

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

105TH Sitting

Friday, 7TH December, 2018

Assembly convened at 10.38 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Leave Granted to Members

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, leave has been granted to the Hon. Raphael Trotman and the Hon. Bheri Ramsaran for today's Sitting.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

MOTION

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. Nandlall (10.41 a.m.): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to say welcome. I see many young people, including students, in the Gallery. Of course, as has become traditional, the staff of the Attorney General's Chambers are here to hear me speak. I want to express my gratitude to them for their loyalty over the years.

This is the fifth day of this debate and a lot has been said in relation to the Budget which we are debating. We have heard from the Government's side how well the Government has performed over the last four years. We have listened to the various speakers outline the policies of the Government and state how effective they are and how positively they have impacted the people of this country. But we cannot turn our eyes blind to reality. What is the reality? Fortunately, this

Budget is being debated at a particular juncture when we can make some realistic assessment of how the Government has performed, *vis-à-vis* the people of our country.

On 12th November, 2018, just a month ago, the people of this country spoke, and they rejected the policies of this Government. We cannot turn a blind eye to that reality.

The commercial banks in any economy are a safe barometer by which one can judge how that economy is performing. The commercial banks operate in the commercial sector and they are dealing with the flow of money in an economy, and they are better positioned, more than many other organisations, to assess the economy of a particular society.

If we want to reject the verdict of the people from 12th November, as they expressed them, we cannot - and I advise we should not - turn a blind eye to signals that are coming from the banking sector. Today, the Bank of Baroda is selling its operations in Guyana. That is what is happening. That is the reality on the ground. Three weeks ago, we were met with the announcement that Scotia Bank is selling its operations in Guyana. That is the reality.

We can speak here in the finest of languages, using the best of adjectives to describe the economy, but the reality out there is quite a different one, and that is how I wish to begin my presentation today – by advancing the proposition that the Budget is not one that is in sync with the reality of what is transpiring on the ground. There is a reason for that.

The crafting and presentation of a national budget is not an abstract exercise. Governments prepare budgets to fulfil certain objectives. These objectives are the direct output of that government's economic, social and political policies. The fundamental failing of this Government, from the time it took office in 2015, is that it has failed to clearly articulate to this nation what those economic, social and political policies are.

Five budgets have been presented and we are yet to decipher what and where is the economic, social and political plan that the Government is pursuing. *Budget 2019* is no different. Like its predecessors, it is a chronicle of random policies and projects lacking a centrally-directed vision. Indeed, such a vision has been absent in every budget presented by this Government, and the people of this country are entitled to know what on developmental path this Government is piloting them to traverse. That is why, after the expenditure of over \$1trillion in budgetary allocation by

this Government, if you ask the ordinary Guyanese, they would tell you that they are worse off than they were in 2014. In fact, last month, they did so by voting resoundingly against this Government at the Local Government Elections (LGEs)

Hon. Member, Mr. Harmon, by no standard can the Green State Development Strategy (GSDS), in the manner in which you have articulated it, be described as a developmental plan for this country. At best, it is simply an environmental policy to which your Government is committed, whenever it decides to craft a developmental plan. If we cannot agree on these basic concepts and cannot get these basic concepts clear in our minds, how can we ever competently manage this economy?

So, they have simply squandered \$1 trillion, over the past four years, in consumables and a never-ending list of non-productive expenditures, policies and programmes. My Colleagues have spent a lot of time highlighting them so there is no need for me to repeat them.

Look at the capital projects that are being executed. Every single capital project of worth, executed over the past three years and currently ongoing, are the People's Progressive Party (PPP) projects. They include the East Coast Highway, the Cheddi Jagan International Airport Expansion Project, the East Bank Berbice Highway, the recently-concluded West Demerara Highway, the recently-concluded East Bank Demerara Highway and the Sheriff Street/Mandela Avenue Road Expansion Project. That is the reality. No matter what we say here, we cannot change that. The Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, cannot seriously argue that the roundabout at Vlissengen Road and the two pedestrian overpasses on the East Bank Demerara are projects of worth. They are not.

Not only has this Government spent over \$1 trillion from 2015 to 2018, in the process, they have doubled the national debt. They have placed our foreign reserves at perilously low levels, more than it has ever been in years. They have made our balance of payment as volatile as it has ever been in two decades. They have imposed over 200 tax measures on the backs of the Guyanese people. Through their policies, they have caused a reduction of both our imports and exports. They have closed the sugar estates, our largest productive industry. And due to mismanagement, they have triggered a decline in almost every single productive sector. As a consequence, 30,000 jobs have been lost; dozens of business have closed; our growth rate continues to decline; crime is wreaking havoc in our society; and our dollar has become as weak as it has ever been in two

decades. In this milieu of misery, I cannot omit the fact that, apart from at the ministerial level, wages, salaries and pensions increases for the ordinary Guyanese have remained at a bare minimum.

In addition to that, the Government has also scrapped a whole regime of poverty-alleviation policies and programmes, promulgated by the PPP Administration, which targeted the poor, the elderly and the less fortunate in our society. I hate to paint such a dismal picture, but that is the reality of what has transpired over the last four years, and that is the reality which faces the Guyanese people, and of which this Government appears absolutely oblivious.

It is against this bleak backdrop that, at a minimum, the average Guyanese expects this Budget to at least attempt to rectify this depressing situation and to chart a new course. However, it does no such thing. It is simply a compendium of highly questionable data and there is citation of projects and policies, sophisticatedly packaged with the intention of deceiving the Guyanese people into believing that it will transform the economy, empower them and build sustainable communities for a good life.

I say questionable statistics because, while the Minister boasted about presenting an early budget, he omitted to tell us that the statistics he has used were extracted from the mid-year report, with a projection of how he estimates the different sectors will perform for the remainder of the year 2018. Therefore, what we have and have been given are only six months of actual data, merged with the Minister's self-serving, optimistic speculations.

We are being asked to debate a Budget which has no reference to a national developmental plan and where the foundation of the framework in which the Budget is presented is fraught with surmise and assumptions. However, the Minister has skilfully managed to package this farce attractively and with great sophistry. A little probing beyond this glittering exterior reveals how hollow and empty the Budget is. I will attempt to unmask this deception as I go along.

Understandably, the people of this country are anxious to know the plans the Government has for the oil and gas sector, for there is no doubt that this sector has the potential of transforming the life of every single Guyanese in record time. At the same time, we are very much aware that without proper regulatory framework, competent management and strong oversight, we can be visited with

the resource curse that has befallen so many oil-producing countries in the third world. Yet, the Minister, in his Budget, mentioned not a word about the fundamentally important local content legislation, neither did the Minister make any mention whatsoever of the Petroleum Commission Bill. These two pieces of legislation will constitute the foundation necessary to properly manage and scrutinise this sector to ensure that Guyana gets its fair share.

10.53 a.m.

After all we are starting out with the most lopsided profit-sharing agreement ever negotiated on planet Earth. How could we prepare for first oil in 2020, as projected by the Minister, when in 2019 we do not have these indispensable mechanisms in place? These are gaping holes in the budget.

On the important issue of foreign direct investment, the Minister has articulated no investment scheme, whatsoever, to attract them. In fact, we know that the incentive schemes that were established under the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) administration for both foreign and local investments have all been dismantled. In fact, many of these investors are currently being hounded by the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) to recover concessions granted under the previous Government. The budget does nothing to make Guyana an attractive investment destination, yet the Minister craftily said:

“Guyana Office for Investment (GO-Invest) had facilitated approximately \$73.8 billion in proposed investments anticipated to create 1,700 jobs across the coastal region and Region 9 in sectors such as agriculture, light, manufacturing, services, forestry and tourism. To date, \$44 billion of the aforementioned proposed investment has been approved in 2019. Go-Invest is targeting between \$60 and \$80 billion in investments.”

Mr. Speaker, you will note that in all the billions that the Minister has referred to and in all the sectors he has mentioned he has not told us that a single dollar has or being invested in 2019, not a single dollar in this nice compendium of the citation of what will happen. That is the guile. That is the sophistry of this budget. The budget speech of the Minister is replete with illusory statements such as these which are intended to fool the Guyanese people.

It is the same vein that the Minister told us that our young entrepreneurs are seeding and fertilising rice fields in Berbice with drones. I cannot say in this House that the Minister is lying. No one has ever known of seeding and fertilising of rice fields being done in Berbice by drone. What the reality is that is happening in the rice industry, and this is as of yesterday, the *Stabroek News*, “Corentyne farmers without water to irrigate rice fields at peak of rice cultivation.” That is the reality on the ground. They do not even have water to put in the rice lands and the Minister is coming here and telling us about drones with rice fields. That is the guile. That is the sophistry that I am speaking about. What I do know is the rice farmers leases are being revoked in Berbice. The accessed dams in the rice fields have become impossible. The drainage canals are plugged. Mahaica-Mahaicony-Abary/Agricultural Development Authority (MMA/ADA) has imposed hundreds of percentages increases in rates and rent for rice land and still it is bankrupted. As a result, rice farmers continue to lose thousands of acres in paddy. There is no drone. That is what I said, that this budget is out of sync with reality.

The above, notwithstanding, it is in the area of infrastructure that the Ministers prevarication and artifice range as supreme. The Minister has listed almost every major infrastructural project ever conceived in this country since independence and put them as part of Budget 2019. They included the converting of Lethem aerodrome to a regional airport, the bridging of the Kurupukari River, the conversion of the Linden into a central commercial hub, the Diamond to Ogle access road, the upgrade of the Parika Stelling to a modern marine transport, the construction of an all weather road from Parika to Bartica, a four-lane highway from Buxton to Mahaica, the construction of a four-lane bridge across the Demerara River, the Linden to Lethem Highway, the extension of Soesdyke-Timehri road to form a continuous link from Georgetown to Lethem via the Takutu Bridge to the transcontinental highway connecting South Central and North America. Reading this, the ordinary Guyanese believe that by the end of 2019, he can jump in a taxi at Stabroek and arrive at Liberty Avenue or Flatbush in Brooklyn. That is the impression that it is creating here. This is not optimism; this is delusion. However, when one reads between the lines, all that the Minister is speaking about is the drawing of plans, the commissioning of the pre-feasibility studies, feasibility for each of these projects. In reality, not one would commence in 2019. That is the farce of this budget.

I suppose that the Minister knows full well that the ordinary Guyanese enjoys a good gaff. However, when all the gaff and the huff and the puff subside, the people out there wants to know in simple terms what this budget contains for them. I ask, what do I tell the 8,000 dismissed sugar workers? What do I tell them that this budget contains for them? What do I tell the rice farmers that the budget has for them? What do I tell the cash crop farmers that the budget has for them? What do I tell the fishermen? What do I tell our public servants? What do I tell our teachers? What do I tell our nurses? What do I tell our university graduates? What do I tell our Amerindians? What do I tell the private sector? What do I tell them? I could seriously identify no specific measure or policy which targets any of these groupings. What I could tell them though is that Minister Jordan projects to collect in 2019 from them taxes in the sum of \$224 billion. That is \$52 billion more than in 2017 and \$89 billion more than in 2014. That is what I could tell them. This money is moneys that would have been available as disposable income for the ordinary Guyanese people. This Government has sucked it out away from them. This information is not written in the gloss and the glamour of these pages. It is at the back in an appendix, in fine print. That is the sophistry that I am speaking about.

Mr. Jordan also omits to say that he will be spending \$16 billion more on Government employment costs. We will have more contract workers. Cleaners will continue to get \$200,000 take home with gratuity at the Office of the President. That is where the money is going. That is where the \$52 billion that they are taking from the people will go. The Hon. Member Volda Lawrence is here. We know the employment practices she had made references to them. Only friends will benefit, and family.

Another \$20 billion will be going towards buying goods and services at the capital expenditure through contract, which most likely, having regard their track record, would be awarded in violation in Procurement Act to another grouping of friends and cronies. To top it all, after sucking \$52 billion more of taxpayer's dollars, relative to 2017, Minister Jordan still has to borrow \$41.5 billion in 2019. Not contented with *vampirism* from the people a \$52 billion in taxes, he still wants to borrow \$41 billion more.

I will turn to the legal sector. Once again, the nation is treated with the Government's perfunctory to the declarations of its commitment to constitutional reform. Again, in reality, there has been no appreciable effort on the part of the Government to push this agenda, although it has been given

to the Prime Minister who has no portfolio. They choose a man without any portfolio to push the agenda, yet it cannot be pushed. More time is spent in framing photographs at \$1.2 million. Over the past four years all we have had is a report done by a committee established by the Prime Minister. This committee did not consult with either the public nor the Opposition in Parliament. The report apparently ranks among the state's most high-profile secret since no one has ever seen it. Only this year a Bill came to this House on constitutional reform. It was sent to a Standing Committee chaired by the Attorney General. [Ms. Teixeira: It was in 2017.] It was in 2017, sorry. There has been, I think, one meeting and two days ago I received via e-mail an invitation to go to an emergency meeting this afternoon, so that the Prime Minister will stand up there and talk that there is work being done. That is the sophistry in the budget. It is the fooling of people, telling us that we have a meeting this afternoon to give an impression that there is great improvement. I acknowledge the presence of the Prime Minister.

That is the sum total of the Government effort in four years in delivering one of its major campaign promises. That is what it did in four years. A few gaff sessions we will have and in 2019 we will have a few gaff sessions in the committee and nothing will crystallise out of it. Of course, we will be spending a lot of money.

The Minister continues to speak about promoting in the independence of financial constitutional bodies. Just two weeks ago the nation witnessed him bringing their budget here and chopping them. Under the judicial reform and strengthening, the Minister begins with the sacrosanct admonition that the rule of law is good. The rule of law serves as the backbone of any society. With that declaration, I must register my emphatic concurrence, but the reality as we know, it is different. Every Guyanese is guaranteed under the Constitution as a fundamental right, freedom and equality of treatment, protection from any and all forms of discrimination, the right to hold political views and to belong to any political party of their choice, protection of the law from vindictive and malicious prosecutions and a whole host of other freedoms. It is the amalgam of these rights and freedoms which forms the foundation of the rule of law. What is the reality? The reality is this: Only friends I have is PNC, so the only friends I will give work is the PNC. This strikes at the heart of the rule of law. This is political patronage. This is discrimination. This is cronyism. The Minister has not uttered a single word of condemnation.

The institution of contrive and concocted charges against your political opponent is not only vindictive and pity politics, but it is an assault on the rule of law. Do not use the criminal justice system as a form of oppression. They abuse of judges in open court is an assault in the rule of law. The failure to constitute the Judicial Service Commission for over a year is an assault on the rule of law. The failure to pay thousands of sugar workers their reverence forthwith upon severance is an assault on the rule of law. The capricious revocation of rice farmers leases and attempts to disposes them from rice lands are an assault in the rule of law. The political directions given by Ministers to service commission is an assault on the rule of law. The failure and the obstinate refusal of this administration to deposit US\$18 million signing bonus into the Consolidated Fund is an abrogation to the rule of law. The multiple and rampant violation of the Procurement Act by this administration.

11.08 a.m.

The public safety of our citizens, rampant and violent criminals is one of the fundamental functions of the rule of law. The Government has failed to craft a policy to protect our people from the violent criminals that are out there.

The Minister in his budget speech said this: Four new court houses have been set up in 2018 in Grove/ Diamond, Bartica, Mahdia and Kwakwani. He said it would have already been set up. I have here, this is Bartica, last year, the Minister said that the courts were already built. Mahdia, they are turning the sod again, Kwakwani, one truckload of sand, Diamond two truckloads of sand, and the Minister is telling the House that these courts have been built in 2018.

Three years ago, the Attorney General came here with great haste and told us that we need to amend the Coroners Act, that His Excellency the President has made promises in the campaign to hold thousands of inquests. He rejected our amendments and he rushed that Act. Since 2016, not a single coroner has been appointed under these amendments, not a single coroner. This year again we are hearing about law reform, Law Reform Commission. We passed a Bill here about two or three years ago, last year we budgeted millions, we rented a building, we approved money to rent a building at \$800,000 a month. We approved salaries at a rate of \$750 a month. Up to now, we are at the end of 2018, not a single commissioner is being appointed to the Law Reform Commission.

The Attorney General's office is devoid of any programme. It is difficult for me to make an assessment, but what I know is that it has held a few training seminars for judges and prosecutors. I want to put on the record our objection to judges and prosecutors being trained together. It creates a bad impression, an impression that strikes at the heart and soul of natural justice. Prosecutors and judges represent different interests. They cannot be trained together. I am asking the Attorney General to stop that practice. The programmes there have been done in a very piecemeal manner. We already have the public record of the performance of the Attorney General Chambers in defending litigation, defending the state. I do not have to say much about that the public is aware. It is one thing to say that you lose law books. It is another thing to say that you lose cases. It is another thing to say that you lose the chairmanship of your party, but when you lose a whole law school, Mr. Speaker, that is a cause for concern. How do you lose a law school? I do not know.

With those brief remarks, I cannot support the Budget 2019.

Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]* (11.12 a.m.)

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Williams] (11.13 a.m.): I rise to congratulate the Minister of Finance and his team, the Hon. Mr. Winston DaCosta Jordan. It is a brilliant budget. Notwithstanding the old Marxist-Leninist approach to negation of the negation, we would not be side-tracked. There is the biggest budget ever in this country and they are trying to tell the nation that big is little; that big is nothing. You cannot fool the people of this country. What the budget is saying to you is that inclusivity has triumphed over divisiveness that had hitherto permeated the politics of this country. You have been bypassed. You do not even know that. You felt that this Government would have done the same thing that you did to the traditional communities that never supported you, such as Linden which you decimated and marginalised. You thought that we would have done the same thing in the sugar industry, but we did not. What we did was that we saved the sugar industry in this country. We inherited a sugar industry that was a parlour state. We, the APNU/AFC Government, roll back all those years and we decided that, notwithstanding the failures of the People's Progressive Party (PPP), we are going to ensure that we salvage the sugar industry and justify the existence of the sugar workers in this country.

We had warned them. I personally, in this chamber, had advised them in 2010 when all the world knew that sugar was not going to have the preferred position under the African Caribbean and

Pacific countries (ACP) convention. We told them that they should start retraining the workers. They never did that. A certain Hon. Member of this House, Mr. Ramotar, was managing the sugar industry when there were other members of the politburo on the board of the sugar industry. There was the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) operating out of a Washington suite and a New York suite being paid the normal salary. What is going on? We refute, out of hand, that we had anything to do with the sugar industry reaching another year and we will continue to look after the sugar workers to the best of our ability. I think that we should observe... I had spoken for years in support of our traditional workers in the public service teachers, police, that they have been neglected by us in favour of the sugar workers of this country. The divisive politics of the past will prove to be the 'dead bell' of the PPP.

Let me address some other misconceptions. We were told about the rule of law. The rule of law never existed in 23 years of PPP's ruling this country. What it would have produced was a gangster advertising in the national newspapers that he was in charge of the national security of this country. What did the administration produce? What it also produced was the largest killing field in the history of Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and Guyana, where over 800 young Guyanese, husbands, brothers, uncles, sons, were decimated in a crime spree in which this country had never seen before. I do not want to be distracted, because we have the no confidence motion which will be coming up and we would talk to them more on these matters, but they are in no position to lecture us on anything about the rule of law.

For example, there was this 'big' talk about the Coroners Act. If upon a proper perusal of the Coroners Act or even a mere visual apprehension of this Act, anyone can see that there is no power of repose under that Act in the Minister of Legal Affairs to appoint any coroner. I do not know if it is because the Hon. Member has been out of office for some time now that he is no longer dealing with the law. I do not have power to appoint the coroner, so the record must show that this is another misrepresentation in this House.

The Hon. Member spoke about the performance of the Attorney General Chambers. That public relations programme in which they went on - I am a very busy man, I must say that - I do not have any intention to be firefighting those stories. I would ask my learned friend to list the cases that I have lost. That is the end of the conversation.

Let us talk about it. In the reporting year, up to 277 cases that were concluded, these were the results: 118 were dismissed or discontinued; 110 were won by the Attorney General Chambers, with or without cost and 68 were lost. Where is the losing Attorney General's Chambers? Our winnings double what we lost, so we are winningest chamber.

It is not only that. Let us go to the court system. In 2018, the Attorney General Chambers won several high profile cases. Mr. Nandlall would want to leave. We have to hold him down there. He wants to leave. In the High Court, *Bibi Safora Shadick versus the Minister of Communities* in the Chief Election Officer case which attempted to prevent the holding of the 12th November Local Government Elections, that was thrown out by the court. In the Court of Appeal in the case of Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha, my good friend, and Attorney General, it upheld the decision of President David Granger to appoint retired Justice James Patterson to the office of Chairman the Elections Commission. That is constitutional. Further, in the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ), in the *Attorney General of Guyana versus Cedric Richardson* that court upheld the presidential term limits were valid. The CCJ, by majority decision, allowed the appeal, set aside the order of the lower courts here and declared that section 2 of the Constitution (Amendment) Act, No. 4 of 2000, was constitutional. It was an amendment to article 90 of the Constitution and was validly enacted.

We also won the case *the Guyana Stores Limited versus the Attorney General of Guyana*. The Commissioner General of the Guyana Revenue Authority, where the CCJ held that there had been no violation of the company's constitutional right to protection from deprivation of property. It further held that the 2% minimum corporation tax was not alone, because the state does not repay the taxpayer nor does the taxpayer has the right to repayment or redemption. Instead, the taxpayer could get the deduction under section 10(A).

Additionally, we won the *Satti Basdeo versus the Guyana Sugar Corporation Limited, Noel Holder and the Attorney General*. These cases were at the CCJ. I want them to show me where they won comparable cases in the CCJ under the tenure of the Hon. Member. What he did was he left us with some enormous amounts of heavy judgement and we will get to that just now.

In the *Sharmilla Indarjali versus Director of Public Prosecutions*, Marcus Bisram's case, where the CCJ held that Bisram must stand trial for murder. The CCJ dismissed the application made on behalf of Bisram for an urgent hearing of a challenge to a local judge's refusal to discontinue the

charge against him. Is that familiar? You were running to the court to stop the trial. I do not know if my colleagues want me to go on to show my winningest ways.

11.23 a.m.

Let me show you how busy we are in the Attorney General Chambers, as I go to the Drafting Division. The Drafting Division, in 2018, has been a very productive year for it. The division has successfully drafted a total of 20 Acts which were passed by the National Assembly. There are Bills before the Special Select Committee and two Bills have been read for the first time before the National Assembly. Attorneys of the division were also involved in country wide Anti-Corruption and Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism, (AMLCFT) proliferation financing (PF) sensitisation seminars. With respect to legislation, some of the Acts passed were the Juvenile Justice Act 2018, my learned friend, Vice-President Ramjattan spoke of that yesterday, *inter alia*, the intention was to remove the offence of wandering and others, so certain Acts were repealed.

Under the Local Authorities (Elections) (Amendment) Act 2018, that Act amended certain Acts including the Municipal and District Councils Act and the Local Government Act. It did so, among other things, to facilitate the effective implementation, which is very important, of continuous registration and the availability of an electoral list which shall always be enforced, and which shall be routinely updated every six months. It also made provisions to resolve ties in the election of mayors, chairpersons and deputy chairpersons and ties among constituency candidates which must result from an election.

The Attorney General Chambers has been very active and productive. We do not have time to be running after fake news. Our record speaks for itself. I do not have time to reel out. Look, we have the Rasul Saddiqi case, where the last Government had given an armoury, equivalent to that of the Guyana Defence Force's (GDF)'s own, to this man, Mr. Saddiqi, and we won that case, so there is no more armoury. Ask the Minister of Public Security. There are so many cases. I do not want to be detained with that. Let us go on to more important issues.

The Support for the Criminal Justice (SCJS) Programme: In June 2017, the Government of Guyana received a US\$8 million loan from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to support the criminal justice system in reducing the situation of overcrowding at prison and increasing the use

of alternative sentencing. Currently, the prison's overcrowding rate is 209%. We have experienced the challenges of prison's overcrowding in Guyana on multiple occasions, such as numerous safety challenges, negative effects on the physical and mental well-being of prisoners and violent incidents. The SCJS programme comprises six interventions which will help in tackling this challenge, namely a legal aid intervention, strengthening the probation services, a restorative justice project, implementing a case management system, technical support to the Law Reform Commission and strengthening the judiciary and prosecutors.

A study completed in 2017 shows that approximately 71% of prisoners did not have legal representation. For those who were able to access representation, only 14% were represented by a public defender. The SCJS programme allocated \$31 million to provide support in various legal aid tasks in prisons and police stations, such as seeking dismissal of charges, arranging diversion where appropriate or arguing for bail and generally avoiding procedural delays. We anticipate that at least 20% of those accused of minor non-violent offences, in pre-trial detention, will benefit from this intervention.

Also, statistics from the Ministry of Social Protection, of my learned friend, the General Secretary, show that only 0.57% of the total prison population was placed on probation in 2018. Our goal is to strengthen the Probation Services Department, so that a minimum of 1.05% of the prison population is placed on probation and shifting the focus to the person's rehabilitative needs. To this end, we have allocated to that Ministry, \$58 million to implement a probation development action plan.

We have allocated a further \$20 million for the implementation of a case management system. Studies have shown that implementing case management technologies in the justice sector resulted in 7% average rate of a decrease of old civil, criminal and juvenile backlogs. Additionally, it resulted in a 15% productivity in the public sector. The case management system will allow key justice institutions to share information and access live data. This network will connect probation services, the magistrate's courts, legal aid, restorative justice, interlink with the high court, Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and police prosecutors and interlink with the prisons. The SCJS programme seeks to introduce new alternatives to imprisonment, particularly restorative justice practices. We have decided that since this practice has seen 72% satisfaction rate among victims and 80% to 90% successful resolution rate in the criminal justice system, we will allocate

\$56 million for capacity development and sensitisation activities in introducing this new practice in Guyana.

We continue our efforts in legislative reviews to ensure that modern alternatives to imprisonment are introduced which transforms the administration of justice and improves the lives of the citizenry. In 2018, we advanced our work in reviewing the Summary Jurisdiction Offences Act to remove archaic laws and introduce alternatives to imprisonment. We identified the commissioners for the Law Reform Commission. We provided ten heavy-duty copiers for police prosecutors. That was what my learned friend was saying about commission. We have identified the commissioners. It is just the financing to be set on its way. We already have, as he said, the building, staff and they will have to be appointed by the President, but they have already been identified. We have allocated \$44 million to continue our efforts in supporting the judiciary, police prosecutors and the Law Reform Commission. We have identified the need for training, the need to address marijuana as a public policy issue and the need for legislative reforms in other pieces of legislation, such as the Mental Health Act, the need for a Bail Act and the Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Act of 1988.

The Ministry's administration, that is, of the Ministry of Legal Affairs. The Ministry of Legal Affairs in its support for legal education in region, successfully hosted the Executive Committee and the Council for Legal Education (CLE) meetings. The meetings were attended by the Chairman of the CLE, a representative of the Caribbean Court of Justice, Attorney Generals, Chief Justices from CARICOM member states, members of the Bar Associations and principals of the three law schools located in Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica and the Bahamas. The Joseph Haynes Law School (JHLS) was subjected to another shifting of the CLE's position, to deny Guyana its rights to establish a law school. However, we will continue pressing the CLE, the Bar Association, the judiciary, the Department of Law at the University of Guyana and the Opposition for their support of the establishment of this law school. They will step up and tell the students that they are going to continue opposing the establishment of this law school. The Hon. Member who left. He knew why he left. He wrote, he emailed, the chairman of the CLE to tell him, "Do not worry with this school, we did not get permission to support it. "That is what he did and that is why he has to leave in disgrace.

The effect of such support would remove the discriminatory quota of 25 Guyanese in a backdrop where 250 students are being graduated every year from the law schools in Trinidad and Jamaica. It is allotting to us - Guyana, a founding member of CARICOM, a signatory to the CLE, it was signed here by no lesser persons like Sir Shridat Ramphal - 25 students while they are churning out students there. I do not know where they are going to come because this here is the hub. If it is going to do that and feel that we are going to employ all those lawyers that they are churning out at the expense of the Guyanese lawyers, let us see what is going to happen. We are going to do as the Bahamas.

We cannot understand how the Opposition that we have mentioned is seeking to maintain this quota of 25 law students, annually, to the Hugh Wooding Law School. Once we remove this quota and we have more Guyanese students coming into our own law school, the hardships suffered by our young people in Trinidad, we cannot even begin to describe here. It is punishing our students. This nation must call on this Opposition, in this country, for this law school that should be built and in the name of that legal giant Joseph Haynes Law School. We on this side of the House have always had the interest, welfare and well-being of the Guyanese people at heart and we will continue to do so.

Recognising that capacity building is fundamental to ensuring the effectiveness of state lawyers, attorneys of the Attorney General Chambers received training and attended workshops and seminars in several areas. Some of these include, human rights and acquire immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) discrimination, World Intellectual Property High Level Ministerial Meetings, seminar on International Criminal Court, International Arbitration Training, Anti-Money Laundering (AML) Compliance Training from Arthur Lok Jack Global School of Business at the University of the West Indies World Bank Seminar for Countering and Combatting the Financing of Terrorism, Caribbean Regional Exclusive Economic Zone Course, workshop on the Fair Administration of Justice and the United Nations (UN) Convention on Torture and Impact Justice Workshop on the Law of Treaties, Treaty Negotiations and Drafting with Reference to CARICOM member states, just to name a few. Additionally, the Ministry of Legal Affairs conducted its second training on the new civil procedure rules. This training served to familiarise attorneys within the chambers with the new civil procedure rules, so that they can effectively draft pleadings and

conduct cases. In 2019, we hope to expose our attorneys to more courses and workshops to ensure that the mandate of the Attorney General Chambers is executed with continued excellence.

Office of the State Solicitor/Public Trustee and Official Receiver: This office is responsible for filing all pleadings in actions instituted by the state and against the state, administering the estates of deceased persons, minors and the liquidation of companies and collects rents for the Government. The Public Trustee Department received and responded to 80 estates and 43 papers for estates duty were lodged and compliance granted.

The registries: The Commercial Registry had several significant accomplishments for the year 2018. The Deeds and Commercial Registries Authority (DCRA)'s website was launched. This website enables the general public to have access to the services provided by the registry. One of the key features of the website is that the necessary forms needed to register businesses and incorporate companies can be downloaded. The Commercial Registry can now boast that the two sub registries, in Berbice and Essequibo, can now connect to the database server in Georgetown via the wider area network. The registries can now access and input data regarding businesses and companies into the database located at the Commercial Registry, Georgetown. The Guyana e-registry system was also developed and is stored at the CARICOM data centres. The credentials for the database along with the universal resource locator (URL) were submitted to the registry in order for staff to begin to use the system. The registry earned \$183 million or roughly \$184 million for the period January to November 2018. It has done very well, too.

The documents filed for the period January to October are as follows and are instructive: local companies application – 418, foreign companies application – 16, new business name – 9,813 – check and see who made these registrations - business names renewed – 8,619. I do not know what all this talk is about that we are not doing well. Why are all these people coming to register businesses in Guyana if it was a doom and gloom situation? We all know that Guyana is the place to come. Why? It is because we are on the cusp of transformation. We are rich. That cannot change. What is important for us to be rich though is to ensure who distributes the wealth. It must not be those who distribute it in those 23 years where most of the country was impoverished.

The Deeds Registry is mandated to efficiently and expeditiously administer the laws enacted by Parliament affecting land by way of transport and leases. What is important about this registry is its discharging of its responsibilities and they have earned significant revenue for the state.

11.38 a.m.

The Deeds Registry, Demerara earned \$654,167,948, the Berbice Registry earned \$56,610,656, and the Essequibo Registry earned over \$14 million. This brings the grand total earned by the Deeds Registry for this year to \$725,255,405. This sum can be compared to last year January to October figure of \$683,888,000, so there is definitely an improvement and increase.

Land Registry - when we took Office, this was the most heavily criticised institution of the State. I am pleased to report that the issue of backlog, which typified conversations concerning the Land Registry, is now a thing of the past as matters are now being dealt with in a timely manner. For the most part, the Registry has been achieving a two-week time span after date of filing, for delivery of titles.

Excellence of service has been the watch word of the Land Registry and towards this end, there have been some major developments, namely the registers in the Berbice and Georgetown Registries have been scanned and the process of uploading same to the main system and restoration of registers has been completed. At the Head Office Branch, the Registry's profile has been enhanced by the launching of its website. Computer terminals have been acquired, such that, as intended, at the commencement of 2019, each member of staff will be able to access the digitised records, thereby providing responses to the public.

The transactions that were completed for this reporting period are: transfers - 1,413; re-issued titles - 236; mortgages - 1,393; and miscellaneous - 4,041. The Guyanese people and foreigners have found Guyana to be a place for doing business and are complying with our legal requirements to get their registration and the necessary documents that would give them *locus standi* to do business in this beautiful country of ours and they are flocking in droves.

Anti-Corruption – this is something so good that we could actually deal with it now. We were regaled from day one of this budget. All of a sudden, us being only three plus years in Office are

accused of being the corrupt ones, when we know that the corrupt ones are on the other side. I am not speaking idly, I will give you the facts.

The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Government (APNU/AFC) continues to have combatting corruption on the front burner, unlike what they are trying to say, which is that we forgot about it. The Government has been working to fight against all forms of corruption and our policy is that corruption must be eliminated. This Government recognises that corruption hinders economic growth and development and undermines public confidence in the Administration. That is what they are trying to do by making these false allegations, unsupported by evidence as the Hon. Member on the other side likes to say. The Government, therefore, continues to strengthen its anti-corruption mechanisms and to formulate strategies to ensure that all Guyanese, not some, can enjoy the 'good life'.

This year, the Attorney General's (AG's) Chambers continued its anti-corruption sensitisation seminars. The team visited Bartica in Region 7, Vreed-en-Hoop in Region 3, and Fort Wellington in Region 5. These seminars form part of the Government's anti-corruption policies and raised awareness on the protection afforded witnesses and other persons who assist in the investigation and prosecution of perpetrators. To this end, presentations were made by the Drafting Division of the Ministry of Legal Affairs on the State Assets Recovery Act, the Witness Protection Act and the Protected Disclosures (Whistle-blower) Act. Additionally, the State Assets Recovery Agency (SARA) and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), joined the Attorney General Chamber's team and were involved in the seminars and gave presentations on the role of SARA and corruption related offences. These sensitisation seminars will continue in 2019 in the other regions.

The State Assets Recovery Agency - SARA's mandate is to recover stolen national wealth. The agency has been working on 25 cases referred to them by the Police Legal Advisor, plus other referrals. Presently, the agency has five cases, which are 90% complete and are only being held up because requests for information have not yet been fulfilled. Several agencies are still going through mountains of old documents to find the relevant pieces of information which are needed to wrap up cases. There are another 12 cases, with a possible recovery value of over \$2 billion, that are about 70% complete.

The State Assets Recovery Agency, working with National Industrial & Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL), was able to have three pieces of Government property repossessed from delinquent leases. Two of these properties are again on the market and interested parties are prepared to pay 300% - 400% more than the previous tenants, which means that these properties were rented at a gross under value. The third piece of property was sold to the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) for over \$60M. The State Assets Recovery Agency, working alongside the various agencies which have the responsibility for lands, was able to provide information, which led to the following actions: one - the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC) repossessed approximately two million acres of forestry land; two - the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission (GLSC) repossessed approximately 80 house lots; and three - the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) was able to repossess 100 acres of land, plus several smaller pieces.

Further, SARA, working with the Ministries and regions led to improved inventories of equipment and the repossession and reallocation of more than 30 buildings across the country. If we are recovering buildings, it means that these buildings were being falsely occupied by the persons found in them.

The Ministry of Legal Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, working with SARA, are seeking to recover revenue loss through gold shipments leaving Guyana. There have been several cases where amounts declared at the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) were vastly different to what was declared at John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK), in New York. The State Assets Recovery Agency is presently seeking cooperation with Brazil to identify and, if possible, recover gold held in Brazil due to illegal activities by Guyanese smugglers. Since corruption is at the root cause of Government property being stolen, the less the nation loses, the less the need to recover. Hence, SARA has made meaningful contributions to the anti-corruption efforts.

Available figures cited in a series of articles written between 2012 - 2014, note the time, show that the Government of Guyana was losing billions per annum in procurement fraud. Tens of billions were lost in illicit capital flight and due to the activities of the underground economy. While the analysts in SARA are still working to obtain current figures using three international indices as references, they have moved, not slipped, several points in the right direction. They have moved, not slipped. [*Interruption*] Did the people in Linden get their money back? We will talk about that.

Prince Akeem listen carefully, the Special Organised Crime Unit's (SOCU's) core function continues to be focused on money laundering, weapons of mass destruction, proliferation and terrorist financing, given that the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force's (CFATF's) 4th Round of Anti-Money Laundering and Countering Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) Mutual Evaluations in 2022 requires more convictions...

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

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Sir... to show sufficient progress. The work of SOCU has been very important because, coming out of their forensic audits, there were 18 submissions of money laundering terrorist financial referrals to SOCU, inclusive of Mr. Shervington Lovell. This has resulted in several criminal and civil files for prosecution. The cases referred for prosecution during this period includes the Guyana Bank for Trade and Industry (GBTI) case; the Omar Shariff case where the former Permanent Secretary (PS) of the Office of the President (OP), not Ministry of the Presidency, is being investigated for \$20 million, there is \$34 billion; the Guyana Gold Board (GGB) - Ashni Singh and Winston Brassington for eight charges of misconduct; and also there is the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB) case - 132 counts of keeping fraudulent accounts of body corporate or public company. [*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members...

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I trust that I will get back my time, please.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we do not do ourselves any good if we keep on shouting.

Mr. Williams: There is nothing to the case in Court. We are stating, we are not examining the contents of the case. [**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]] You are not a lawyer.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Williams?

Mr. Williams: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: If any matter is presently engaging the attention of the Court, it ought not to be the subject of comment.

Mr. Williams: We are not commenting on the case, we are stating that for these cases, persons have been charged and are before the court. We are not doing anything else.

Mr. Speaker: Please, proceed.

Mr. Williams: We are not talking from the top of our heads, these matters are reported in the press. We are not examining the contents, we are merely stating the work that SOCU has done. They are receiving taxpayers' money to operate and so they must be accountable and transparent. We are not going into whether they are guilty or not. They must know if they are guilty.

We have 132 counts in the GRDB case for keeping fraudulent accounts of body corporate, involving \$428,328,940. The Guyanese people must know. In that case, there are several defendants including Mr. Dharamkumar Seeraj and Mr. Nigel Dharamlall. There are also other Hon. Member, Mr. Anil Nandlall involving one count of larceny by a bailee and the Hon. Member Mr. Irfaan Ali, for 19 counts for Pradoville 2 - \$174,824,388. [*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Williams, I must tell you that we cannot mention names. If you say that there are cases, let that suffice. The matter is before the Court, then we should respect that.

Mr. Williams: I am guided, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Please, proceed.

Mr. Williams: Thank you. What we are saying is those hollow accusations of corruption that were attempted against this fledgling Government, a three-year-old Government, as against the hardened 23 years that they had; it is important to show that there is nothing to show, whereas, in relation to the 23 years, there are lots and counting. There are more investigations that have been held.

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

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Cabinet has approved that we adopt The Hague Children's Convention and the Hague's Apostille Convention, so the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will ratify those conventions.

In closing, we must remind the people of Guyana that... [Mr. Nandlall: You did not say anything Mr. Williams.] You ran, and I spoke about you. You would have heard.

In concluding, the achievements of our Ministry, as outlined today, are clear that we have been working assiduously towards ensuring that the transformation and empowerment takes place for the benefit of all Guyanese, not a President, his family, friends, and cronies.

For 2019, we will continue to ensure that the Guyanese people benefit from a justice system that meets their needs and that the budget of this Government, delivered in the House by the Hon. Minister of Finance, will allow us to fulfil our mandate. Therefore, I commend this budget for passage through this honourable House. I thank you. [*Applause*] (11.52 a.m.)

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. Hon. Members, we are five minutes to the lunch hour. I will propose that we take the suspension now and return at 12.55 p.m. There is one announcement to be made, which is that the Standing Committee for Constitutional Reform will meet at midday.

Sitting suspended at 11.55 p.m.

1.23 p.m.

Siting resumed at 1.23 p.m.

Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs [Mr. Greenidge] (1.23 p.m.): Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members of the National Assembly, I bid you all a good afternoon. I will start by saying that I wish to congratulate, most warmly, the Hon. Minister of Finance and his team for the impressive and comprehensive Budget 2019 Presentation. For that reason, I am, therefore, pleased to support the motion before us and to give further assurance that we at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would work to ensure that we discharge the mandate entrusted to us and those aspects of our work funded under this Budget 2019.

I would like to start my comments by saying that, I am proposing today to touch on a number of aspects of foreign policies that are not normally the subject of our presentations in this House, some of which seem to be the topic of, perhaps, some misunderstanding. I start by making my comments on the implications for foreign policy of the development of the petroleum sector.

As you know, the ExxonMobil Corporation announced this week that, on the basis on its new Puma 1 Well discovery, coupled with a 25% increase in its projections from their finding, the reserve estimates have been raised from four million barrels of oil equivalent to five billion. Puma 1 is the ExxonMobil Corporation's tenth discovery in the Stabroek Block. One seasoned observer has described this five-year cycle of discovery, development and production along this block, which is to lead, as the Hon. Minister of Finance has indicated, to five floating production storage offloading platforms by 2025, generating some 750,000 barrels a day as nothing short of spectacular.

A recent report issued by the renowned research firm Wood MacKenzie has termed the ExxonMobil Corporation, Guyana's exploits, as one of the most impressive exploration campaigns of recent times. If these developments alone materialise on time, the Government of Guyana could be expected to earn annual revenues that would be a multiple of our current Gross Domestic Product (GDP), even if the price of oil stays around \$50 per a barrel.

I make this point just to emphasis or underscore that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been charged with accelerating the process of integrating elements of the emerging petroleum and gas sector into the overall architecture of foreign policy. One such element is collaboration with other petroleum producing nations, multilateral entities and others, to share their experience and to have the benefit of the analysis of the petroleum market and the production processes with which they are familiar.

A most urgent need for the country, even in its established industrial and agricultural industries, is the shortage of physical and socio-economic infrastructure. The provision of infrastructure is an area in which Guyana has struggled to secure meaningful funding over the last four decades, except in perhaps what might be described as fitful financing. The development of the petroleum, especially the gas section, will not materialised unless we are able to arrange such funding in a manner and with a timing consistent with the Government's approved plans of the operators.

The Government of Guyana is currently considering this issue, which also has implications for industry diversification and our ability to secure and maintain control over the new commanding heights of the emerging economy. It will not be achieved if the ill-informed and political jaundiced

views being peddled by what distinguished Professor Clive Thomas calls the Guyanese media's the peddling of wholesale and retail anxiety among the public.

Most of our traditional bilateral partners have shown little interest in rendering assistance in this context, and by that, I mean, in terms of the infrastructure funding. So, we have to turn to non-traditional partners as well as supporting bilateral and other agencies - private sectors and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) - to secure funding for the development of that aspect of infrastructure. To this end, the Ministry has been consulting with a variety of agencies ranging from the Global Liquefied Petroleum Gas Partnership (GLPGP), the Energy Transportation Group (ETG), which are entities focusing and providing assistance to developing countries. For example, to plan finance and implement national scale availability and the use of liquify petroleum, as well as providing assistance on energy logistics and infrastructure project developments.

We are working, also, with Japan-Caribbean Climate Change Partnership (J-CCCP) of Japan, which is funding pre-feasibility studies, and an oil and gas master plan in relation to the development of downstream activities in Guyana. In that regard, I make mention of the Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) which are constantly confusing the press with 'I reuse' I believe. MoUs are a tool which could facilitate collaboration, including joint ventures, the promotion of joint ventures, and those devices identified by the Minister of Finance, such as Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) for downstream activities, which the industry might find appropriate and feasible, as well as profitable. We are pursuing this, prior to and alongside the engagement of relevant agencies with the external partners.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will be looking at opportunities and avenues offered by existing international regional agencies to see what they could offer. We are particularly interested in seeing how these entities might help with identifying the pillars that are necessary to support such a large and complicated sector.

Perhaps, I could just pause a second to make mention of a feature which has characterised the debate in Guyana, in which some observers have sought to make arrangement for the prevention or handling of oil spills, for example, as a condition for their support for exploration and production. I would say that, whilst the risk of oil spills are real, no single developing state has ever been called upon to meet the cost of a petroleum spill in its entirety.

In fact, states insulate themselves from the risk by the time one devise of insurance - industry insurance as well as national disaster arrangements. I make mention of the 1992 International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund and also the Supplementary Fund. I want to say that Guyana would be no exception in this regard. In that context, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has already presented to Cabinet, recommendations which Cabinet has accepted, regarding the international agreements and conventions to which we need to be signatories in order to benefit from such protection. We have also had discussions with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago with a view to seeing where we could collaborate; where we could get an insight into how they are handling their risks, and where the risks between the countries may overlap, how the two countries could tackle this possible eventuality.

What I wanted to say is that, we would also, when the time comes, advise Cabinet to have the relevant agencies on the internal front put in place the appropriate regulations. Meaning that the Maritime Administration Department (MARAD), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) and the others may wish to consider requiring tankers operating in Guyana waters to contribute to funds and have contracts with the Civil Defence Commission (CDC), for example, and Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CEDMA), to ensure that the disaster relieve arrangements are properly in place on the internal side as well, not only in relations to the international front.

I want to say that, obviously, our work in this regards was not simply a question of joining the relevant, what you might call, Petrol Diplomacy Organisations, which is what I had been talking about or examining our standing in international bodies, but also determining what new internal institutions we might find it necessary to create in order to advance our own foreign policy.

So, in closing my comments on that chapter, as it were, I want to say that, contrary to what seems to be perception in some of the press, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is charged both with having an interphase with the international multinational corporation, international organisational multinational organisations and the like, to ensure that they understand our position, they are aware of our laws and regulations. By the same token, we will comment upon positions taken internally, whether it is by the media or any element of the media, to ensure that they do not misrepresent or project to the international community an image of Guyana, which is incorrect, let alone one which is irresponsible. I would not say more on that.

I want also to say that the post-independent governance of Guyana, for example, for one relatively recent period – relatively short period, have taken a nationalist position on the operation of multinational corporations in Guyana. We have learnt, I think, of the limitations of some of the tools we have used in past, whether they be nationalisation or very tight regulations. What I think, from where I sit, we try to convey to the multinational corporations is that they have a responsibility to live within Guyana’s law and to adhere to those laws. We will try to ensure that regulations that are in place have a light touch and are relevant enough to ensure that their performance is mutually beneficial, and that they operate with an eye on the sensitivities and the legal requirements in the country. I am thinking here of the current debate that is taking place in relations to honouring or respecting labour laws and industrial relations practices. I do not want to say more on that, except to say that, of course, we would be expecting all operators to recognise that we do have also a history of working with multinational corporations, and in the past, had similarly require them to adhere to our laws and regulations.

If I may turn briefly to the question of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Guyana, which is the usual fear of such presentations in this House. Of course, everyone is painfully aware that we continue to face challenges along our borders, both to the east and west. In 2018, following heightened diplomatic efforts, we were able to secure a decision, where predecessors on both side of the House, I believe, sought to achieve over the years. That decision has been to refer to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the contention by Venezuela, that the 1899 Arbitral Award is invalid.

1.38 p.m.

On 30th January of this year, the United Nations Secretary General (UNSG), António Guterres, informed the Presidents of the Corporative Republic of Guyana and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela that he had:

“...chosen the International Court of Justice as the means that is now to be used for its solution.”

This position was arrived at after exhausting all the options under the 1966 Geneva Agreement for a peaceful resolution of the controversy. In accordance with this decision, Guyana filed its application with the ICJ on 29th March, requesting the Court to adjudge and declare on several

issues, including the fact that the 1899 Arbitral Award is valid and binding on both Guyana and Venezuela.

On 19th November, in accordance with an order of the Court, Guyana submitted its memorial on the jurisdiction of the Court. The Court has established 18th April, 2019, for the submission of the counter memorial by Venezuela. We have no doubt that the Court has jurisdiction to resolve the controversy that has plagued our relations with Venezuela and undermined our ability to develop our sovereign territory and the natural resources within our frontiers. We are confident that the ‘rule of law’ will prevail in this arena.

Now that the matter is before the ICJ, observers may be tempted to ask what, if anything, is left for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to do. In relation to Venezuela, Venezuela remains our neighbour, and so, we still have to work closely with them on matters of mutual interest, where possible, within the framework of several regional and international arrangements and institutions in which we share common membership. Notwithstanding the ICJ process, Guyana remains open to pursuing meaningful, functional cooperation, whenever the opportunity arises. We have sought to do just this in relation to challenges we face, in relation to health, for example, as you know, the problems of measles, malaria and other infectious diseases and threatening pandemics.

This honourable House would also be aware that Venezuela, at the highest political level – meaning in its own National Assembly – has not accepted the direction of the Secretary-General in this matter to the court, so I will leave that there.

Venezuela, in the meantime, continues to experience a quite significant outflow of Venezuelans to its immediate, as well as its distant neighbours. In recent years, or in recent months even, Guyana has itself been the destination of many thousands of migrants. Of course, I think we ought to acknowledge and not forget that Guyana itself, over the last three or four decades, has been the origin of many migrants to distant and near shores. In fashioning our own policies and reactions to the movements of persons, we have to bear that in mind. The people crossing our borders will not only be and have not only been Venezuelans, but also Cubans, for example, and Haitians. In the distant past, we have had significant movements of migrants from the Republic of Suriname, which I think people forget and which is something that we should not. We have sought to address these regular, as well as irregular flows across our territories by putting in place mechanisms that

avoid the undesirable feature of criminalising ordinary persons, or those migrants forced to move, simply for infringements of relatively routine immigration laws. I do not want to take that too far, but I am saying that a part of our goal here is to try and ensure that we use means, and whilst they protect our security, our national interest and our citizens, we do not, perhaps, go overboard in terms of criminalising those that move for reasons that we can understand politically.

On the other hand, our relations with our Caribbean Community (CARICOM) sister state Suriname is a warm relationship, but it is not without its challenges. Those challenges, I might add, are not without solutions, but the challenges do require political will and good faith, and most importantly, the full implementation of agreements that we have signed with the Government of Suriname. I would like to emphasise that the Border Commission of both states – we have a joint Border Commission – meet and work towards developing recommendations for solutions to the outstanding border issues between Guyana and Suriname, a resolution based on the diplomatic history of boundary creation from the 1930s in particular. We have to be mindful of the fact that the agreements reached between ourselves and Suriname are, on occasions, made inoperable, or perhaps, I should say barely operable. This is because some agencies in Suriname mistakenly view their own laws as being superior or not consistent with the agreements that they have signed with us. And so, this is an area that we have to work on; it is an area in which the Border Commission need to attend to. As I say it, they are not insoluble. If the political will is there, they can be resolved.

Both Guyana and Suriname have much to gain from cooperation, and we are the only two geographically contiguous CARICOM member states. Obviously, there is a great deal of scope for cooperation in agriculture, health, mining, combatting illegal activities, transboundary crime and so forth. These remain top priorities, but I would say that so are matters related to the Canawaima Ferry Service and the good-faith implementation of the cross-border protocol. These are very important to the services that we jointly commit to provide. What has been agreed to, including the operations of Guyanese minibus operators, for example, should be honoured in Guyana and Suriname, are to make progress towards greater cooperation for our mutual benefit.

In recognition of these challenges, the two Presidents did agree late last year to put in place a specific mechanism which will allow for consultations at the highest level through envoys that

have been appointed on both sides. The arrangements or mechanics for giving effect to those appointments are still being developed.

Colleagues and Mr. Speaker, as regards the maritime space, Guyana will be receiving technical assistance from the Commonwealth Secretariat to draft the necessary regulations and orders to provide the legal framework to support the Maritime Zone Act of 2010. Many of my colleague Ministers have a role to play in this exercise, and when we have put our heads together, we will be able to ensure that there is a framework, as regards the infrastructure for the development and expansion of the emerging sectors, off shore of Guyana can be in place.

Issues related to navigational rights in Guyana's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), the limits of our maritime zones, economic jurisdiction, the management of living marine resources in our EEZ, and the protection of the marine environment and a Marine Scientific Research Programme. You can see from that list that we are speaking of the work of many of the agencies in Guyana, and many of the Ministries will be required to contribute to that.

In this the 50th Anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations, we have a year of extraordinary significance in the history of our relations with the Federative Republic of Brazil. There were several high-level exchange visits and the convening of meetings of various mechanisms for bilateral cooperation. These covered a wide range of areas, success in which could only reach down to the benefit of our peoples. Worthy of mention in this regard is the completion of the drilling, which was mentioned by my Colleagues – the drilling of potable water by way of eight artesian wells in the South Rupununi by the Brazilian military. This is a process initiated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in collaboration with Itamarati on the other side. We will continue to build our long standing good neighbourly relations with Brazil.

It is, of course, both a destination and a consumer market, so it has the potential for economic cooperation, which is pretty extensive. Within the next five years for example, Brazil, which is already the world's leading exporter of soya, is scheduled to displace the United States of America (USA) as the main global exporter of corn.

The point I am making is that we will be working, and we are seeking to collaborate with our neighbour, not only in providing transport access to the Atlantic, but also acquiring some of the

management and technology skills that they have exhibited and exploited in order to achieve these feats in the agricultural arena.

As regards CARICOM, I wish to refer to the fact that the maintenance of our territorial integrity is largely a function of the management of our foreign relations. In the management of our foreign relations, CARICOM looms very large. It is the centre of what we might call a concentric circle of international relations. We continue to appreciate the value of that relationship, even as we participate actively to try to strengthen CARICOM itself, especially by way of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME), which we believe is important to CARICOM's future, and is critical to its economic well-being and social welfare in the future. The decisions taken at the recently concluded meeting of the Prime Ministerial Sub-Committee in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago are very valuable in this regard.

For a long time, the discussions at the level of the CARICOM Heads have tended to suggest that there has been a stalemate, that we have come to a cul-de-sac. I think what you will see in the declaration issued by the Heads two days ago, and in the conclusions of CARICOM Heads, is a commitment to moving forward on many of the areas that appear to have been stalled in recent times. For example, there has been a decision to expand the category of skilled nationals to include agricultural workers, beauticians, security guards, and some other areas. This is in relation to the movement of people as well as other areas. We are amongst the states that signed the protocol on contingent rights and the declaration to provisionally apply that protocol. Contingent rights, I might add, are rights granted to the CARICOM nationals, and to the spouse and dependants of such nationals, if the principle CARICOM person has exercised the rights of establishment, provision of services, movement of capital or free movement of skills.

At the CARICOM level, I would also say that we have worked assiduously with a number of the member territories of CARICOM, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados and Cuba, in a bid to pursue the very goals that I set out at the very beginning, in other words, to collaborate in a manner that would ensure that we can take advantage of the skills within the CARICOM region, of the markets in CARICOM and of the opportunities now being opened up in Guyana.

1.53 p.m.

Some of those are specific to the oil and gas sector.

For the wider CARICOM Region, in relation to Cuba for example, as you know, we have had long, deep and quite fruitful political and cultural relations with Cuba. We are moving to a stage where we are working on the economic relations with this very important political partner. At the level of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Embassy in Havana, for example, you would have seen that considerable success has been achieved in opening the Cuban market, again, to paddy and rice as well as in the area of pharmaceuticals. So, those efforts have borne fruit and I think as a nation we have to ready ourselves to be enterprising and innovative in trying to deepen collaboration with our partners within the traditional and widening CARICOM fora.

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

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the Americas, we have sought, also, to deepen our relations. You would have seen, in recent times, a lot more effort being made, especially in relation to Chile in the areas of mining and governance; Argentina on the cultural side; Colombia in technical cooperation and cooperation possibly in the agro-industry; and Mexico and elsewhere.

I want to say that does not mean that we have forgotten the longstanding ties with our traditional partners such as Canada and the United States of America (USA) with which we enjoy a close and good relationships.

The work in relation to Europe is well-known in the context of Brexit and Cotonou. In the Middle East and the Pacific, a considerable amount of effort is being made, especially to take advantage of offers they have made to collaborate with us in the new areas that we are developing, together with other areas of common interest, such as climate change in small and vulnerable economies and so forth.

In relation to the collaboration with Africa, diplomatic relations and work on the political side can be expected to be deepened and we will see some effort, as with the Middle East, to open either additional embassies or honorary consulates as well as other dimensions of cooperation.

I close with a comment on the question of working to enhance our cooperation with the diaspora and, finally, on the question of capacity building of the Ministry. The Government of Guyana firmly believes that our country's foreign policy will be best served by a core of professionals,

who collectively comprise a diverse but relevant pool of skills. As such, throughout the year, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has ensured that Guyana has benefited from our participation in numerous regional and international fora, dealing with issues which are relevant to our own foreign policy focus. The Ministry has conducted several in-house training programmes at the Foreign Service Institute and has been able to organise, with the assistance of bilateral, training for our staff abroad.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs remains committed to working towards securing a better life for all Guyanese by safeguarding our sovereign rights and interests and working with like-minded States in the international community. We aim to build alliances in pursuit of our national development objectives. To this end, I wish to commend to the House *Budget 2019*, which is before us and which would help to fund and facilitate the work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in pursuing these goals.

I thank you very much for your attention. *[Applause]* (1.58 p.m.)

Leader of the Opposition [Mr. Jagdeo] (1.58 p.m.): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Members of the Government withdrew from the Chamber.]

I, on behalf of the People's Progressive Party, express our deepest wishes and prayers and that of all Guyanese for President David Granger, who is now receiving treatment in Cuba. We hope that he will get the best treatment and return to Guyana in good health to continue to serve our country.

I, also, right at the very outset, as is customary, would like to say to the Minister of Foreign Affairs that we support all of his efforts and that of the Government of Guyana in ensuring that our territorial integrity is preserved. There is no equivocation on our part where our national patrimony is concerned. This land, all of it, belongs to all of our people, regardless of our politics. He will continue to have our full support.

My Colleagues who preceded me addressed the goals of this Budget, as outlined in the theme on the front cover of the Budget Speech. I think that every single one of them has pointed out that no part of the theme outlined, *Transforming Our Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities*, would be achieved through the Budget as it is currently configured. In fact, we believe, and we have demonstrated over the past five days, that not only are these goals not

achievable, that is transforming our economy, empowering people and building sustainable communities, but that the measures outlined in the Budget will run counter to those objectives and goals.

For anyone to have an understanding of the state of the economy and the future economic well-being of the country, they have to do a more in-depth analysis of the Budget and it starts largely with the four macro accounts. Mr. Speaker, if you and people across Guyana look at this, as some of my Colleagues did, you would see the most salient features of every one of these accounts. They paint a picture and they tell you about what will happen in the future in Guyana.

In the monetary sector, the most salient feature is the domination of Government borrowing from the banking system. The second dominant feature is the 'running down' of our net foreign assets from the banking system. These are two very important variables when one looks at the well-being of the economy and the future of Guyana.

Under the balance of payment, what do we see? What are the dominant features? There is a massive deterioration in the overall deficit of the balance of payment, defying all the rosy projections of the Minister. As a consequence of that, we have seen a depletion of our reserves because that balance of payment gap has to be filled by 'running down' the reserves. So, one would see that feature being demonstrated there.

On the fiscal accounts, we have seen a massive increase in taxes and revenue collection and that has already been spoken about extensively. We have seen a huge growth in expenditure, but mainly recurrent, non-productive expenditure. I would come back to every one of those accounts and analyse them in greater detail in a moment.

Then, in the real sector or the national aggregates, what have we seen? Again, if one just opens the first few pages of the Budget Speech, one would see that almost every sector of our economy has suffered from lower growth or anaemic growth. It is reflected in several variables. I am going to go to the variables themselves. So, that is the static picture, that is what has happened. It is very ominous for the future when the four major accounts, which are used to analyse the well-being of the economy, now and in the future, are all exhibiting these negative traits. That cannot be good.

We would have expected that the Minister of Finance would have come here - and rather than spend five hours reading out how many percentages a sector has increased by and largely going through this tedious recital of routine data, which puts us no closer to solutions - and said to us how he was going to address these problems that I have just mentioned and what policy measures he would put in place to address a reversal of our fortunes in these areas. That did not happen. We got a budget chock full of useless statistics that any child could have put together. Then, we heard a lot about the philosophical underpinning of the Budget, which is supposed to be this Green State Development Strategy. Then, we got a listing of several infrastructural projects, most of them culled from the National Development Strategy. Most of them are in there. I plan to come back to some of these issues.

We are engaged in a debate and the Government - this point has already been made - is utterly tone deaf. This Government has elevated incompetence to a virtue. It is impervious to criticism and advice because they think they know it all. The fact is that our country is heading for disaster, given their philosophy of management of our resources.

What we have had and are suffering from...and these are not immediate consequences alone because many of those have been felt already by our people through higher cost of living, loss of jobs and increased criminality in the country, *et cetera*. It is the damaging policies that will harm us in the long term. So, when one looks at how we are badly served through incompetent negotiations, they are also damaging our future prospects at growth.

We heard the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Finance speak about the oil and gas sector. But for a moment, nobody talked about the incompetent negotiation that led to this lopsided agreement with ExxonMobil Corporation. I believe that ExxonMobil Corporation went into the room and placed its maximum demand on the table. On our side, we had a couple of people who are neophytes in this sector and who did not seek proper legal, technical, and financial advice as part of the team. Now, they even have difficulty in telling us who comprised the team that negotiated with ExxonMobil Corporation. This is a company that has a \$400 billion Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or revenue base. We have a GDP of \$4 billion. Their GDP is 100 times more than our entire economy. They hired the best lawyers and the best technical people, and we walked into that room to negotiate, putting the future of all Guyana and the hopes of all of our people at risk through incompetence and eagerness to please.

2.08 p.m.

We went in the room, the people put their maximum demand on the table and what happened? We agreed, immediately, to the maximum demand. We are stuck, now, with a lopsided contract that will harm us. When they talk about \$5 billion barrels on reserves, every time ExxonMobil Corporation makes a new discovery, we weep a bit more because our share of that will not change. They are so proud to recite the successes of ExxonMobil Corporation, but they are still, until now, unwilling to come clean with the Guyanese public about how we are going to benefit from the proceeds of oil.

I saw the Minister of Foreign Affairs chastising the Guyanese media and civil society for spreading ill-informed views about the oil and gas sector. He said we are damaging our international reputation. But, in a democracy and a free society, where there is a free civil society and an independent media, this is normal. You do not expect them to carry the Government line only. They will investigate, and, in their investigations, the Government has been found very wanting, from concealing the contract, to concealing the bonus, to making spurious reasons for not releasing the contract. One time, they said it had national security implications - that Venezuela would invade Guyana, or something like that, if they released this contract. They hid it away for over a year using that as the excuse. Then, what happened? The contract became public and nothing happened. We did not suffer grave consequences or national security consequences because the Guyanese people suddenly had the contract. It was just an excuse. Then, we had them denying the existence of the USD \$18 million. A Minister of this Government, the Minister of Finance, said we never received it, nor did we ask for it. A year later, we discovered that they had received it and that it was in a bank account which was not part of the Central Government reserves or part of the Consolidated Fund. That bank account was set up by the Ministry of Finance since a year and a half prior. The denial came for a year and a half. I was just looking at the Natural Resources Fund Bill 2018, which was placed on our desk. It has some penalties and offences. At Part XI, Section 45, it states:

“A person who fails to comply with any obligation to publish information, provided for in this Act ...”

Which is how much money he or she receives.

“...is liable on conviction on indictment to a fine of five million dollars and to imprisonment for three years.”

If this Act were in place then, some of the Ministers would have been in jail already. In fact, quite a few of them who denied the existence of the USD \$18 million. Then, the same penalties are there for people who disclose information, and this is the Government that talks about protecting whistle-blowers. I will come back to that.

Since the last person on our side who spoke was Hon. Member Nandlall and there were two speakers who came after him, right now, it behoves me to respond to those speakers before I get into the meat of my presentation. This is a debate. This is not reading of speeches in Parliament. This is not Ministers making statements here. This is a debate. You raise something, we have to respond to it.

So, I would like us to look at what the Hon. Vice President Greenidge said. He chastised, as I said, the media for exposing what took place with the ExxonMobil Corporation contract. He is very unhappy about it and he quoted Professor Clive Thomas as saying that we are inciting anxieties among our people and in the international community by peddling false information. Professor Clive Thomas was the one who suggested that each Guyanese family should get US\$5,000. We have 200,000 households, if you believe the census. That means a billion dollars USD has to be distributed every year to the Guyanese public. It is because US\$5,000 by 200,000 gives a billion. We are only collecting, in the first few years, USD \$300 million from ExxonMobil Corporation, but we will give out a billion dollars. Then, he went on to say this is only 2-5% of revenue, when it is 300% of revenue. Who are inciting anxieties among our people by peddling falsehoods? It is not the media. It is many in the Government and one hears it consistently when they paint this rosy picture about the future of Guyana. We heard from the Minister of Foreign Affairs who told us about his numerous engagements in the international arena to get us into a network that will oversee this transformation of oil and gas - the petrol diplomacy. I have with me a letter that the President sent to many institutions. The President said in that letter and I quote the last sentence of the letter:

“foreign and local agencies, corporations and financial institutions are urged to refer all oil and gas matters to the Department of Energy, Ministry of the Presidency.”

How does he reconcile this with the letter from His Excellency, President David Granger, referring all matters by all international organisations to his Ministry? Is he poaching on the sector? Maybe, at some other time when the Minister is in the country, he travels quite a lot representing us, he may want to address that question.

The Minister spoke about cooperation with the diaspora. In this Budget, the Government decimated the re-migrant's scheme. They went, before the elections in 2015, and spoke about inclusion and about even having a Ministry for the diaspora; that people should come back to Guyana and they should invest here and live here; we need their skills, *et cetera*. After the elections, like with other people, they promptly forgot the diaspora. Now, we hear it resurfacing once again.

In this Budget, the Minister reduces the tax concessions. For people who live abroad and who are coming back to Guyana, previously, if they were to bring a vehicle here, they would have gotten the duty-free concession on their vehicle. Now, he is giving them a tax credit of only \$5 million. That limits the type of vehicle they could bring into the country. Many of the people who are migrating to Guyana and who have vehicles cannot bring their vehicles home. He reduced the period of qualification for students who live abroad from four years to three years, but they still would not benefit from the generous concessions that were there before because he has reduced the concessions. That they are interested in the diaspora is, again, a fallacy.

May I say a bit about the Hon. Member, Basil Williams? Mr. Basil Williams spoke about Marxism, Leninism, and negation of negation and he failed to look at this Government. This Government has grown the State sector to the detriment of the private sector by multiples, by exponents, since it assumed office. It is crowding out the private sector from every sphere of activity. Just look at the Budget itself. If a body could be characterised as socialist it is this one. This is parasitic socialism. This is not socialism designed to help people. This is parasitic socialism that they, over there, are practicing.

I know that the People's National Congress (PNC) has huge problems within its ranks. So, we witnessed a trend. Every one of the speakers who contested the position for chairperson of the PNC are jostling for position now. Each is trying to sound even more strident than the other in how they could respond to a base, a base that lived maybe 30 years back. It is so narrow and so clouded. It is only a few people because the whole country has moved on. The Hon. Joseph Harmon

had his moment in Sophia. Hon. Volda Lawrence had her moment at a party gathering. And, today, was the Hon. Attorney General's turn to sound very strident. If they want to know why they were defeated so badly, it is not because people in the base believed that they were being discriminated against. It is because they have seen this Government operate for nearly three years. There is this fallacy somewhere going around. In five months', this Government will enter its fifth year in office. This is the fifth budget of this Government. How many more budgets do we need to show the trend of what will be happening in the future? On the campaign trail recently, we had to point out to people...I heard Simona Charles-Broomes begging, basically, for a chance, saying it is only three and a half years, *et cetera*. We are saying it is clear...

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you will refer to Hon. Member as Hon. Member.

Mr. Jagdeo: Yes. The Hon. Member, Simona Charles-Broomes said that it is only three and a half years. Mr. Speaker, if you have an appliance that is running well, and somebody comes and markets a new appliance for all the new features it has, and you buy that new appliance and then you find it is defective - you open the door and you find grime coming out - it is like APNU - you do not need to wait another 20 years to go back to the reliable appliance you would have already known. You have seen the nature of this Government. What more? Look at the trends. It is taxation - more taxes, taxing poor people, taxing private sector - collecting more and spending on themselves. That is it. The arrogance. People walked the street among their activists. Their activities went door-to-door in the past. The same activists cannot come and see them now. They have differentiated themselves. They have gone into a different class because now they have a big income that they took for themselves. They are living a different life. How much more do we need to see? How much more suffering are we going to go through in this country?

2.23 p.m.

As I was saying, in Hon. Member, Basil Williams' turn, he said that we decimated and marginalised the people of Linden. If anyone marginalised Linden, it is the People's National Congress (PNC) and the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) Governments. In 1992, when we got into Office...and I have to repeat it here because it is pandering, once again, to a bigoted notion that the People's Progressive Party (PPP) managed Guyana for only a particular group of

people. They are falling back on based instinct once again and that is why I have to repeat what I have said in this House. In 1992, when we took Government, already the bauxite industry in Linden was on the verge of collapse. The Government, at that time, hired a company called Minproc Engineers Limited to determine whether it could restructure the bauxite industry and, if it could not, not close it. We had to make that decision and we said “no, we are not going to close bauxite”. We started subsidising the industry. We made sure that we kept the community programme and added people to community facilities. So, the electricity and water bills, *et cetera* were subsidised and are being subsidised until today. We spent billions of dollars every year in subsidies, not for bauxite workers, but the entire communities in Linden and Kwakwani. That is happening until today and it happened throughout the 23 years of the PPP. We did not take it. That is not for bauxite workers only. It is for the entire community.

We then took a team to Linden. We did an area study. I, personally, led that team. At that time, I was the Minister of Finance. We worked into the night meeting the communities and walking the land. As a result of that, we came up with a development plan for the area. We then got a grant from Siemens. We built roads into West Watooka to open up agricultural lands. We built a business incubator to start small businesses. We set up a small loans programme headed, at one stage, by Minister Valerie Patterson so that people in the community could have gotten small loans to start small businesses. We established a call centre there; 88 persons were working there. They lost their jobs as soon as this Government came into office. We built a new hospital. In Block 22, we built a new housing scheme. This is billions of dollars. In Amelia’s Ward, on ‘worked-out’ bauxite lands, there is a spanking new housing scheme. In Burnham Drive, there is a new water treatment plant. There are four new schools in the area. I can point to things. I can go on with a long list.

We, then, were not satisfied with that because we wanted to get more business entities to invest in that region because of the difficulties it was having as a result of PNC mismanagement that brought the industry to a collapse by 1992 when we got into office. So, we then passed, in this very House, a special incentive regime for Region 10. If persons invested in that region, it meant that they got concessions that were greater than in any other part of the country. It is because we wanted to stimulate that region.

What is their record? They are the ones, through their devaluation, who pauperised the public servants. They are the ones who, when the bauxite workers were striking, took the dogs and

teargassed them, *et cetera*. Now, suddenly, they have become the friends of Linden. What has happened in the nearly four years that they have been in office? What transformational projects have they done in Linden? Nothing. In fact, more persons have lost jobs and welfare in Linden than they had when the PPP left office. The people of Linden know this. They had a 21% turnout at the Local Government Elections. One out of every five persons voted in that region, the lowest for the whole country. That is the reality of what happened. So, who marginalised them?

What I consider another racist and bigoted statement is that we basically kept down servants, policemen, *etcetera* and we diverted all of this money. I forgot the word that he used, it means at the expense of. We put money in sugar at the expense of public servants and policemen. It is coded racism because most persons know that the majority of the workers in the sugar belt are Indo-Guyanese and those in the Police Force and Public Service are Afro-Guyanese.

But let us examine the facts. Under this Government, did the Police and the members of the Disciplined Services get the money because now Government is not spending it on sugar? The answer is no. What have they done? They have taken away that one-month tax free bonus and said that we were bribing the policemen, the firemen and the soldiers and not paying the public servants the money. They stopped the subsidies to the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo). So, you would think that if we were doing everything at the expense of the public servants, that money that they are not spending in GuySuCo will go to the Public Service, but the answer is that nothing came over. They then took the money away from the members of the Disciplined Services claiming...The Minister of Finance, in an article recently, said that we were bribing them at the expense of the rest of the Public Service. So, did the teachers get the money? The answer is no. They gave a paltry 2% increase, after the long strike, on what the teachers got in 2016. That is the fact of life.

Where has the money gone really? It has gone in more vehicles for Ministers, more extravagance, travel and celebration of national events; not the public servants. They want to polarise our country, once again, along racial lines. It will serve their purpose. That is how they see their future. It used to happen like that but people in Guyana are fed up with this. They are just fed up with this approach.

If they want to understand the success of the PPP at the recent LGE, where we got over 60%, it is because we made it clear that we have a policy of inclusion. People of every race, every religion, every gender and every class can find a home in our party. It is not about who looks like Jagdeo and who looks like Volda Lawrence. It is not like that at all. It used to be that way. This generation of APNU/PNC leaders are stuck in the rhetoric of the past. They are stuck. They are dinosaurs. They cannot relate to people out there. They are dinosaurs, a dying breed. They cannot lead our country with that jaundiced view of our future and our people. Our people do not want all of this talk. They want to see a better life for themselves and their children, and they are not delivering any of that.

We heard, also, the Hon. Member Basil Williams say - he has increased the number now – that some 800 Guyanese have been killed by the PPP. It used to be 400. They put together a list and, like with everything else, the corruption argument and everything else, they used it to their advantage. He said that Guyana became the largest killing field in the Caribbean. His Excellency the President came here and said this was the period of the troubles and he wanted to do a Commission of Inquiry (COI). We said fine. We are going to cooperate with the COI. We need to find out what happened. We would like independent commissioners and we would like to participate in the terms of reference. We know that many people on the other side were visiting the same people, the same gangsters that he spoke about, and they were the ones who tried to mobilise people to support them in a community that was harmed in many ways. Reputationally, materially and physically the residents were harmed. The people in Buxton have become the victims of this all. It is not that they were aggressors. Ninety-nine of the people who lived there lived in fear because their community was taken over by bandits with the complicity of APNU leaders. Who were the lawyers? I have looked over there. He is talking about the killing fields. Who were the lawyers who appeared for those same bandits when they were caught? Some of them are there now on the other side. Why did they not want the COI - a comprehensive one, starting with the escape of the bandits all the way to when they were apprehended or killed by the security forces? The only aspect they chose was the aspect where there was an accusation by 'Fineman' who said he did not do the Lindo Creek killing. This Government chose to set up a COI to take his word. It was limited to Lindo Creek. Everyone here would agree with me that if you want to do an inquiry like that, you would choose independent people. The sole Commissioner was the father of a Member of the Cabinet and a sitting Minister and the lawyer to the Commission

was a brother of another sitting Minister. That is the commission for you. Impartial? I made it clear what the result would be even before the Commission concluded its work and, lo and behold, that was the result. They blamed the security forces. Our soldiers and policemen, who every night have to toil and keep this country safe, got blamed and 'Fineman' was vindicated. Why did they not want to do a COI into Bartica, Agricola or Lusignan and the links there? They selectively did. This list of 400 that they produced, which has escalated to 800 now, has the policemen who were killed, innocent victims, Indo- Guyanese, Afro-Guyanese, everybody, mixed up with the bandits. This is another fallacy. They were complicit in this.

Contrast the behaviour when the bandits escaped from the prison the first time - we have an incompetent Minister; he is not here - I said that the PPP stood on the side of the security forces; that we supported our security forces to apprehend them early; and that we could not put our country at risk. Contrast that with their behaviour in this period. The people who escaped from prison, who killed innocent people - a baby, I do not want to go graphic, but I saw the images - and who mercilessly killed children, *etcetera*, were called "freedom fighters". Contrast the behaviour. It will tell you a lot about who have sympathies for what.

The Hon. Member, Basil Williams spoke about Guyana Stores Limited. They won the case. This was one that the PPP left also. They got \$3.8 billion judgment and until now they have not collected the money.

2.38 p.m.

When the Commissioner-General was asked about it, \$3.8 billion outstanding in a judgement from the CCJ, he said, "I do not know how much came in yet. I have to check it", \$3.8 billion. They are busy running down the 'little' shopkeepers in the villages in the Rupununi, Mabaruma and in Mahaica, in my area, and all across the country, 'little' shopkeepers, vendors and taxi drivers for small sums of money, harassing people every day at the GRA. You have a fruit, the low hanging fruit, as the Minister said, of a \$3.8 billion judgement and you are not moving to enforce on it. Why? It is because of political connections.

It is the same thing as in the case where the Minister of Finance, a couple of days ago, said that the shares that were sold - this is in the public domain - to Mr. Badal, were below market value. Why did they not appeal that case? Mr. Badal diluted the Government's shareholding from 30%

down to 7%, unilaterally, and we took him to court and that led to a lot of falling out. The court ruled in the favour of the Government and restored the shares to 30%. This Government went to the Court of Appeal, half-heartedly. The Court of Appeal ruled that he should restore it to 7%. Why did they not take it to the CCJ and appeal it? Again, political connection. The 7% that remained, the then Minister of Finance said they sold it below market value to him. They gave it away. This is it.

The Minister mentioned – I have to do this because he mentioned it - the names of Dr. Ashni Singh and Mr. Brassington, in the National Assembly. Dr. Ashni Singh and Mr. Brassington are now charged with selling land below market value. Let us look at this. Liliendaal, on the East Coast Demerara, People's National Congress (PNC) Government sold it for \$3.5 million, 100 acres. Guess how much that workouts to? They sold it for \$35,000 per acre, 100 acres for \$3.5 million. We in the PPP opposed it. We went all the way to the CCJ. The CCJ gave back a huge part of the land to the Government. The Government then turned around and sold it at \$18 million per acre, \$180 million for 10 acres, which is 514 times higher than what they sold it for. We went and got it back and sold it at 514 times more and put the money in the treasury. Mr. Brassington and the others are charged for that now. *Pradoville*, the cost people paid for the land is 142 times more than what they sold it for, that piece of land there to one of their cronies, at that time.

I do not see the same zeal. I suspect the reason *Pradoville* is getting all this attention is because I live there. But I do not see the same zeal by State Assets Recovery Agency (SARA) to go after some other actions of Jagdeo. For example, I gave the Burnham family, when I was President, five acres of land, and guess how much they paid - they paid zero. The people of *Pradoville* paid \$5 million per acre and they got five acres for zero. Why is this Government not trying to repossess that? It is because that was a terrible act of Jagdeo too. That was prime land in the city, right here. Mr. Speaker, you see that, at the same *Pradoville*.

Mr. Irfaan Ali, his name was mentioned. He gets 19 charges. The Director of Public Prosecutions got a piece of land too and she was mentioned in one of the charges. She institutes charges against Mr. Ali and she is the beneficiary, or the holder of that office is the beneficiary of the land and it is a conspiracy. He does not receive a bit of land there, but he gets charge and not the 19 persons. He has to carry that blame.

Mr. Anil Nandlall, it is clear. The President, as per conditions of his service, it is proven in court, the Parliament Office, itself, showed that Ministers can benefit from concessions by their Cabinet outside of what they get as Ministers here. We have seen it happened a hundred-time. The Hon. Member Simona Charles-Broomes got \$500,000 for rental. The President of Guyana approved that lawbooks should...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I must remind you that...

Mr. Jagdeo: He spoke about it.

Mr. Speaker: You said that he spoke about it. I am not questioning what you said, but the wrong that one does does not entitle anyone else to do wrong. What I am saying is that if the matter is in court you should not discuss it.

Mr. Jagdeo: If you mention an Hon. Member's name and attribute corrupt motives to him or corruption to him in this House... Mr. Speaker, that is what he was doing. Then I think that the House is owed an explanation and you, as to the circumstances that took place, and the people of the country. It is supposed to be \$2 million. This time it was probably \$400,000 for those lawbooks. The Hon. Member, without conceding, because he did not do anything wrong, offered to restore another set of books, not the same ones. They refused to do that. For \$2 million, at that time, he gets charged. He is before the court. He is threatened here to be convicted. What has happened? There is \$500 million missing and there is an Auditor General's report supporting that from the Ministry of Public Infrastructure for the D'Urban Park fiasco. The Hon. Member, Minister Patterson, does not face the police - \$500 million missing.

The Public Procurement Commission (PPC) said that he illegally went ahead with an unsolicited bid for the feasibility study for the Demerara Harbour Bridge. What happened? We reported to Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU). The Hon. Member Juan Edghill, in this very House, pointed out to the difference between what Cabinet also illegally approved and what was expended, over \$80 million, and he has not been charged as yet. The Hon. Member Nandlall is now facing a charge and Irfaan Ali did not benefit anything.

He mentioned Hon. Member Mr. Seeraj and Hon. Member Mr. Dharamlall and there was some \$438 million fraud. They are not charged for the missing money. Nothing is missing. What they

are charged for is failing, as board members, to update the general ledger. If this is not a witch-hunt, when billions and billions of dollars are being stolen every day. I will deal with that in a moment. This is what people are being charged for, claiming that you are trying to recover state assets.

I do not want to spend too much more time on the Hon. Member Basil Williams' presentation. Again, he repeated in the House, as there is no history to this, the same old campaign rhetoric, that SARA is going after \$300 billion that was stolen. It cannot even recover anything as yet. I think he said ten house lots it has recovered and it has repossessed two million acres of forested land. That had nothing to do with SARA's effort. That was the Ministry of Natural Resources working out a deal with those investors, absolutely nothing. It is not as if it is stolen and it has recovered it. It is still state land; it was always state land. What did he recover? The \$300 billion cannot be justified. It is only in Professor Clive Thomas's head and writing. The same Minister of Finance said, and it was repeated here several times, that the economy was funded from drug proceeds under the PPP. What happened? The private sector asked him for evidence, and guess who he cited again? It was Professor Clive Thomas who had written about that and one PPP Member who left us. I suspect that it is the Hon. Member Nagamootoo. Those were his sources.

They spoke about \$28 billion to \$35 billion of procurement fraud per year under the PPP. Guess who wrote about that? It was Mr. Goolsarran. Until today, he is hiding. If any of you know Mr. Anand Goolsarran, ask him to disaggregate how the PPP stole between \$28 billion and \$35 billion per year. You will see that he will run from this country. There is no credibility, whatsoever. I invited him to make a public presentation to explain it in the media. It was all in their manifesto. It is as I am citing Mr. Irfaan Ali or Mr. Clement Rohee as the technical source for my undertaking. Professor Clive Thomas was part of A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) and Mr. Goolsarran was also part of APNU. Now, their studies have become the internationally verified studies.

The Hon. Member Basil Williams spoke about winning cases, and stuff like that, a lot of cases that he won. I think he forgot the case where he was forced to operationalise the Judicial Review Act. He lost that one. He tried to hide from it and he was in contempt of the court and when the proceedings were being served on him. He hid and then brought it into being. He spoke about Rasul Saddiqi and how he got some armoury under the PPP. The licence to export gold was given to this man under the APNU Government. He spoke about the CLE. He got a public spanking from

the CLE because of incompetence. He could have easily done what he is doing now and come and ask us for our support and we would have guided him accordingly on how we go about doing this properly. He ran ahead and said that they are going to start a law school and the CLE just put a public spanking on him. These are just some of the things. I have a lot more to talk about Hon. Member Williams, but I will not do that.

I promised that I will come back to the accounts, the macroeconomic accounts to discern some of the trends that we see. Let us look at the monetary sector. The Minister, on page 13 of his presentation, said that net domestic credit is expected to grow by 14.6% to \$251 billion in 2018. That is one position. What the Minister declined to tell the country is that public sector net credit is going to grow by 88.5% and private sector credit by 3.9%. This tells the whole story. When someone sees a figure of domestic credit growing by 14.6%, that person would say it is a respectable figure, but you have to disaggregate the component. Who is borrowing? It is the Government. Of the credit that grew, 88.5% of it went to the Government and the private sector only borrowed 3.9%.

2.53 p.m.

Let us look at another aspect. It is the borrowing again. If you look at another statement, on the same page, it is one sentence, "The public sector is expected to remain in net credit position." That is that he said. When you hear that, an ordinary Guyanese would say that net credit position means that they are, with the banking system, in the positive with their banking system. If you go to the estimates of 2019, where you see a positive figure, that is borrowing. Where you see the negative - that is how it is done in the monetary survey and tables - it is a deposit with the banking system. In 2014, this credit to central Government was \$28.8 billion. That grew in 2018 to \$103 billion.

In 2019, if you look at the fiscal accounts, you will see a financing gap there and \$32.843 billion will come from domestic sources. That is domestic borrowing. If you add a stock of \$103 billion and \$32 billion more in 2019, that gives you a \$136 billion. If you net out 2014 and then calculate the percentages, this Government has increased domestic borrowing by 373% since it took office. When the Minister came and talked about foreign borrowing, he said it only grew by 11%, people are thinking how the PPP is coming up with all these figures. It is here; it is domestic borrowing. Do you know why they cannot borrow from foreign sources so quickly? One, they require

feasibility studies; two, the foreign money has another audit, an external audit. They do not like audits in this Government. The country gets what I mean.

On the net foreign assets for two of the banking systems, I made that clear, for 2014, it was \$195 billion, it is now \$160 billion. That means that it has changed for the worst by \$35 billion. This is key when you are looking at future indebtedness. The domestic borrowing is about two years of all the money from ExxonMobil to pay back. It is just for domestic borrowing, if you were to recover this. The first two years of all the money would be gone, and they talked about these things.

Let us look at the overall balance of payments. It is another issue, because it tells you about the health of the economy with the rest of the world. In 2018, the Minister said that it would have been \$79.7 million. That is in the negative. The actual was negative \$180.7 million. It was \$100 million worse than what he projected. In Budget 2017, he said that it would be \$19.9 million, but it turned out to be negative \$69.5 million. That was about \$89 billion worsening. In 2016, he said it would be \$46.3 billion in surplus and it turned out to be minus \$29.3 billion and a worsening of US\$75 million.

We have seen consistently a pattern, the balance of payment figures that the Minister brings here when he presents the budget, the actual out turn is very different. What does this mean? In this year's budget, he said this would lead to a build-up of reserves. When you have a positive balance of payments, you have a build-up of reserves and when you have a negative one, it runs down the reserves. He said it is going to be a positive build-up of reserves. I am predicting, because of this historical trend, that we will see a further running down of reserves in this year. The reason is that this Minister has just in a static way reported on the balance of payment as he has done with everything else. There is absolutely no policy measure to address the deteriorating balance of payment. You can do two things. You can control demand. Private sector demand is practically flat, so they are lucky that it does not put pressure on the balance of payments. It is flat because there is nothing happening. We have lost the business confidence. They are lucky about that. On the other hand, this expansionary policy with the Government sector is going to put more pressure on the balance of payment. That is one. They are not managing demand nor are they doing anything to increase supply. There are no supply side policies. We have value added tax (VAT) on exports. This is one of the few countries which has introduced VAT on exports.

The Minister came here and said in his budget presentation that “I am going to give you credit for your electricity and water bills, a refund, if you export.” Exports were zero-rated. They should have automatic credit on all their inputs, not only on water and electricity. That is how you make the sectors globally competitive. A policy, rather than stimulating the improvement of the balance of payment, what he has done here is causing a deterioration of the balance of payment.

Putting VAT on inputs, such as fertilisers, pesticides and a ton of these things, moving them from the zero-rated category often to 14% then putting them back in the exempt category. It does not help people because they cannot claim the import VAT. When you put VAT on inputs into production, especially for exports, you have a cascading too and this is going to harm our exports again. You are not going to have an improvement in the balance of trade and the balance of payment. There would be unreliable electricity rates, higher fuel costs and land charges, all of these contribute to making sectors more globally uncompetitive.

The Minister of Finance should be coming with measures to improve the situation and the supply side policies, but there is nothing. What is dangerous, in this sort of environment, there is a massive running down of reserves and it impacts the stability of the exchange rate. This Government has kept exchange rate fairly stable by reintroducing exchange control through *bullyism*. They have directed the banks: a circular from the central bank was sent to the cambio dealers limiting the spread. They have called in the key exporters in the rice and gold industry and directed them to sell at a particular rate despite the demand that exists in the market. The threat is, if you do not do that, we will revoke your licences. The market is not clearing although the rate is fairly stable, but this would lead to a worsening of the situation there.

On the fiscal side, a lot of my colleagues spoke about this extensively. I just want to get on the record how the fiscal accounts are going to deteriorate too. We have known now that \$88 billion more is being collected - you have heard this figure often - in tax revenues compared to 2014, in five budgets. It is \$88 billion more. When we left office, it was \$135 billion, so they are getting close to doubling it. Secondly, this year alone, on tax revenue, it is about \$31 billion if you net out the half from the amnesty. They are collecting a lot of money and, as I said, that is a prominent feature of this account.

Let us look at the growth in ten areas. My colleagues mentioned these figures, but I just want to repeat them. This is a comparison between the budgets of 2014 and 2019 to show how these figures have grown, National Events - \$675 million and Dietary - \$2.203 billion. The Hon. Member, Mr. Bulkan is disingenuous when he said that it is for children, and stuff such as that. We know where the *fatfowling* is going if there is a word like that. I think there is. The Other Category on Other Operating Expense increased by \$1 billion, Local Travelling and Subsistence - \$1.014 billion, Vehicles Spares and Service - \$645 million, Other Transport Travel and Postage - \$519 million, Rental of Buildings - \$827 million, Security Services - \$2.6 billion. This is not for the Guyana Police Force (GPF). You know, Mr. Speaker, why because we have mentioned that there are lots of new security companies which are aligned to lots of people in the Government. The Government is expanding this budget. In the regions where there could not even be a security guard for the school, now there are security guards for even the toilets in the schools. It is because they want to expand this budget because they are making money there. For the Equipment Maintenance - \$595 million and the Other Category under Goods and Services - \$3.397 billion dollars.

The overall increase is at \$13.5 billion more in these ten areas that we are spending more on than in 2014. Mr. Speaker, why I recite this, once again, it is just to tell you, the Guyanese public and my colleagues here about the priorities of this Government. Guess what, for Drugs and Medical Supplies, 2014, that budget head, \$5.13 billion, in this year's budget - \$5.12 billion. It is less we are spending on drugs and medical supplies than in 2014. I think my colleague did that. On capital expenditure for Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education, if you exclude the regions, it is \$4.6 billion more. We are spending for these regions \$4.6, but \$13.5 billion on these consumables.

The capital expenditure increase for the budgets for all ten regions is \$1.4 billion this year. We talked a lot about how we want to expand infrastructure across our country, in all ten regions of Guyana, across all five programmes, that is, regional administration, agriculture, health, education and public Infrastructure, the growth in the budget for capital project is \$1.4 billion. The increase in four areas: dietary, local travelling and subsistence, rental and national events is more than the entire capital expenditure. That increase, in only those areas, is more than the entire capital stock of all ten regions in the country.

This gives you a big idea of the priority of this Government. In this same budget, we have seen a reduction in capital expenditure on the Amerindians. Hon. Member Ms. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai spoke about that, the Amerindian Development Fund (ADF). On agriculture, it is the same; on youth, it is down; the child care and protection, it is down and the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), it is down. We are spending less in these areas.

You get the idea of what I am talking about on the fiscal accounts and the salient features that I mentioned at the beginning, that is, how it is dominated by large-scale increases in taxes from everyone and how massive increases in recurrent expenditure are taking place which are often non-productive. The capital stock of this country is not expanding. That is dangerous for the future.

I will not go through the fourth account because that one is pretty obvious, that is, the real sector. If you only go to budget you will see what I am talking about.

3.08 p.m.

You just look at it and will see negative, it is as if almost all the sectors in the economy are not performing. As I said before we have seen no measures to address these. Take for example, the measures, all of the measures from A-K, I think there are 11 groups of measures and there many listed under 60 measures, and guess how much the Government is giving up from all of this? It is \$3.5 billion and that is the big concession that they are giving back to all the sectors, from older folks, to people in the green sector, disabled people, private sector, social assistance and everybody which is less than the increase in some of areas for consumables alone in Government. That is how much the Minister is doing for the people. It is very confusing. For example, it is dominated by special interest. We have taxes coming down on Shandy, but we are arguing about food for children or take off the tax on prescription drugs, so that when people go to the hospital or the pharmacy they do not have to pay a 14% VAT. You cannot be taken it off from the prescription drugs even, but you could take it off Shandy, and that is the priority of this Government. We are taking it off limestone, but you cannot take it off sand, stone and cement, because those are building materials. I know which company uses a lot of limestone again. It is dominated - I am not going through the entire list - by special interests.

What is interesting is that in 2015, when the Minister stood here, and we were not here as yet, and he presented the budget speech and he said there is \$55 billion in tax remission, widespread

discretionary elements which are being used to favour and reward friends. He was extremely proud in 2017 to say he has reduced it to \$49 billion. Guess what it is today? It is \$72.9 billion, and it has gone up back with no explanation. It is to friends and family of the APNU's people, all of Hon. Member Ms. Lawrence. What is dangerous too is that this discretionary power is returning. We wanted to move the administration of concessions away from politicians to a technical agency. The PPP/C, when in Government, removed the discretionary powers of the Minister and placed the administration of all duty-free concessions in the GRA which was technically done.

Now, this Minister, for the first time, is reversing that. He is saying remission of VAT – “I propose to amend the VAT Act to provide for the Minister of Finance to make regulations to remit in whole or in part, the VAT and the interest on VAT payable by any person where good cause is shown.” The businessmen now have to go to the Minister's office and sit outside and wait and then go in and show him the good cause and then he will decide whether he waives their taxes or not. It is a recipe for corruption, the return to discretionary powers.

I recall another amendment we made when we took the Cabinet out of the award of contracts. We said Cabinet, as politicians, must not award the contract. It can offer a “no objection” role but if it exercises that “no objection” function, it has to say why it is exercising the “no objection” function and then it cannot recommend who will get the contract. It has to send it back to the adjudicating authority which is the National Procurement Tender & Administration Board (NPTAB) to make a decision and the final decision will stand. This Cabinet has reversed it, and not only is it exercising “no objection”, but as we have seen in the Demerara Harbour Bridge's feasibility study case, it has awarded the contract. They have reversed even that. We have seen a return to the discretionary powers of this Government.

There are lots more that I can say about the budget, but I want to hurry to a couple of other issues. It made the news about the People's Progressive Party/Civic doing some \$600 million worth of projects without any feasibility study done. I think the embattled Minister Patterson who was devastated by the presentation of Hon. Member Juan Edghill when he asked about the missing money and spoke extensively about the Demerara Harbour Bridge's feasibility study, the tact was to divert attention - do not deal with my issues, and before \$500 million missing through my Ministry for the D'Urban Park project, I have illegally got an unsolicited bid and spent \$79 million more than the illegal award that I got from the Cabinet and I am before the Special Organised

Crime Unit (SOCU). I should not say “I am”, because next thing they would clip that. The Hon. Member Mr. Patterson has been in flagrant violation of the tender laws. Our Procurement Act mandates, set out, how to structure, how you have to adjudicate bids. They have been tampering with that, and that has become the practice rather than the exception.

We are giving the hinterland roads contracts to people who have the seventeenth highest bid among all recognised bidder. They have gone back to pure discretion. We have seen the suggestion that they want to set aside 20% of civil works for small contractors, but we have seen how, right here in this House when the Hon. Member was questioned, he manipulated the pre-qualification process to award contracts for Berbice for the small Alliance For Change (AFC) contractors in that area. We have seen all of this and the Minister did not want to deal with those issues, a huge pile of baggage before him, all for corruption.

We also heard what happened at the Guyana Power and Light (GPL) board and it was asked of him what benefits there is for not having a board for one year when billions of dollars are being spent and there are international loans implemented and executed by that agency. I wonder what those international agencies are doing about this. I plan to talk to them about what they have been doing about this.

The contract for the meters, engineers estimate \$3.9 billion. It awarded the contract at \$4.6 billion, but there was a bid at \$3.5 billion. It awarded the contract at \$1.1 billion above the next bidder, and it was for the supply of meters. It is not anything complex - \$1.1 billion. There is a Macau connection here. If you go back, one would see some pictures of people travelling to Macau.

I have heard the vilest things in this House said about us, accusers of being in bed with drug dealers and the nastiest of things said about our people, and, guess what, you would not get from the Hon. Minister Patterson an independent investigation of how there was a breach at our airport security and someone ended up in Grenada with \$2.325 kilogrammes of cocaine. If they talk about people, they should look right within their own circles, their own family. They talk a lot and here in this House we are accused of being in bed with drug dealers. I wonder who is in bed with whom.

I am not going to go through why they had to obfuscate, change tact by accusing us of not doing feasibility studies. If you look at what was said about the Linden-Lethem road project in 2016, 2017, 2019, it is the same thing and already my colleagues have listed some 15 projects in this

budget that are only slated for feasibility studies. We were not questioning the feasibility studies. We are questioning the intent to deceive people to create the impression that things that are going to start in 2019 when they will not. That is what we are questioning. The Minister then deliberately said that we did not do feasibility studies. Well, he mentioned several projects, but he did not mention the Marriot Hotel. Let me say to him that he should check HBS Consulting International and Marriot International which did the market study for that one.

If he goes to the Booker Tate's website, this is what is on it:

“The Guyana Sugar Corporation approached Booker Tate in the year 2000 to assist them in developing their sugar industry with the intent of increasing sugar production, lowering operating cost and thereby improving profitability. Booker Tate carried out a viability and expansion study which recommended developing sugar production in the east of the country where agricultural conditions were more favourable than the west.”

We had a feasibility study for sugar. It was done there and there was a loan from the World Bank. The World Bank does not make any loan available unless there is a feasibility study.

I do not belabour the entire National Assembly, but if you look at the Parliament, this is the Supplementary Order Paper, National Assembly, 2 p.m., Tuesday, 23rd November, 2007. There is a question by Mr. James McAllister who was a Member of Parliament at that time, Construction of the Bridge Berbice across the Berbice River. He spoke about the bridge and then he said, “AND WHEREAS Patricio Millan Development Consultants Inc. conducted a review of the feasibility study done by the Louis Berger Group and provided the IDB and the Government of the Guyana with independent cost estimates.” The Minister said he cannot find this. It is either he never looked hard enough or something is wrong with his eyes. He said he searched everywhere. He said that searched up and down. It was in the Parliament. The feasibility study was mentioned by his colleagues in the PNC. There is a feasibility study for the Berbice River Bridge too. On the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, he asked for a study and he said that he cannot find it anywhere again. These are big things about him, \$600 billion on Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), Demerara Harbour Bridge and the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project.

So, there is a Cabinet decision that was prepared for Minister Jordan, and I do not know whether he signed it, but the Hon. Member Minister Patterson was also part of that arrangement and this

was just after they took office. Here is a table which shows all the consultants who worked on the project and who did the study.

3.23 p.m.

It is a document that the Minister of Finance would have sent to Cabinet. It states, “Government of Guyana, Engineering and Technical: Black and Veatch, SRKN, Ground Structures Engineering, The Harrington Corporation (Harco), Power Planning Associates Limited, John Cush, KANIE Services Consulting, Mercados Energeticos and Forsyth Global which is a subsidiary of the BlackStone Group.” They are criticising that now, but they were prepared to go with Lloyd Singh for a year. This is a subsidiary of one of the biggest companies in the world – the BlackStone Group. They had problems with that. Their consultants were MHW Harco Ground Structures Engineers, BBFL Caribbean Limited, Geographic Information Systems Solutions Company, URS Limited, Washington Group International and Alice Geo, then the Inter-American Development Bank and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) hired Tractor Bell, Harco and PPA – that was for engineering and technical.

Legal - Hogan and Lovell; Trunkman Saunders; Timothy Jonas; Melinda Janki; Foley Hoag; Hughes, Fields and Stoby; Fraser, Housty and Yearwood; DeCaires, Fitzgerald and Patrick, *et cetera*.

On the environmental studies that were done, we have a long list of about 10 companies. Under financial, there are three or four companies. These are the studies that were done which they knew about. These were prepared for them and the Minister still comes here and says we did nothing on them.

He should not just apologise for the East Bank.... The Hon. Member, Mr. Ali, already shared this feasibility study on the East Bank Road. He is absolutely misleading the National Assembly. These are public documents - half of these are public documents. When a Minister comes to the National Assembly and accuses the other side just to hide or divert attention from all of the illegal corrupt practices taking place in his Ministry, it is terrible.

The Hon. Minister, Ms. Lawrence, is also another embattled Minister. The HDM Laboratories, Inc. and their procurement fraud there; the \$325 million spent for renting a house in Sussex Street

and calling it a bond; and the \$605 million single source award, all of which were investigated by the Auditor General and the Public Procurement Commission. They found that there were significant breaches. I do not even want to go through the others. The Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, is also struggling to deal with the huge amount of corrupt practices with procurement in her Ministry. It is unbelievable, and we get all of these explanations. The Hon. Member also did the same thing, she started accusing our side. The Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, sits next to her, so I guess that they worked out a strategy.

In 2012, the New Guyana Pharmaceutical Corporation (GPC) Inc. got a single source contract. It is hard to explain to people, who are impervious to technical reasoning or explanation, that there is a difference between pre-qualification and single sourcing. With pre-qualification you get this through a competitive process and single sourcing is like what they did with the bond and with the HDM Laboratories Inc. and the one with the hospital – the ANSA McAl Project.

“You see this long story, me aint able buse and cuss and waste me time”. We cannot do that. We cannot “yap yap yap” and “lash them in their heads””. That is not for us in the Parliament here.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member...

Mr. Jagdeo: This is a quote, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for one and an half hours under an understanding which has been worked out. I will extend this time for half an hour more. Please proceed.

Mr. Jagdeo: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I had hoped that you would have been a bit more generous to me. I am just starting.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you are the only person that has so far received that generosity.

Mr. Jagdeo: Mr. Speaker, there is, and you are aware of it, information has been that there is no time limit. We never imposed that on the Leader of the Opposition when we were in Government.

Mr. Speaker: What has happened on this occasion allows this to happen.

Mr. Jagdeo: Really?

Mr. Speaker: Allows me to be generous.

Mr. Jagdeo: Let me go on because I am hoping at the end of my 30 minutes, you will probably spare me. Since it is up to your discretion, you will give me a few minutes more.

We seem to have elevated now, discrimination as an official policy of the Government. When we sent over 1,000 students abroad to study medicine and they came back to this country to serve the people of this country, we never, in selecting them, asked them who they voted for or what their affiliations were. It was good enough for us that they were Guyanese children; good enough for us. If you look at those who went, they were people from all 10 regions of Guyana. We ensured that there were diversity and balance in the students we sent abroad. That was a policy. For these children to come back now as young doctors and serving all of our people, I am being told that “I am looking for a doctor, but he/she has to be only People’s National Congress (PNC)”.

[**Mr. Nandlall:** And speaking Spanish.] Forget the speaking Spanish. That can destroy, demean people and dehumanise them. When we go to the doctors, and I want to ask the Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, if when she goes to a doctor, does she start off by asking the doctor before he/she treats her “Are you PNC?” This is party policy elevated to a State position and this is terrible.

Maybe I should not just go on because you have read the comments about speaking to people and saying who looks like whom; who looks like Jagdeo. Indo-Guyanese are being told the people who look like Jagdeo, that they are referring to Indo-Guyanese. This is from the Leader of the PNC, from the Chairperson of the PNC. I saw an apology and the apology seems to be “I am sorry that I was caught. I should not have said it publicly” There was no apology for nothing else.

I recall that I ended up in Court. The case is gone now. When a person filed private criminal charges because I reported on what they did in the villages on the East Coast Demerara – beating their drums and using racist sentiments. It was a public meeting and I said at the end of it that any person in the People’s Progressive Party (PPP), who uses this sort of language, we will kick them out. Those were the exact words. It was a condemnation of it and it landed me in Court. This is not condemnation of racism and partisan behaviour.

How many of us hold party cards? They may be people, sympathisers to the APNU too or PNC, but they are not party members. Since when do we do this sort of thing? I would not say much

more about that Ministry, but I wonder if it is in practice already because we have seen people being thrown out of places, for example, at the Medical Council, the lawyer was changed. Someone who has been defending her now, one of the young persons in APNU/AFC has now replaced that. The Hon. Member, Mr. Adams, [Ms. Teixeira: He is not young.] No, I am speaking about someone else. This is already in practice. I think that it is utterly disgusting. I would not bother.

I need to quickly rush through. The Hon. Member, Mr. Joseph Harmon spoke about us being scatter short, *et cetera*. He was the teacher, but he had it wrong. He said the cash grant was stopped in 2015 by the People's Progressive Party, even though we were not in Government; that there was a secret sub-committee that he knows about. That is absolutely not true. The cash grant was not supposed to be \$10,000. It was supposed to grow to a maximum over the years of \$50,000 per child in this country. That was what we had intended over time to grow it to because we could not provide transportation.

They took it away. If he is so concerned about who took it away, why did he not put it back? This Government has stolen \$8 billion from our children and spent it on themselves. One billion, six hundred million per year times five years is \$8 billion, that is what they stole from the children of Guyana.

I heard Mr. Harmon speak extensively on the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). He quoted Mr. Chris Lang from REDD-Monitor. He said Mr. Lang was opposed to our project. What he did not say to you was that there is a connection between REDD-Monitor, Ms. Janet Bulkan and Mr. Palmer, who is also related to Mrs. Bulkan. REDD-Monitor hates people like us. I do not have a chip on my shoulder. They were very angry with me when I, as roving Ambassador for the three forest-basins in Congo, when we had the Heads of State meeting, they had asked me to perform that role after I left, I made sure that the caricature of the Developing World across Africa, Asia and in this part of the world could not perpetrate that caricature, that we were incapable of managing of our forests.

Mr. Lang, the United Kingdom (UK) national moved to Indonesia, and that is his whole thing. You need to come through us, we are the civilising people. You cannot take care of your own forest. If you try to bypass us, then your programmes are not going to be approved. I can give

reading material for the Hon. Member, Mr. Harmon, to understand the true nature of Mr. Chris Lang. *Carbon Markets and REDD*, you could read that article.

He said:

“...Carbon trading does not reduce emissions...”

Nobody in the world believes this. This is a neophyte, a hustler. In fact, if you read the truth behind Mr. Chris Lang, you will know that he is just that – a hustler. You will know also that, in an open letter to Mr. Erik Solheim, who is now the Head of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and who was the Minister responsible, that Ms. Janet Bulkan and the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, wrote them trying to prevent money from coming to Guyana through the LCDS.

They wrote them saying:

“Do not send any money to Guyana.”

3.38 *p.m.*

Ms. Janet Bulkan and the others wrote in 2009 that we were talking about this LDCS, but that the LDCS was not part of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Project. It is true, but we did not allow that to daunt us. So, when the Hon. Member, Mr. Harmon, came here and regaled us with his knowledge about why we need the Green State Development Strategy, and he told us that the world is on a path to destruction above two degrees Celsius - above three industrial levels, and that we face an existential threat, we have been saying that a long time. We have been saying that the Paris Agreement, the level of ambitions there, as forward as they are, they would never achieve the 1.5 degree that is needed for sustainability.

The Hon. Minister told us that anthropogenic actions cause climate change, but what is new? We know about that already. The Hon. Minister then said that, our strategy, we got McKinsey and Company to do a strategy to have the people come here and pay for carbon credit. Clearly, the Hon. Member, Mr. Joseph Harmon, does not understand the concept. It is not about paying for carbon credit.

We started off developing the LCDS because there was a gap in the framework of the UN Convention, where a number of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), when the Kyoto

Protocol was being negotiated, some for reasons that were altruistic and others like Mr. Chris Lang and Mr. Palmer, for selfish reasons, opposed it. They did not want forest carbon to be traded as an offset mechanism and so what happened was that we fought for this. We said, why is it that you only support the abatement solutions that are located in the developed world, because if the carbon trading takes place there, that is where money is, and you do not support the abatement solutions that are cheaper, but are located in the developing world? Since deforestation contributed about 20% of the greenhouse gas emissions, so 20% of the solution had to be in countries like ours.

We started off with fighting the international community and people like Mr. Chris Lang and we did not do it like this *weak kneed* Government. We did not go into it with a chip on our shoulder because people look differently than us. We defended the national interest and countries like ours. We fought and we managed to get changes and they are hostile to us because of this.

We got McKinsey and Company to come here, one of the biggest consultancy companies in the world. We did not get Professor Clive Thomas or Mr. Goolsaran, it was McKinsey and Company because we needed to use a consultancy company that the Developed World was using for the credibility of our numbers. They repainted several scenarios. We said, what if we built a model, where it says, we leave 10% of our forest with the highest conservation value and what if, we deforest over 25 years, the remaining forest, and convert the forested areas into other activities like mining and ranching and large-scale agriculture like the developed countries had done? Most of them do not have their primary forest, but they come out here and tell us, “You protect yours”, and they think that you should protect it for free, although it serves a global good and they busy cutting down their trees. All of their primary forest is done, they have converted it. So, we argued, what if we do that? How much could we earn at an annuity and the annuity using USD \$5 per a tonne of carbon trading came up to about \$580 million a year - that is what the world should pay us for avoiding deforestation. That is how much we contribute to the global climate fight. That is what we did.

Once we got that, we then went all outside of the UNFCCC process, because the UNFCCC process is slow. Until now they have not done it and we had this arrangement with Norway for them to buy carbon from us at \$5 per a tonne for avoided deforestation. We even changed the concept from REDD+ and Mr. Chris Lang and Mr. Palmer confuses the REDD+ with our Low Carbon Development Strategy. They are very different. Most of his criticisms was about the REDD+; how

we did it before and without consulting with people. He did not understand the difference between the REDD+ Strategy and the REDD Readiness Plan, which was done through the World Bank and the LCDS, which was a development strategy. That was the basis on which we did it.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Harmon, said that he did not know much about this and how it was done in secrecy. I went to the website last night and the website is still there, and there was a posting up to a year ago. Mr. Harmon, on that website, said that:

“Bartica will be a microcosm of green development in the entire Caribbean...”

This was posted in June, 2017. Mr. Speaker, if you look at the documents there, you would see that between 2009 to 2015, when we left office, we had 75 meetings of the Multi Stakeholder’s Group. I would just want to let you know, quickly, about who were the people there, I would not call the names, but the institutions; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – this is a meeting with the President of Guyana, 75 times between 2009 to 2015 and all the minutes are on that website now that he does not know about. He said that it was secrecy and they are posting his picture on the same site. I thought that they had discontinued it after June. There were the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, Office of the President, Office of the Prime Minister, Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC), Guyana Gold and Diamond Miners Association (GGDMA), Private Sector Commission (PSC), National Toshias Council (NTC), North Rupununi District Development Board, the Amerindian Action Movement of Guyana, National Amerindian Development Foundation, Guyanese Organisation of Indigenous People, University of Guyana Conservation, International World Wildlife Fund, Iwokrama International Centre (IIC), there was Ret’d Major General Joe Singh in an individual capacity, Raquel Thomas, Annette Arjoon and several others. There were Ministers, then there was the Amerindian People’s Association (APA) that was invited, but it decided not to attend. It is not to cite Ms. Jean LaRose from the APA. I do not want to be too critical, but Ms. Jean La Rose is not an independent person. She was the Deputy Head of the A Partnership for National Unity list during the last elections and the Government is citing her as its source of criticism of the strategy, but there are several other organisations. It is an absolute lie about the LCDS.

Now, what has happened is that, let me tell you the sectors that the LCDS has and moneys set aside for those sectors, so we are earning moneys. Mr. Harmon said that it was just a strategy to

collect people's money abroad, but he is busy using the money. I would point to that now. The low carbon transition - ecotourism, aquaculture, business process outsourcing, fruits and vegetables, the Centre for Biodiversity Studies, renewal energy, the land titling, the low carbon transport, Amerindian Development Fund, Curriculum Development for New Economy, and Hinterland Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Access - US\$17 million in the budget that the Hon. Member, Catherina Hughes referred to. This pretentious thing about what is happening in the sector, I have listened and it is revolting, as though it had nothing to do with the PPP. She has been using money now that we have earned through the same programme; micro and small enterprises, flood resistant crops, introduction of instruments to mitigate risk, that is, innovative financial instruments and insurance policies; upgrading infrastructure and assets. All of these are part of our Low Carbon Development Strategy. Look at it here, it is specific projects, policies, *et cetera*. This Green State Development Strategy sets a goal. It says, *oh* we want to better manage our resources. We want a low carbon trajectory, but they are busy going to polluted sources fuels and they want a low carbon trajectory. They made a pledge to do 100% renewal energy by 2025 in the Paris Agreement. We are not anywhere near that, no way of achieving that. By 2020, people are supposed to raise the levels of their ambition. That is the meeting that is taking place now in Poland, to raise ambition, and they are going backwards.

This Green State Development Strategy could never be the philosophical underpinning of anything, much less the budget of anything. It just states what it wants to do, better manage our resources, including oil resources, the big contradiction.

Then it states that it wanted a low carbon trajectory. This document (LCDS) here sets out the goal, pathway, policies, projects and the source of funding. So far, their source of funding is the budget, that is the difference here.

If you go to this year's budget and you check the profile in the budget, then you would see what I am talking about. The profile outlines all of the things - I have misplaced it. They renamed the programme to Low Carbon Development Programme, but the moneys come from Norway and it is there to do almost all the things they boast about; the land titling, funding of Amerindian villages, the \$17 million ICT Project, all of these. Check their profile under the Ministry of Finance, Volume III and you would see what I mean, the entire thing.

I do not have more time to deal with Mr. Harmon comprehensively because I think this policy is wasting our time and effort, and, definitely, you have to scrap something that is useless like that. There is no way forward with that strategy.

The oil and gas sector is one that we heard a lot about. We have made it clear that, for us to make progress here, we have to understand the dynamics of the economy. The Hon. Minister spoke at length, but he failed to answer some key questions. The first one is: What are the terms of reference of the Department of Energy? What are the terms of reference of the Petroleum Commission? A draft came here and then it got stalled. How do they overlap? Which is the technical body? Which one deals with licensing and all of that, especially in light of the President's letter? We are no closer to an answer for that. We heard the Head of the Department of Energy saying no new oil licence would be issued until a model contract is completed. Is that true? The Hon. Minister could have mentioned it if that was the policy of the Government. But just like with the National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited and the Guyana Sugar Corporation fighting and nobody knows who is in charge of the sugar industry now, the same thing is here. We are not any closer to finding out.

Will those contracts, after the ExxonMobil Corporation contract, be reviewed in light of this model agreement? Something that we sought to ask here in this National Assembly. So that is the first thing.

Mr. Speaker, what is happening to the audit of the pre-contract cost? Why is it the ExxonMobil Corporation's decided to postpone Liza II? Is it because His Excellency made a statement that he would control the pace of development of the oil fields? So, we heard that there, and then the Hon. Member, Mr. Carl Greenidge, came here and said, "Oh they will get to 750 million barrels in a couple years' time." And the decision to move to Liza II is not even made as yet, there is some hold up of it and the President said that we are controlling the pace of this.

3.53 p.m.

Three - will they tender future blocks or does the Hon. Member Mr. Harmon still believes that he needs a foreign consultant to tell this Government that? And a foreign consultant of a particular hue too, not any Guyanese consultant. So, do they still need that?

The Sovereign Wealth Fund. This Government believes that oversight can be a backend process. Oversight has to be throughout from the beginning for it to mean something. That is not what they are doing, because we have seen the sort of backend oversight from this Government, where nothing happens, and their level of arrogance. He did not explain, nor did he address the fundamental issue which came up in all of the consultations with the private sector. We have been in the public domain speaking about it, and in the international community and the media, which is that the model is not the best practice model that they are imposing on us. It leaves too much room for capricious Government action that the Government almost controls the entire thing: the Central Bank, the macroeconomic committee and the investment committee. All have an overwhelming presence of the Government. I am not saying that you must exclude the Government totally, but we believe that no arms-length management of the resources, where the politicians get involved, is managing the stream of revenue that gets deposited into the Consolidated Fund. The process to get that out of the Sovereign Wealth Fund is one that is established by clear criteria and is independently verified, not by the Ministry of Finance, some macroeconomic committee or any other group, but independently verified with a report coming to the National Assembly. These are key things. To cite the Santiago Principles does not address those major things.

We believe in predictability. Any investor would not find us as a rollover; we negotiate strongly for this country, as we have shown. That is what is good for Guyana. We believe that there is a balance to be struck between investors making enough money to encourage them to invest more, and with the people of this country, to whom the resources belong. Therefore, we are yet in the dark. We have heard a lot and we have seen a lot, but there are too many questions that remain unanswered.

Coming back to the budget, it is said that you can put “lipstick on a pig” – I think President Obama popularised it – but you cannot change the nature of the pig. They have done a lot of brush work on this budget, but we have gone through its elements, and this budget is not going to change Guyana for the better. I want to refer all of Guyana to the advertisement we put in the newspapers. Did you see the advertisement? It is so full because these are all the things that we want to reverse, all of the hardship measures that they have imposed on the country. Some of our Colleagues read this out. This is in the newspapers, so please pay attention to what we have asked for here. I do not

want to read it out because there are so many things that this Government has changed for the worse that we want restored.

Regarding the sugar workers, there is an unbelievable level of arrogance, outrageously so; arrogance about this unkind, uncaring behaviour. The day that the sugar workers came here for their severance, I came back into the National Assembly and I asked some Ministers, “Why do you not just pay the people their money? You said that it was released.” They said, “Oh, there is still some Court case.” I said, “Go and tell the sugar workers that they are getting paid. Go out to the line there because they have been working for 25 years, some of them, and they have to come now for two years and practically beg this Government to give them the \$400,000 or \$500,000 that their severance would amount to”. After two years, they had to take legal action to get it, and you are telling me that the legal action is preventing it. Many of those workers’ lives are being devastated. This is illegal. I think the Hon. Member Ms. Burton-Persaud raised it in this House that employers under the Severance Pay Act, could go to jail/prison for not paying workers their money on time. But they do not see it that way because a lot of them got their big increases right at the beginning. They are living the ‘good life’ and they are busy eating in here, in the Parliament Building and then got one of the newspapers to ask “How did the people, if they are so poor, get the passage to come to Georgetown?” That is what you are questioning, how they got the fare to come to Georgetown. They should just go and listen to the sad stories. This did not have to happen. We are demonstrating it over and over again. They could have kept all of those workers working and they could have kept the jobs.

Somebody spoke about jobs. Our young people have not seen a single initiative in this budget to create jobs or to retain jobs. We are losing jobs and we do not have anything to create new jobs. What are you going to tell the young people? We hear about how they are being educated in robotics. Two robots will go in some school, and we are flying with drones and the Ministers are travelling around. I do not understand and they read these speeches, almost believing them, robotically, as some of our Colleagues said. There is no care in this Government, absolutely no care.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have another 15 minutes to wrap up.

Mr. Jagdeo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I heard the Hon. Member, Ms. Ally, said, “Bring it on.” She was talking about the no-confidence motion and she was talking about how they won five towns, and that the five towns are 50% of the towns. That is a perfect example of delusion and desperation. I recall on that the night the no-confidence motion was filed, we saw the dishevelled group hastily posing in a house to show unity. Then there was the ‘Love and Unity’ Concert in Sophia, which was well attended by 150 persons, and by some protestors too. The panic that ensued in this Government which seemed so invincible, they have started now to even threaten their Colleagues. People said to me that they had threats to their lives and their families. They have even threatened to disrupt the Parliament on the day. I am saying this to you because I will be writing you about what I have heard, so that you can be aware on the day of the no-confidence vote, what they plan to do. This is because they are very unsure. When they said, “Solid 33”, any person on that side, who has a conscience and who is a patriot, should vote for the no-confidence motion. They cannot not see the destructive path that this Government is leading them into - any person on that side. Behind all of this bluster and *fat talk*, there is a scared group of people - extremely scared, suspicious and looking at each other.

Secondly, the results are clear for the elections. The Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, spoke extensively about that, but they would not even listen to that. They are so arrogant. At the meeting in Sophia, they blamed the people for not voting for them, rather than blaming themselves for pursuing policies that are impoverishing our country. That is what we have from this Government.

There is one other issue that I want to address, and then I will come to the end. Our Prime Minister, Mr. Nagamootoo, who made the Local Government Elections a test case, has quickly moved on. The 115,000 votes that the PPP secured more than the AFC has done major damage to his psyche, I think. I am not going to speak about the extravagance in his office anymore, we will have another time that will come, but in five years he has spent \$849 million in capital expenditure through his office, compared to a small amount... [*Inaudible*], in excess of \$800 million.

I believe that the Hon. Prime Minister is squatting in the House. So, I want to bring to your attention something that we will be focusing on shortly.

It states here, as part of our Constitution of the Corporative Republic of Guyana, in article 178 (4):

“During any period when a minister is performing the functions of the Office of the President under article 96 or 179 or has assumed office under the proviso to article 95(1),

his or her seat in the National Assembly shall be regarded as vacant and may be temporarily filled in accordance with any provision made under article 160(3). At the expiration of the period the person temporarily filling the seat shall vacate it and the seat shall thereupon be resumed by the Minister.”

What is article 96? Article 96 states:

“Whenever the President is absent from Guyana or considers it desirable so to do by reason of illness or any other cause, he or she may, by direction in writing, authorise any member of the Cabinet, being an elected member of the National Assembly, to perform such functions of the Office of the President.”

So, in accordance with these two provisions of the Constitution, we have had this Prime Minister come here over and over when he is acting as President, in violation of our Constitution, squatting in the National Assembly, contrary to the practice of the past, and we have allowed this to happen. We plan to raise this on Monday when we come to consider the estimates. His presence will not be missed in the House. I am sure they can find another member from the APNU side to perform the functions well.

I want to say to the Guyanese people to not lose hope. We can go on and talk about the callous behaviour of this Government, be it their Mayor and City Council and what has happened and what they have subjected the people of Georgetown to, we will address that at some other point in time. That is why they got the results in Georgetown, not because of people who look like Mr. Jagdeo or who look like Ms. Volda Lawrence, as she said, but because of their policies in the City. We spent \$30 billion in the City from Central Government over the 23 years. Thirty billion dollars in the City to transform this City. If you look at the Commission of Inquiry Report, you would see that in the last three years there was no audit report. The hundreds of millions spent. The Commission of Inquiry enumerated whose son and whose daughter and whose friends and families were getting the contracts. That was all in the Commission of Inquiry Report that was just concluded. They had 28 out of 30 seats there. They allowed it to continue in the City, that is why the people in Georgetown rejected them, not because of race, *et cetera*. They continued with those people. They are still in the fold, and this is a practice of this Government. So, incompetence is a virtue, as I said before. Someone gets promoted if he or she is incompetent.

4.08 p.m.

Secondly, they live in a dream world so everybody else must be corrupt except them. It is a cesspool in the world in which they live.

Thirdly, they have no vision for Guyana. They have no ability to execute the plans of this country. They have no care in their heart for the people of this country. They discriminate extremely vindictively against people. That is why their tenure would be limited. So, take hope, Guyanese.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]* (4.08 p.m.)

[The Members of the Opposition withdrew from the Chamber.]

[Interruption]

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo] (4.10 p.m.): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak to *Budget 2019* during this debate.

On 18th October, 2018, when His Excellency, President David Granger, addressed this august Assembly, he said the following:

“I restate my government’s vision for Guyana’s development and the means through which we shall achieve our objective.

The State’s principal objective is to secure the ‘good life’ for all. The ‘good life’ entails providing every citizen with opportunities to be the best that they can be. The ‘good life’ is about securing sustained economic prosperity, ensuring citizens’ access to quality public services and promoting social cohesion...”

His Excellency continued:

“The ‘good life’ involves eliminating extreme poverty and removing social, ethnic and geographic inequalities. The ultimate indicators of the good life are happy communities, happy households and happy people.”

I believe that those words used by His Excellency, in his address to this Parliament, have guided the theme of next year's 2019 Budget: *Transforming Our Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities For the Good Life*.

Our foreparents were motivated by emancipation and the end of indentureship to work and to make sacrifices so that they could enjoy their freedom and lay foundations for the good life. The good life for our people was the dream of the fighters for our independence and the expectation of our new generation under our Republic.

While 50 years of one-party rule may have many negatives and consequences, successive governments did make notable contributions towards transforming our economy to give Guyanese a greater stake in and to share in our national wealth. Over the years, our people claimed the right to elect their governments, both at the central and local levels, which gave them greater power to share and influence the nature of our society. They used the nation's wealth, through national budgets, not political party wealth, to take us through further along the road to a good life.

Everyone knows that we cannot do the things we would like to without money, whether as salaries and allowances, pensions, social assistance, student loans and stipends, income tax exemptions and savings at the personal level, and through concessions at the corporate level. Budgets are not new to me. As a journalist, I covered some 20 budgets before I entered this Parliament. I was involved, directly or indirectly, as a Minister of Government, in shaping the policies for budgets over another 20 years.

However, *Budget 2019* is the biggest budget ever. Three hundred billion and seven hundred million dollars is a lot of money. It is *nuff bread*. This \$300.7 billion national purse will ensure that all persons in the public service get an improved salary. The increases are based on a progressive model. Those with lower salaries get bigger increases. These include the vast majority of employees in Government Ministries, Government Departments and offices - teachers, doctors, nurses, policemen and soldiers, firemen and firewomen, coastguards, *et cetera*.

The Opposition, during the debate, said that there are no jobs. But I heard, as I was coming in here, the Hon. Member, Anil Nandlall, shouting and screaming that his political party, the People's Progressive Party (PPP), is opposed to the \$16 billion being set aside to employ public servants, highly educated and specialised persons in the public service. I wondered whether those who sit

on those now empty green benches and who have become so eloquent in their noise, could be demanding jobs and, at the same time, be opposing allocations to create those jobs and be making a mockery of the allocations. It appears clearly that it is an attribute on that side to approbate and reprobate; to and condemn the very things that they seem to advocate.

The Budget gives back, in tax exemptions, some \$3.5 billion that would benefit persons with disabilities, re-migrants, tourism promoters and drivers. These measures have been set out fully in the Budget. I just heard how horrible this \$3.5 billion 'give back' to our people is. The solicitous views being expressed is that these "poor people" are getting \$3.5 billion. It seems to be such a bad thing that one does not remember that when we speak to the issue of re-migrants, that there are many students who study in places like Cuba and who wishes to buy vehicles, but they are not available. They may qualify as medical doctors, engineers and agronomists and have money in their pockets, but they cannot buy vehicles in Cuba. Those students, those qualified Guyanese returning to their Motherland, are now being given an opportunity to have a vehicle bought in Guyana and pay no taxes if the vehicle is \$5 million and less. We know it is possible for them to secure a vehicle in Guyana. They can have vehicles with the necessary capacity and they can benefit. So, this lamentation of the "poor Guyanese people" being given back \$3.5 billion, as if it means nothing, is a part of the political rhetoric that we have heard during these last days, and even just now. I will come to the meat of the matter, the last presentation, in a while.

We know that tens of thousands of jobs are secured from the funds in this Budget. It is one thing to talk about creating jobs. But it is another of budgetary allocations being set aside to pay those who are in the employ of the public service and, I will explain, in other areas. But we heard from those who sit on the now empty green chairs how the emoluments are going up, how the Government is voting more and more money to pay salaries and that is supposed to be a bad thing.

It would have been better for those doomsday advocates if the Government had frozen the allocations of emoluments and had found no money to pay public servants or to do the things that a government is elected to do. Then, they would have come back and said that the "poor public servants" are not being paid and that "poor people" are not being given facilities to which they are entitled. There is this pathetic lamentation for what has now become, for those who sit on the now empty green benches, a no-win situation.

4.23 p.m.

It is difficult to even formulate a response to that type of political legalism, that out of nothing comes nothing. This is what summaries the contribution I have heard from that side.

The Opposition Leader said that he is opposed to the Budget having allocations for public servants. The allocations we see in the \$300.7 billion Budget ensure pay and continued jobs for all workers, both inside and outside of Government. Jobs are saved and created, also, by private companies that get contracts from Government - be it clerical staff, engineers, labours, technicians or security guards. We are not dealing only with people in Government's employ. It stretches outside. That is how the spread takes place with a Budget as large as this one. Moneys from the \$300.7 billion Budget ensures that the programmes in the health, education, housing, water and security sectors are adequately funded. Jobs must be maintained.

In this \$300.7 billion Budget for next year, agriculture will get a big boost to push our nation's food security and to secure the livelihoods of our farmers, cattle and poultry rearers, fishermen and others. Better drainage and irrigation facilities would be provided, sea defences and internal canals will be maintained.

I speak directly through this House and through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Guyanese people that they should understand the difference between a serious Government taking care of the interest and welfare of people and political bluster, vacuous charges and allegations to which I shall return and to which I shall respond.

Better drainage and irrigation facilities would be provided, as I said. Financial assistance, called subventions, would be given to the Town Councils and the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs), irrespective of which party controls these towns and NDCs. They need to be assisted to improve streets and dams in the villages and towns, clear canals and trenches, provide better garbage disposal and solid waste facilities, maintain or build new markets and provide cleaner burial grounds. Our Guyanese people demand, quite justly so, the delivery of these services. This Budget, like the previous Budgets and like all other Budgets ought to do, should find ways and means of helping our communities so that they become cleaner, healthier and that they become models of what we could do in Guyana for our people, particularly those in the villages and at other grassroots levels.

This Budget, as our Ministers have said, ensures that infrastructure works continue in all sectors and in every geographic region to benefit every stratum of society.

It is from the national budget that moneys are found to maintain the several constitutional agencies, such as Parliament and the Judiciary. We were told that the Parliament, whose financial independence have been guaranteed by this APNU/AFC Government, is eating up too much food.

The PPP/C was opposed to creating these constitutional agencies and had defended a practice of political interference by making the Legislature, the Judiciary, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and even the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) subservient to a Minister's discretion. We heard the hollow talk, empty talk, just now about the discretion of Ministers. But, in the past, if GECOM wanted money to do anything, to ensure the integrity of the electoral process for which it is commanded by the Constitution, it had to take its hat out and go to a Minister of the Government. It was not even a Minister; it was the then head of the Presidential Secretariat. Someone had once nicknamed him Rasputin. They had to go and beg. If the Chancellor wished that a Judge should travel overseas, he had to go to a subject Minister because moneys were coming from a Budget agency. You know the old saying, *he who pays the piper calls the tune*. So, justice could be compromised if there is this type of political diktat and control over constitutional bodies which, under the Constitution, ought to be autonomous and independent. We broke that shackle that was imposed on our constitutional bodies and it was this progressive Government that guaranteed their financial autonomy.

Having created these bodies, even the Government is then bound to obey the law. The law states that it is only the Cabinet, and the Minister of Finance, who acts through and for the Cabinet, could come to the Parliament to make a request for the disbursement of moneys from the Consolidated Fund. It does not mean that, having given autonomy to constitutional agencies, they could make a request for any sums of money and decide it by themselves.

There is an irresponsible, callous and reckless Opposition that decided that it wanted to be the Government from those empty green benches. They said that the law states that they should decide how much the constitutional agencies get. We put down a heavy foot on that arbitrariness and that arrogance where the Opposition masquerades as Government or pretends, in a very obsessive,

unexplained manner that, cannot be explained by rational mind, that they are over here when, in fact, they are over there.

You heard, today, the Hon. Member, Anil Nandlall, cry out that we chopped the vote for the constitutional agency. In our times, we used a very delicate instrument called scissors. The law states that you could cut, but you cannot add. What we did when were over there was within the law. We were not outlaws. When we heard this word “chopped”, we knew that it was used opportunistically with a view to *curry* favour with the constitutional agencies.

Sir, I will come back to the text of my speech. Because of my experience earlier this year, I have been advised by those who love me, who, of course, are many - almost all Guyanese - that I should take it easy. One person said, take it *aaraamse*. It means the same thing - take it easy.

I just want to digress to what I heard a few minutes ago. I heard the Leader of the Opposition, in what must be an act of sustained desperation, in which one could see not only the perspiration but the fear and the uncertainty, the opportunistic obsession with wanting to charge the Government with issuing threats to Members of Parliament. It is only a diabolical mind that would conjure up allegations of that type against Hon. Members of this House and to impute that, because there was a motion of no-confidence tabled in this House, attempts would be made to deal with Members of the Government side who would dare to support such an unpopular motion.

Of course, there are, in this House, parliamentary privileges while one is on one's feet. One is almost subject to certain limitations; uncensored. In anticipation of the failure of the no-confidence motion to stand, this arrogant and vicious allegation was made. Of course, not satisfied with that brazen attempt to create division on this side, the Leader of the Opposition proceeded, as a new born constitutional expert, to advise, of course, the Hon. Prime Minister, who they say has no portfolio, who is useless, does nothing in the House...He is suddenly obsessed with the presence of the Prime Minister in the House. Any lightweight or featherweight knows that when they are dealing with a heavyweight they have to come strong. He has no argument with which he could convince anyone of this politically pathetic position, so he decided to invoke the Constitution.

[**Mr. Bulkan:** He is grazing.]

It is not even grazing. Grazing presupposes that there must be some grass.

According to articles 100 and 101 of the Constitution, the Prime Minister... and I am not speaking here in my defence. I am speaking here as a Member of this august Assembly, having been here for more than two decades.

4.38 p.m.

As a lawyer, I think I could very well better advise the Leader of the Opposition that he has strayed into unexplored territory, uncharted waters, as my friend has said, because the Prime Minister is the Leader of Government's Business in this House. If the President leaves the country or is in the country and under his hands authorises the Prime Minister to carry out certain functions - we do not know what those functions are; it could be any function, and the President does not have to leave the jurisdiction either to do so, the Prime Minister remains Prime Minister. The Prime Minister remains the Leader of the House for Government Business and the Prime Minister remains the First Vice-President and the Principal Adviser to the President.

I can tell you this because I have been on the Committee that explored and examined the 1980 Constitution from 1996 and even before that. We were probing the Constitution since 1990. I was honoured to share the company of persons such as Professor Harold Lutchman in the initial exploration of the constitutional provisions. And I can tell you for sure that article 178 (4) does not apply to the Prime Minister. It states that if the Prime Minister is not appointed to perform these functions, any Minister could be appointed. So, the provision applies to any Minister appointed to perform the duties or functions of the President. He should resign from the House. In any case, there has been a convention that has not been touched and that has not been contaminated, except by the attempt, the feeble one, today. The Prime Minister performing any functions, one or more, has never been invited to vacate his Membership of the National Assembly.

The Constitution provides that the President is elected and, once elected, he remains the President until he is unelected. The Prime Minister is an elected member of the National Assembly. One cannot *ipso facto* un-elect me. In fact, I cannot act on bad advice to un-elect myself. I want to put that in context for the Guyanese people to know that deviousness is what we see playing out. They are trying to first divide Members of this Government and set us up against each other. As a fall back, they are now asking for the removal of the Prime Minister from the House because the intention is to first be able to defeat the Budget, the \$300.7 billion Budget, to lock down the

Government, to create a constitutional crisis and to breathe disaffection and rebellion among the people of this country. It is diabolical, and it has to be met squarely. It has to be answered. It has to be defeated. We are not moving.

Last year, the year before, and the year before the year before, when the Prime Minister took the floor to speak to the budget, the Opposition staged its usual annual ritual of walking out, storming out. This Prime Minister has no power, according to them. He has no portfolio. According to them, the propaganda and the bottom house, he is a waste man. They run every time the Prime Minister stands on his feet. They cut and run. They hide. I believe that the mischief has to be answered.

When you deal with a nation's feeling – and I am not without a large number of people who think that the Prime Minister is a fit and proper person - it offends the conscience of people that you can show this crass disrespect for another human being and feel that you can 'run through' the person. I interpret some of the remarks, which were made here, and which were directed at the Prime Minister, as a direct threat to the safety and the limbs, perhaps life, of the Prime Minister. The obsession to have me removed from this House is to achieve an objective, a nefarious objective, of removing a Government.

Your Honour, through you, I want to give notice to this National Assembly and to the people of this country and I am serious today. I am very serious. Today, we saw the attempt, again, to stir up hostility, knowing that the sugar workers have been near and dear to the heart of this Government. I have sat with President David Granger and members of the Cabinet for days, weeks and months agonising about how we could deal with the tragedy in the sugar industry, which we inherited. We heard the Leader of the Opposition say that they had a feasibility study since 2000. He mentioned all the names of the companies that had given advice, in 2000, that the estates should be concentrated in East Berbice, which was better suited for cane cultivation. They did not act on the advice of their own feasibility study, if it was a feasibility study; and I doubt whether there was a feasibility study. If was just *gyaff*; it was just froth. They allowed the sugar industry to go down. They allowed the sugar industry to be bankrupted. When we got into the Government, we looked into the books and the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) owed \$85 billion. It had become unsustainable to operate the sugar industry without bringing the entire economy down. And they knew, the former Government knew that, unless it gave bail outs to the sugar industry and it gave up to about \$17 billion, it would not have been able to keep those workers as the milking cow and

as the ethnic voting machine to re-elect them into Government. So, they resorted to social bribe at the expense of the Guyanese nation. They played with the lives of the sugar workers as well as every other worker in this country.

When I came here two years ago, I made a statement here about Wales. No one wants factory closures. I came from the sugar belt. I have sugar in my blood. Tomorrow, the Grinch will have a headline, "Nagamootoo is diabetic", but that does not bother me. We have so many people who are diabetic and we need to be concerned about their health and encourage them to take care of their health. We spoke here about the plight of the workers and we gave an alternative for all those workers who wanted to go to Uitvlugt. They could have had re-employment. So, there was alternative job. Some chose not to go to Uitvlugt and they were paid. This is not the work of a callous administration. They were paid the balance. There were others who were not sure whether they wanted to go immediately or take severance. But the union that is in the bosom of the PPP, Guyana Agricultural Workers' Union, filed a court action and got an injunction that the severance should not be paid until they were consulted. There was information reaching me that they wanted union dues to be deducted first and they wanted workers who took loan to pay back the loan. They wanted to milk these poor sugar workers, poor suffering sugar workers. The workers came to me at the Office of the Prime Minister to complain that I should prevail upon the Union to withdraw the case so that they could have been paid. We kept to our side that, as soon as the court decided on the issue, GuySuCo was prepared to pay. Of course, GuySuCo was broke so it was the Government that had to dip into taxpayers' money to find the severance, as we had found before - \$37 billion. It was \$37 billion in over three years to bail out the sugar industry, to pay sugar workers' salaries, even while we were unable to produce sugar to sell competitively overseas. We were producing sugar at 50 and 55 cents per pound and the markets that we had were for 16 cents per pound. So, we were carrying this industry, but our interest was to save it - save 10,000 workers.

It needs to be explained to Guyanese sugar workers that this is a Government that has thought over the matter and that brought a green paper to this National Assembly, having first established a Commission of Inquiry (COI) to look into the problems of the sugar industry. Then, we took the decision that we were going to modernise and transform the sugar industry and put finance and capital into those three factories that could survive.

Sir, the severance has been paid - \$5 billion plus \$85 million in interest. I do not have the exact figure for Wales, but I think that it was a substantial sum and interest would be paid as well. So, this should bring us to the closure of that chapter so that the Members of the Opposition would not exploit it for divisive purposes and be able to tell the sugar workers that we are heartless.

4.53 p.m.

When I heard the Leader of the Opposition spoke today - I am sorry that I am mentioning the Leader of the Opposition, the LOO, so often - I know, and it is not hard for anyone to see through, that there was an attempt to turn this Parliament, this National Assembly, into a court of law, to try to advocate and resolve issues that are before the court. I am not going into the substance of that. I have the file here. I have the newspaper clippings of all those who have been charged with malfeasance, various types of frauds, skulduggery and theft. They are in the newspapers, accessible to all. As a lawyer, and Your Honour as a lawyer, we are advised against admitting exculpatory statements. Anything that is said here was intended to be used outside of the court in order to influence the court because you have parliamentary privilege. What is said here will be reported. If you say that the men, and whoever else, and women too, are victims of trumped up charges, are victims of vendetta, you are making an exculpatory statement that they are innocent and therefore the court should take cognisance of that. It is elementary, rudimentary law, in legal practice that such statements are highly prejudicial and they serve only the self. They are motivated by self-interest. I do not know if the Hon. Leader of the Opposition is conjuring up, as he has conjured, fears of threat in this Parliament, of a situation where he probably may be a guest of the courts, and he was trying to set the tone that it is all contrived and that he is innocent as charged. That is what I read into all of that.

Then we saw, in answer, statements made in this honourable House by Minister of Public Infrastructure, David Patterson, that many projects had been undertaken by the previous administration in the value of \$600 million. [Mr. Patterson: It is United States dollars].

It is US dollars. My apologies. I am, subject to correction - without feasibility studies. We have here an itinerant expert on feasibility, waving some paper like straw in the air and saying, "feasibility study; I have it here." We are in the Cabinet, feasibility studies are serious things. They would be tendered and submitted to Cabinet. Then another piece of paper was waved, quoting, someone saying, "I have seen it". He is trying to be like Moses, "I have seen the Promised

Land”, but I have not yet entered it. I have seen it in the court of law. That is hearsay. You want to say that you have a feasibility study, and someone referred to it in a correspondence, but you have not submitted it to the Cabinet, submit it to the National Assembly, make it an official document.

That, here again, we have an attempt to pull wool over the eyes of this National Assembly and the Guyanese people that there had been Amaila Falls Hydropower Project feasibility study; that there was another feasibility study for the Berbice River Bridge. It is the one they said that someone had seen. Of course, they talked about the Skeldon Sugar Factory feasibility study. They probably have other feasibility study for the fibre optic, \$2 billion that went down the drain for trying to run fibre cable from Brazil. Somewhere along the line the cable disappeared.

Having not been able to answer the Hon. Minister David Patterson, it is regrettable that a former President now condemned to the green chairs as Leader of the Opposition, resorted to *ad hominem* and started to personally attack the Minister, trying to wage, under privileges, a vendetta against the Minister. It turned this debate into a vicious assault on the character of prominent Guyanese of merit, Guyanese of quality, such as Dr. Clive Thomas, renowned in the world as a Third World economist and Mr. Anand Goolsarran, throwing these derogatory and divisive remarks about their character and their capabilities. It is really a descent to the political pit. I believe that what was passed out here as a contribution to the debate was intended to turn this House into a political opera, a political theatre, because there was nothing that you could see that was rational that was coming from it.

Every year, I describe that “Nagamootoo, Nagamootoo, Nagamootoo”, as the “*Naga-mania*.” It is a disease. [Mr. Patterson: Is it contagious?] No. It has a cure. If you are close to me, I have the antidote of love, affection, kindness and compassion. You come here, and you talk about Nagamootoo’s sport utility vehicle, (SUV). We remember that. When I was sworn in, I have a Prime Minister’s vehicle. I am not personalising this. We were driving along Vlissingen Road and it broke down, in the middle of the road. The Prime Minister had to jump out. He ran into the security vehicle. A vehicle was bought, a SUV, and there was the headline. Hon. Member Mr. Nandlall came into this Parliament here and said that the Prime Minister has a \$100 million SUV - custom-built and bulletproof. It has a freezer; it has a bar – the good life. Then a repeat of the SUV story, because as Goebbels had the line that a lie often repeated becomes a truth. That it is to

repeat this thing and Nagamootoo is there, as in Shakespeare/*Twelfth Night*, as Olivia, who said that she sat like patience on a monument, smiling at grief. Your Honour knows that. There I was, like a monument of patience, smiling at the grief of someone, every day, dragging my name into the mud and placing me in a \$100 million SUV. I mentioned that and, of course, the money turned out to be \$13 million for two vehicles and two motorcycles. It was never \$100 million, not \$20 million, but it was \$13 million, because we heard here about how much money was being spent on repairing vehicles in the Government service. Well, if you oppose Government service having new vehicles then you have to make do with the broken-down ones and you have to pay to repair them.

You want to know whether these allegations made in the House were in fact serious, since they brushed off what the Minister of Communities explained to repeated allegations of dietary - spending money to purchase juices for children, providing hot meals and breakfast. You brushed that off as if it is not an explanation at all because you want to send over a message that this Government was wasting money on feeding public servants. Of course, we know, how the food is going or gone, right here.

Sir, I do not know if I am infringing on your time for dinner, having talked about dietary.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, you are quite within the time.

Mr. Nagamootoo: I just raised that to give me an opportunity to have a bit of dietary myself. Well deserved.

Then the conversation ran cold. I saw the Hon. Leader of the Opposition sweating profusely, that he was running out of steam. He was running out of charcoal to burn the fire he wanted to light in this House of mischief. He then referred to problems in the party camp. He was referring to the PNC, trying to paint a picture to exploit the illness of the President and having made that nice statement that we are in sympathy with the President and wish his speedy and full recovery. Then he came back and said, yes, we know that there are some problems in the party. I was glad he said that because it gave me the opportunity to immediately rebut that the problems are over there. They are not new problems. It started when this same accuser engineered the rigging and manipulation of internal party elections out of fear of this minuscule, insignificant, worthless Nagamootoo. But he came back, every day, and you can hear him, the tape would catch, I am sure, him saying,

“Naga, you got to come back.” [Ms. Charles-Broomes: What is he saying?] “Naga, you got to come back.” *Boat gone a falls*. That is a reflection, because the season is returning for the selection of the party’s presidential candidate and the ‘turks’ are out there with their knives behind their backs. When you throw allegations over this side, it shall be responded appropriately.

The Hon. Member himself is adopting what a Trinidadian friend told me as the car garage tactic. I asked what this car garage tactic is. He said, *when you deh home put your car in your garage*. People on the road, a thief, would see that the owner is at home. Even when you are not at home and your car is broken down, leave it in the garage, so if the *sweet-man* pass, the man is at home. The Trinidadian gave me a joke.

5.08 p.m.

We see up to this day the Caribbean Court of Appeal would have made a ruling that there is no third term. [Mr. Bulkan: There is no coming back.] It is no coming back. There is no way you can contest the internal party elections but what you did is to keep the car in the garage, occupy it. Nobody else could get into the garage. That was explained to me that it was a game being played out to be able to occupy the space for the appropriate time when the elements would all be in place; so manipulation will take place and there would be the cry of foul.

I heard also when the voodoo economist failed to analyse Budget 2019, how is it that a \$300.7 billion could be reduced into nothing. The three-card, “the more you watch, the less you see and the less you watch, it is better for me.” You know that game. Guyanese know that game. We had this three-card trick today. Suddenly we were told - this Government was elected for five years and not a day less - that we have entered the fifth year of our term. That was a voodoo calendar. It is from voodoo economics to voodoo calendar. It depends which side of the coin you are looking, the positive or the negative side. The Hon. Leader of Opposition has never been convinced that there is a positive side. He is a loser. Yes, we know that.

Whether the glass is half empty or half full, he should have been looking at the APNU/AFC coalition Government having one and a half year more before elections are due. He tried to reduce it, by this three-card trick, to say that we are in our final year. The game is up because he is playing to the gallery of the people out there.

I want to come back to something which I should have touched on before. I want to do it early and I will come back to some other matters.

We were told by almost every speaker of the Opposition how the PPP/C scored a landslide victory in the local government elections and how there was a referendum on this Government and if they won it, *ipso facto*, the Government is defeated and should resign. You could imagine that I was not here to look at demeanour, as lawyers do, to see how power and the attraction of power could cause one to salivate. I was not here to see the pig with lipstick, but I heard it. It was sad that even the Prime Minister was defeated. This is a fatal obsession, as I said, with Nagamootoo and Whim. I want to say that Nagamootoo did not lose and Whim did not lose. I am here and wherever I am there will be Whim. It will be in my heart until eternity. They cannot take that away. Whim has not lost.

It reminds me of the story of the old man who came to Georgetown for the first time. He was going to Water Street and must have been given some bad advice, as we have had some bad advice today. They told him when he goes to Water Street he will have to fold up his pants, and all of that, because it is Water Street. I am sure that you heard that story. Here is this old man with the boots around his neck and some children from Georgetown shouted at him, "Old man like you are lost. He said, "*Me, me deh hay, Wata Street lost.*" Well, I am here, and Whim is here.

In 2016, the APNU/AFC fielded one constituency in Whim and it scored 31 votes. In 2018 the AFC, running independently, secured 62 votes and this is for the record. It is 31 plus 31 votes. It increased the vote over 2016 by 100%. No amount of statistical juggling will change the reality that Whim won. Whim has made an inroad into what had been a PPP ethnic fortress, as I recall from the 1960s. I belong there. I know that its politics. When the PPP contested in Whim other parties got zero. For a little party to come, engage the PPP in this ethnic fortress, and secured 100% increase in the votes, for me, it is a victory for all of Guyana. It is a victory against racism and tribal politics.

They said in Whim that this little party did not have the number of backers. You had to get 20 backers each, but I do know, as I have said it is the voodoo calculations, if you look at the number of votes you will know that it is more than 20. When you point a finger, they say the thumb and three other fingers come back at you. I look at Buxton/Friendship where the PPP contested, the

headline was, “PPP won in Buxton.” When you look at the fine print afterwards, for Buxton, in two constituencies - Buxton and Friendship - under the first-past-the-post APNU got 1,336 votes, AFC - 103 and PPP/C, it was a big doughnut, zero. There were other ones whereby they got three and seven, but in this one where they had 20 backers signing up on this... [Mr. Jordan:

They lost both constituency.] They lost the constituencies. They got the doughnut treatment, zero, then turned around to claim this incredible victory and tried to wipe out their own failure on somebody else’s identity, which is the AFC, which explains a lot as to why the PPP had to withdraw from constituency two, Rushbrook/Maria Johanna in Wakenaam. They found that there were a lot of fake names. Dead people were registered as candidates and backers. Of course, it did not absolve the Leader of Opposition when he said if it is found to be fake, I will withdraw from the list. The deed was done.

I want to go a bit more into this. There are allegations of manipulations, abuses of proxies and fake names in Mabaruma and Hosororo which the Guyana Elections Commission is investigating. This big pompous feat and exhibition that we saw here of victory, are hiding the facts. We have been silent for a while. I have not engaged this in the public. I have seen it over and over, all about Nagamootoo and his crushing defeat in Whim but silence does not mean surrender. I have decided to put it into the records. I hope that the media will be able to give reproduction of these facts, that this party, AFC... I must say as Prime Minister I am very conscious that I am dealing with a party advocacy almost, but it is a party defence. It is a political defence. It is a necessary defence because what has been said into these records will go down in history, that the AFC contested and took fourth place in four municipalities, Georgetown, Linden, Mahdia and Mabaruma and three Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs), Whim/Bloomfield, Mocha/Arcadia and Diamond/Grove. I want you to pay careful attention to this. The votes cast in these municipalities and the three NDCs amounted to 43,295. The APNU scored 24,881 or 57.46% in these municipalities and NDCs. The PPP scored 14,106 or 30.27 % and the AFC scored 4,964 or 11.4%. This issue about landslide, we must look at where the party was engaged because we cannot allow this matter to go further than it has been taken.

We know that there was a headline that stated AFC’s overall votes was 4%. In the local government election there is proportional representation (PR), but for the national election, the whole country is one constituency. All your votes are calculated as against the total number of votes cast. In local

government elections, you are accountable only for the areas in which you contested. You cannot translate the number of votes for a political party as against national total and it is to bring your 4%. That is why the *Stabroek News* newspaper stated, it did its calculation, that in 27 areas AFC had 8,719 votes. In 27 constituencies, even if we ran in individual constituencies, the AFC pulled 8%. It now went a bar higher. It is not 4%. It is 8%, if you look at all the single constituencies. If you look at where a full list was put up the AFC came out with 11.40%, which was 1.4% more than what was estimated and bandied about as the 10% party. Where is the defeat?

There is this decimation of the party. It was cleverly done to weaken the coalition and show that a partner in the coalition has been decimated. It is part and parcel of the divisive campaign. It is the dividing rule campaign that I have been talking to in this House and to the nation. I want to say this, even if it was true that the Alliance For Change had 4% of the votes, it is enough. The 4% is enough. It is like 100%. In real political term it is enough to keep the Pharaohs and *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* out. Four percent is all you need. Do not worry with the 10%, 12% and 15%. They know that.

5.23 p.m.

That is why there is this bombast and boast about having won the elections convincingly. If you transpose and use the same arguments they have used about putting the percentage as against the national list, let us put the number of votes Hon. Member Colin Croal was talking about in the elections and the Hon. Leader of the Opposition said that they got 122,000 votes and how much more they got than the AFC and the APNU. Well, I have the figures here and when you cast the figures against the list of the 2015 General Elections, there was 585,727 voters and if you look at the number that they said they have in the local government elections that they said that it will give them a landslide victory in a future national elections, it came up to 20.8%. This big party that thinks that it got the 2020 Elections lockdown in its pocket, when you look at the real votes as against the last election, you would only get 20%. If you calculate it on the basis of 71% turnout in the elections of 2015, it would secure 29.4%, and no more.

I want Members of this honourable House to know that you cannot fall victim to this propaganda of the omnipotence of the pharaoh, because the statistics, here, show that this party which went out to tell people that this is a referendum on the Government, if you vote for the PPP in the local

government elections the Government will have to resign. It failed even that, to motivate their supporters, and so there was the tragedy of the elections, of course, is on our houses, but more particularly 36-40% turnout does not motivate confidence in the Opposition. It was a vote of no confidence in an Opposition that tells supporters to come out overwhelming to throw the Government out, and so it is failure from the point of view of mobilisation.

This talk here about landslide victory is part of the propaganda. It is part of the psychological warfare, war of the fleas, to pick at the coalition and hope that it will demotivate us, discourage us and divide us, and so we must know the nature of the political beast we are dealing with. There might have been apathy among supporters of the Government, who are many, but apathy is not acquiescence, apathy is not giving in and therefore we are hoping that we will be able to turn the tide and to show the Opposition that it has not been able to capture the imagination of the Guyanese people. I will tell you why it could not capture the imagination of the Guyanese people in the past and nor will it be in the future.

Mr. Adams assumed the Chair.

Congratulation John Adams, for securing the seat. It must be a very hot seat by now, judging from the length of the last presentation. Sir, I would offer you no comfort.

This national budget of \$300.7 billion has a special feature that appeals to the young people, the generation that will run this country, and that is the ICT sector. We heard Minister Catherine Hughes and Minister of Finance talking about the exciting years and days ahead of us when we will bring Guyana into the digital age and these allocations and the creation of the *Infohub*, and bringing young people from high schools wherever they are into connectivity, e-commerce, e-health, e-postage and you name it they are going to have it, but it is coming out of this budget. It could not be that bad. It could not be so negative that the Hon. Members who have all spoken here from the Opposition felt that the budget has nothing to offer. Of course, there is money in the budget and they recognised that the Office of the Prime Minister has a 'Cinderella' budget. We are very frugal and we do not ask for a lot of money, but we work properly, we work efficiently and we produce results at low cost. We will continue with the support of this Government - \$908 million in all - for all the public information sector as well as the Office of the Prime Minister. We

will continue the revolutionary policy of connecting with our Indigenous peoples and our hinterland communities via television, radio and various colourful publications such as these.

I have taken the liberty because I want this House to see what it is that the Ministry is doing at low cost. I have a sample, and it is not the glossy and expensive magazine, of the *Hinterland Highlights*. There is a special edition of the *Hinterland Highlights*, the smiling Minister of Finance with caption, “Special for the budget, big plans for more hinterland development in Budget 2019.”

There is something for Linden. *Linden Ledger* and it focuses... Minister of State, you look sharp here.

[**Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon:** Yes. Thank you.]

[**Mr. Jordan:** What about the

Minister of Finance? He looks decent too.] Well, you look sharp. You knock him out. There

is the *Linden Ledger*, and it is for free distribution. Do you know why I am doing this? I am a newspaper man. Ink is in my blood. This is a business I know. When you see the headline that read that there was going to be a lot of spin in the budget, you know that they were referring to this bowler. We know that. Then there is *Essequibo Express*, “Rice exports jump up 43%”, “Mainstay pushes tourism,” “Thousands access free health care at Suddie Hospital”, “Youths benefit from environmental workshop” and Parika Selling to get long overdue upgrade”. This is the *Essequibo Express*. *Rupununi Roundup*, our President looks so relaxed with a child in his arms. Then there is the *Westside Diary*, Region 3, “Green Light for the New Demerara River Bridge”. You know that is the bone in the throat of the silent green Opposition’s chairs. They do not want this bridge. It links the West Demerara. The ethnic tribal politics would not be served by a four-lane bridge across the Demerara River and so they are trying to kill this project by discrediting the Minister and discrediting the feasibility study. It is as the west side story. This is a nice one, The *Berbice Bulletin*. “Region 5, successes hailed at RACE”. This one here has Minister Anna Ally smiling graciously on the front pages, and Ms. Cummings.

These are the publications which tell the story and because of what has been alleged to water down the contribution of the Department of Public Information (DPI) to place on record, my deepest appreciation for the work being done by this dedicated new staff who are young and very aggressive and hardworking. They are developing capabilities every day and they are very versatile. As you could see, in the publication of seven monthly newspapers, it is to keep citizens informed of how their taxes are being used to bring progress and development to the communities. In addition to the longstanding *Hinterland Highlights*, I showed you the others that we have, and

so we are hoping in the new year to have other newspapers in Regions 1, 5 and 8 and it is to have a special edition for Georgetown. We are also sending inserts to newspapers in New York and Toronto, to keep our Guyanese in the diaspora updated with developments in the homeland.

The DPI produces a daily news programme focusing on bringing news and information to the people about the business of Government, not contrived negative stories seeking to cause gloom, division and disharmony in our country. *Infohub*, as we all know, has brought a breath of fresh air to Guyana's news and information services. It is broadcast daily on National Communications Network (NCN) and several privately-owned stations, including E-networks and SKAR TV which reach out to us and start to broadcast this programme as part of the licensing agreement to provide 60 minutes for public information in every 24-hour cycle. Guyanese can now access news and information from the DPI via newspapers, via television, online, via the website www.dpi.gov.gy, via social media on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and also via Whatsapp. I encourage all the Opposition Members, indeed all the Guyanese people, to subscribe, for free, by sending a message to 608-4111.

As I am speaking now, what I say here and what everybody else had been saying here is being broadcast throughout the world, not only via the Parliament Office's website but also via DPI on the very popular Facebook livestream. Unlike what an Hon. Member of the Opposition interrupted the proceedings to allege, all presentations are being broadcast, and when I say all, including those by the Opposition Members. We now have fair and non-partisan coverage, unlike the information blackouts that transpired under the previous Government. Even further, not only is the DPI broadcasting this via Facebook to the world, but NCN is broadcasting live on Voice of Guyana (VOG). We are being heard on seven regional radio stations, right now across Guyana, Radio Mabaruma, Radio Mahdia, Radio Bartica, Radio Orealla, Radio Aishalton, Radio Lethem and, of course, Radio Paiwomak. Hello, to all of you in radio land now listening to the Prime Minister. Yet still this broadcast is going even further via a combination of radio and the internet as Radio Bartica and Radio Mahdia are broadcasting live online and can be access from anywhere in the world via the DPI website and the radio gargled act on any smartphone.

I wish to add that your humbled servant has now found some extra time to go on Facebook every Wednesday at 1.00 p.m. to engage with the people here and abroad and to transmit ideas about what is taking place in our beloved country.

5.38 p.m.

I know that it is being listened to because we see hundreds of trolls from those with PPP allegiance who would monitor what I say, every word. I believe that today Guyana is a better place for having a public information network that is open, that is impartial and carries the news to all our people.

I have tried to navigate what I had to say here today, as calmly as I could, but when I hear as an old political animal that the budget of this APNU/AFC coalition, that has laboured for such a long time to find the right tune, to find the right balance and to find the right social content, is being accused in this House in a derisive way that we are only selling “fluff and puff”, then that brings out the animal in me that I have to answer. This is because this is a new budget and the Opposition tried to receive it with “old politics”, old politricks and “old polyticks’ came out and attacked the budget. “Poly ticks”: poly – many, ticks – blood sucking insects, came after this budget with ravenous intention to shred it, destroy it and to denude the Guyanese people an opportunity to hear in this House, the contents of the budget and how it will impact their lives. We see all these bad and negative speeches - so called contributions. We noticed the hostility, the anger, the hate, the racist innuendos, the lust for power, the obsession with taking back Government at all costs. This is what the debate was used for. It was not to make honest, sincere, positive and constructive contributions on how we could improve on the budget, perhaps not this year, next year, or the year after next year after the General and Regional Elections of 2020.

We are always welcoming ideas, but we have seen the Opposition at its worst level. We have seen, we have heard the loud-mouthed, the noisy, insulting and disrespectful tone of the contributions. They huffed and puffed, they distorted facts and peddled untruths, they read old and cold speeches, each a fairy tale of what does not happen in Guyana.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, you have been speaking for an hour and a half. There is an extension for another half of an hour. Please proceed.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Thank you very much. I am very grateful to you. This debate gives us an opportunity to also judge, and for the Guyanese people to judge that Guyana is not so bad after all. We have an Opposition that does what it can do best – oppose and the Guyanese people are taking note that this Opposition should in fact remain in the Opposition because it is doing a good job as the Opposition. As the old people say, “One good term deserves another.” A good term of

Opposition deserves another. We have seen through that and we know that we could cope with the Opposition once we get the Government's business going.

For the Guyanese people this is, as has been described by some of my Colleagues, a peoples' budget. It helps to move Guyana, even by a little bit, along the road to the 'good life'. Even a little bit, it is helping to move us along this road. For me, it is also a confidence budget. Every dollar from the \$300.7 billion budget that would be spent in our country, on our people, promoting their welfare, providing security for them, defending our rights and protecting our sovereignty, build among our people confidence in their Government - this APNU/AFC Government.

The increase in the salaries for public servants, including teachers; the increase in 2018 as a lumpsum, tax-free Christmas bonus, earns the confidence of the Guyanese people in this APNU/AFC coalition Government. The Opposition Members of Parliament (MPs) say that they will not vote for this \$300.7 billion budget; they said that the budget is anti-working class and that the Government is corrupt and that is why they would not vote for the people to have \$300.7 billion. They have forgotten that under the post-Jagan PPP regimes, children used to spell the word corruption with three Ps – "Corrupption". Did you get it? I will spell it again – "Corrupption".

Conveniently and sadly, several Opposition MPs bandied about Ram and McRae's focus on Guyana's National Budget. Mr. Ram is my friend and I tell you that his accounting firm for many years have been doing these budgets. They have not set out only to review, critically, this year's budget, they did so on previous budgets. Let us go back to 2011. The review by Christopher Ram and Robert McRae referred to the then PPP Government as a:

"a mountain of corruption".

They did not go back there. They are talking that we are corrupt, and we are anti-working class. They forgot that, in 2011, the same *Ram and McRae's Report* spoke to a mountain of corruption. They said,

"Guyana cannot even make its Integrity Commission functional."

Integrity was important and still is. We revived the Integrity Commission. We have a functioning Integrity Commission that is asking and going after the declaration of assets and incomes by public officials. Some Government and some Opposition Members did not comply, but the question is –

under the PPP, after the death of Bishop George, the Integrity Commission was headless for nine years. They never wanted the Integrity Commission to probe the income and assets of officials, many of whom, presumably from the charges that had been levelled, were benefitting from disproportionate wealth, disproportionate to earnings. That is what the Integrity Commission was set up to do. It was to be able to ascertain that no one benefits from unjust enrichment.

[Ms. Hughes: Mr. Jagdeo did not send in his stuff.]

Yes, you could say that.

It was 2011 and the Leader of the Opposition was in his last days as the President. The *Ram and McRae's Report 2011* asked rhetorically, what would be Jagdeo's legacy? This is what they wrote:

“The Presidency has witnessed corruption rising to heights that are as dramatic as the depth of governance.

The Public Sector has effectively been subservient to the political directorate. The independence of the Judiciary was under constant threat, the gap between rich and poor is widening into a chasm and fear of victimisation has silenced civil society, the business community and independent professionals”.

This was an indictment of the Government in 2011 and of the President at that time by the *Ram and McRae Report*. No one chose to quote the legacy indictment. They came here and tried to brand us with the same indictment that had been levelled against them.

Ram and McRae's Report stated this:

This is something to remember. They concluded that:

“The Executive Presidency was synonymous with dictatorship...”

We have here today all this condemnation of the Government for being corrupt. As one Member said during an earlier Sitting, quoting reference to equity:

“He who comes to equity comes with clean hands.”

We did not see those clean hands because this is where they came from. This is the genesis. I also feel that decent-minded people, those with clean hands, also share the blame because, in 2011, the

Government was allowed to continue for another three years. This was Ramotar and not Jagdeo. They were commenting on legacy in 2011.

The combined Opposition, we were over there - the APNU/AFC. We had the majority of seats in this House and we did not use it earlier to exorcise the ghost, the phantom regime, that haunted the people. We allowed it to go on for another three years. They have brought discredit and shame to our country that is evidenced by the reports that we have seen. The damage they have done to our country is irreversible. That is why they could today stand and say what they have said.

We came to the 2014 period when judgement had to be passed and they brought another budget to this House. On 31st March, 2014, Ram and McRae, in their *Focus on Budget*, pronounced the budget “*Dead on arrival*”. Their report highlighted on its cover “A dried up Amaila Falls” with a caption “*Dry stone*”. Maybe they found no stone elsewhere.

They exposed the sleaze over that project and the job-for-the-boys’ contracts, on a road to nowhere. That project still stinks, flipped-flipped and the road flopped. Budget 2014 was said to be presented against a backdrop of Guyana’s experiences of an unusually cold relationship with the diplomatic community for languishing as a very corrupt country in Transparency International Corruption Perception Index - pervasive corruption. We have these people with their hands in the cookie jar coming here and lecturing us about corruption.

On page 18 of the review, Ram and McRae states:

5.53 p.m.

“Ministers have taken statutory abuse and impropriety to new heights.

Statutory abuse - abuse of the law.

“Moneys were being spent in violation of the provision of the Constitution and the Financial Management and Accountability law and in defiance of the House.”

Six billion dollars had been spent and then the Hon. Vice-President, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, then Leader of the Alliance For Change (AFC), I recall, went to the Commissioner of Police to inquire whether criminal charges should be brought against the Hon Minister of Finance. It was then that

we had seen a revolutionary situation developing, that we should move from the removal of a Minister, to the removal of the whole corrupt Government. It was corruption that brought it down.

We know that several years after these abuses took place, and as the learned Attorney General told the House today, when he exhibited the paper clippings of those who are before the Courts, I am sure that the justice may be slow, but justice will be done. Amen.

They sprang another, like mandrake, another rabbit from the hat. Just in case the arguments failed that this budget was fluff and puff, they said that you have not done enough. Show us what you have done in three years. They were comparing us to their 23 years of unbroken powers. I was part of that Government and I could tell you that when they say that in the last four years and if they want to make it the fifth year, that we spent \$1 trillion of public money and have nothing to show for it, I have done the calculation of 22 years of the PPP Government and I came out with the figure that they had spent \$2,127,680,000,000, *et cetera*. It has a couple of thousands inside, but I am not looking at the thousands here now, but trillions. If you look at the exchange rate then, the low exchange rate with the smaller budget, this possibly could be two into four into six trillion dollars. Then you mention these numbers, I do not blame the Guyanese for seeing *ning ning*. Some people say they get *bazodee*, seeing all these noughts. It is a lot of noughts. I cannot imagine that any government could spend that huge sum of money.

Then I hear one of the overzealous Stalinists levelling accusations against the Hon. Minister of Finance that the budget he has brought here is incapable of buying dog food. He called it a dog food budget. How insulting!

We want to know what had happened to the two, four and six trillion, which they had spent and which they are saying that we should compare ourselves, our three years, our one trillion we should compare our records with theirs. They always saying that we must match the performance and that all the projects that were done under the PPP Administration were projects that belong to them, they claim ownership. I heard a little boy in Whim said, '*Is wah, is mi mama man money*'. They think they own the money. Having been elected to Government that it is their money; that it is their school, it is their hospital, their bridge and their road. The little boy was not wrong. It is not their *mama man* money, it is the taxpayers' money, it is the people's money. A government is only

an agent to ensure that it is spent wisely, that there is financial prudence in spending people's money and that you get results for what is spent.

I want to shatter this comparison that we were given that we could not compare and that we are the corrupt ones. I say here, that we cannot allow those who have made this country suffer from external sanctions and for our people being put on benches in our own CARICOM countries, being treated as mendicants and suitcase traders, that we cannot allow them to parade themselves as saints and savers. We cannot at the same time allow them to go back to have another chance to feed at the trough. Guyanese people cannot allow this to happen. That they are salivating after the oil wealth and they begin to see all the tricks in the bags; that they could fool the Guyanese people with nice fluffy talks, nice figures being paraded, as if, suddenly, they are experts in running governments. Well, experts at running governments do not find themselves in oppositions. Experts at running governments first protect themselves in government and do not open themselves to the kind of sleaze that would have brought them down when the people voted on 11th May, 2015.

I say this, having heard some other contributions there, but not even, no pitiful political priest is going to be able to baptise this slush that was inherited in Guyana and turn it into gold. None can baptise it and convert it into gold. Even I might say that all the waters of the Berbice River; all the waters of the Demerara River and all the waters of the mighty Essequibo River, cannot cleanse the Augean stables which we have inherited from the PPP. We are still grappling with the shadows of those corrupted times and the mismanagement, inefficiency and the extravaganza and the waste.

I have looked at the records of the Leader of Opposition, when he was President, the Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo and I have seen that he had made in excess of 70 trips overseas. I have seen the amount of moneys that was spent on those trips, where he took what Guyanese would call would call..., **[Mr. Ramjattan: A baraat.]** Yes, Mr. Khemraj, he took the entire *baraat* with him as if he was going to a wedding ceremony. Not only moneys for airfares and accommodations, non-refundable contingency amounting to US\$360,000. Those trips cause the taxpayer's \$147 million.

I think when the Hon. Member, Volda Lawrence, was speaking the other day to the issue of how much money had been used for the health treatment overseas of members of the former regime, she had been very polite in saying a \$100 million. When the list is published, you would see the excess that had been committed for cosmetic treatment and health, decorations and alterations,

fertility treatment and the whole works, in excesses of \$500 million. The Hon. Minister, Ms. Lawrence, had been very kind. I think that you are a very generous and very compassionate person.

We have to move on and I could say today that I have walked those 23 years to which I referred, and I have been part of for a time, plus 28 years before that, and where I am standing today, is like being on a mountain top. I can say that Guyana has never been safer, more secured, stable and strong than she is today, thanks to the APNU/AFC coalition Government.

Every one of our budgets has taken us to a better place. I want to offer a bouquet to the *budget boy*, the Hon. Winston DaCosta Jordan and his hardworking and dedicated team who have laboured. Not a bad comparison, I saw movies and cartoons as Santa worked in the factory, to bring good joys to our folks, particularly senior citizens like myself. Thank you very much. I look forward for a freck. I did not refer to the Speaker, but we are always grateful for small mercies.

So, this budget, in layman's term, in the language of the ordinary people, in the language of the grassroots, the breadwinners, the *Sistrens* in the villages, not only gives us bread, it gives us a little butter on the bread and we are grateful. **[Mr. Jordan: Nut butter.]** Nut butter. A little cheese next time, but butter will do for now.

The 'good life' could be realised through the efforts of the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) and the Partnership of Business and Labour. As regards the Business and Labour Sector, I say that we have to dialog and to find better ways of working together. Where Guyana is today, is not only the result of big budgets. We are here also because of political will. We have built a new architecture of governance that is built on a stable multiparty parliamentary democracy. We have an independent judiciary; we have open governance; we have a free press; and we have in the making, the building of a professional public service.

I could say this that no institution of democracy has been spared the Opposition's scorned and condemnation. They say that moneys are wasted on food, as I said before, and House does not meet regularly, but Sir I could say this to you today. This Eleventh Parliament, just in its midterm of this Government, has done well and I have to defend this edifice of a Parliamentary democracy and to show figures that, in the Sixth Parliament in 1992-1997, there were 105 sittings. In the Seventh Parliament, 1998- 2001 - 62 sittings, Mr. Jagdeo was then President; in the Eighth Parliament - 126 sittings; Ninth Parliament - 166 Sitting; the Tenth Sitting, 2012-2014 - 88

sittings; and then President Ramotar prorogue the House. He closed down this Parliament; he shut it down. The only other time that had happened was in 1953, when the British invaded this country, landed troops and they suspended the Parliament. This is the first time we ever heard the word prorogue, again, since in 1953, but it was the PPP that did that, inflicting that wound on our democracy.

From 11th June, 2015, to today, we are meeting here for 105 times and they are saying that we are shutting down Parliament, going for recess and going on holidays. They did everything to besmirch the character of this House and the integrity of this institution. They even started to say that Ministers were going on recesses and leave, but the record would show that this APNU/AFC Government has been hard and consistent at work for the Guyanese people.

6.08 p.m.

Between 2011 to 2015, Cabinet met 212 times in four and a half years. Between 2015 to 2018, this was September gone, we met 215 times with sub-committees and Ministerial conferences in just over three years. Four and a half years, 212 times - this is Cabinet; and in three years, 215 times. We beat them again, and that is why we will continue to say, “Thoroughbreds do not cry, they run and die.” In this Government we do not cry, we listen to the attacks, we take the blows, but we keep fighting and we keep moving forward. That is the way forward.

Today, we can say to the whole world with pride that there are no death squads, no phantom squads, no extra-judicial killings, no partnership with the drug cartels and no assassination of political activists. We can tell the world that. There are no threats against journalists; faeces are not being thrown at any journalist under our watch - this Government; no sedition charges had been made against journalists. We have our little tiff and our little dispute now and then, but no one has been called a carrion crow, people from the Corentyne say, “*Channicrow*”. We do not insult journalists. And so, I believe that we here on this side, I have looked around and I hope that I am right, I have not seen anyone here who has lost their visa to the United States of America (USA). No Government official.

So, we believe that we have, in Guyana, a new democracy and we have a new democracy with a new content. I just want to summarise because I know that my time is running, but I can just give you ... They say, “Easy lesson good for dunce.” I am addressing the Opposition, that even if they

had touched on these things I would have been satisfied today that they have come to grapple with a serious situation in this House of how we are dealing with the many problems of the Guyanese people, and how we are trying to find solutions to these problems, and that we have to work together to bring that, not to bring down, like crabs in a barrel, those who are trying to step forward.

We have little things like the As, in terms of children going to school. His Excellency President Granger has articulated a policy of access, attendance and achievements, and every effort, even setting up a commission of inquiry, declaring a state of emergency in the education system when our mathematics results fell way below - going down to 30%. Today, we have seen that we are ensuring that children have access to school, that they attend and that they can boast of the achievements we have seen in recent in times. Then, the three As have been complemented with four Bs from the President's own gifts and donations, not personal. There are buses, boats, bicycles, boots, and we can add breakfast and books. Not any breakfast, but a hot meal.

I went to an exhibition and a conference by Minister, the Hon. Dominic Gaskin, and I heard young people sitting there talking about youth entrepreneurship, and I heard rolled out the five Cs - Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre's - Programme of accessing and encouraging young people to enter into the world of commerce, to form companies, and to subject themselves to counselling from people who know business. They got a cash grant of \$50,000 and more to start up their businesses, and then they are taught how to enter into contracts. All for young people. I was there, and I have seen how many of them reported that they have opened little businesses, and here we have an allegation that no employment is being found. It is an insult to the young people who are full on entrepreneurship and who have enthusiasm, energy, talent and creativity, and they want to move forward, and they want to be self-employed and self-sustainable, and they are being accused that there is no opportunity and support for them.

At the larger level, we introduced the six Ds. So, there are the As, Bs, Cs, and the Ds, that we ensure the defence of our country; we guarantee our democracy; and we implement the devolution of authority from Central Government to the Municipalities to the Regions and to the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDC). We promote development of the infrastructures so that all can benefit. We have diversification in agriculture to be able to supplement traditional crops with other crops. And, of course, there is the 6 Ds, which is the Guyana dream - the Guyana dream for the 'good life'.

And so today, it is a great honour and privilege for me to endorse this \$300,700,200,000, 2019 Budget, and to congratulate all those who worked towards this realisation. I hope that we can extract the light out of this budget and that we can altogether - the Guyanese people - can help us to dispel the despair, the doom and the gloom that the Opposition wanted to envelope this budget in, and that we can see the positive side of the content of the budget, this people's budget, this budget of confidence in governance, and that we can move forward and make Guyana not only a better place but that we can realise the 'good life' for all of our people. I ask for the unanimous – well, of course you would not have the unanimous – but for the approval of the budget in this honourable House.

Thank you. *[Applause]*(6.15 p.m.)

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Prime Minister for his statement. The next and final speaker is the Hon. Minister Jordan.

Minister of Finance [Mr. Jordan] (replying) (6.15 p.m.): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As is usual, and as has happened over the last four budgets, the task is now mine to *bring the curtain down* on these debates on Budget 2019. This is the 5th occasion on which I am doing so in the familiar atmosphere of 32 empty green chairs on the western side. But, it is familiar, we have become accustomed to it.

As usual, I would like to start by thanking and recognising several persons who have contributed to the shaping of Budget 2019. I would first like to thank His Excellency President David Granger, whose indomitable spirit will allow him to win the health battle he is currently fighting. We all wish him well and a speedy return to full health, so that he can continue to lead this nation and this coalition Government.

I would like to thank my 32 Colleagues on this side for their continued and unstinting support, in and out of this House. I would like to thank our Budget and Allied staff of the Ministry of Finance, who, operating as 'Team Unity,' have shown that our limits are defined only by what we believe. I would also like to thank the Hon. Members of the Opposition, without whom there can be no debate. Their usual and predictable absence is a blot on the business of this House. To you, Mr.

Speaker, I would like to thank you for your astute time management of these debates. I hope that it will be extended to next week's consideration of the Estimates of Expenditure.

As noted in my Budget Presentation, this is the third time that the budget has been presented, in this House before the start of the fiscal year. After some apprehension, the private sector has begun lauding this sensible approach to budgeting by this Government. The records will show that only Frank Hope's 1976 Budget, which was presented on 24th November, 1975, was earlier than Budget 2019. It is true that our technicians, administrators and others are still coming to grips with starting the year with a full budget, but progress has been made in the quest to unlearn a culture that had permeated the budgeting environment for nearly four decades.

A number of speakers on the Opposition benches attempted to define what a budget is. I can distinctly remember Hon. Mr. Lumumba's forthright statement that a budget is not about numbers, it is about policies - or something to that effect he was saying. If the Hon. Member needed reminding, he could have done so by referring to Budget 2017, where, at page one it was stated that a budget serves the critical functions of "economic management; financial management; management of Government; and effective implementation of Government's policies." So, to the Hon. Mr. Lumumba and to those others who were thinking alike, a budget is as much about numbers as it is about policies. It is how we weld these together to create the ultimate 'good life' for all Guyanese, for which we set out as our goal.

I believe that it was Indira Gandhi, former Prime Minister of India, who is credited with indicating that "It is the opposition's duty to oppose, expose, and if possible, depose." These debates have shown up an Opposition that has become jaded, bereft of ideas and new thinking; an Opposition that continues to take the easy road by regurgitating their yearly presentations. The Hansard can testify to this assertion of mine. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, I felt your pain when you were moved to express, openly, your wish for Members to raise the levels of their contributions. This is a serious indictment on the quality of these debates and a disservice to the people of this country.

In their typical manner, the Opposition opposed everything in the budget, as indeed they have done for the past four budgets. Almost all of them ended their presentations with "I cannot support this budget." The Hansard will bear me out that this refrain, "I cannot support this budget," is not unfamiliar. Even if we did everything that the Opposition asked, they would still not support this

budget. I could recall the Hon. Ganga Persaud crying that the newly laid East Coast Demerara road, for example, was too smooth. So, it is not that we do not have a road anymore, it is now that the road is too smooth. Do you see why you cannot please those on the western side? That is because it is in their deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) to oppose, to be adversarial and so forth. To them, social cohesion and unity are just meaningless concepts to be waved around. There is this overpowering sense that they must be in charge for everything to go right.

6.23 p.m.

This is an Opposition that refused to take up its seats on boards, commissions and committees. This is an Opposition that refused to attend budget consultation meetings so that it could *cry wolf* and *cry foul* after not attending.

The Opposition is supposed to expose, but instead, they were exposed during this budget for their hollowness and shallowness. They were exposed, for example, for bringing to this House a variant of the television series, *Sex, Drugs and Videotape*. In fact, I would like to call it “sex, drugs and masking tape”.

The Hon. Joseph Hamilton, in his presentation, seemed to be so enraptured by the beauty of the monument in Mahdia that he transported it to Lethem, only to realise that he had done so without lubricants to stimulate the economy. Is this the extent to which debate in this House has degenerated? A Member of the Opposition using sexually charged language to drive home his point on what he perceives to be nothing happening in an economy. I say: shame on you, sir! His ploy is no more different than that employed in the advertising industry, where women are exploited for nefarious gains.

In relation to the part about drugs, we had the Hon. Dr. Frank Anthony and the Hon. Dr. Vishnu Mahadeo making allegations about drug shortages, which were vehemently denied by the Hon. Volda Lawrence, and substantially refuted with facts, figures and refutations by senior officials in at least one hospital. On the aspect of refutation, I would also indicate that the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRBD) had refuted certain statements also made by the Hon. Dharamkumar Seeraj.

Then, we have the masking tape, an allegory for the Opposition blinding themselves to the progressive policies, projects and programmes that inhere in *Budget 2019* that are designed to benefit all Guyanese.

They were exposed, too, for attempting to falsify statistics, numbers and calculations. I am reminded by a little saying which I saw on social media that states, “statistics are like bikinis. What they reveal maybe enticing but it is what they conceal that is vital”. We have the case of the Hon. Irfaan Ali referring to Government’s expenditure on personal security. He was indicating that the Government was incurring expenditure largely on personal security. I do not know how many of my Colleagues have personal security, but I do not. **[Hon. Members of the**

Government: I do not.] A fair number do not. Do you see what I said about statistics? First of all, I do not understand how he came to that conclusion simply because there is no chart of account in the estimates that is called personal security. This is just playing, again, to the Gallery.

The allocation in *Budget 2019* is for \$5.7 billion and it represents a 15.3% increase over the 2018 revised position. Of this amount, 60% of this increase or \$458 million is to expand the provision of security services to our schools across the country. I heard the Hon. Leader of the Opposition say that we are putting security guards in the toilets. Well, so be it. If we have to put them there to protect our children, then we would incur that cost.

Almost \$100 million or 12% of the increase is related to the provision of security in health facilities across the country. People will tell you that when they go at certain times to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC), particularly on the weekends, there can be a security challenge there. The doctors and nurses feel afraid when families, relatives and friends, *et cetera*, get exuberant when treatment is not meted out to their family or friends and so forth. So, we have to protect our doctors, our nurses, our teachers and our school children and it is a cost that we are prepared to bear. It is not personal security. Indeed, some of us need personal security, based on some of the things that have been said in and out of this House, but we are thoroughbreds.

The remaining \$200 million is the cost of providing security services across the remaining 89 Programmes within the Central Government. I think, also, we must appreciate, that it is this Government that raised the minimum wage of the private sector last year. Therefore, security rates

went up, which we have to meet. There is no such thing that personal security is causing an almost \$1 billion increase and that is a fact.

We also had the Hon. Irfaan Ali making mincemeat about inflation. Do you see what we talked about regarding statistics? The goodly gentleman was adding up percentages and getting overall percentage increase. I believe that the Hon. Jaipaul Sharma mentioned this in his presentation, but I think it is worth restating because what we see in this House is a pattern of falsifying statistics to create confusion and to leave in the minds of the public something that is not really happening. There was a situation, when he was speaking about inflation, where he said that if there are three products - bread, milk and eggs - each costing a \$100, and the price of bread went up by 1%, the price of eggs went up by 2% and the price of milk went up by 3%, the total increase in prices is 6%. One plus two plus three equal 6. Which school did these people attend?

Is this the level of numeracy we have in this country now? Is this the level to which people with degrees have sunk, that they could add 1%, 2% and 3% and give that the overall increase is 6%? Let us see if we could do it the right way – the way we were taught as little kindergarten children. A 1% increase of \$100 is \$1; a 2% increase on another \$100 is \$2; a 3% increase in another \$100 is \$3; the total increase is \$6. If one were spending \$300 on these three items, one would now be spending \$306. Six divided by the original base of \$300 equals a 2% increase. Do you, Mr. Speaker, see how simple it is?

We, on this side, could give lessons. I said it in this House before: we are prepared to give free lessons where this is concerned. I will continue to show how this is a pattern of disinformation using statistics. So, there is a 2% increase in overall prices, but it is being shouted from the rooftop that it is a 6% increase and that we are killing the consumers and poor people and so forth.

Continuing in this vein was the Hon. Gillian Burton-Persaud. This Hon. Member took 0.5% of \$1,000,000 and came up with a \$20,000 increase. Now, let us see if we could do the math again. Ten percent of \$1,000,000 is \$100,000. Is that not so? One percent of \$100,000 is \$10,000. Therefore, half of that 1% is \$5,000. How can the Hon. Member take 0.5% of \$1 million and get \$20,000? It is because the Hon. Member wants to show that, even though 0.5% was given to the higher bracket, they are going to end up taking home more money - \$20,000 - than the person who got 7% at the minimum wage; they got \$4,200. When, in fact, \$4,200 should be compared with

\$5,000, which gives the more accurate picture that it is the bottom that we have favoured in the salary increases that we have given. That is no mistake. It was done deliberately because, as you could see, right through the range of speakers, it was a pattern of falsifying statistics in this honourable House. If it were a mistake, then it would have been one, but it is a pattern.

I will continue to show you the pattern, Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo came to this House and said we budgeted \$100 million to build a monument in Wismar, Linden for the Linden martyrs who his Government killed when the people were protesting for their rights. We did not kill any sugar worker. We did not kill a single sugar worker when they were protesting. We did not, and nobody should be killing anybody because they are protesting for their rights. These were unarmed people protesting for their rights and they were killed. We have budgeted a mere \$5 million in *Budget 2019* to recognise those martyrs.

I am asking my section here to revisit the compensation that were given to those people. Do you know why? It is not only that they should get it but think about this: The total compensation given to those people was less than the compensation given to one Commissioner. Just one Commissioner got more than the total compensation given to those people. Shameful! I am asking my Government to see it in their hearts, sometime before our term is finished, to correct this egregious wrong that was done to those people. One Commissioner got more than the total given to all of those people. That is how cheap life is in this country for certain people.

It was Mr. Vickram Bharrat who said it. My apologies to Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo.

Then, we have the Hon. Anil Nandlall. The Hon. Anil Nandlall made the incredible statement that the national debt has doubled, I presume since we came into office. It appears that no matter how many official documents you bring to this House, no matter how many official documents you can get from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank or the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), these are totally irrelevant when they come to this House and make their erroneous presentations. This document, which has now become an official document of this House was presented maybe two months or no more than three months ago. If we go to page 9, Chapter 3, Total Public Debt, what does it state?

“The total public debts stock in Guyana declined from \$355.8 billion in 2013 to \$345 billion at the end of 2017.”

6.38 p.m.

Does that sound like something was doubled? Is this not a pattern of deception that is developing in this honourable House, Mr. Speaker?

The next time this statement is brought to this House, we will ask that they produce the evidence of the 200 taxes that they continue to say, as a mantra, that we have increased since we have come to power. Reality: we have not increased a single tax since we have come to this point. Let us see our record. We have reduced the Value Added tax (VAT) from 16% to 14%. We reduced the income tax on non-commercial companies, first 30% to 27.5%, and, in 2019, from 1st January, it would be 25%. Do you want to hear what Mr. Ramesh Dookhoo has said? He said:

“Personally, I never believed that in 2019 we would have seen a corporate tax rate for manufacturers of 25%. I must commend the Minister [of Finance, Winston Jordan] for putting pedal to the metal.”

We have reduced the income tax rate to public servants and to all those employees out there, from 30% to 28%. We have increased their threshold from \$600,000, when we came in, to \$780,000 come 1st January, 2019. We have also instituted a one third, so those middle class and not so middle class going upwards could take one third of their gross income as their threshold, as their free pay, as we call it.

We have removed the income tax that was on National Insurance Scheme (NIS) contributions and we have removed a range of products from the exempted list to the zero-rated list. We have provided a range of concessions in the Budget. There has been no series of Budgets, I believe, in the history of this country, that have had the type of tax exemptions and tax relief that this Government has given over the last five Budgets. That is why we said that this is a private sector-friendly Government and this particular Budget is a private sector-friendly Budget.

Here again, is our good friend, Mr. Ramesh Dookhoo. He says:

“Budget 2019 contains good social and private sector measures.

Dookhoo noted measures such as the reduction of income and corporate tax rates to 25 percent was a “good measure” that will encourage small business to grow and be successful.

He said the continued measures to reduce taxes is a relief to local companies and serves as an incentive for international companies seeking work in Guyana.

What it means for the manufacturing sector is that persons who are involved in manufacturing would have more money to plough back into their businesses, retool, recapitilise and even open new manufacturing businesses in Guyana.”

Then, there was the Hon. Anil Nandlall speaking about the growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It is amazing. I thought the Hon. Nandlall is a practicing lawyer. I was initially concerned when I saw the notes and it stated “Anil Nandlall”. Then, I realised what happened. It appears that Hon. Irfaan Ali had done such a bad job that they were scrambling towards the late end to get somebody to come with some economic and financial rebuttal of the Budget. Poor Mr. Nandlall was out of his depth. I would just leave what else he said and just talk about the last one where apparently this is foot-to-mouth disease, which we thought that we had gotten rid of; it seems to still be around and can be contagious.

It was the Hon. Gentleman who spoke about commercial banks being safe barometers of the economy and that the actions of Bank of Baroda and Scotia Bank represent the verdict. The verdict of what, Mr. Speaker? The first thing is that, contrary to a by-line carried in *Kaieteur News* today, Bank of Baroda pulling out did not come as any surprise to us. [Mr. Williams: Nor to them.]

Nor to them, I think, easily. We knew since April. It was signalled to us in April that Bank of Baroda was pulling out of Guyana. We tried, during the interregnum between then and yesterday, when the news came out, to persuade them that doing business in Guyana is good. Alas, the local office was not able, maybe, to persuade the headquarters. In fact, I learnt that the local office chief did not even know that such a decision had been made until he was informed.

What is important is what is happening, generally, around the world. It did not start yesterday. It is just galloping, so to speak. The point being made is these banks consider doing business in these states as not profitable anymore. It is not that they are not making profits, but it is not profitable for them to continue because the risks have increased dramatically. They have to contend with this

form, this regulation and that regulation. They have Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) to deal with. They have the anti-money laundering regulations and so forth to deal with. So, they do not consider our territories to be profitable, investible territories anymore.

If you read the article in today's papers that was carried by *Kaieteur News*, it states plainly why they were pulling out. It is not only Guyana they would be pulling out from. It is indicated that they will be pulling out from Trinidad, Africa and New Zealand. They have already pulled out of the Bahamas. They said their focus is Middle East, parts of Europe, United Kingdom (UK), Japan, Singapore, Dubai and so forth. They do not want anything to do with us here. That is a fact of life. Scotia Bank is the same thing. They are pulling up worldwide; almost everywhere in the Caribbean they are pulling out, selling out and leaving.

What we have to do, really, is see opportunities in these challenges. The opportunities exist for our businessmen locally, businessmen in the diaspora and so on to *step up to the plate* and get involved in these businesses. That is where our opportunity lies. Let us be very blunt: with \$5 billion - and counting - barrels of oil, who is pulling out and for what reason? Who is not willing to take a risk with 5 billion? American Airlines is here. United Airlines is talking. There are more on the calendar and they will all line up. It will galvanise. Once that first barrel comes up, it will galvanise. Nobody is going to run from Guyana because they see a bleak future in Guyana.

In fact, within the banking sector, here are some of the recent headlines. This is *Stabroek News*, dated 26th November, 2018, "Republic Bank profit up by 14.4%". "Demerara Bank records \$2 billion in profits". This is 18th October, 2018. Citizens Bank - is where you belong - recorded a 51.6% increase in after tax profits. Those are three banks in Guyana. Does that look or sound like the verdict is in and that these banks are pulling out because there is doom and gloom in Guyana? No, it is not. I think it is just a wicked piece of commentary that was made by this Gentleman, again to satisfy a certain audience, when the reality, not that he does not know the reality...He knows the reality or the untruth of what he is saying. As I have said, we have to be careful in this House of what we are letting into the *Hansard* because ulterior motives are afoot.

Back to the Hon. Irfaan Ali. He alleged that President Granger spent \$1 billion in travel. This devastating untruth, told in this House, at a time when our President is not enjoying the best of health and at a time when the President cannot defend himself in this House, was rightfully refuted

and destroyed by Hon. Joseph Harmon. Such palpable untruths have consequences in this House, as one Hon. Member on the Opposition benches has found out. I am sure this one will have consequences too. While we wait to hear what those are, let me now fill you in on some travel numbers.

I have here the overseas conference and official visits made between 2012 and 2018. In 2012, the budget for overseas travel was \$270 million. Do you know how much they spent in 2012? They spent \$343,431,000. Almost \$100 million more was spent on travelling. The Hon. Prime Minister just told us who was doing the travelling. Did I hear somebody say it? In 2013, the budget for overseas travel was \$343 million. They spent \$412,071,000. In 2014, the budget was \$392 million but that was coming close to elections, so they pulled back. The actual was \$352,625,000. Entered the new Government into office in 2015. We came in, we set the budgets at the same amount - \$392 million. Do you know how much was spent? We spent \$263,567,000. Does this sound like people travelling all over the place? In 2016, we made a conscious decision to cut the travel vote and so it was cut from \$392 million, in 2015, to \$360 million in 2016. And of that \$360 million, we only spent \$232,736,000. In 2017, we made another conscious decision to cut the travel vote further. We cut it from \$360 million the year before to \$300 million.

6.53 p.m.

So, in 2017, of the \$300 million, we spent \$294,305,000. In 2018, it is still \$300 million and, based on the spending so far, we will be spending significantly less than \$300 million. So, at no time in this Government's time have we ever exceeded the travel vote. Not only did we not exceed, we were bringing down the budgeted amount and we are facing higher exchange rates, higher travel rates and everything else than three or four years ago when they were in power; and they travelled royally. Ministers of this Government travel business class. As I indicated in this House, I have the *Hansard* here, Friday 9th December, 2016, the Prince and Princesses travelled royally. I am at page 82 and I am quoting:

“Our people travel business – class and here is an example, on the 28 – 30th January, 2015, going to Geneva, this Minister, a Hon. Member who is in this House who was Presidential Advisor...”

At that time, I was speaking of none other than the Hon. Member Gail Teixeira.

“...went to Geneva, of course the Minister travels first – class and not business – class, the hotel accommodation, remember these rates here up to what I have read to the House, Geneva is Europe and so the individual would have been entitled to US\$250 per night.

She took five nights at US\$500 per night when the stipulated rate, approved by the Cabinet at that time, was US\$250. [Lt. Col (Ret’d) Harmon: Do not forget about her telephone bill.] I am not even going to the telephone bill. It is amazing that, when it comes to this House, people who are coming to equity are not coming with clean hands. But they think that they are dealing with people who have short memories. We do not have short memories. In fact, yours truly, who is standing here, has a very long memory. He operated in the belly of the beast. He knows what the beast gives. He knows where the bones are buried, and I am telling you, when they are coming, they have to come good because I know where the skeletons lie.

The Opposition is also tasked with strenuously trying to depose the Government. Why else, other than mischief, a craving for media attention and a penchant for behaving like the Grinch - trying to steal Christmas from our people - would they bring a confidence motion when it does not have a majority in the House? Wait a minute. They are banking on a Member of our side voting with them to unseat the Government. I say to you, the Opposition, we like it on the eastern side of this House. None of us, I repeat none of us, will be afflicted to exercise a conscience vote. All of us will be voting solidly against the no-confidence motion. We will defeat you, not only with the strength of our numbers, but the correctness of our policies. So, in the words of the Hon. Amna Ally, “bring it on!”

The Opposition seems to think that its showing, in an otherwise poor turn out at the Local Government Polls, is a reason to salivate about its likely success at the General Elections in 2020. I say to them: it will take more than that to unseat this popularly elected Government. When the elections bell rings in 2020, we will see who is still left standing to go the proverbial mile and a quarter. As they say, “*fancy gallop don’t win race*”. We are thoroughbreds, as Hon. Prime Minister reminded, just like ‘Sport Desk’ and ‘King’s Bounty’ two famous local race horses when Durban

Park was the home of horse racing in Guyana. We have stamina and I have proven it at age 61, with five budget presentations, the longest being 2019. We have stamina and when the elections are over, and the verdict is in, the Opposition would be sentenced to permanent residence on the western side of the House.

Continuing this trend of falsifying statistics, I seem to remember Hon. Dr. Vindhya Persaud perusing the Budget and finding that we are spending \$6 billion in feasibility studies. As indicated by the Hon. David Patterson, a number of projects under the previous government were done without the benefit of feasibility studies, and we, the taxpayers, are paying for these missteps and mistakes. We can name them: the Skeldon Modernisation Project, the Amaila Falls Hydropower, the Specialty Hospital. You name them, they are there. None of them is giving us a return today. And we the taxpayers have to be paying for projects that were meant to give us a return and that were meant to add to our capital stock. The Hon. LOO, Leader of the Opposition, talked about how we are not adding to the capital stock and that all we are doing is maintenance. Well, we are maintaining, up to this day, infrastructure that we inherited from the previous Government, infrastructure that should have been working for us right now. Some US\$200 million in Skeldon Modernisation Project, \$200 million of borrowed money. Do you think Skeldon or Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) could pay back US\$200 million? Who has to pay it back? It is me, you and all taxpayers who happen to be paying taxes.

A road to nowhere, Hon. Prime Minister just mentioned it, Amaila Falls road. Some US\$45 million. Who had to pay for it? It was the taxpayers. They are doing analysis of the numbers from 2014 to 2019. A lot is due to the missteps of the last government. A lot of it.

Today, we have a lot of money. Banks are falling over to lend us money, but they want to know if we had feasibility studies done on the projects that we want to implement. That is why you see so much money in the budget. We have to create a project bank of projects for which feasibility study has already been done. Then, we could go and look for financing. We have to stop the idea of looking for financing based on project ideas. It is just like how the man turned up with the money for the airport - there is no study – and said take \$130 million and we said, “thank you”. As a result of no feasibility study, they started at the wrong place which had quick sand. They abandoned it and went to the other side.

Ram and McRae is shaking all over the place. He wants to know...we talked about doing the Linden/Soesdyke Highway last year. We spoke about doing it the year before and so forth. And we will be talking about it next year and the following year too. Do you know why we have to talk about it? It is not about throwing a little bitumen on the Linden/Soesdyke Highway, which they did back in 1993, with the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) loan, when the previous Government went into office. There is a safety zone that one should not have crossed when it comes to the Linden/Soesdyke Highway. But because of lack of monitoring or poor monitoring and supervision or a blind eye being turned, the safety zone was breached, thereby compromising the Linden/Soesdyke Highway. So, it is no longer about throwing a little bitumen on it and saying that it looks good. The road has been heavily compromised. Now, geological surveys have to be done to find out if it has centipede cracks and so forth, dig up the highway and so on so that we could build a proper road that serves as part of the conduit for the Linden-Lethem road. And the road has to be able to take off how many wheels we are talking about and so forth. This is not a case where we could just go and get a loan of \$17 million, throw down some bitumen and then say that we did the road. We have to do these things properly.

There has been a study, I am told, where it has been shown that Guyana gets the lowest return on dollar invested in its Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP). Part of the reason for that is because many of these projects did not have the benefit of feasibility studies to determine whether they should have been a go or no-go. This is a change in what had happened in the past. Also being changed is the issue of projects that are financed purely from the budget, not foreign financing. These projects, also, will have to go through rigorous project selection criteria before they get into the budget. We have to stop this thing of doing projects so that the budget looks big, but when we look three or six or months down the road the project is not properly done or should not have been done in the first place. We have situations where projects were built, and the residents said that they did not want it. I think a classic case is the Mon Repos Market. That was built with grant money. Yet, if you pass Mon Repos, it is chaos on certain days. There is a market, and nobody wants it. Where was the feasibility study, where was the consultation, where was everything that caused us to use grant money on a facility that nobody wants? We have to stop this, otherwise, it is going to be a case where we would continuously in this cycle of doing projects just because it is elections, doing projects because it happens to be our ethnic community, doing projects because it happens to be our political community, and, at the end of the day, it does no one any good.

On that, I would wish to say, yes, feasibility studies are a fact of life and they are going to be a way of life continuously in our budget.

I am going to come to our goodly gentleman who was given almost three hours. But, I want to deal, quickly, with severance because it was dealt with already by Hon. Prime Minister. I just want to make a quick mention of it because the Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo talked about how we claimed that we had to give the GuySuCo all of this money.

7.08 p.m.

Now, that the money has gone. We do not have to give GuySuCo anymore, so what will happen to the wages and all of that. I really do not follow the deduction, the reasoning or whatever you want to call it. To me, it sounds like good politics. After all, the television is there and when these things are said, and it goes out to the community, people are riled up. “Yes, they have \$32 billion now, what are they doing with it?” That is so unfair, but life was never fair.

First, let us start with the severance. Can you imagine, since we came into Government, having to give GuySuCo, \$38 billion – not \$37 billion, \$38.5 billion - up to the end of 2018, we had to turn around and find severance pay, just when I thought we could have given the public servants a bit more. It is just when we looked around to find the money, the court puts a little thing on us - “boy, you got to pay with interest too.” We had to now go again and find interest to pay with the severance. We did it. We are legal honourable people and if the court said so, we must do so. We did it. We paid the severance to the workers. I understand that Wales Sugar Estate has started today and will end tomorrow. Everybody is happy; it is Christmas. I hope they do not spend it out.

Having now, hopefully, got GuySuCo off our backs - figuratively, [because when this statement was used in a previous time, apparently, the language was way above the individuals’ head and they literally took it and felt that they were monkeys] we are now turning attention to the areas that we should have been giving attention to. That is, for example, why you can have a budget of \$300.7 billion that caters for everybody in a bigger way than before. That is why we can promise our public servants that they will get an increase in 2019 before oil and 2020 once the oil starts to flow.

It makes a lot of sense to go around telling people is only 8% they got, and so on. Well, 8% to the teachers is over \$1 billion-plus, because the 8% plus the 350 came up to one point- something billion dollars. It is \$1.5 billion, thereabout. The 'little' \$1,000 that was given to the pensioners – God bless all the pensioners - I have not met one pensioner who has said, “it is only \$1,000.” They were quite happy. If I see a smile on my mother’s face because she will get the \$1,000, I am happy too. One thousand dollars given to pensioners, plus public assistance, it is almost \$1 billion I have to find for that. It is not that we do not want to give pensioners \$25,000 or \$30,000. I would love to see the day when we could do that, but *one, one dutty build dam*. When we came in, it was only \$13,000-plus. Today, it is \$20,500 from \$13,000. They want to know what we are doing with the money. It is to talk to the person who was getting a minimum wage of \$39,000 plus. Now, it is \$64,200. The fastest rise in wages, so fast that private sector people are calling me, worried, that we are raising the public servants minimum wage too fast and it will have implications for their competitiveness and ability to export. We have to be wary that we do not draw people as a result of these fast rises in wages from the private sector into the public sector. Those are considerations we genuinely have to deal with. After all, we want a private sector that thrives and grows; a private sector that is creating wealth and not the Government. We do not want to do anything that will be injurious to our private sector, once, of course, they pay their taxes. We have paid the severance and we have paid the transfers, and so on.

Going forward in 2019, we expect that the savings, as a result of not having to pay GuySuCo and pay anybody else, to be quite honest - we are tired of paying public corporations - will be used in a number of areas to treat with the social security, to treat with the pensioners, and importantly, to treat with our infrastructure. I am sure that there are smiles in all of the communities as you go around as they heard their names called and their roads have been called. I got a lot of smiles, when they finally said South Ruimveldt, because they cursed me out. They said that I am living in South Ruimveldt and look at our roads. Finally, they said that it is South Ruimveldt. I am sure that other communities are quite happy that we are going to look at their roads. When I looked at the picture that the Hon. David Patterson sent to me about the little paving that they have done on the East Coast road, I said, finally, we are looking upscaled. The picture of the road, the quality of the road, and so on; I could just imagine when it is finished and they put on the markings the international standard in which this road would have been done. I think this is what worries, the Opposition, it is what is worrying them. Of course, the big worry is the extra one billion barrels

that were found, recently. At five billion barrels, they did the quick math - carry a nought across, divide by two and put back another nought, it comes up to a trillion dollars. "Oh my God, we are going to be out of power". This cannot happen.

We have to beware of wounded lions. They are the most dangerous. We cannot lower our guard. We saw it today in the fuming and frothing that took place by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition. That is why you have to beware. The propaganda will thicken and it will expand. We, at all times, and timely, have to counter the propaganda and sell our programmes while we do it. That is why I will reiterate that there were no new taxes under this Government – no new taxes. There was reduction in taxes; there was increases in thresholds. All that we said was that we are trying to broaden the tax base.

Now, the big mantra is the taxes in the budget, but this has been achieved without a single new tax. Jordan is not a wizard. This is straight economics. As the base widens and as more people are brought in, the tax will go up. Now that the taxes have gone up, we can reduce rates further. Bear in mind, as Mr. Dookhoo has said, that he did not believe that we were going to put manufacturing tax to 25% within our first term. We did it. That is because not only we are true to what we have said, but it is because we believe that we must continue to give incentives to our private sector so that it could thrive and grow. This is not the only measure that it is going to benefit from in this budget. It has benefited from property tax, capital gains tax, wear and tear, export allowance, remissions being paid upfront, refunds being paid upfront, a glorious measure. Nobody has to wait five or ten years and wait on the budget to get refunds. Now, after these laws are passed, once the Guyana Revenue Authority has a refund for you, it has to pay you and it can make that payment out of current revenues before it remits it to the Consolidated Fund. Is this not something? I do not know how many of you have refunds to get. This is a measure clearly that will put money in people's pocket and certainty to people getting back their refunds.

This will galvanise people to pay their taxes because if you know that you are going to get your refunds and you will not get the bureaucracy that states that you have to wait until some budget to pass, or for them to put it in, people are going to pay their taxes. At least, certainly, the rate ought to be going up slightly more. Again, as I said, once the base continues to broaden, we commit to the public that we will continue to reduce taxes and increase the threshold.

I will take my next half an hour or so, to speak to Hon. Member Mr. Jagdeo. There is a lot that he said, and I do not know if I will get through, but I will try as much as possible to see how far we will get with this. There is no doubt that the economy has been evolving over the last three years. It has been going through some growing pains and it has to adjust to an economy that is legal. I said it, and I will say it again: No amount of private sector can ask me to prove it and all kinds of story. You do not prove a fact. A fact is a fact. It was a criminalised state for which many benefited, if they do not want me to call their names. Where drugs were not involved, wholesale giveaway of our national patrimony was involved. The Hon. Member talked about remissions. I can get tell you, I have the numbers here.

In 2014 – because the reference year seems to be 2014 – remissions of taxes was \$92.4 billion. There were not ExxonMobil and those companies then. So, who got \$92.4 billion in remissions? We know all the names. We can call all the names in here. We know their links to certain people in the former Government. In 2014, \$92.4 billion in remissions. When we came into power, we made certain adjustments and certain cut-outs. The remissions reduced dramatically by 2017. In 2017, remissions were \$64.3 billion. In 2018, it went up to \$85.9 billion. It is not because we have become more profligate. It is because of ExxonMobil which is coming in now and ramping up for 2020. That is expected because the laws that have been coming here in this House and have been passed two or three times give it complete duty-free and tax free, and so on and so forth, and it has ramped up activities. There are three drill ships, food and all kinds of story, so that is what is causing that there.

What the Misterys do not know, do not understand or do not appreciate, is that on the balance of payment, there will be a situation where all the current items, which are coming in, will come as imports. It will be financed by the capital side because it is foreign direct investment that is coming into the country, and that is on the capital side of the balance of payments.

Now, why is there this large current account deficit on the balance payments? It is simple. On the import side, there are large chunks of imports, capital items, and so on, particularly for the people who are drilling out there. There is also a situation where there is no cheap oil anymore.

7.23 p.m.

Oil has increased dramatically in price over the last year. It will increase further, even if prices stabilise today, because the oil is no longer coming out of Petrotrin in Trinidad. That has been closed, so we must go further afield looking for oil. We do not have tankers, so we cannot get economies of scale even if the price of oil falls on the international market. We have a little 'two by two' boat that goes on this long journey and brings in a "quarter pint" of oil. By the time it reaches back here and puts the oil out, it has to turn around to get another "quarter pint" of oil. Until we could dredge the Georgetown harbour and have larger boats and storage capacity built in Guyana, we will face this situation. Do not holler how prices gone down at the international level but it is still high in Guyana. That is a fact of life. We have a little boat.

We do not get the economies of scale. We buy spots. We do not buy futures. Spot means that you go there (refinery), whatever is the price, you pay it and come back here. Futures is when you have a long-term contract that locks you into a price. This price is what will hold for the contract period. We do not have that capacity. Nobody wants to lock you in for "two gallons" of gas. For two million gallons of gas, yes, but for two gallons nobody will have time to lock you in and there is no futures for that. This is the reality. The Opposition loves to holler how international prices gone down but prices here are still high. International price is not the price we face. When we turn up with our boat, they say the price is this, and we say all right, fill it up, then we turn around and come back here.

Happily, we made representations to CARICOM Council and it has agreed to suspend the Common External Tariff (CET). When we go now, ex CARICOM, which is outside of CARICOM, to pay the fuel, we would not have to pay the duty that is employed on all products coming from outside of the CARICOM territory. That at least will hold prices down a bit. We have received that from CARICOM a couple of days ago. We are trying all kinds of things to make certain that we can stabilise the price. Then you hear on the current side, exports... Sure the exports receipts have not gone down, but they have not increased as massive as they should. Let us be blunt about everything of this country.

Our exports, from since Noah built the ark to now, have been the same. This is a mantra. I have said this in the House all the time. Nobody can come and say something differently. It is the same. You may be lucky if gold prices are good, today you may see gold export earnings going up.

Tomorrow, or not even then, by the time you sleep and wake up, it goes down back. Gold earnings will go down.

The big reason why we are in this position, today, is because sugar is no longer contributing in a big way. That is number one. Number two, sugar is not getting a preferential price in the European Union. That has gone a long time ago. We are not getting a preferential price for rice out of Venezuela. We are getting a nice price out of Panama, but it is nothing as what we were getting in Venezuela. Those are the facts. They banned the greenheart. It cannot get out and timber exports have gone down. This has nothing to do with our Government. These are not excuses that we are making. We cannot be selling timber, bauxite, rice, sugar, none of which we control the prices, and expect that tomorrow when the prices go haywire that our export earnings would be stabilised. What kind of zombie economics is this?

This is the reality that we face in this country. No amount of propaganda can change that. They could tell you how much they had and how much was exported in 2012 and 2013, but it will be the same thing. They had a lucky break with gold. They had the PetroCaribe which was going for the rice and sugar was still doing, 100,000+ to 212,000 tons. All that has gone. The past is dead. Long live the past. We must think about the future. The future is bright. We have five billion barrels of oil that will start flowing from 2020, March, and they still are talking about the past. It is the past they are talking about and trying to rile up sugar workers for votes. Talk to the sugar workers on how they could get a piece of the pie, come 2020 and beyond. Five billion barrels and counting; that is where the future lies, not in the past - brewery of sugar.

If you speak to many of the sugar workers... I read some of it, where they said they should have been out of the business a long time ago, now that they have their severance. They said they should have been out of that business a long time ago. One reason why they probably were not out is because of the propaganda that they were being fed that kept them on those estates, but now they have seen the light. For the Opposition to keep them corralled, it has to send out these messages: "Pay out these ethnic waste", "the Government did not...", under the bottom house, "the 'black' Government does not like you all," and "the Government doing this...", and so on. We have get our public relations (PR) message that states the numbers do not add up. "You are telling us that the Government does not like us, but here is what it is doing for us." This is what we must do. The message might be difficult to counter but we still must get the message out. We must get it out

timely because those Hon. Members are not wasting time. They are like the cracks under the highway, eating away at the foundation.

It is good to come here and talk about the four accounts of the national economy - fiscal and real accounts, balance of payment – the man sounded like a professor. The long and short, after we strip away all of that, the reality is: What is all of that doing for the man in the street? What is all of that doing for you? Do they have a \$300.7 billion alternative budget to give to the man in the street, to give him hope? Do they have that? It is only this Government that has put forward a budget. What they have done is to put forward a lot of hot air and talk. Talk is cheap and talk is plenty, but they have not put forward an alternative. For people who consider themselves to be a Government in waiting, they have not put forward a single recommendation. All you are getting is the refrain, “I cannot support this budget.” [Mr. Patterson: They said to take it to a Special Select Committee.] Yes, Hon. Member Odinga Lumumba recommended that we carry the budget to a Special Select Committee.

This business about the signing bonus comes up again. I saw the Hon. Prime Minister’s good friend, Mr. Ram, was making the same point in his column. I wanted to call and remind him that he being a lawyer, hearsay is not admissible in court and I am writing it down. It could bring libel charges. He used to be my friend, so I let it ride. I would like Mr. Ram and everybody else to bring the recording and bring the written that I denied that we did not get a signing bonus. I am not a lawyer, but they asked me two questions. It is in the *Hansard*, because I have raised this matter before in this House. They did not ask me if Government received a signing bonus. The question asked of me was whether Government received a US\$20 million signing bonus. I said that I do not know anything about that. [Mr. Bulkan: It was US\$18 million.] It is US\$18 million, but I do not need to tell them that it is. [Ms. Lawrence: They must do their homework.] Go and do your homework. It is because they did not get me saying, “no, it is not US\$20 million; it is US\$18 million”, that they are saying that I lied about a signing bonus. You did not ask me any question. If you ask me that same question in the court, and I answered similarly, you cannot tell me that I lied to the court. You are asking me a specific question, “Did the Government receive a US\$20 million signing bonus”? The answer is no. What do you want me to do? Continue the answer? I am telling Mr. Ram openly now; if he accuses me again of lying

about a signing bonus, it is not going to be this easy. When the Leader of Opposition makes that statement outside of this House, where he does not have privilege, he also should take notice.

They talked about the Government decimating some re-migrant scheme. It is laughable as it is palpable. We are fed-up with the situation whereby honest people from the diaspora are being made to pay for the dishonest. We have had quite a lot of dishonesty. People are coming here under the guise of re-migrant scheme, but the principal thing is to bring home many containers containing high-end televisions and high-end vehicles, then they disappear. I am not saying it is everybody, but a significant number of cases of this chicanery has forced us to make changes in the way we do business.

The way we will do business now is to give the re-migrant a \$5 million tax credit. The re-migrant could bring whatever vehicle he or she wants after. We are not responsible for the re-migrant wanting to bring any BMW in this place. We are not responsible for that. We said if you come back home, we will give you up to a certain level, and so forth. The genuine people will come. They will come even without the car. In fact, most of them would come without a car. Now they would be happy that they can buy it here within six months of when they come. They do not have to worry about a left-hand or right-hand drive car. They can come here and buy a car. They could bring the car that they have too if they are willing to take the challenges on these very challenging roads that we have. And what is wrong with reducing the limit from four to three years? The Hon. Member, the Leader of the Opposition, jumped up and said that they would not benefit.

Now if you are a lovely student, bright, who went out there, finished a first degree in three years, saved up all the 'little' pennies and you can buy a little something and come back, you are going to be treated first as a re-migrant. Secondly, you are going to be able to bring your car. I do not expect you to be a 'little' student who is going to bring a BMW, having served only three years in college. All of us who went to universities, if we could have afforded it, we bought a little second-hand jalopy to get us around and when we were ready to come home we would have sold it. Now we are not even asking you to have it in your possession for six months before you come home. You could bring the money home and buy one and go to your work, and so. Why is this not a positive for a young person who is coming home?

It is in recognition of the excellence of young people that we have moved from four years. A first degree would normally take four years, but there are some excellent youngsters who could do it in three years. We are also not committing you to do a degree programme. We said three years of continuous study. Once you could prove that you went to high school in the United States of America (USA) or the United Kingdom (UK) for three continuous years, reached the A-Level standard and came home, you are still entitled to it. It has nothing to do with a degree, and so forth. The idea is to assist young people. They are always saying that we are not doing anything for young people. It is to assist young people when they come home to re-integrate and to have a “good life” too.

7.38 p.m.

It is to jump in your car and go by the creek. You would not have to wait on a minibus. This is how we are helping young people where this is concerned. [Ms. Wade: We are rolling nice.] We are rolling good, # help-young-people.

Then of course, you cannot have a debate without hearing about the 50%. Even a certain trade union leader has picked up the cudgels of the *50 percenters*, as I like to call them, and has been running with it. I wrote a letter and I gave up. I was not about to continue because he has whole day to write. I do not. This matter has been dealt with *ad nauseam* and I do not really think it ought to be repeated *ad nauseam*. The simple reality is as follows: The Government came in and for reasons that have been stated, decided to increase salaries, one-off. I know it took a lot of blows, but it is one-off and not everybody got 50%. It was only a few persons got 50%. Prime Minister got 5% and President got nothing. The senior Ministers got 50% and the junior Ministers got about 19% and the Members of Parliament got a smaller per cent, and so on. The Senior Ministers’ salary is the same salary as that of the Hon. Speaker and the Hon. Leader of the Opposition. Please note that the Hon. Leader of the Opposition took the higher of the two because he cannot get both, and so he is stuck with the pension. That is our goodly person who loves the poor. He did not take the \$800,000+, but he takes the \$1,600,000, or whatever, tax free pension. It is a pension that he gave himself just before he left office in 2011.

We have to repeat it because he likes to make the mantra of the 50%. Not only did he raise his own salary so that he could get seven-eighth of it as a pension, but he made it seven-eighth of the current

President's salary. Do you know what we have had to do, Mr. Speaker? We are not giving the President an increase too, because to increase his salary means it is an increase in pension for the Opposition Leader, because it is seven-eighth of the current salary of the current President. It is not only the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, he got fellow travellers because there are two other former Presidents who are getting the identical pension. We have to hold His Excellency down, because if we increase his salary, their pensions automatically go up and for us they got more than enough.

Whenever the Leader of the Opposition or anybody talks about the 50% increase, let us talk about the one point-something million dollars tax-free pension that the Hon. Member gets and if that is rounded off it is two point-something million dollars taxable. Nobody sitting anywhere here gets two-point something million dollars a month, not even the Prime Minister nor the Attorney General. There are people who are not working as hard as us earning almost two times as much as most of us here. I know it is not going to finish.

Then there is story about the members of the disciplined services. I am going to say it again, and I said it out there and I am going to say it in the House; the PPP/Civic Government paid a one-month bonus to the disciplined services. It was moneys that were intended to pay salary increases for the entire public service. This is not gossip. This is not a rumour. I was there. I am telling you, Mr. Speaker, that the PPP/Civic Government creamed off money that was meant for the entire public service, to pay the one-month bonus to the disciplined services. It had an ulterior motive of doing so. It was to keep the rest of the population in-line. It was to keep a certain segment of the population in-line, and it worked for them. The unfortunate thing about that is that, at a personal level, it bothered me when I used to see it being done because even moneys that were left back were sent back to the treasury. You saw through what was the whole motive behind it – the whole mischief behind it.

The second reason why it bothered me was because of the message, subliminal or otherwise, that is sent. I would leave it at that. It bothers me up to today the subliminal message that it sent. It will continue to bother me because I learnt that certain red jerseys containing certain 'grangers' were handed out to certain sections of the population in return for certain votes. It bothered me from the standpoint if this is what we have come to and is this what our forefathers, who came as indentured labours and who came here as slaves, fought for the right to vote and it can be bought with a jersey and a \$5,000. I believe, wherever this is being done, we have to say this is wrong, and we have to

call it for what it is. I do not know if it is against the law, but this here goes against the grain of what our forefathers and foremothers fought for, and to be bought with a red jersey and a \$5,000 is unspeakable. I am telling all of my brothers and sisters outside not to fall prey to this. I am not saying do not take it. Money is money, but do not fall prey, because it will come back again in the 2020 Elections and there is no question about it. There are deep pockets out there and it will come back, but I could only urge my fellow citizens not to fall prey. It is to take the money, but do not fall prey.

There are two or three quick points because I know we want to get out of here.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for an hour and a half. I will extend the time to another half hour.

Mr. Jordan: Thank you Sir. We heard about the Commissioner General, and I know they do not like him, but God bless him because he came at the right time and pretty soon, next year, we are going pass the threshold of \$200 billion without increasing taxes. They do not like him because, without a doubt, he has unquestionable character and integrity and he cannot be bought. He is not for sale. We have got from Guyana Stores Limited a judgement of \$3.8 billion. I do not know why we want to bring the people's business in here. It is just to set the record straight, since the Commissioner General cannot speak about taxpayers nor can he speak in this House. The individual is paying according to an arrangement he has with the GRA. That is all we are going to say. The Commissioner General is not running around the place looking for shopkeepers and vendors, and so on, because they are not exempted from paying taxes if they have chargeable income. We cannot have a situation in this country where some are paying taxes and others are not paying and when you go after non-compliant taxpayers to broaden the tax pool, one would get all kinds of thing. It is just as the story of the noise. We are not stopping you from pushing your cart and selling your music, but do not do it in violation of the law. Nobody is stopping the vendors from earning a living or the shopkeepers, or whomever.

Why is it that we, as a people, cry out that we are paying too much taxes, but we do not want to speak about the ten who are building all those fancy houses but are not paying no tax? We do not want to say anything. First of all, we are trying to register everybody under the tax net. If you do not have to pay tax, then you would not be registered. As long as you have to pay tax then you

have to be registered and pay your fair share of taxes. I would like to see income taxes go down, in the next round, when we get our next five years, to 20%. The speed with which this can happen depends on whether the willingness of a greater part of the population to pay their rightful taxes.

When we gave the amnesty, an Hon. Member jumped out and said we did it because of our friends. Everything is our friends. I would like to tell the Hon. Member something: in his case, the only non-taxable income that he has is his pension, and anything else he is earning he has to pay tax. I do not know his file and I do not want to know. I do not want to know anybody's file. For his sake, I am going to urge him, as a friend, to pay his taxes on the income that he is earning from the various jobs that he is doing. Come with clean hands. I am not threatening him. I do not know his file. I do not know anything. All that I am reminding the public is that the only tax-free income that he has is his pension. I do not need to threaten anybody. I do not go down that road at all. I do not need to do such things. The man (Guyana Stores) is paying his taxes. We are not harassing any vendors or anything of that sort. We just want them to register and if they have to pay some kind of tax, then let them pay their tax.

The amnesty was very successful. We gave people nine months of opportunity to pay and the plus about that now they are on the roll. The plus about it is that we now have an idea about their income and you are going to hear a lot harassment from a certain sector that we are harassing the gold sector and all these kinds of story. There is a weight of asset which is going on down there and all we are asking people to pay their rightful tax. The next thing you hear that the sector is being harassed. A significant set of the money came from gold during the amnesty. Thank God for the miners. Thank God now that they would be paying the right taxes. This has given us an opportunity to put people on the tax roll and to get an estimate of what is the income that they are earning. As I said, come 2020 and the next five years, we will have a tax structure here which all of us could be justifiable proud. It will be moved from what might be called exorbitant to perhaps one that there will be too much of moneys. Those are some of the things we have in mind: broaden the tax base, reduce taxes and bring everybody on board.

7.53 p.m.

Then there is this case of the Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL, Inc.) meters that the Hon. Member was speaking about – about how we gave some contract to some firm. First of all, I think

that the public should know that the firm that won that contract is a firm that was brought here by the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government to do the submarine cable. The GPL Inc. has gone across to West Demerara and they did the substations under the loan that was taken from the Government of China. It was that same company that won this contract here. One thing that the Hon. Member was right in saying was – the price at which they won the contract was over \$1 billion more than the Engineer's Estimate.

Whose fault was that? This is an international tender, financed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Where is the chicanery, where we as locals are concerned, when anything that is done in the name of an international financial institution, it has to be done according to their rules and not our rules? This is one time when our sovereignty had been weakened because we had to subsume our Procurement Laws to the laws of the international community. This is not something that the Hon. Member does not know about. He was a former Minister of Finance, and he was a former Governor of several of those international institutions. He is aware of it. We cannot play around with an IDB financed contract or a World Bank financed contract. We did not award it to the Chinese. When the evaluators were finished, and it went up to the IDB, they had to sign off on it. Nobody wants to pay \$1 billion more than the Engineer's Estimate on any contract. In fact, that caused a lot of trouble for the Phase II. It was because a significant part of the moneys was for Phase II, but had to be expended on Phase I. These are facts and they are known. If they had taken up their positions as members on the Board of GPL, Inc., they would have known all of this. If they do not know, they have enough insiders in those places to know anyhow. We have no witch-hunting. They are there, and they are still passing the papers and so on.

They are speaking about me instituting discretionary powers. The Budget Speech is absolutely clear. What we are trying to do is to even things across all the taxes that we have. We did it in 2017 under the Value-Added Tax (VAT) Act. If you owe, we would bring it under the same thing, like the Income Tax Act. We are doing the same thing. In the Income Tax Act and in the Customs Act already lie provisions where the Minister of Finance can remit, in whole or in part, taxes due for good cause. What we are doing now is applying it to the VAT Act. I do not care to be given these powers. The Income Tax Act is older than many of these Acts here. The VAT Act is the newest of the Acts. I do not recall remitting anybody's Income Tax, to be quite honest, since I have been Minister of Finance. Where is this thing that they will go and do it for their friends and so on? Is

this the best that the Opposition can do – malign you, stain you and throw mud at you? For three and a half years, I do not recall remitting any tax to anybody. Quite frankly, if you know me also, it would be a very difficult thing for me talking about remitting taxes.

In the Financial Administration Audit Act, therein, also, is a section where the Minister of Finance can relieve a debtor of taxes due for cause, and they put the cause there in the Act. Even in there I do not remember, although I have seen one or two come across my desk - very old and aged people, but, I do not recall signing off on anything as such. These are just put there, as we said, to even things across, same treatment across all taxes. They have also done a case where if you have refunds you could elect to have the funds pay another tax that you owe and so on. These are progressive measures. We must not see hidden things under every cupboard, behind every cupboard or under every stool, which the Opposition knows is not the case. They have to make these outrageously low comments. They do not get to you, but still.

The last one I want to speak about is this business about us using the money to buy vehicles and all kinds of things. I do not know if my Colleagues have gotten any, but I could speak for myself. The vehicle that I have is the vehicle that was purchased by Dr. Ashni Singh, former Minister of Finance, using funds that were under the Office of the Prime Minister. He got a good deal, so he also got a car with it. He was meant to use the vehicle and his better half, I believe, was meant to use the car. They were using them. Vehicle No. PSS 2010, which is the vehicle that I am using, was Dr. Ashni Singh's vehicle. I have not bought a new vehicle. I do not want another vehicle. The car that was being used, not by an official of the Ministry of Finance, it is there. It is laid down most of the time.

I do not know why there is this need to spread mud, based on what the Hon. Members used to be doing. **[An Hon. Member: Inaudible]** I do not know. I saw the Hon. Prime Minister's car broken down on Carifesta Avenue - one of the sick things that they left back. They had to push it off of the road. The poor Ambassador in Kuwait sent us pictures where his car broke down in the middle of the highway and it had to be towed. This is not being said to show how frugal we are, this is just to maintain the reality of the situation. It is not easy to get past His Excellency and the Prime Minister about purchasing new vehicles and so on. After all, he went to the mountain top already and it was he who saw the Promised Land, so he does not have to worry about new vehicles anymore.

This is the reality. People out there should know the facts and must not be led astray in terms of what the Opposition is trying to sell them, but again, as I said, the onus is on us to sell our case.

In coming to the end of this very important debate and session, I want to just indicate something that was said by the UNDP's Resident Co-ordinator, Ms Mikiko Tanaka, when she was giving a speech recently to the Consultative Association of Guyanese Industry (CAGI) on 15th November, 2018. This was about two or three weeks ago. What she said was quite instructive. Do you know why it was instructive? This is because you get self- flagellation that takes place in the media with some of the favoured commentators. This gives you a situation that suggests that all things are gloomy and that we have to be sorry for ourselves and so on. But here is a person who has been here for just about two years, and in two years she can make this speech. I will read a couple of paragraphs of it. It is a good speech and it should be made available. Here is what she said:

“Guyana has vision and leadership. President Granger’s message is clear and consistent, a better life for all Guyanese through an environmentally, sustainable, diversified and inclusive economy and society.

The United Nations (UN) system has accompanied the elaboration of the Green State Development Strategy and the many consultations that some of you have been involved in. The strategy is soon expected to go to Parliament and then go to the public for dissemination.

The strategy is comprehensive, aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and very ambitious, as it should be. Oil will bring in revenues and attract foreign investors to create a few thousand jobs, but the real engine for Guyana’s Green and Human Development will come from a modernised agriculture with value chains that can also supply nutritious food to the people; environmentally and socially responsible mining, quality construction for infrastructure development, tourism and other services.

Implementation will not be easy and requires commitment and discipline, hard and sustained work overtime from Governments, State institutions, private sector, civil society, communities and citizens.

The Public Sector for sure needs to seriously shape up into a coherent system of institutions that enables and enforces Public Servants to serve the public professionally. At the same time, the private sector has somewhere to go to generate enough employment for Guyanese youth; to build up professional standards of work, both in the quality of products and services and in work conditions for the workforce.

Oil has put Guyana on the world map and is attracting more foreign companies to partner with foreign companies with good management and socially responsible practices to invest and innovate for SDG-aligned businesses. Say no to corruption. Corruption only happens if there are takers and givers.”

I think that it is fitting that nothing that has been said in this speech has not been said in that budget. You do not have to be an optimist to understand what lies ahead for Guyana. Even a pessimist, even Stevie Wonder, could see that, in Guyana, there is a paradise waiting to burst open and that there is a path to the Promised Land. You do not have to be like Moses and go up to the mountain, you just have to use what God has given. You do not have to have 20/20 vision; if you have eyes, you will see. If you have the wherewithal, we will get there.

Mr. Speaker, at \$300.7 billion, I am not thinking about the biggest budget. I have never once in my speech talked about the biggest budget. Money is not all, it is the quality of the spending that will make us achieve our goals. Three hundred billion, seven hundred million dollars is a lot of implementation. I know that we are up to the task, but those would be hollow words if we cannot make \$300.7 billion work for the intended beneficiaries - the ordinary citizens of this country who elected us and who are depending on us to come through with our promises, and to make their aspirations and dreams become a reality.

8.08 p.m.

From promise to prosperity, I rest my case and I commend this budget for passage. *[Applause]*
(8.08 p.m.).

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the general debate on the budget is now concluded. Before we adjourned, we will consider and dispose of the report of the Business Sub-Committee of the

Committee of Supply on the allocation of time for the consideration for the 2019 Estimate of Expenditure by the Committee of Supply.

Assembly resolved itself in Committee of Supply

In Committee in Supply

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I wish to report that the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply met yesterday, Thursday 6th December, 2018 and considered the allocation of time for the consideration of the 2019 Estimates of Expenditure in the Committee of Supply. The sub-committee passed a resolution on the matter. Copies of the sub-committee's minutes, resolution and schedule have been circulated. Could the Hon. Minister of Finance kindly move the necessary motion.

Mr Jordan: I now moved that this Committee doth agree with the Business Sub-Committee in the said resolution.

Question put.

Motion carried.

Mr. Chairman: The Committee of Supply has been allocated five days for the consideration of the estimates. The consideration will begin on the Monday 10th December, 2018, at 10.00 a.m. and would continue, thereafter, on Tuesday 11th; Wednesday 12th; Thursday 13th; and on Friday 14th December, 2018, that being the last day for the consideration of the Budget Estimates. This is in accordance with the resolution of the sub-committee.

Assembly resumed.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today. Before I invite the Hon. Prime Minister to move the adjournment, I am bound to express thanks and disappointment. Thanks for the assistance I have had from Hon. Members from all sides and disappointment that some of the chairs are empty. I express the hope that this is not a ritualistic thing that will occur every time we have the budget under consideration, that one side or the other is absent. Thank you.

Prime Minister would you please.

Mr. Nagamootoo: I move that this House be adjourned to Monday, 10th December, at 10.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: The House stands adjourned until Monday, 10th December, at 10.00 a.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 8.11 p.m.