so disenchanted in this country that they would not believe or even accept that there is anything in this budget for them. Therefore, in that context no one believes the Government. There is a crisis of confidence now. People lack total confidence in this Administration. Irrespective of how well you package whatever you have, there is total disbelief on the part of the population. That is the situation you are faced with – the Government.

The presentation by the Hon. Minister was populated with a lot of grandiose projects, most of which remain unachievable like *pies in the sky*. One commentator who the Government does not like to hear much about these days or for quite some time now, is on record stating that there were over 20 initiatives in this budget and in previous budgets that remain unfulfilled. We have very little doubt on this side of the House that the same will happen with respect to Budget 2019.

The excruciating circumstances and conditions under which people live now in this country, I think is clearly reflected in what the Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, said when she spoke earlier this afternoon. I would not wish to further elucidate on that. Simply to say that the budget offers no answers whatsoever to the thousands of unemployed who are walking, marching, demonstrating and making their voices heard. There is no solution to the unemployment situation in Guyana. The budget has not mentioned a word to this effect. Therefore, this is another problem that the Government has which it has failed to resolve. These conditions it appears have become a way of life for people so much so that the Government has become numb to these difficulties facing people. Many people are now deciding to leave the country. Only recently, we were told that 100,000 visas were issued to Guyanese who were desirous of leaving our country. That is a very significant statement that the Government and all Guyanese ought to make note of. The United States of American (USA) Embassy said that they have processed more than 72,000 non-immigrant visas and 7,000 immigrant visas – people leaving the country. This is a good example of the degree of frustration facing the people of Guyana.

Nothing was stated in the budget to address the high levels of corruption that is taking place in our country. It boggles the mind that the Government has become so numb to this criticism, constantly coming from various circles to the effect that corruption has become a hallmark of this Administration. I think conventional arguments were made by many of the Members on this side of the House about how money is flowing or seeping from the system into the pockets of many of the cronies, the friends and families of Government functionaries.

The Hon. Minister in his budget speeches over the past two or three years, always resort to the tune that it has just begun. He seems to love this song by *The Carpenters*. He has gone a step further where he talked about *reaching out and touch*, but the questions are, *reaching out and touch* who and touching them with what? Is it the Midas touch that everything the Government touches transfers into something of a wasteless lump of ... I do not want to use the word?

The economy clearly seems to be suffering from some kind of remission, in a period of relapse and is drifting like a cork in the ocean. There is a lot of day dreaming taking place on that side of the House. They are in a state of day dreaming. As though to contradict himself, the Hon. Minister, while speaking in glowing terms of about what is happening in Guyana. In fact, not only the Minister, but many of his Colleagues admit that:

“Our institutions and systems continue to operate with a high degree of inefficiency...”

He stopped short of speaking about incompetence. It is not only a question of inefficiency in the system, it is also a question of incompetence on the part of the Government unable to deliver goods and services to the people of our country.

We were told that whenever the people in Government travel, they would find in some of the countries that they travel to that they would be admired by the people there, for example, for the quality of the roads, the maintenance of buildings and other infrastructure and the quality of the local services that are offered. He said that in his Budget Speech. He said that the people in those countries pay their taxes. Of course, they pay their taxes, but what the Minister failed to mention... We do not know what countries he is talking about in the first place. Is he talking about industrialised countries or is he talking about developing countries? What is he talking about? This is because the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), one has to measure what is the GDP in those countries. How much are people earning in those countries that would enable them to pay the kind of taxes that are levied on them. What are the taxes we are paying in Guyana as compared to those countries that are able to spend huge amounts of moneys to improve their infrastructural capabilities and conditions?

It would seem to me that Guyana's economy is on life support. Unfortunately, the Government side fails to admit that this is the case. It only appears to be a dose of euthanasia to help them and that is why they are looking at the question of oil and gas. Incidentally, most of the Ministers and the individuals on the Government's side have not said a word about oil and gas, and they are painting such a huge picture - such a rosy picture about oil and gas. Very little has

been said about oil and gas. I was expecting at least one or two of them to speak on the issue. The Minister of Finance in his presentation, *en passant* mentioned oil and gas, but not a single one of them, having painted such a glorious picture about oil and gas and the promises it brings to the country, have not said anything about it. What is the problem? Is there a lack of capacity and understanding? Can they not explain this question to Parliament? Something is rogue.

The Hon. Minister of Finance paid a lot of attention and placed a lot of emphasis on the question of growth and competitiveness as if growth and competitiveness are the ‘be all’ and the ‘end all’ of everything in our country. He seems to be in a more, with what I would describe as *growthmanship* - growth without development. You speak a lot about people-centred development. You could have all the growth in the world and I am sure that the Opposition speakers would elucidate more on this, but if you have a lot of growth but no development from which the people are benefitting, then it makes no sense what so ever. As one person said, “you better put it in your pipe and smoke it”.

Another matter I noticed in the presentation of the Minister and in the words of those who spoke on the other side of the House, on the Government benches, they seem to be surrendering the economic sovereignty of country. Not one speaker has spoken on this subject that, notwithstanding the fact that we want to have investors and so many others come to our country, what is important is that we must take a firm grasp of the sovereignty, particularly the economic sovereignty of our country. That is extremely important in today’s world where we are living in an international situation where there is a hostile international climate. We have to survive. We are still price takers and we will continue to be price takers, even though we will produce oil. What will happen with the economy if we do not take full possession of it?

The Government says, through its Minister of Finance, that it has taken tough decisions in order to right the economy that was perched precariously - beautiful words. The economy was perched precariously when they took it over and they had to take tough decisions. I would say yes, tough decisions, but against who? These tough decisions were aimed primarily against the working people and the business community. Let us not leave them out because I will come to that later when I talk to the Minister of Public Security.

Tough decisions have been taken indeed - heavy taxation, but levied mainly against the working people of this country, those in the productive sector who produce the wealth. Penalisation, as someone said earlier this morning from this side, of the House. In trying to right the wrong, what they have done is more wrongs than rights and messed up the entire

economic and social conditions in our country. The Minister admitted, and I was surprised to hear that none of the speakers on that side of the Government benches made mention of the fact that the Minister had admitted that Guyanese continue to face hardships and that there are pockets of poverty in a number of areas in our country. I was expecting the Ministers who spoke on that side, especially those who live in the interior areas, to refer to the pockets of poverty that still prevail in our society. No mention was made of that.

7.34 p.m.

It was brushed under the carpet entirely as though it were non-existent and as though we were in a utopia. It is a surreal situation. You must admit and reflect on what the Hon. Minister said in his speech, which is that there are these problems still prevailing in the country. Do not create the impression that everything is hunky-dory when, in fact, it is not so. It is not sufficient only to recognise the problems. The question is: what are you doing about it? [Mr. **Ramjattan:** That is what he stood four and half hours to tell you.] Well, we would come to that later. So, recognition of the problem is one thing, but doing something tangible about it, which really, in effect, touches the people is what we want talk about.

We were told, the Hon. Minister himself said this, I am just quoting what he said, that:

“...we did not promise that the Good Life would be achieved in our first term...”

Well, let me tell you: there would not be any second term. So, forget this talk about first term and that you are going for a second term. There would not be any. *Do not count your chickens before they are hatched.*

It is like telling the Guyanese people not to wait for heaven on earth; wait until they die and then they would go to heaven and get everything there. I would like to respectfully advise my Parliamentary Colleagues on that side of the House to stop this day dreaming about their first term. There would not be a second term.

The Hon. Minister of Finance also said:

“We can, at last, reach out and touch the hopes and possibilities of our nation.”

We need to state what we are talking about when we are talking about hope. Hope is an illusion. Is that what you are promising the people, an illusion? We have to move beyond giving the people hope. You are in the Government. We are on the Opposition. Our task is to give hope

to get over there and we will get over there. But you have to stop giving hope. You are the Government. You are controlling the purse strings. Deliver. Deliver the goods and services to the people. The Hon. Minister is also quoted as saying - in fact, he boasted to this effect:

“...I can say with confidence that this is the most business-friendly administration in recent history...”

This is unbelievable. It is like he is living in a surreal situation. What a joke. How could this be possible?

Then, the Hon. Minister of Finance’s Colleague, the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, is targeting the small and medium size businesses in our country, particularly those in the entertainment sector. You are targeting them. You said that you want to take the profits out of their business. You are a socialist now. The Hon. Member is a socialist now. He wants to take profit out of the business community and make them bankrupt; close shop. That is what he is aiming for. How could you be business friendly when you are targeting business people?

We were told that, in the first half of 2018, the tourist arrivals in our country was 18.3% more than what it was around the same period last year; that is approximately 134,347 tourists in our country. These people are coming here to have a nice time. These people are coming here to have fun with their friends and families. They are going to be going out. You want to shut shop. What are the people going to enjoy and what are they going to see? Are you anti-tourist? You should not be anti-tourist. Allow the people to come and move about the country freely.

In fact, when one analyses the crime statistics, the occurrences of crime are not committed at the places that you are targeting. They are not committed there. The Hon. Minister is sniffing in the wrong direction. **[Mr. Jagdeo: Like the dogs.]** No, I did not say that. He is looking in the wrong direction.

The Hon. Minister is famous on Facebook for telling people what they must haul to carry it somewhere. But now, it seems as though he is telling them, *y’all catch y’all house before 2 o’clock in the morning*. The statistics with respect to robberies show that robberies rarely take place at these night spots or these locations which the Hon. Minister is targeting. The hours between which these crimes take place are totally out of sync with the hours that the Hon. Minister is targeting.

There is big talk now about Stabroek Market. What are you doing about Stabroek Market and those all those people who are around there picking the tourist pockets and selling watches under the clock? [Mr. Ramjattan: We are trying to clear it up.] Are you trying to clear it up? You moved the mobile police station from there and took it somewhere else. Why did you do that? Most of the criminal activities, according to the crime statistics, are committed during the day time and the others are committed for the bells; burglary and larceny cases are most of the crimes that are committed in the evening and early morning hours. It took the acting Chief Constable of the City Constabulary to point out, in a press interview, that gangs of young men between the ages of 10 and 19 are wreaking havoc in the city at the car parks and at Stabroek Market. They called for an anti-crime plan to be implemented.

What happened with the Combe plan? The President, with due respect, had promised to provide this House with that report by October of this year. He made that statement. We are in December now. Where is it? The Hon. Leader of Opposition was supposed to be presented with a copy of the plan. [Mr. Jagdeo: I got mine.] Well, he got his. We do not have ours as yet. He said that it would have been presented in October. He said that, in October, it would have been laid in the House. That is what he said. Your duty, Minister Ramjattan, is to make sure that the President fulfils that responsibility. That is your job. So, speak to the President.

A call was made for the police to draw up a plan to deal with these gangs that are roaming the city. The Hon. Minister has fallen short. He has not done anything to address this situation and he is allowing himself to be distracted with secondary issues - noise nuisance. Deal with the real issues that affect people such as threats to life and limb. Do not worry with noise nuisance. We are going to deal with that later. That is a secondary issue.

What is even worse is that, earlier this year, there was a report in the media that the schools are now penetrated with 'ecstasy'. 'Ecstasy' is in abundance in our schools. [Mr.

Ramjattan: Do you know where it is coming from? It is those same bars with the rum drinking.]

Well, you must present the evidence to let us know that. What we know is that this problem has become widespread and it is affecting all of the schools, especially the young girls. [Mr. Ramjattan: Absolutely.] Therefore, it is

not only good to say absolutely, yes. What is it he is doing about it? Could the Hon. Minister tell this House what concrete steps he has taken to address the gangs that are roaming the streets of the city threatening and being harmful to tourists? That is one. Secondly, what it is he is

doing to address the question of drugs, particularly 'ecstasy', penetrating our school system, the secondary schools, *et cetera*, in order to bring a halt to it? That is your responsibility. You are receiving a big salary. You have to work for the salary.

These are some of the issues which I would like the Hon. Minister to address in his response. By the way, both the Hon. Minister, Mr. Ramjattan and the Hon. Minister of Finance are on record as saying that the People Progressive Party (PPP) presided over a drug economy and that the drug trade was a false prop to an ailing economy. These are their exact words, quoted from the press. Minister Jordan also went on to say that the private sector benefited enormously from the drug trade.

Well, I would like the two gentlemen to tune in or ask for a copy of the transcript of a television interview that was done by three representatives from the Private Sector Commission (PSC). The Hon. Minister, at one time, threw up his arms and said that he had no more ideas. He was directed, I think, by a Cabinet paper or CIC meeting to invite as many people as possible to consult because he never seemed to have a solution to what was happening. What we were eventually told was that they had two or three studies that were done by Professor Clive Thomas to prove that Guyana's economy was fed by drugs. Where are these studies? They have never been circulated. They have never been published. **[Mr. Ramjattan:** The man wrote about it in *Stabroek News*.]

Well, I do not know about *Stabroek News*. I do not have time for that. The man who has been put to produce these studies, listen to the linkage, is now the head of the State Assets Recovery Agency (SARA) conducting a witch hunt against Hon. Members of the Opposition. **[Mr. Ramjattan:** Witch hunt?] Of course! That is what he is doing. So, we have to pay careful attention to these matters because they resonate, in a very serious way, in respect to the 'going on' in the Government.

Again, how could they claim to be business friendly when they are accusing the business people of surviving as the result of the drug economy? You are talking from two ends of your mouth; on one end, you are saying that you are business friendly, and on the other end, you are attacking the businessmen for living off of a drug economy. So, this, of course, does not go down too well. I recommend that they go and listen to what was said in the 'Plain Talk' interview. You are not going to get all onboard in that way. You are going to isolate yourself more from important sections of the population, rather than being inclusive

7.49 p.m.

From what I have heard from the utterances of many of your colleagues, you appear to be more exclusive than inclusive because you seem to know all the answers. All will not be on board if you continue in this way. I would like to criticise, publicly, the Minister for attacking the business community as being beneficiaries of a drug economy in our country.

The Hon. Minister said that he is having sleepless nights. He cannot sleep because this prison situation is haunting him. That is what he said. He said, “Look, this thing gives me a headache every night.” [Mr. Ramjattan: What is wrong with that?] Nothing is wrong with that. It is good that you are getting a headache now, because when you were over here, and we were getting the headache, you were saying that you had all of the answers. Well, find the answers now. He is looking for a boat now to warehouse the prisoners and send them in a flotilla, like Noah’s Ark, floating somewhere out in the Mid-Atlantic where the seas are getting warmer as a result of climate change. What is this? We are moving into a state of ridiculousness.

One of the shortcomings of the Government, particularly in the security sector, is that billions of dollars are being left unspent. The Minister of Finance, on one occasion, had to criticise his colleagues for the slow pace of spending the moneys that were budgeted for them. The Ministry of Public Security is one of the chief culprits. Every year, they are getting billions upon billions of dollars and they cannot spend the money.

I just want to conclude by pointing out that the report...

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

Mr. Rohee: Yes, Sir. Thank you for reminding me.

The Minister knows exactly the record of the People’s Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C), particularly the public safety and security sector. You must match that. The Minister is a master of plagiarising; in fact, the Government is a master of plagiarising. Every single project that is functioning in the security sector is not only what we had started - because I do not want the Minister to say we had ideas. We had ideas, but we implemented many of those ideas, and we left very little space for you to do anything else. There is very little space for you to do anything. So, what more can you do other than plagiarise what the PPP/C Government did in the security sector? You could only embellish it or do a makeover, like the People’s National Congress did with A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) makeover. They tried to do a makeover to make it appear as if they are coming with something new when, in fact, it was a PPP/C project. I

want the security sector people to match what the PPP/C did in all of those projects. The building behind Castellani House is the National Security Centre. We left a powerful National Security Centre for you. We left a powerful training centre. [Hon. Member: Water

cannon.] I knew you are going to talk about the water cannon. You seem to have a shortage of water, but you will get no water.

Thank you very much. [Applause]

Vice-President and Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs [Mr. Allicock]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It is my distinct honour to stand here tonight in full support of *Budget 2019*, a Budget which will, undoubtedly, continue to transform the economy, empower the people and build sustainable communities. Firstly, it is only prudent that I commend the Minister of Finance, Mr. Jordan, and his hardworking team for a job well done. I would also like to take the opportunity to give support to my colleagues on this side who have made their presentations, especially Minister Garrido-Lowe.

As I sit through the debate thus far, I am appalled by the misconceptions being peddled by the Opposition. It forces one to wonder if they have created a Budget of their own, which they have construed, or whether sweet lies are the actual theme of this presentation.

Could I just take a little time to respond to my Hon. Friends on that side who spoke? I would like to bring to the attention of the House that, in 2015, there was a tsunami on the land and it has now taken us three and a half years to clean the area and lay the foundation. We have been able to bring some order under this Government.

The Hon. Member, Ms. Pearson-Fredericks, reminded me of times gone by. I would like to say that I still have those indigenous eyes, but I have grown to also have political eyes. I have these political eyes to follow you closely to see how you are misleading our people. You said, also, after the presentation of the Hon. Garrido-Lowe, that you did not know if it was this country she was talking about. I would like to confirm that it is this country, Guyana. She is not accustomed to Guyana now. She is accustomed to Guyana of three and a half years ago.

As of when we came into Office, there has been no screen to hide what is discussed here. There is transparency; we are allowing other persons to be able to see out there.

Power was placed into the hands of the people of this country. In addition to that, the streets are better off, and drains are better off. There are four new towns, regional capitals. Roads are there, solid roads, and we have heard what is happening. I must commend the hardworking Ministers of Public Infrastructure and Minister Bulkan. [Mr. Seeraj: What about

Mr. Harmon?] All of the Ministers are hardworking Ministers, and we work together to achieve these things. The days for slapping persons are over. We do not have that any longer. There is more freedom. The people in the various communities have freedom to express themselves and to meet with us to have discussions on matters of their interest.

There was also the extension of the Amerindian residences. There is beautification there and there is more space. There is also the extension of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs. There is more space, because the population is growing. There are needs out there and we have to get more staff; likewise, we have to get more space. [Mr. Ali: What about the

chartered flights?] The chartered flights are there for us to meet out to our people because the indigenous peoples are not totally in Georgetown. They are in the Hinterland, where the riches of this country are. The past Government used the Hinterland for its own benefits and did not give back. We are not doing that. That is why it looks like a different country, but it is the same Guyana.

No more are our youths standing and protesting in front of this Parliament Building. Their memories are a little short over there. Those over there used to have our young people protesting in the sun and rain. They were paid to protest, in addition to what they were being paid. Today, our young people are busy producing in the Hinterland and they have no time to come out here. We have given them that opportunity.

I could also say to you that in the communities, they are coming back together. Those communities were left divided. Disrespectful.

I must also say to you that, in addition to the Hon. Member, I would like to agree with the Hon. Mr. Charlie. He seems to respect the indigenous people. I would love for him to allow his colleagues on the other side to do that. Stop misleading people now. We must be able to understand that there is a transition.

[Mr. Damon: How big is your ranch? I heard you have the biggest ranch in the Rupununi.] I have had cattle since before getting into politics. I would like to say also that we must stop disrespecting the intelligence of our indigenous people by asking them questions such as, "Are

you going to eat the road?” What sort of a low-class question is that? Our people are aware that roads are useful to get to where they would get to their produce to eat or sell. This is the reasoning of our people out there. We cannot continue in this archaic way of thinking. We are a rich country and we have to begin to operate as persons in an oil-rich country. [Mr.

Ali: That is why you are chartering whole day.] We would be renting probably helicopters because it could go to any village. It is so misleading when we listen to the Hon. Members on the other side. It is smooth. They are just so qualified in misleading. We have to allow the public to know what is the case. I would like to say to the Hon. Ms. Campbell-Sukhai that I looked in the whole office to see the strategic plan or the research for how to rear hassar but there was none.

8.04 p.m.

I would like to know if that project was a success. We, the Government, have been working, also, on building the capacity of our people over these three and half years and working towards allowing our people to be prepared for the gradual development of the oil industry. We have to prepare. It is not just to get the oil but to develop our communities within those areas. We have to build capacity. This was never done. All was a set of political young people. We have to work towards appropriate education in all these communities. For example, we heard about the development of the roads, new trails, new riverways, new passages, new airstrips, but to manage we have to get our people up to speed. We have to give them the necessary training to be able to manage.

We are working towards allowing the indigenous peoples to have the Act revised. We heard about the question of the Act from the Hon. Member. When they got into power, it took them about 14 years before they could have addressed that. We have just been in Government for three and a half years and we are already working on it.

If you walk around, you will see that it is the biggest group of young people entering into the University, which means that they are understanding what is happening in the industry of oil. I would like to also use this opportunity to say to the Hon. Ms. Teixeira, as she comes in, that they continuously talk about knocking off so many Community Service Officers (CSOs). I have said it before and I want to say it again, I have a document here showing that that project ended in April, 2015. This is the document which was passed by Cabinet. There is a Cabinet decision. Cheques, which were to pay these youths, were cancelled. They just cancelled it and left us in the...

As a naturalist, I would like to say that *when the flowers bloom...* [Interruption]

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel]

...the honeybees will follow to pollinate so that life could continue; where there is carcass, the vultures will fight and continue to fight. We do not have to be like crabs in a barrel. We could actually have a barrel of our own.

However, looking forward, we are determined, as a Government of the people and for the people, to continue to work to ensure that every citizen of Guyana has the benefit of the good life. It is commendable that this Government is truly one that is reflective of its people.

Minister Jordan and his team enshrined this into *Budget 2019* which is the result of meaningful consultations with varying responsibility groups in Guyana. As Guyanese, despite our political preferences, we need to unite for the advancement of our country. This means seizing opportunities such as consultation on this Budget, a Budget which would affect every Guyanese citizen. True leaders care; true leaders show up; true leaders do not mislead.

It speaks mountainous volumes that the learned Members of the Opposition have failed to seize opportunities umpteen times to contribute meaningfully to the Budget, but rather mislead at this junction. Despite the evident fact of lack of support from the Opposition, of which we are not unfamiliar, we are here to continue to work for the people of Guyana.

Budget 2019 is to allow the people of Guyana, which include the indigenous and hinterland population...and it even goes further to specifically address the needs of the hinterland, which is the heartland of this beautiful Guyana. It looks to literally bridge the gap between the heartland of Guyana and the Coast. It seeks to develop the human resources in Guyana which would obviously include the hinterland people.

Minister Jordan could not have put it more aptly when he noted that the Budget intensifies the investment policy in the indigenous peoples, as we continue to work towards the advancement of the pace of development in the hinterland regions.

The Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs - The theme of *Budget 2019* is completely aligned with the vision of the Ministry, which is to ensure that, over the next 20 years, all the Guyanese indigenous peoples and communities are empowered to have a better quality of life, now and for future generations. What *Budget 2019* seeks to do is to transform the economy and empower the people. And as Minister Garrido-Lowe rightly noted, this Government is not a Government

of handout; it is a Government of empowerment and support to its people, so that they can grow, a growth which was obscured for many years under the reign of the previous Administration. This is the philosophy by which the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs is guided.

Over the last three and half years, the Ministry has been continuously working on the good life, especially for indigenous youths. However, the situation we met, which the previous Administration left, was one of distrust, dependency and political manipulation of Guyana's heartland people. It was an overwhelming situation which led to their inevitable removal as the Government of the day. We have had to rebuild a foundation of trust and teach growth. This is an ongoing exercise to which we remain true.

Embedded in the strategic guiding principles of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs are the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the principles of the Green State Development Strategy (GSDS) and the still very relevant 10-point plan of action. Our personal strategic principles are: primacy of indigenous culture preservation of the said culture as enshrined in the Constitution of Guyana. This is central to the Ministry's work and we measure our actions against their impacts on indigenous cultural health.

Local grounding – This is for the empowerment of indigenous peoples and organisations to act and prioritise interventions which enable peer-to-peer solutions as close to the point of need as possible.

Collaboration – We recognise that many fundamental services required by the indigenous peoples are delivered by other organisations. We work as a catalyst to enhance others to deliver culturally and contextually appropriate services that generate positive outcomes for the indigenous people. We have continued to work together not only within the Government, but with other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) who are likeminded and are willing to help. We have been very successful in that area of working together in partnership.

Economic development of villages - As you know, Mr. Speaker, we have been working towards eradicating poverty. Approximately \$1 billion was injected into 154 communities and villages to do agriculture production and processing, village infrastructure, tourism, manufacturing, village business enterprise and transportation, to name a few.

In 2019, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs will continue to provide training in financial accountability, leadership and capacity building to overcome challenges some

villages face in these projects, while strengthening the positives, such as knowledge of project implementation and business management among the beneficiaries. Intrinsic to the development of villages is the bridging of the gap between the hinterland and the coast. In the role of technology, and that is why we must applaud *Budget 2019*, we will see the investment of \$375 million to equip hinterland communities, via satellites, benefiting over 11,392 residents. Again, I want to thank the hardworking Minister Hughes who has been all over this country looking at these possibilities. Even more in bridging this gap, \$38.5 billion is to be allocated to expand and maintain the infrastructure. This will result in the improved movement of people and goods and enhance resilience of the coastal and riverine communities.

Additionally, *Budget 2019* sees approximately \$101 million being allocated to continue and extend the electrification programme to Orealla, Kwakwani, Siparuta, Waramuri, among others; and it will see the continuing of drilling of wells in the hinterland communities that will benefit the residents living in over 200 indigenous communities.

8.19 p.m.

We have just celebrated the successful completion of eight wells in the South Savannahs and this is working in collaboration with the six DET military engineers of Brazil and our Guyana Defence Force (GDF) members and also 16 villagers from these villages who are now trained to continue to maintain... It is theory and practice going together, because water is of great necessity in these communities. I would like to thank the Ministry of Communities and the Ministry of Agriculture for giving that support. It is excellent to see the depth of the well between the 800 and 80 meters-plus. That was the depth. To see the operation of these wells is evident to the fact that finding the right people, technical people, we could go a far way. The volume of water that is coming from these well is between 5,000 and 6,000 gallons per hour, which is very good. Water is life. The people have asked and we have produced. There have been suffering for many years. We went there, they requested it and we produced and we delivered.

The Ministry continues to work in close collaboration with the institute of applied science and technology, work with agriculture, work with business to promote the development of new products using some of the abundant natural resources that are available in our hinterland regions. There is a variety of products, such as the sun-dried tomato, those are what we call the Pakaraima Flavours. A variety of products. We also have beauty products, Rupununi Essence. We also have soap that is made. On the very first day Ms. Yvonne Pearson- Fredericks said she

did not see evidence of the Hinterland Employment and Youth Services (HEYS) in general development. How could you fail to see? These are products. [*Minister identified products.*] This would be from the mountains, PK Paramakatoi. This is from the Annai area. [**Bishop Edghill:** That is not a HEYS project.] I said other products. For his information, there are young people who are working at Institute of Applied Science and Technology (IAST) for the developing and bottling the products, HEYS students. If you do not know, sit down and listen. This is honey from Toka. This is from sand hill. All of these are HEYS and these are just a few. We have so many.

For the sake of Hon. Member Pauline Campbell-Sukhai, I took your order for the earrings, the precious stones. Place your order and we will get it on to you.

The Ministry is forming its partnership with Bina Hill Green Enterprise Development. This is to help the young people to get truly rounded for the anticipated development that we see. The road will be going through and we need persons in readiness to grasp the opportunities that will come. We would be able to give to the young people in those areas an opportunity for the “good life.”

I wish to remind everyone listening that the principles of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the Green State Development Strategy and the ten-point plan will also be reflected in the use of proceeds in the oil towards continued protection of the natural environment through the development of education facilities to impart to the nation and the world the opportunity to discover the undiscovered education of the hinterland by the teachers. When it comes to the oil, however, we ought not to think what the oil will do for us, but rather how we could position ourselves to make good use of the profits from the industry to meet our needs.

Time is running out on me, but I would just like to say to the Hon. Members on the other side, that the cup is empty. I would like to offer you something. When you hear the bell rings, come for some coconut water and have a heart to use your hands with the power in it to turn the keys to unite to build our community. Happy Christmas.

I would like to support the Budget 2019.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Croal: When I heard the Hon. Minister said happy Christmas I thought we were finished for tonight.

After listening for approximately four and half hours of Budget 2019 presentation under the theme, *Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities for Good Life*, approximately 99 pages and five budgets over the three and half years period, and then when I read about a few days before the presentation of the national budget, the announcement of the public service salary increases, I was wondering why the Minister would have made that announcement just before the budget presentation. Then I realised that the budget eventually became what it was, one that flatter to deceive, except for the announcement that it was the largest budget, \$277 million, that is excepting the subvention agencies. Then the Hon. Minister, in turn, should have done what he did last year, and that is, mounting a number of billboards across the country to give us what is the punchline with this Budget 2019. [Ms. Ally: Change of plans.] All right, let me deal with you then. Let me change.

I heard my good friend the General Secretary of the People's National Congress Reform (PNCR) who sought to bowl a googly on us in the analysis of the local government elections, and as the Hon. Member Ms. Gail Teixeira said we contested all 80 local authority areas. Yes, we won five out of ten of those municipalities and you won five out of that ten. What you did not mention is that two of your trump cards, that is Mabaruma's municipality and the Lethem's municipality, were won by the PPP/C. Then you presented, Hon. Minister, some figures. Let us go. In 2016, the PPP/C had 125,585 votes the coalition Government had 100,269 votes, compare that to 2018. The PPP/C had 123,512. The APNU had 68,125, a mere 40,000 less. The AFC had 8,666 votes. I was wondering when the Hon. Member Ms. Amna Ally was giving that figure I saw the AFC Members were trumpeting, and they are clapping, but I was not sure what they were clapping at, because, first of all, they announced that they had 10% of the votes and when they calculated them, but it was a mere 4%. I do not know where the AFC was figuring all of that. The bottom line when you analyse the entire local authority results the PPP/C won 63% of the overall votes. Then when you look at the subvention, page 26 paragraph 4.26, I quote from the Minister of Finance:

“I am pleased to announce that over \$1 billion has been set aside in Budget 2019 as fiscal transfers to support the operations and community works of the local democratic organs (LDOs).”

My colleague, Hon. Member Ganga Persaud, mentioned about the fiscal transfer. When I look on under capital at project 1902900, Project Development and Assistance, I see \$602 million, in which the legend stating provision for capital subvention for municipalities and

Neighbourhood Development Councils (NDCs) are a far cry from \$1 billion. Let me pre-empt the Hon. Minister's response. Under current items, line item 6312, agent 42, Subventions to Local Authorities, budgeted is another \$685 million. The question, Hon. Minister, I would like you to clarify is one, a verification, because we would have heard the Hon. Member Ganga Persaud asked the question, that the fiscal transfer was applied in 2018 and it is intended to be applied in 2019. Having said that, what are the factors you are using? Are you using the three variables, that is the geographical size, the population and your rate of collection? Those are the three variables as per the law.

On the 1st of October we were greeted to the news that the Ministry of Communities signed a \$335 million project with the Municipal Assessment Canada to update the property inventory and valuation systems across the local democratic organs in Guyana. Firstly, what has not been stated to date is how did we get to such announcement? When was this tendering done? Where is the evidence of the tendering? Having said that, what is the real intention of this exercise? Hon. Minister, you, yourself said, a year ago, that the intention is not to increase rates and taxes across the local authority areas.

8.34 p.m.

Yet, your pilot local authority New Amsterdam, before the exercise is being conducted there as the pilot, has already applied 100% rates and taxes increase, even before that valuation exercise is conducted.

Then, we go to the district tender boards. Hon. Minister, I asked the question: What is preventing the implementation of the district tender boards across the local authorities because it is there in the Act? You may want to ask the question: "Why we did not do it?" I will answer you. When the Hon. Minister got into office... I see his Permanent Secretary is at the back there. They would have by then on their desks a submission by all if the local authorities of their proposed Members of their district tender board and the proposed valuers. All that was required of them was to conduct the necessary training. I may also answer this question... You may state that using the current Act, the ceiling, you may say that it is outdated, because you have raised the ceilings across the regional tender board, and it is raised at the Ministry level. All it required is to amend the law to raise the ceilings for those local authorities so that they can conduct their own exercise and bring autonomy as to what you preach.

I want to also bring to your attention, as I speak, you have both Bartica municipality and the Mabaruma municipality, you still have stipend and, in the case of Bartica municipality, outstanding salaries that have not been paid. The question remains: Was it intentional? Evidence will suggest, in the case of the Mabaruma municipality, that some have been paid and some have not been paid. Some payments were made for 2018. Some were made for 2017, and some were made for 2016. I am not sure what mathematics they are applying for their payments, so I would ask that you pay some attention there.

Let us look at the regions, I draw your attention to the Report of the Auditor General...

[Ms. Ally: Again?] Yes, again. This report last covers for the fiscal year ended 31st December, 2017, the ten regions alone have taken up over 133 pages, pages 298 - 431 to be exact. Instead of dealing with the message, the Government is now attacking the messenger. The Audit General seems to have now become an enemy of the state. [Ms. Ally: It

is your cousin.] I do not have “Sharma” in my name. I challenge them to the point. I asked them to point out anywhere in this report where they can disagree with any of the statements that have been made in this report. [Ms. Ally: Were you not listening to

the Minister of Education?] I was not listening. I do not really listen to her too often.

It did not stop there then I was drawn upon a report whereby it states:

“Government asked PAC...”

That is the Public Accounts Committee –

“... to suspend oversight of the 2016 Report of the Auditor General Report.”

I will quote some sections of the article.

“After back to back revelations of mismanagement and officials being thrown out of the PAC, the communities ministry has requested that the Committee suspends its activities.”

I will quote another section.

“The letter was written by the Permanent Secretary of the Communities Ministry and requested that the committee suspend examination of the 216 Report of the Auditor General Report for the remaining Regional Democratic Council (RDCs).”

This Government - I heard a voice that was given earlier, one of the days, by the Hon. Member Bishop Edghill - speaks about transparency and accountability. Instead of dealing with the issues, instead of dealing with the queries, instead of dealing with the missing vouchers, instead of dealing with the overpayments, instead of dealing with the overpayment of salaries, instead of dealing with shady works - I wilfully said “shady” and “shoddy” - the Ministry of Communities has sought to shield the REOs. [Ms. Ally: They are professionals.] They are professionals.

Let me answer you statement. Government seems unsure how to treat the REOs. The first thing that the Ministry of Communities did in 2015 was to advertise for REOs across the ten regions, and clear criteria was set out. In fact, if I may recall correctly, at the level of Master’s Degree. [Mr. Williams: You could not have made it.] I do have a Master of Business Administration (MBA). Yet before the closing date of those application, the process was aborted, and what happened? We then had the commencement of political appointees. Then there was the explanation that was given by the Hon. Minister Harmon. He explained that the appointment of an REO is not one which requires public service approval. REOs, he said, have always been *quasi* political contracted employees. I have no problem with your statement, except Hon. Minister, you, yourself, before when you were on this side condemned the REOs that we had in the system. You said that they were all political and when you got into office you started to practise what you preach, but then you changed all of that.

We have a next scenario happening now, they have started to rotate the REOs. And they are only rotating some. I am not sure if all or some. What happens? Some of the REOs, I understand, it is intended to move them to another region so that they can run from the examination of their own current accounts. [Mr. Bulkan: It makes no sense.] Okay, it is if you say so.

Let us deal with Region 1. On behalf of the people of Region 1, I asked, and they have listened to your national budget, Minister of Finance, but no mention was made, nor was any mention made by the two Ministers of Public Infrastructure, and I am speaking here about your flagship ferry for the North West route. Hon. Ministers, do we have to await funding for another feasibility study? Tell us, update us, update the nation. It is listening. In the meanwhile, the residents and the business persons continue to suffer hardship. The current service is inadequate Hon. Minister. The cost of living has gone up because persons are now mostly relying on the private boat providers to get their goods to go up. They are left to the mercies as of what

happened recently, about three weeks ago, where one boat capsized just before Shell Beach. Of course, with the private providers, there is no contract to cover those goods.

Much is touted of the limited roads that have been done under the Ministry of Public Infrastructure in Region 1. Mr. Speaker, allow me to show where this region is being short-changed. As a policy, we had all the way up to the mouth of the Pomeroon River, it was considered a buffer zone, but yet, what did this Government do when it established the GRA at Morawhanna, \$5,000 is being charged for every drum of fuel. When you look at the total amount being charged of taxes at that port, we are talking about \$1.2 billion that is leaving the region. When you compare for the \$200 million that have been invested so far on the roads, that you spoke about Hon. Minister Patterson, it means that the region is still being short-changed by another billion dollars. It did not stop there.

I will give you another example. For the people of the hinterland, let me speak specifically of Region 1, airfare, goods that are travelling by air to the region, VAT have been charging on them. Those were all *non-vatable*, so again the region is being short-changed, again, more increase hardship for the people of Region 1. As we speak about Region 1, Hon. Minister Patterson, next week you will have your chance to answer when we are looking at the estimates.

The solar farm, clarify for us, for myself and for the people of Region 1. We were first told that we will have 24 hours electricity supply. We are now being told that we will have 18 hours of supply. Kindly clarify for us when you have the chance. First of all, have you sorted out the connectivity with the generator and the energy that is going to come in with the solar? You can ask your technical people if there is compatibility. When you are finished, answer for us, how many hours definitively the people of Mabaruma will be getting.

I also called on the Hon. Minister of Communities to increase the allocations on line item 6211. This region is now expected to host activities such as rays, now you have some additional...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I hesitate to interrupt, even to ask this question, but I wonder if you are into the estimates now. I thought that we were staying away from that. Maybe I misunderstand what you are saying. I just thought that I might mention it.

Mr. Croal: Can I response?

Mr. Speaker: Do not respond, just treat as you go along. I just wondered whether we are going into the estimates. That was all. Please proceed.

8.49 p.m.

Mr. Croal: I was going to alleviate... When last I checked line item 6211, Expenses Specific to the Agency, it in this book, the budget estimates. When last I checked, the solar farm was mentioned in the estimates. When last I checked about roads, they are mentioned in the budget speech. The region is required to also pay increased stipends because there are now some additional vice-toshaos. There is also the issue to deal with the influx of the migrants, so the region's budget is extremely stretched. With a \$1 million increase, it is inadequate Hon. Minister, because I can tell you, it is even unable, because it is expecting to have its RDC... week after next. It does not have the necessary resources to even conduct the next RDC...

I was expecting my friend, the Hon. Minister of Citizenship..., because he has as one of his fortes, a committee that deals with the issues that arise with both Regions 1 and 7. What is interesting is that Region 1, at the level of the RDC, that has a direct impact, it is not even represented on that committee. I had also expected the Hon. Minister to update us because he would have announced about the procured acquisition of a land to place such persons. What is the status, Hon. Minister? We are not hearing anything about this.

When we speak about birth certificates, we are happy. That is a function of the General Registrar Office and that is its mandate to ensure that it continuously reaches out, if you are not going to the office, to the regions, and it has been doing that. That is good. There is one problem. There is one particular gentleman who, I do not know if he works with the General Registrar's Office, accompanies the team. The General Registrar Office, functioning in Region 1, has now become politicised. There are even accusations of even selected persons not getting back their birth certificates.

I bring to your attention also Minister Allicock and Minister Garrido-Lowe, Four Miles. The people of Four Miles are crying out for your attention. I know you will tell me you went, and I will answer you. They are asking where the representation by the Ministry is. Minister Allicock, you took a team. You took some GLA officers to start the demarcation for the titling exercise. Yes, you reminded me that it has finished, but the problem has got worse. They have asked me to bring to your attention that now that the exercise is completed, the main concentrated areas where the people reside are now falling outside of the titled area. What has happened, Hon. Minister? I have a certain colleague of mine who also goes to that place and invokes separation, and I will leave it at that. Now, the people that are looking for your

representation are at the whims and fancies of others. I will leave it at that. I say nothing further. I brought it to your attention.

Minister Garrido-Lowe, you reminded us that Government does not believe in handouts. We too do not believe in handouts. You are correct. You must ask yourself what clear long-term policies and clear long-term programmes you have for the people of the hinterlands. You do not want me to remind you of the Community Support Officers (CSOs).

Let us look at cohesion. The Ministry of Social Cohesion, I think, has now become a slush fund to the state. When this Hon. Minister was demoted, who I personally believe is a very nice individual, I thought in this demoted capacity the Hon. Minister would have coped well, but Hon. Minister, you owe this nation an apology. Why? For stating yesterday, to this nation, that the Guyana National Stadium, Providence, was made into a world class stadium by the APNU Government and that they could not have held any International Cricket Council (ICC) events prior to that. If in our very eyes, the Hon. Minister can seek to rewrite history, then I think his stewardship, henceforth, should be questioned. It does not stop there. While there is all this preaching about cohesion, may I advise the Hon. Minister to firstly save some of the money by starting at the governmental level. Once he is satisfied that the leaders, themselves, know what cohesion is, then he can further invest with the communities. You cannot get cohesion within the communities if you, yourselves, are also appointing, as cohesion officers, persons who are activists for your political parties. How can you get cohesion? Who will be leading by example?

We also have the goodly Minister of Public Health who reported that no procurement department existed in the health sector before 2015. I wish to debunk the Hon. Minister by stating that that is another “sweet lie”.

Mr. Speaker: Yesterday, I said that I will not permit it and the Hon. Member is using the example of the Vice-President who began in much the same way as I said. I am saying it once more to all Members, I will not permit the use of that language. That is all I will say.

Mr. Croal: Let me rephrase that for you then, Mr. Speaker. I wish to debunk the Hon. Minister’s statement by saying that is another and I will leave it blank for the others to fill.

The Hon. Member Sydney Allicock said that we now do not have “slapping” and I do not know what else he is stating. I must ask the Hon. Minister that he is not telling us what we now have is SOCU. Everywhere you turn and everything you do, all you hear at the back of your ear is SOCU.

I want to bring your attention to the Local Government Commission. The Local Government Commission is provided for under article 78A of the Constitution and Act 18 of 2013. The passage of the Fiscal Management and Accountability (Amendment) Act 2015, envisages that constitutional bodies, such as the Local Government Commission, would enjoy financial independence. Hence, that budget shall be presented to Parliament through the chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee and that lumpsum payments will be made directly to those bodies, thus freeing them from discretionary powers that may be exercised by the Minister of Finance. Contrary to the requirements and the expectations that are set out in section 54(1) of the Principal Act, the Local Government Commission has not been included in the FMAA schedule of constitutional agencies and consequently has been required to submit its annual budget for 2018, now 2019, through the Ministry of Communities which will submit it onwards to the Ministry of Finance. There has been no movement in this regard, despite the Chairman of the Local Government Commission writing His Excellency. I would like the Hon. Minister to address that. The Minister of Communities needs to walk the talk of decentralised authority for the RDCs and ensure that his Regional Executive Officers show much more respect for the authority of the elected councils and their decisions.

Region 5, we have there what you call our local ‘Ayatollah’, to date and counting. The wretched RDC for Region 5 has been unable to meet for nine times due to disruption and the collaboration by the REO. Therefore he has a free rein within the RDC with the RDC being unable to level any scrutiny and monitoring within the finances.

Then when you go to Region 1, for this current tenure, the REO has attended only three of 19 RDCs, and I repeat, three of 19 RDCs. Do you know what is worse? In part of the rotation, if he cannot make it in Region 1, he now being sent to Region 8. If he could not function there, and many times reported sick, am I not sure how he can function within the North Pakaraimas. We ask: Where are the jobs? Where is the vision? Who is having the “good life”? It is basically a selected few who are enjoying the “good life”.

With those few remarks, I cannot wholeheartedly support this budget as it is.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Vice-President and Minister of Public Security [Mr. Ramjattan]: If I may start right away getting the message across to my colleagues on the other side, I want to say that the scourge of misinformation is as old as the language itself. This Opposition’s manipulation during this

debate has carried internet fast speed to scuttle and erode what was supposed to be an authentic debate. This Opposition has dashed the authentic debate in this august Assembly against the rocks of emotion, bias and impulse. I have sat and watched certain political manipulation happen here.

9.04 p.m.

Very outrageous, and false stories packaged to look like real truths. That is what they have done. If we do not pay attention to this and there are counterfeit utterances over there, we are going to move to an extraordinarily dangerous place. There is hardly any promotion of any fact-based narrative here. It was the PPP's propaganda and disinformation, both crudely and subtly, presented. Of course, with a straight face directed to their base, who they know would be watching on the television, to give red meat to that base so that this Government can look very ugly, very racial, and very discriminatory. That is what they have done. This I remind you is very dangerous.

Anyone, listening to them over there with their litany of woes, would believe that selling into a calamity beyond redemption.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Vice-President, I think you mean that you are referring to your Hon. Colleagues.

Mr. Ramjattan: The Hon. Members over there, yes. What dooms day delusions they come up with; what pessimism they are propagating. I want to say, immediately, that Guyana has its challenges, but there can be no doubt that it is doing better in almost everything when compared to years ago. Guyana is doing better every day and everywhere. I just have to name a couple: public servants' wages have gone up; we have had two Local Government Elections when you did not have one in 22 years; we have gotten a Public Procurement Commission (PPC).

[**Mr. Damon:** All two you lost?] That is fine, live in your triflism. [**Mr.**

Greenidge: That is why you did not have any.] Yes, that is why you did not have any.

As stated by the Minister of Finance and it was true, he mentioned that we have pockets of poverty in certain places in Guyana. That was also there under the PPP/C Administration. If you listen to them, you would believe it is not only the pockets, but it is in the entire trousers, their shorts underneath, their shirts, and vests, when they are finished with you. I want to tell Mr. Jordan, our Minister of Finance, thank you for the best budget that he has presented. It has

been getting better than all of the previous ones. I want to thank him also for the 15% increase that he gave to the Ministry of Public Security. Our budget is \$35.6 billion dollars now and that, quite frankly, is a fine sum.

I want to say this, when I made mention of the fact that they are all over the place dealing with what is called half-truths and fake news - the Members over there. **[Mr. Greenidge:**

Hon. Members...]

Hon. Members, yes, especially this Hon. Member here.

[Mr. Nagamootoo: This Hon. Member.]

This Hon. Member. They gave the impression

to deal with this emotion, bias, and discrimination as if we here never loved sugar workers...

[An Hon. Member: You fooled them.]

And that we fooled them, as you heard. That

is their base, food for the base. Let me just remind Members here that, indeed from when we started in the Administration, every month for 36 months, the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) wanted \$1 billion to bail out sugar. We gave it to them. When we give it to them, we started getting criticism as if there were no other people in this country. Oh, we must let the sugar factories grind; let the estates continue working and we must bail them out. Our love is also greater than that for just one component of this country. We have to look after our soldiers, teachers, nurses, and all of those, and so we had to make a decision.

You over there, Hon. Members, could not have made that decision. You knew that it was coming down since 2010 with the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union (EU), that sugar will not be profitable. From 2010 right up to 2015, it was almost US\$40 million losses ever year. What do you do with an industry that is making so much loss? Do you know what you have to do? You have to still employ the people there, do not right size. Do you know that Ms. Volda Lawrence made a statement recently that she would get some employment for her people? You want to say that is wrong, but when all the time you are stating that we have to employ sugar workers, that is not wrong. That is not job for the boys. If it is anything, it is also job for the boys. You want us to employ your people because you are very strong in the sugar estate areas and we must pump more. No, we will certainly have to bring it to an end.

Forever now, just as in Barbados, when he spoke to Freundel Stuart and all those people, they have halted. In Trinidad and Tobago, it is the same thing. So please, do not play to your base that we are the ones who are discriminating because of a certain statement and you are saying all the time that we must now employ, ensure, and spend more money.

I want to also say that this fanciful talk that you all have over there, which is very much biased and based on emotion, is because you know that the rice industry is collapsing. It is sliding to calamity. It was under your Administration that you had a three-mile-long motor vehicular protest in Essequibo. We have not had that. [Mr. Damon: ...Minister.] You, Mr. Damon, know about it. The people were demonstrating for what you did to rice. We have seen enough demonstration in relation to the rice because we have been doing exactly what has to be done for the rice industry. [Interruption]

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, let us avoid a shouting match.

Mr. Damon: He is calling our names.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Damon, would you rise, please? The rules which guide us here oblige us to allow a Member to say what he is saying, and if it is that the Member transgresses, that is brought to the attention of the Speaker. However, Members prefer another way, and that is why I am saying that we would not have a shouting match. No one here would say that to me. All have sinned. I say it over and over. The Speaker will not permit...

Ms. Manickchand: ...[Inaudible]

Mr. Speaker: Ms. Manickchand, do not sit there and shout at me. The Speaker will not permit any conduct that steps beyond what is permissible. Please take your seat Mr. Damon.

Mr. Damon: He called my name and I answered him. I have a right to answer him.

Mr. Speaker: What Mr. Damon must do, if he objects, is to address the Speaker.

Mr. Damon: Alright, in the future I will come through you when he calls my name again.

Mr. Speaker: Vice-President, please proceed.

Mr. Ramjattan: This inflamed rhetoric coming from the Opposition continued with a number of other persons across the floor who tried to give the impression that, when we decided to close certain estates that, is what caused domestic violence and suicide.

Well let me give the reports of suicide for the years 2012-2018. To counter what they are doing... [Mr. Rohee: Whose statistics is that?] It is the statistics from the Guyana Police Force (GPF). In 2012 there were 95 suicides; 2013 had the highest number that

we have ever had for those years, it was 129; it was almost 200 in 2005; in 2014, it was 97; in 2015, it was 92; in 2016, it was 99; in 2017, it was 90; and in this year, 2018, it is 82. Where did the 129 from 2013 and 200 from 2005, happen? Yes, well this is the trouble, you cannot go and link it to say that because the sugar industry had to be reformed and right sized this is what caused it. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

I am telling you that this is consistent with what they have. Whatever it is, there are lots more that occurred. The Guyana Police Force keeps records too of suicide. I do not understand what they are trying to say. I am residing because I got it from the Guyana Police Force's reports. So, when you are giving the impression here that the suicide rates started high as a result of the sugar industry being right sized, no, that it is not. It started with Hon. Member, Ms. Sheila Veerasammy. **[Ms. Veerasammy:** That is your report.] That is not my report. Also, even Ms. Indra Chandarpal indicated... **[Ms. Chandarpal:** *[Inaudible]*...] You did indicate that we are doing things that are affecting the lives of the sugar workers. I am trying to indicate there is an argument that you must not do that. They want, of course, to indicate as much.

I want now to tell Hon. Member, Mr. Rohee, that we have the statistics on homicides that happen in this country. For the year 2012, we had 139 murders and for 2013 there was 155. I do not know if the Ministry of Public Health would now have the numbers for murders, but this is 155 murders; for 2014 it is 149; and for 2015 it is 149. It could also be a crime too. For 2016 there were 142 murders; for 2015 it was 115 and for 2018 up to now it is 93. It is declining. Just do not then give the impression to your base that the crime rate has sky-rocketed. It has not.

I am telling you that robberies for all categories were 1401 in 2012. **[Mr. Rohee:** Throw away that paper.] That is what you do not want. Throw away the paper, which is what you are going to do. Let me a Janet Jagan with it. In 2013, there were 1531 robberies; in 2015 1449; and in 2016 1293. These are robberies of all types. In 2017, there were 1237 robberies and, in this year, thus far, there were 965. That is what false news and fake news does. It weaponizes the truth to the extent that it will burn. That is what you Guys want over there. That is what you want.

It is important then that, when you deal with the figures for serious crime, and I will give it, I will lay it over, you must understand it. The Colleagues across the floor want to give the impression that it is very high in Guyana.

9.19 p.m.

Let me say that the Homicide Monitor for the Latin American and South American countries indicate this. In Guyana, out of 100,000 persons, there are 15 murderers per 100,000; in Jamaica, it is 56; in Trinidad in Tobago it is 36; in Saint Lucia it is 34; in St. Vincent and the Grenadines it is 35; in Belize it is 37; in Barbados it is 11. **[Mr. Rohee: That is good.]** Barbados is doing well. I want to say that although 15 murderers per 100,000 is really bad, it is far superior to the impression the Opposition want to give to the world out there. This is from Homicide Monitor. That is what we have

Mr. Rohee, I would like to tell you that we live in the vicinity of an extraordinarily violent set of countries, where the rates are very high because of guns and also because of cocaine. That is why it is important that in this context, when we could do 15 and Venezuela could do a 120, we have done as best as possible. The guns and all of that because of porous borders you could not maintain, you could not have kept a tab on, and you are telling.

We have started an amnesty that brought in a whole number of guns. Every day with the stop and searches, we almost catch somebody with a gun. That is what we are talking about. **[Mr. Rohee: That is nonsense.]** Well, you could say it is nonsense, my trouble is that we are clarifying a number issues in relation...What we also have that is helping the situation that never happened under the Ministership of Clement Rohee, is lots more training. We are training at risk youths and our policemen. Yesterday, it was in the press that 31 persons in the Guyana Police Force graduated with Master of Business Administration (MBAs), first Degrees or Diplomas. They did not have that to that large extent in one-year Mr. Rohee, so please understand what we are doing, it is important.

The quality of the police stations and the capital works that we are doing now revealed lots more infrastructural works which make life comfortable. You gave the impression as if we are not doing anything and that is what is dangerous. We are doing very much what is required.

The memoranda of understanding (MOUs) that we have and, also, the agreements that we have with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and so many other international partners are seeing lots of other studies and consultancies. The Interpol, Drug Enforcement Agency

(DEA), also that same body that you spoke about in relation to the British Security Sector Reform. I just cannot understand, My President told me that he gave the Leader of the Opposition and you come making a big stink here as if you never got it. Did you not ask the Leader of the Opposition? **[Mr. Rohee: I am a Member of Parliament (MP).]**

Oh, you are a MP. Well an MP would first ask his/her leader. Oh, you do not ask your leader. Well, I understand that was the promise the President made that he was going to give the Leader of the Opposition. Whatever it is, please go and get it from him.

In the document, there are lots of plans in relation to a whole set of sectors. Strategic Management Unit, management and personnel relations, we are talking about a public relations (PR) department. Also, ensuring that the divisions of this country are what now would be the divisions of the policing arrangement. Also, having a headquarters in Lethem and in Mabaruma, so that we do not have an A, B, C, D, E, F Division, but that we also have Division 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 to 10. That is also, so that we could have Senior Superintendent to Assistant Commissioners at those areas taking care of the place. You would not appreciate that, you would not appreciate the statistics that we are doing better. We have been getting from Implementing Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS) and the Council for National Security and Law Enforcement (CONLE) and all of these regional bodies that, yes, indeed, Guyana is doing better.

Mr. Clement Rohee, then indicate that I am getting my priorities wrong, if you know that it is on to liquor, music and noise nuisance, if you know that in this crime fighting strategy, one would have to take care of all manner of crimes. This is because of what happens with rum drinking, noise nuisance and all of those things that leads to those bigger things. So, we are tackling all the crimes, the big and small crimes because it has to be done that way. We have our major crime units that is now finding all the murderers and pirates that around the place. If it is one statistic that I am very proud of is that, is that prior to coming into Government, we use to see a lot of piracy incidences, almost every week, in the Corentyne and in other places. Have you been seeing them? You all just have to be truthful to yourselves and you would appreciate that indeed this matter is not going the way it used to go.

I would like to say that there are lots of places that we have spent a lot of money to repair. We have done brand new stations at Cane Grove, La Grange, Mibicuri, Port Kaituma, Mabaruma, Suddie, Kwakwani, Issano, Aishalton, Annai, Aurora and a brand-new station at Mc Kenzie which we opened about six weeks ago. In 2019, we have an additional six police stations which

will commence rehabilitative works are also getting to go brand new. The six stations are Mahdia, Barometer, Albion, Whim, Wismar and Parika. We are also going to upgrade our forensic science laboratory. The contract has gone out for the Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) equipment that is worth about US\$1 million. An Italian company has won it and it is now coming to Guyana. The first phase for the installation of that electrical cable, air conditioning and all of that has now been completed and it is to get the equipment in for the DNA. So, we are making progress. Of course, the company that won it is Q&T out of Italy and, also, we are going to get a gun residue testing equipment there.

We have, also, a lot of consultancies which are going to ensure that we learn a thing or two more about evidence collection and investigative capacity. Justice Education Society has been dealing with a lot of training for our policemen. Over 2000 have been trained this year. That has never happened from the information I have from all three of the Commissioners, Mr. Seelall Persaud, Leslie James and Mr. Ramnarine, that this kind of training was so constant and in a big quantity like that. No, it was not. [Mr. Damon: Where is Mr. Ramnarine?] He is on leave.

The implementation of the Phase Two Electronic Document Management - we want to digitise all police stations. That has started and, in 2019, we will complete Phase Two, whereby, when there is a report, and it is typed in, all stations across the country will know if it is a rape that happen at 51 Village Corentyne – everybody will know about it.

The expansion of the crime and violence data monitoring is important. The Citizen Security and Strengthening Programme (CSSP) has been helping in very many ways in connection with these. A contract has been inked with the University of Guyana (UG) at a cost of US\$251,000 in collaboration with the United Nations (UN) Women to conduct Women Health and Life Experiences surveys. We want to know more about domestic violence and its causes. Just like the suicide survey that was done by [*Inaudible*] from the Netherlands that indicated the reason why - so many people in the rice industry exposed to poisonous substances is one of the causes, rum drinking is another cause and a whole set of things are the cause. We want to know about domestic violence so that we could have a far more complete report from experts knowing what it is that is causing the prevalence of women having violence done unto them. [Ms.

Manickchand: Inequality between the genders.] Well, whatever, you are stating that.

I want to also indicate that Mr. Gill, had indicated that we have new prisons and not put the one in Central Georgetown. That is the view of this Government too. The trouble is, where do

we put it and the capital cost for such a big prison that is going to take care of the rest that are in and around Demerara. We have the Mazaruni Prison and I have been given over \$500-\$600 million for the continuation of that next year. Berbice, New Amsterdam Prison - a brand-new prison is going to be built in Berbice and \$500 million have been given for that. We now have made a decision that has been circled around for further discussion as to... I have a certain area where it should be and, indeed, we have to get a road to go there. Building prisons is an expensive exercise and I am certain that if we had started to talk about where we were going to build it and for how much money, you would be the first, Hon. Members over there, to say "Oh, what are you building buildings for? Are people going to eat prison buildings, just like roads?" You all would have said so; that is exactly what they would have said.

We are also having a number of programmes to ensure that we do not jail our people. We have a legislation, I think it was proposed first by the Hon. Member, Mr. Carrington, that we not make custodial penalties for crimes committed in relation to small amounts of marijuana. That will go a far way. [Ms. Teixeira: Let us do it now.] Yes, you are ready for it. Well fine, you will get it early next year.

We are also talking about restorative justice inside of the prison, whereby we will grant for those prisoners who are going to apologise to the non-violent and very minor violent offenders, so that they could have earlier releases as a result of the remissions they will get. We are also asking the Parole Board to ensure that they move a little quicker with those cases where persons can go on parole, especially our women prisoners and our young people, so that they could be removed from that kind of scenario and be placed outside.

It is important that all these works are being carried out. If I may say, we also have additional capital expenditure for the Guyana Police Force that I missed. That has to do with the construction of divisional headquarters to the tune of \$400 million. [Mr. Rohee:

You mentioned that already.] I did not mention the \$400 million. I also want to say that we have \$200 million for water and land transport in and around the hinterland and riverain areas, to sustain the increase efficiency and effectiveness of ranks responding to crime and, of course, another \$255 million for equipment in these police stations that would be built there or either rehabilitated. So, this is what we are talking about. The Ministry of Public Security has a lot to fetch, but we do have broad shoulders and we are going to so fetch it, whatever it is.

Reduced risk factors related to crime and violence is a strategy that we are working on. Almost all the other units, Customs Anti-Narcotic Unit (CANU), National Anti-Narcotics Agency

(NANA) and all the others have been working very heavily in relation to drugs by having a masterplan strategy that have resulted, and I have some figures here, in 2018, where over a 171 kilograms of cocaine were seized; over 543 kilograms cannabis were seized; almost 532 grams of 'Ecstasy' were seized and this is about 2000 of the tablets; crystal meth, a 100 grams; heroine 304 grams. A number of persons have been charged. They have also worked along with international bodies to ensure some big movements like the one with the famous owner of that hotel that has been charged in America.

It is important that we have our units doing a number of things. We are going to cut the profit out of it by doing what is called the proceeds of the crime.

9.34 p.m.

We are not only going to ensure that they are jailed but they must cut the profits out of it so that it is not something profitable. We are now making all the contacts to ensure that we have what is called 'the request', that we start making those things. Forfeits of proceedings it is called.

[Ms. Teixeira: When are you bringing that?]

When am I bringing what?

[Ms. Teixeira: The proceeds of crime.]

Is it the proceeds of crime? We have it

already in our legislation to a certain... We will use what we presently have because if we bring it now we cannot do anything to him. This is because it has prospective application if we bring a law now. We are going work along with the old law to that extent that we could do it. Please understand that.

We have a lot of partners that we are working with – the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund was very instrumental this year in ensuring that the Juvenile Justice Bill became an Act. Our young people now can have a more modern justice system. We now have to build a half-way house. Of course, the price for these new Bills to be implemented to a very satisfactory level will be in the vicinity of almost \$596 million. You have to get a new set of people - the Juvenile Justice Director and the Deputy Directors. We have passed all of these in Cabinet already, to the extent that we have to find office space for them and a place where they are going work, but we would have to pass the Bill first. That Bill took a very long time under the PPP/C Administration.

[Ms.

Teixeira: *Inaudible*]

Yes, that is true, but at least we passed it.

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

Mr. Ramjattan: Thank you very much for that five minutes. This also brings me to, not necessarily what we do there, but what we want to also get involved in and that is not exclusively law enforcement. Yes, indeed the Ministry has as its core policy, law enforcement. We also have to do social programmes with young people especially, to ensure that they do not fall prey to the criminalities of the day.

With regards to economic and social activities, I am pleased to report... **[Mr. Rohee:**

Has the President...]

Of course, my President appreciates what I am doing. Two hundred and fifteen at-risk youths from 20 target communities. They have graduated from the technical institutions and training centres in Regions 3, 4 and 6. A further 663 at-risk youths will be trained this coming year at these technical institutions. It is in association with the Ministry of Education. We also have what is called the Rapid Impact Projects that would be implemented in 2019. Youths from 10 communities would be ensuring safe spaces within these 10 communities, such as rehabilitation of community centres and training in income generating activities. These 10 communities will include Sophia, Kilcoy, Kildonan, Port Mourant, Rosehall, Adelphi, Canefield, Vreed-en-Hoop, Mocha, Wismar, Angoy's Avenue and Buxton.

This is important. A lot of people are asking what we are doing in relation to young people, well I am telling you. We also have a number of other training activities going on. The Ministry of Public Security has signed up another MoU with the Small Business Bureau...

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

Mr. Ramjattan: ...to conduct entrepreneurship training, targeting 200 at-risk youths. This is a US\$653,000 project where youths will be trained. We have another one addressing business fundamentals. It will involve three practical exercises whereby another 200 youths will be trained for another US\$300,000 – all towards fostering entrepreneurship and business management skills for these at-risk youths in these areas that have been targeted.

It is important that we and the effort of the Ministry of Public Security are not white-washed as just happened. We are moving along and doing all that is necessary to bring the crime rate down, especially in the vicinity of a geographical location which has humongous crime rates. We are doing our best and I want you, my Colleagues over there, to understand that.

[Ms. Teixeira: Humungous.] Yes, it is a humongous problem. We are utilising and in

an integrated way, all the units that we have – the Police, CANU, our Parole Board and even the Judicial system in restorative justice to ensure that it happens.

I want to thank the Minister for doing a lengthy and lovely presentation to the extent of making life better and as is stated here, *Empowering the people, Building sustainable Communities for the Good Life*.

I want to let the Minister know that we are going to ensure a better quality of security in 2019. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Minister of Communities [Mr. Bulkan]: If it pleases you Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to Budget 2019. In so doing, at the outset, I wish to state that I emphatically endorse this budget, recognising it is reflective of the APNU/AFC coalition’s vision and was crafted to consolidate the development gains of the past three years, as we continue to manage and grow the economy amidst the enormous challenges we inherited, literally a poisoned chalice. The most poisonous of all the pills was GuySuCo which required the gargantuan injection of \$39.5 billion in the last four budgets to keep it alive.

We have saved the sugar industry. The Hon. Member, Mr. Bharrat could come to this honourable House and speak of the closing down of Sugar estates; the Hon. Member, Mr. Mustapha could say as he did - that sugar workers cannot get a job under this administration; and earlier this afternoon we heard from the Hon. Member, Mr. Seeraj who said that the blame for the state of the sugar industry lies with this Government. I repeat, this Government has saved the sugar industry, and in the process, approximately 11,000 jobs. We did this with the transfusion of \$39.5 billion in the last four years.

The criticisms and condemnation of this budget started even before the debates in this House. It began with the Leader of the Opposition at a press conference one week ago. It was reported in several media outlets, including the *Guyana Times* newspapers, in an article titled:

“Coalition Government in spin mode over 2019 Budget - Jagdeo”

In this article, the Leader of the Opposition is quoted as saying:

“The Opposition Leader further revealed that billions of dollars have been added to the Government’s ‘unimportant wants’”

“To this end, he noted that dietary has increased to \$2.203 billion per year.”

This was followed by the opening batsman, the Hon. Member, Mr. Ali, who in his presentation on Monday said, *inter alia*:

“then we have the waste in the budget, national and other events.”

Since this Government came to office we have spent \$4.7 billion; Dietary - \$18.4 billion; Refreshments and meals, local travel, Subsidies and Personal security - \$35 billion. Note, Mr. Speaker, \$18.4 billion. It is the sleight of hand, it sends a subliminal message that this Administration is on a *squandermania*.

Mr. Speaker, I would trust the numbers presented by the Hon. Member, Leader of the Opposition. Where did this money go? I will be very brief. Under ‘Dietary Supplies’ for the Schools Feeding Programme, the sum of approximately \$898 million is allocated in Budget 2019 for a total of approximately 25,901 students in principally, our hinterland regions. The comparison was made with 2014, the last budget presented by the PPP/C. The sum provided under that programme stood at approximately \$535 million. That has been increased by approximately 68% under this Administration.

Briefly, some of the schools that are benefitting under this programme, as I said to the tune of \$898 million, include in the Barima/Waini Region: Wauna – 406 students; Mabaruma – 398 students; Hosororo – 516 students; Baramita – 367 students; Santa Rosa – 577; Waramuri – 461 students; St Nicholas in Manawarin, Moruka – 543. A total of 66 locations in this region. In the Pomeroon/Supenaam Region, a total of 22 locations, approximately \$73 million; in the Cuyuni/Mazaruni Region, a total of 29 locations – 4,319 students, approximately \$152 million; in the Potaro/Siparuni Region, a total of 24 locations, \$86 million; Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo Region, a total of 64 locations, 7,261 students, \$255 million. These include locations such as Arapaima in Lethem, 426 students; In Karasabai, 262 students, but as I said, it is in 64 locations.

In addition, under the Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs), which a number of the dormitories are catered for, there is an additional sum in Budget 2019 of approximately \$942 million. The total of these two allocations, and in the case of the RDC, the locations included in the Potaro/Siparuni - Kato, Paramakatoi and Mahdia Secondary Schools dormitories; in the Barima/Waini - the North/West Secondary School, Santa Rosa Secondary School, Port Kaituma Secondary School. In the Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo Region – Annai, St. Ignatius, Sand Creek and Aishalton; in the Cuyuni/Mazaruni Region– Waramadong Secondary

School, Three Miles Secondary School and Bartica Secondary School. A total of approximately \$1,840,000,000 to provide hot meals for students principally in our hinterland locations.

The rest includes this Parliament and I do not believe that Members on this side of the House are eating more than Members on the other side. There is only a difference of one and barring very few exceptions, I do not believe anyone here is gorging themselves on food, Hon. Member.

The very article that I referred to ends by quoting the Leader of the Opposition. He went on to say:

“They prefer to spend more on eating than on public security, education and drug purchases. The budget has nothing for poor people”.

He ended by saying:

“This is called “jukking people”.

We do not agree with that description. It is not eating what the Leader of the Opposition asserts, but rather feeding. We are investing in our students in the hinterland regions. We are supporting their education and development for they represent the future. This Administration will continue the 5-B's Programme to provide Books, Breakfast, Boots, Boats and Bicycles, to produce A-students, students that will allow for improved access, improved attendance and for improved achievements.

9.49 p.m.

The Hon. Minister of Education gave the enviable statistics of what has occurred in the last two years, but we heard of cash grants and uniforms. They were piddling to this \$1.8 billion that is being provided in *Budget 2019*.

I would like to thank Mr. Collin Croal for all the issues that he raised, save and except to say that it is not feasible or practical for me to utilise the few minutes that I have at my disposal to answer all of the issues and queries that he raised. Quickly, I would refer to some of them.

One is fiscal transfers. It seems to be a fixation. It was introduced by the Hon. Member, Ganga Persaud, and others. I was asked the direct question of whether the formula is being applied under the Fiscal Transfers Act. As is well known, subventions to our Local Democratic Organs are transferred in two tranches. The sum of 50% is given automatically at the beginning of the

year, and the other 50%, the second tranche, is provided based on the stipulated performance indicators in the Act. These being the population size, the geographic area and the revenue collected. These disbursements are not done at the whim and fancy of any Minister. I have no desire to be micromanaging any of our Local Democratic Organs.

With regard to the balance of the 50%, in the past two years, there has been a shortfall in the allocations that have been due under the formula. In 2017, of the \$146 million that was budgeted for the municipalities, based on the formula, the sum of \$137 million should have been transferred, leaving a small balance of \$8.8 million or 6%. In the case of the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs), of the \$248 million, \$212 million would have applied under the Fiscal Transfers Act and 14% or the sum of \$35 million would not have qualified. In 2018, the figures were not much different. In the interest of time, I would not repeat them, but the percentages are 4% and 12%, instead of 6% and 14%.

What the Central Government has done is: given that the allocations were already made, it was released to all of the Local Democratic Organs, equally, as a grant, allowing them to benefit from these resources, which were provided for in the budget.

With regard to the audit queries that we have heard from the Hon. Member, what I would like to say is that, as was recognised, the system is not perfect. But, I would just briefly state that the audit queries in 2016, in relation to regions, there were 345, but in 2017, it fell to 236 or 32% less.

So, I agree that the system is not perfect, but the evidence is there that there have been improvements, and this continues to happen. With regard to the Local Government Commission, the query was posed as to why the Commission is not being treated as a constitutional agency. In the Act, at section 3(1), it states that the Local Government Commission shall be established as a corporate body. I am advised that an agency cannot be a corporate body and a constitutional agency at the same time. But, further, I will say that the budget of the Local Government Commission was submitted directly to the Ministry of Finance and not through the Ministry of Communities. We have no desire to micromanage the actions and activities of the Local Government Commission.

With regard to the District Tender Board, the Hon. Member, Mr. Croal said that I would have found some documents when I arrived at the ministry. I would like to disclaim any knowledge of the documents to which he referred. What I recall is that when I arrived at the ministry and

I asked the Hon. Member, who was the Permanent Secretary of the ministry at the time...the Hon. Minister then was Mr. Norman Whittaker, but my intelligence tells me that the roles were actually reversed. Nonetheless, when I asked the Hon. Member for a list of the staff at the Ministry, I was first given a list and, on further enquiry, I was then given second list with some names that were not on the first list. Some of the names that were on the second list, which were not on the first list, included former Member of Parliament (MP) and Minister, Mr. Clinton Collymore, a gentleman by the name of Mr. Gocool Boodhoo and another gentleman by the name of Mr. Harripersaud Nokta. I never saw any of those gentlemen show up at the ministry. They took their exists without returning to the ministry. But what I would like to say is that I thank the Hon. Member for the questions that were posed and those that I have not addressed here, I would certainly respond to him directly.

Moving on, I would like to say that I would not suggest to this House that this is a perfect Budget. It, by no means, contains all that we would like to offer the people of this country. However, it does reflect a vision and it is crafted to cater to each and every sector and to each and every citizen. Every member of society could look at this Budget with anticipation of a better tomorrow and a brighter future.

The theme of this Budget encapsulates the vision of this Government, a vision which we have never shied away from, which is that an empowered nation and empowered people are critical to advancing national development, building cohesion, transforming the economy and affording the needed opportunities for sustainable communities and a good life.

Our Constitution lays great emphasis on the involvement of people in the task of managing their communities and developing the areas in which they live. In particular, it envisages people being involved in the day-to-day decisions-making processes which affect their lives, and this is in keeping with articles 71, 74 and 75 of the Constitution.

The holding of Local Government Elections in 2018, the first time, I repeat, the first time consecutive elections were held in our post-independence history, as lawfully due, removes any uncertainty about the primacy of local democracy and reinforces our commitment to democratic renewal at the local level. An A Partnership For National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government would not deny the citizens of this country the right to elect their local leaders and to play a meaningful role in the sustainable development of their communities. No more odious Interim Management Committees (IMCs).

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, would you allow me a few minutes? Please reclaim your seat. I will request the Prime Minister to move the motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO. 10 (1)

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: I move that this House continues its sitting until the end of the contribution currently on the floor.

Mr. Speaker: The proposal is that the House continues to sit to complete our business for this evening. I see all in favour. Please proceed, Hon. Minister.

Question put, and carried

Standing Order suspended

Mr. Bulkan: This renewal has seen the emergence of a 27-year-old as chief citizen of the Capital City, the youngest ever, by a long way, in our history. It has also resulted in the election of a 22-year-old as a Chairman of the Beterverwagting/Triumph Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC). The Mayor of Bartica is a young man. A cursory review of elected councillor indicates that a tide of young leaders is appearing all across the country, building critical, human and leadership capital to safeguard Guyana's future, testimony to the Administration's commitment to youth empowerment, inclusivity, promoting diversity and entrenching democratic governance. This is thanks to the vision of President Granger and the investments made in every one of our five budgets. This is an integral part of the sustainability to which this Budget speaks. But there is a saying that *there is none so blind as those who do not wish to see*. So, my attention was drawn to an article published last Friday titled:

“Govt's witch-hunting, ... weakening democracy – ICD”

It was published on Friday, 30th November, 2018 in the *Guyana Times* newspaper. [Lt.

Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Is that Mr. Ali's picture there? Yes, it is accompanied by a picture of the Hon. Member, Irfaan Ali. This article quotes, extensively, from statements made by an overseas Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). It calls itself the International Centre for Democracy and it accuses the Government of not having:

“...intentions for a strengthening of democracy in Guyana...”

“...weakening of the democratic fabric...”

“...assault on democracy...”

Our actions, however, speak for themselves and they nail the propaganda being pedalled. This is a democratic Administration. It is within this context and the related public policy that the Ministry of Communities has, since its establishment, focused on rebuilding the institution and capacities of the Local Government System to enable the efficient, effective and sustainable provision of services countrywide and to promote and deepen democratic governance.

Budget 2019 caters to increased access to affordable housing units and increased occupancy, particularly within infrastructurally underdeveloped schemes, another deformed project inherited from the previous Administration, which requires considerable resources to rectify to make habitable and suitable to our citizens. My Colleague, Ms. Valarie Patterson -Yearwood, has already presented the programme for the housing sector and the many achievements we have to our credit to date. The Hon. Minister fittingly said that Hon. Members across the aisle are evidently suffering from glaucoma to not being able to see the progress made in this sector, across the country. Of particular pride to us is the hinterland housing programme, where to date, over 400 households in the Barima- Waini and Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo regions have benefited from housing subsidies by way of core homes and roof replacement.

With regard to water, the Government's priority in this sector in 2018 is aimed at increasing access to safe water and reducing the disparity in service between coastal and hinterland communities. While noticeable strides were made, this remains our priority in 2019, with an allocation of \$2.7 billion - \$2.34 billion for capital expenditure and approximately \$420 million for recurrent expenses.

Budget 2019 continues to prioritise the management of our water resources at the national level, while simultaneously supporting a programme to improve the Guyana Water Incorporated's (GWI) efficiency, financial viability and sustainability. The programme is also complementing the housing programme to achieve sustainable community development. Hon. Minister Dawn-Hastings has presented on the programmes, its priorities and the initiatives in this sector.

Sanitation – The sanitation work programme aims to build capacity and strengthen institution related to sustainable environmental practices at the local level. The programme includes but is not limited to work on a number of landfills in our new capital towns, improving the facilities at Haags Bosch, construction and upgrade of site facilities and municipal sanitary landfills and developing water management capacities.

The 2018 work programme for sanitation management included promoting effective management of solid waste across communities and facilitated a public education campaign on sanitation management. In this regard, the Haags Bosch landfill site was upgraded to include a leachate treatment facility at a cost of approximately \$95 million and a demonstration site for sanitation management.

10.04 p.m.

This site now bears no resemblance to the one we inherited in mid-2015. The perennial complaints of residents in adjoining communities of foul odors are a thing of the past, another piece of evidence of the transformation that this Budget speaks about. To date, there have been five tours by schools and two by media houses and other groups to this site. I would urge Hon. Members of the Opposition to pay a visit to this site and see for themselves if this is hype or reality. This landfill handles the solid waste from Georgetown and 18 Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs). We inherited a dumpsite. We have invested and transformed it to a sanitary landfill. We are cleaning up the mess we inherited.

The access road at Rose Hall to the landfill facility has made satisfactory progress in its upgrade. Designs for sanitary landfill sites in Bartica, Lethem and Mahdia will be completed shortly, which will provide for the improved management of solid waste in these municipalities.

The health and well-being of citizens in every local democratic organ is paramount. The 2019 programme includes the construction of access roads to and developing a sanitary landfill facility at Belle Vue in the East Berbice-Corentyne to allow for the closure of the Esplanade dumpsite. The closure of this site is important to protect citizens from the potentially harmful health impacts, sporadic fires and other public health hazards. Sanitation in 2019 will continue to feature a robust programme of awareness and sensitisation on sustainable sanitation practices which will be designed and developed in consultation with various communities. The allocation to this programme in the 2019 Budget is approximately \$841.1 million.

The public awareness programme is aimed at transforming attitudes and practices in sanitary management and will rest on the pillars of the Green Generation Guyana (3Gs) Sanitation Campaign, which promotes proper waste disposal habits through a reuse, reduce, recycle (3 Rs) strategy. It will involve community outreaches, targeting children through school

sensitisation, media programmes, green camps, bins distributions, visual aids and printed publications. We are starting with the young.

Regional Development - The guiding principle philosophy of this Administration's approach to regional development is to reduce the disparities between the living conditions and access to social services and amenities between our hinterland and coastal populations. The overarching obligation of the Ministry in this context is to continuously provide necessary technical support towards the realisation of the strategic objectives of the core programmes of education, public health, public infrastructure and agriculture.

Colleagues, MPs Mr. Rutherford, Mr. Adams, Mr. Carrington, Mr. C. Persaud, Mr. Rajkumar, Mr. Figueira, Mr. Allen, Ms. Bancroft, Ms. Wade and Minister Hastings-Williams have individually and collectively presented, in considerable detail, the many projects and programmes that are being realised in our regions and similarly benefitting from funding in the 2019 Budget.

Budget 2019 provides the sum of \$44.7 billion for the regions, representing an increase of approximately 14% over 2018, where the allocation was \$38.1 billion. There have been increases for every region and in every sector: public health, education, public infrastructure, agriculture, finance and administration. These resources will empower our regions to better utilise the strategic advantages in unlocking the potential for innovation, growth, development and diversification of regional economies. If I might single out one area, it is the Regional Agricultural Programme, which is new to Regions 1, 7 and 10. MP Rutherford has spoken of its positive impact in stimulating agricultural production, aquaculture and, with it, job creation. This programme is the recipient of \$72.9 million in the 2019 Budget. This is within allocations in the sectors of health, \$35.9 billion; education, \$52.2 billion; public infrastructure, \$38.5 billion, public security, \$35.6 billion. This will directly impact the welfare of residents of all 10 of our developmental regions.

This Budget constructively references the Plans of Action for Regional Development (PARDs). The PARDs are critical in ensuring bottom-up, consultative-led regional development. Communities and their desires will be accounted for by Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs) in their decisions for regional development. The regional development agenda is also guided by the principle of expanded participation in decision making to enable the regions to be effective in keeping with the policy of decentralisation. With this objective in view, the Ministry will focus on strengthening the capacities of regional structures to be better able to

provide sustainable development related services, the institutionalisation of the Regional Agricultural and Commercial Exhibitions (RACE) and other mechanisms such as the National Regional Development Consultative Committee (NRDCC).

Hon. Member Burton-Persaud spoke of what she claimed was the absence of opportunities for the showcasing of local and agricultural production. I am pleased to inform the Hon. Member that each region held their RACE in 2018, in keeping with a decentralisation agenda and building capacity in the regions.

Suggesting that the 2019 Budget is tone deaf, as has been said - a chorus from the other side - is a deliberate attempt at undermining the empowerment of our people, undermining the empowerment of constituencies, and is, perhaps, the best example of the lack of vision - an accusation that has been levelled.

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

Mr. Bulkan: Thank you, Sir.

The hosting of the first National Conference of Local Democratic Organs (NCLDO) represents the continued execution of a vision of local empowerment, community participation and local economic development. This forum had the objectives of: (1) learning from Local Democratic Organs (LDOs) the challenges faced in delivering services to their communities; (2) examining the relationship among central, regional and local levels of administration; and (3) determining how the Budget for the financial year 2019 could be more effective at the local level. The NCLDO produced the following summary conclusions which reinforced the strategic focus of the Ministry. These being capacity building, institutional strengthening, infrastructural development and public awareness. A report was compiled at this historic conference and disseminated to the chairs, vice chairpersons and clerks of councils of each of the 81 LDOs, Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs), municipalities and NDCs. Sir, you will recall this conference, having attended yourself. I trust that the senior members of this honourable House across the aisle have read this report for its edifying value. This forum will be an annual one and will be held in the first quarter of each year.

Local Government is here to stay. No more micromanagement. No more IMCs. There were 38 IMCs installed by the previous Administration. Because of time, I cannot address the question posed by the Hon. Member Ganga Persaud, who, to his credit, had most of the 38. For 13 of those, he dissolved councils and installed his own.

The local government agenda will be fashioned around the previously listed areas, these being capacity building to ensure that local authorities have the range and depth of skills required for effective management of their communities; institutional strengthening to provide the policies, processes, structures, equipment, tools, resources and information systems to meet their mandate; infrastructural development to respond to the immediate development needs of communities; and public awareness to build understanding of an engagement in the local governance process. The sum of \$55 million is targeted in 2019 for these activities.

This Budget recognises the importance of improving access to affordable and suitable housing; improving access to quality, potable water; improving sanitation services; building the self-sufficiency of our local government system, addressing the outdated property and land values; strengthening the regional capacity to plan and implement sustainable development initiatives and the institutional strengthening activities that must surround such an action. This would be a significant step in equipping and empowering councils; a significant step towards the eventual fiscal sustainability and independence; a further step towards empowering our people in communities; a further step in consolidating local governance; a further step towards building sustainable communities; and a further step towards the good life. I am proud. We are proud of this Budget, and I unreservedly commend it to this honourable House and ask for its unanimous approval.

I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today. Let me express my thanks for your assistance and cooperation throughout. If there were any detours, they were very brief detours. I thank us all. Hon. Prime Minister.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Nagamootoo: Mr. Speaker, I hope I do not add to the detour. I have some good news. Tomorrow and Saturday, Wales workers will receive the remaining redundancy payments. Saying that, I would like to move the adjournment of this House to tomorrow, Friday, 7th December, 2018 at 10:00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow, Friday, 7th December, 2018 at 10 o'clock.

Adjourned accordingly at 10.17 p.m.

