

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2015-2016) 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

24TH Sitting

Monday, 8th February, 2016

The Assembly convened at 1.03 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in Chair]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

MOTION

MOTION TO APPROVE THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31ST DECEMBER, 2016

“WHEREAS the Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana requires that Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Co-operative 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 Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2016 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 2016-01-29.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2016, of a total sum of two hundred and twelve billion, nine hundred and sixty three million and one hundred and thirty-two thousand dollars (**\$212,963,132,000**), **excluding seventeen billion and seventy three million, three hundred and ninety four thousand dollars (\$17,073,394,000)** which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in the undermentioned schedule, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to make further provision in respect of finance.” *[Minister of Finance]*

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now proceed with the debate on the Budget Speech of 2016. For the budget debates, we will sit as follows:

- 1.00 p.m. - 4.00 p.m. - Sitting
- 4.00p.m. - 5.00 p.m. - Suspension
- 5.00 p.m. - 7.30 p.m. - Sitting
- 7.30 p.m. - 8.00 p.m. – Suspension
- 8.00 p.m. - 10.00 p.m. - Sitting.

It is hoped that 10.00 p.m. represents the outside time when we will sit. I emphasise that it is hoped.

Hon. Members, I received a list of speakers who will take part in the Budget debate. It is a list for every day of the week, from Monday through to Friday. I understand that this list was worked out between the two Chief Whips and that what I have received was satisfactory to both or nearly so. I congratulate them both for being able to present this list with times in each instance.

I understand that copies of this list have or would be made available to Members of Parliament (MPs). This list has a time and we will see that the times shown presume, in exceptional circumstances, an additional five minutes would be accorded. I said in exceptional circumstances. I would ask Members to be guided by the list, especially, in the context of the time provided.

Today, we have 18 speakers. It would be the Speaker's wish that this list is exhausted before we rise at the end of today's Sitting. The first speaker for today is the Hon. Mr. Ali.

Mr. Ali: Firstly, I wish to acknowledge the fact and congratulate the Minister of Finance in bringing Budget 2016 to this National Assembly and fulfilling his duties and obligations under the Financial Management and Accountability Act (FMAA).

Budget 2016 is indeed presented and prepared in a highly complex global economic environment. The Hon. Minister, in his Speech, attempted to paint a rosy picture of the economy by citing some of the traditional macroeconomic indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), inflation, balance of payments and fiscal balances. In his Speech, the Hon. Minister reported a GDP growth of 3% and deflation of 1.8 %. Based on these figures, we are expected to believe the fairy tale story that the average Guyanese enjoy the *Good Life* as promised last year.

The fact of the matter is that the *Good Life* was an elusive dream to most and only a reality for select few. The increased income, the wonderful 3% economic growth, was supposed to create, never enhance the real spending power of the average man.

Moreover, the lower prices did very little to stimulate greater spending by consumers. The bottom line is that the utility of the average man never improved, and the *Good Life* was simply a mirage. Indeed, the statistics reported by the Minister suggested an erosion of the well-being of the average person, a questioned growth story that was read to this honourable House last week. The erosion of the well-being of the average Guyanese maybe gleaned from observing other macroeconomic indicators, conveniently overlooked by the Hon. Minister. What are these indicators?

One - Consumer spending: Consumer spending, as reflected by the wholesale and retail trade sector, recorded negative growth last year and was at the lowest ever over the past four years,

according to Appendix II of the Budget Speech. Notwithstanding the expansion of GDP, consumer spending was depressed as Guyanese spent less. In 2012, for example, consumer spending was \$49.352 billion. In 2015, it eroded to \$47.181 billion. The source of this information is in Appendix II of Budget Speech 2016, page 77.

Two - Value Added Tax (VAT) and Merchandisers Import: VAT, which is a tax on spending, also slipped also by 5.2%, again confirming that consuming spending while Merchandiser Import declined by 17.7% or US \$316.4 million, from US\$1.791 million in 2014, to reach US\$1.74 million during 2015. It is instructive to note that the Merchandise Import for 2015 was significantly below the levels reported for the past four years. According to the Bank of Guyana *Statistical Bulletin*, in 2012, it was \$1,196,000,000 and in 2015, it was \$1,474,000,000.

Three - Non-Performing Loans (NPL): Which is considered a leading indicator of a country's economic health clearly points to sky rocketing bankruptcy, and an inability of Guyanese to even service their debts. Based on the Bank of Guyana's half year report for 2015, Non-Performing Loans were \$2.4 billion, almost two times the level at the end of 2012 which was \$10.2 billion. Non-Performing Loans moved from \$10.2 billion at the end of 2012, to \$20.4 billion in the mid-year report of 2015. The sector which received the hardest blow and reported the largest increase in Non-Performing Loans was the services sector. This saw NPLs increasing from \$4.8 billion at the end of 2014, to reach \$6.9 billion at the end of June 2015. Many businesses in this sector were forced into bankruptcy because of reduced spending. The growth in the Non-Performing Loans for the household sector also speaks volume of the spending power of ordinary Guyanese who borrowed from the banking sector. The half-year report of the bank of Guyana showed the NPL grew by a whopping 63.5%.

How do we reconcile the fairy tale story of increased income, when more persons are unable to pay their debts and are entering bankruptcy? While some may argue the statistics tell false tales. The headline stories in the newspapers last year questioned the *Good Life* fairy tale presented last week. For the benefit of the Hon. Members in this House let me read some of the headline stories from various Media Houses.

Stabroek News, 5th August, 2015:

“Private sector concern economic slowdown can spur non-performing loans.”

Kaieteur News, 5th August, 2015:

“PSC ‘deeply worried’ about decline in economic activities.”

Guyana Times, 12th October, 2015:

“PSC mum on Government’s role to stimulate economy.”

Demerara Waves, 25th July, 2015:

“Slow businesses forces staff retrenchment.”

In spite of all these headlines that were verified by the media, the Minister of Finance reports in the Budget that there was no report of unemployment in 2015; a fairy tale; a fallacy. I will point out more directly to information that is available to the Minister of Finance to argue against that fact that he stated in the Budget Speech - that fairy tale not fact.

The question on the lips of an ordinary Guyanese is where is the Good life? On behalf of the people, I wish to ask the Hon. Minister, how is it possible for the average Guyanese to enjoy the good life, when consumers’ spending is contracting and bankruptcy occurring at an alarming rate and at risk? Vulnerable Guyanese are now enjoying less than under the People Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) Administration.

1.18 p.m.

How could the Hon. Minister come to this House with a straight face and tell the Guyanese people they enjoyed a good life, when each pensioner was deprived of the electricity and water subsidies amounting the \$50,000 annually and \$500 million collectively? Well over 100,000 poor families were deprived of the \$10,000 Cash Grant by the scrapping of the *Because We Care* initiative, robbing these families of approximately \$2 billion in disposal income annually. The consumers of gasoline and diesel were literally squeezed at the pumps by paying in excess of \$2.6 billion because the Government refuses to pass on the benefits of falling oil prices.

As I noted in my initial remarks, the ‘Good Life’ is an elusive dream to the average Guyanese, but enjoyed by a selected few. Despite initial denial and some public relations (PR) gimmicks, it is public knowledge that Ministers were granted substantial increases in salaries and benefits

without any consultations. Our Prime Minister is now benefiting from an annual salary of \$20,508,000 and perks totalling \$500,000, while the Vice-Presidents, Cabinet Ministers and Junior Ministers benefit from \$11.1 million, \$10.4 million and \$8.3 million, respectively and perks more than the annual increase granted to the public servants. Contract workers were also fattened by handsome paid packages. The Estimates show that contracted employees will receive approximately \$3.6 billion.

On restoring confidence and effective macroeconomic management, the Hon. Minister indicated that confidence was restored and more investments were made last year. The Minister noted that GO-Invest facilitated numerous projects and highlighted the potential value of the investments. I admired the skilfulness of the Minister to highlight and I quote: “The potential value of investment facilitated...” by Go-Invest and the “...potential jobs” likely to be created, rather than stated the actual investment and actual number of new employment opportunities that originated from these investments.

A quite glance at Appendix V of the Budget Speech tells a different story with respect to investment. According to Appendix V, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) for 2015 was US\$125 million, significantly below the target of US\$217 million and half the size of FDI reported in 2014, when the PPP/Civic was in Government. Moreover, if we take out the investment of the two largest gold mining companies and what is coming in for oil, we actually have no FDI in any of the other productive sectors.

It is instructed to note that the FDI for 2015 was below the levels reported over the last five years. Even in 2011, when we had elections and the global economy was in turmoil, the excuse for the lower investment cannot be blamed on the elections or the downturn of the global economy because even in 2011, when we had the worst downturn in the global economy, and elections at the same time, we recorded higher Foreign Direct Investments. All the major investments last year were made when the PPP/C was in Government. A photo opportunity and a ribbon cutting exercise cannot erase this fact.

In 2012, Foreign Direct Investment was US\$363.6 million. I want us to understand the decline. In 2012, FDI was US\$363.6 million; in 2015, it was US\$125 million. In terms of the businesses climate and investors’ confidence, the FDI is not just only an indicator which suggests that the

economy is slipping and sliding downwards, the Non-Performance Loans of the business enterprises tell the story better about what is really happening in our local/private sector.

According to the Bank of Guyana, Third Quarter, *Statistical Bulletin* of 2015, the Non-Performance Loans of business enterprises exploded as businesses struggled to meet their loan payments. This was the Bank of Guyana. This is what the report of the Bank of Guyana stated on page nine and I quote:

“NPLs remained concentrated in the business enterprises sector at 74.9 percent of the LDFI’s aggregate NPLs and within that sector were further concentrated in the services and manufacture sub-sectors which held 48.8 percent and 25.5 percent respectively.”

What we have is not an expansion of the private sector, but contraction and the Minister must accept this. We cannot plan and implement measures if we do not use the statistical information before us and accept the reality. What is that reality? The reality is that the private sector is not expanding but is at a stage of contraction.

Even more worrying is the situation where the banking system is saddled with toxic loans that will serve to dissuade lending to the private sector. Unless the Government intervenes, we may very well have a financial and economic crisis that would cause billions to escape and magnify the current economic crisis brewing.

I present these facts, not to make the Government look bad, but for us to understand that, if we do not intervene, we can have a complete collapse of our financial and economic system. The Minister of Finance is an honourable man and I know he would accept the fact that we do have an economic and financial crisis brewing.

Given our economic conditions, any responsible leader would take primitive action, instead of hiding their heads in the sand and hoodwink the public with fancy speeches that are modelled with half-truths. To put it bluntly, we do not have real growth in investment. Because of the slowdown in the economy, fewer jobs were created last year by the private sector. For a Government which campaign on the slogan of creating jobs, it is quite bothersome. The lengthy Budget Speech, hardly focused on the issue of job creation. In the entire Speech, the word “job”

was mentioned three times on pages 24 and 27. These are the extracts from the Budget Speech as it relates to job creation. On page 24:

“The potential value of investment facilitated amounted to \$89.3 billion, while the total potential jobs numbered about 8,400”.

“...by upgrading and building industrial estates at Belvedere and Lethem will facilitate business ventures in such areas as light manufacturing, woodworking and fabrication, creating over 3,000 new jobs”.

The Lethem site is partly operationalise and the Belvedere site is not operationalise. The lead time or lag time that businesses would need to established there facilitates would be about 24 months, so where are these 3,000 potential jobs coming from? It is a fairy tale story.

Unlike the Budget presented by the PPP/C when it was in Government, which provided specific information, our Budget, which the Hon. Minister, Winston Jordan was very proudly a part of, always provided specific information of jobs created. This new Government is shy to talk on the issue that it campaigned on last year. The Government campaigned on job creation, how in the Budget the word was only mentioned three times?

The harsh truth is that jobs were not created last year, instead there was a reduction in employment opportunities, especially in the private sector. The fact is reported in the Bank of Guyana’s Half-Year Report.

The Hon. Minister of Finance may wish to correct the statement in his Budget Speech, when he said that there was no reported job loss in 2015. Let me read for the Hon. Minister what the Bank of Guyana’s Half-Year Report said on page seven and I will quote:

“Preliminary estimates indicated a deceleration in private sector employment due to the reduction in activities primarily in the construction and mining industries”.

The Government conveniently refuses to speak to this issue, maybe explain to the hard facts reported in the Bank of Guyana’s Report. There was a declaration in employment opportunity due to lower activities in key sectors. [**Interruption**] [Mr. Jordon: Yes, for the half-year.] Check the end of the year.

On the issue of sound macroeconomic management, the Hon. Minister would want us to believe that the new Government is managing the economy effectively by citing the fiscal balances. According to the Hon. Minister, the fiscal deficit contracted. However, when one reads the Hon. Minister of Finance's Speech and examines the statistics and the fiscal performance, there is very little to celebrate. The improved performance was due mainly to lower spending by Government, caused by its inability to implement the Public Investment Programme. This is an old accounting trick, the academics and practitioners refer to this as expenditure or consumption smoothing.

It is a trick where spending is postponed to give the false impression of a good bottom line. Had the Government implemented the Public Investment Programme, the fiscal balances would have been substantially larger and the overall deficit, as a percentage of GDP, would have been two to three per cent. But is this bad? The answer is no. Any responsible Government would have ensured the successful implementation of the public sector investment programmes, as a significant measure to halt the decline in the economy and stimulate spending.

1.33 p.m.

However, the coalition Government played it safe and there is now low growth, contraction in spending and less employment opportunities. We are in this economic quandary because of the decision by a coalition Government to stall the public sector investment programme which contributes to, approximately, one per cent point of economic growth and cushions external debts.

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

Mr. Ali: In short, our coalition Government induced a slowdown in the economy by cutting back on capital spending when the economy was in decline. This cannot be sound economic management. Let us look at the measures. To sum it up, the measures can be stated as taxing the poor while promoting special interests.

After almost one year in office, one would have expected to see measures in the budget that would serve to fulfil coalition promises, including reduction in Value Added Tax (VAT). Where has the promise of the reduction in Value Added Tax gone? It included doubling the old age pension and public assistance. Where has this promise gone? The promises included increase in

the personal income tax threshold to \$100,000. Where has this promise gone? The promises included rationalisation of the VAT and Excise Tax on motor vehicles and on diesel with the aim of encouraging the importation of energy efficient vehicles and rational importation policy as regard vehicle age.

Based on the budget speech, there will be no reduction in the Value Added Tax but exemption for parboiled rice, packaging material, malt extracts, other than Ovaltine, and personal effects for re-migrants who, by the way, qualify for exemption from customs duties under the Custom Act.

From all indication, the reduction of VAT is not something that Guyanese can expect this year or in the near future. In an article which was published by *Kaieteur News*, the Hon. Minister clearly indicated that the reduction of VAT is not likely to happen soon. Based on the budget speech, VAT will not be reduced this year. Instead, Guyanese should prepare to pay more VAT since the Hon. Minister has signalled the Government's intention to collect approximately \$38.98 billion in VAT which is nine per cent more than the \$35.7 billion which was collected in 2015.

In 2016, old age pension will increase by \$1200 monthly, instead of being doubled by \$13,125 monthly as promised by the coalition Government.

Public assistance will increase by a paltry \$800, in 2016, instead of being doubled. The coalition Government would only increase the income tax threshold from \$50,000 to \$55,000 instead of to \$100,000 per month as was promised in its Manifesto. With this type of marginal increase in the threshold, it will take approximately ten years to realise the promise of \$100,000 per month. The failure to fulfil these promises is a breach of the social contract between the coalition Government and the people who voted it into office.

Other proposed measures in the 2016 budget include the reduction of excise tax on motor vehicle less than four year old and a ban on vehicles older than eight years.

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

Mr. Ali: This measure will now make it difficult or impossible for poor Guyanese to own a vehicle. With these amendments, it will now cost approximately \$5.7 million and \$6.2 million to import the cheapest 1000cc to 1500cc and 1500cc to 2000cc vehicles respectively that are under four years old. This compares with an average cost that ranged between \$2 million and \$3

million for cars older than eight years old. It is hard to see how poor Guyanese will benefit from these new measures when finding an initial investment for the used cars is challenging. The only beneficiary will be importers of new vehicles, the banks and insurance companies which may now want to extent larger loans and charge vehicle owners higher premiums.

Additionally, the Government has outlined an extensive range of measures to tax the nation further by increasing the fees paid on various licences, including drivers licence, fitness, motor vehicles licence, licence for carts drawn by horses, ponies, donkeys, mules, and liquor licence. These measures will certainly affect the poor, especially micro, small and medium scale enterprises, which will now be burdened with higher indirect taxes. To add to the burden, the 2016 budget is proposing amendment to the Income Tax Act which makes it mandatory for the applicants for licence to file annual returns and clear all outstanding taxes. Imagine the reporting burden that the owner of taxi, donkey cart, video rental businesses, ordinary small trader who will now...

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with the agreement, the Hon. Member has 30 plus 5 minutes and, therefore, I wish to request that he be given the five minutes extension. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: I would grant the five minutes but I would suggest that the request is made before the Member exhausts his time. Please proceed for five minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Ali: The higher licence fees and additional cost for preparing tax returns will certainly erode cash flow of these entrepreneurs. This is not a budget for the working class, pensioners and medium and small enterprises. This budget takes away more from the poor. The benefits for the poor, on the other hand, are a few hundred dollars more to the pensioners; a few twenty dollars for the vehicle owners who will benefit from a \$20 reduction per litre of gas and \$9 reduction per diesel; and poor households will also benefit from a \$30 reduction in kerosene. Apart from the obvious disregard for the working class, the budget makes no provision for key sectors such as sugar, rice and mining.

Sugar and rice contributed over \$14 billion to our Gross Domestic Product (GDP), earned over \$300 million in foreign currency and supported the livelihood of persons in poor rural communities last year. But what has the Government done? It has flippantly treated these two sectors as non-existent. Notwithstanding the improved performance in the sugar industry, we are told that some estates will be closed with over 1000 workers and their families being placed on the breadline. The businesses, mostly the Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME), operating in the areas where these estates operate will also be adversely affected. It was not enough to punish the sugar workers by depriving them of their Annual Production Incentives (API). The estate will now be closed to add further insult to injury. Where is the good life for the sugar workers? They were not paid for their hard work. They were also promised more hardship despite the promise of a good life. Like the other promises made by the coalition Government, this one will be broken.

The rice farmers, who were also promised between \$6000 and \$9000 per bag of rice, are now being punished with low prices. To add further insult, the farmers were told that rice is not the business of the Government. There is very little reason to doubt the Government as the Hon. Minister forecasted a decline of 57.7 thousand tons in rice production for 2016. If this forecast is true, then it means that rice farmers will not be in the group to enjoy the good life, as they will suffer significant losses in income.

If the export price of \$79,000 per ton of rice, as reported by the Bank of Guyana (BoG) third quarter 2015 Report, is used, we are talking about a loss in export revenue amounting to \$4.6 billion. This represents loss in income for stakeholders attached to the industry which is equivalent to US\$22.4 million. The stakeholders in the rice industry will lose US\$22.4 million. Already, the farmers are in financial distress from the sharp reduction in prices due to the mishandling of the PetroCaribe deal.

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

Mr. Ali: In closing, I wish to restate the point that I made in my opening remarks. The ‘good life’ is an illusion for most and a reality for a select few. If you are a Minister, definitely you will enjoy the good life. The Prime Minister, the Vice-Presidents, the Cabinet Ministers and the Junior Minister are richer today than when they took up office. The contract workers are also

richer today with the handsome pay-outs, as is reflected by the \$3.7 billion for this category of workers. However, the pensioners, poor families, rice farmers, sugar workers and public servants are yet to enjoy the ‘good life’.

Unfortunately, *Budget 2016* will not deliver the good life for these Guyanese. The pensioners are being offered pensions and public assistance which are below the levels that were promised; the sugar workers were not rewarded for outstanding performance; the rice farmers are crippled with low prices; the reduction of VAT will not come through; and the poor will have to pay substantially more for vehicles. The only groups, outside of the Ministers, who will gain from *Budget 2016*, are the contract workers, the businesses involved in importation of new vehicles and the special interest groups, which, according to the Hon. Minister of Natural Resources, should be rewarded for their contribution and investment in political parties.

Thank you. [Applause]

Minister of Business [Mr. Gaskin]: Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I wish to speak in support of a budget, which from all accounts, has raised the spirits of the Guyanese people. This budget has also raised the bar and set a new standard for effective public spending. “The Good Life Beckons” and with the exception of a disgruntled minority the people of Guyana recognises.

We heard the Hon. Member who spoke before me complain bitterly about consumer spending, non-performing loans, and skyrocketing bankruptcy. He complained about seeing mirages and hearing explosions and he went on to describe the budget as a fairy tale. He also chastised the Government’s programmes for job creation on its industrial estates. But on the issue of job creation, one of the most fundamental roles of any Government, anywhere in the world, is to run its economy in such a manner so as to keep as many of its people gainfully employed.

1.48 p.m.

In fact, this is one of the key indicators of the performance of any Government in most countries around the world.

During the 23 years in which the previous administration was in Government, it never saw fit to release any reliable statistics on unemployment. The rate of unemployment in Guyana has been a state secret for the last 23 years. In fact, it is doubtful that there is even a methodology in

place to measure the rate of unemployment in Guyana. Our Government will make the necessary investments in the development of the Bureau of Statistics so that the Guyanese people can know, on a regular basis, what the rate of unemployment in Guyana really is.

The theme of this year's budget is most appropriate for the nation in our particular circumstances. Our \$52 billion capital budget will pump life into our economy, as it rolls out an infrastructure agenda that been prioritised by our Government. This will give it the stimulus it needs to spur investment and growth. Our second budget in less than six months demonstrates a capacity to govern that will give confidence to investors contemplating the Guyanese economy. Investor confidence is critical; our economy cannot grow and develop without the confidence of the businesses whose investments we rely on. Fortunately, that confidence is growing because we now have a Government that understands this and is signalling to investors that Guyana is a clean wholesome and profitable place to do business. On this score, I was expecting to hear glowing praise from the Hon. Member who spoke before me since, six months ago, in this very House, he was the one griping that *Budget 2015* had failed to address the issue of confidence. This \$231 billion budget is bigger than any we have ever had before and it is focussed on making life better for the people of Guyana. It provides for the funding of a number of budget agencies to carry out the programmes of our Government. These programmes are designed to keep the promises made to the Guyanese people in the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition's Manifesto. I know that, in the past, it has been the practice to bury everyone's manifesto after the election and hope that no one ever picks it up again. This is because anyone who did would have discovered a wide variance between what was promised and what was actually delivered. We, in the APNU/AFC Coalition, intend to ambitiously pursue the promises made in our Manifesto and our budgets during our term in office will reflect this.

Budget 2016 projects tax revenues of \$150 billion and other current revenues of \$23 billion, leaving us with a deficit of 4.7 % of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which is well within the range of acceptable fiscal deficits, globally. However, these tax revenues depend heavily on private sector investments. Therefore, the work of the ministries and agencies that support and regulate private enterprise in Guyana is important for our economic well-being and these entities need to be properly funded. The Ministry of Business is one such entity and *Budget 2016* provides the financial resources for us to strategically achieve the goals that we have set for

contributing to the improvement of the Guyanese economy. The Ministry of Business is responsible for a number of agencies and departments which, combined, will support the development of a strong vibrant and competitive private sector that operates at all levels and in all communities. The total amount appropriated for the Ministry of Business and its subvention agencies in 2016 is \$1,215,817,000. Of this amount, our current expenditures are estimated at \$668,564,000 and our capital budget totals \$547,253,000. It is important for the people of our country to understand the huge sums of money that are required to run a country and to develop a country. It is important that the people understand how their tax dollars are spent.

I would like to touch on our capital budget to show how and why we plan to spend almost \$550 million this year. First of all, we need to do something about Guyana's industrial estates. The \$212 million that has been allocated for developing and fixing our industrial estates, in 2016, will go a long way to creating the jobs that the Hon. Member refuses to accept will be created by these estates. There are two new sites - one in Lethem, Region 9, which, once completed, will be able to accommodate at least 100 businesses; and another one in Belvedere, Region 6, which is smaller and has space for about 20 businesses. These projects have been languishing in the pipeline for well over a decade and our Government will complete them so that appropriate work space can be provided for investors in value added industries which have the potential to export and earn foreign earnings for our economy.

Once completed, the Ministry of Business will assume responsibility for these estates and will not allow them to degenerate into replicas of the badly administered estates at Eccles and Coldingen. The estate at Coldingen will also have to undergo major capital works as a result of years of neglect. Two new bridges will have to be built to provide access for heavy duty vehicles that transport materials and goods to and from the businesses operating in the site. This will cost \$40 million. Proper regulation and management of all of these estates will become a priority so that they will be sustainable over the long-term and that our economy would actually benefit from the investments that Government would make in developing them. The terms and conditions of many of the leases in our industrial estates are not being observed. This has been the position for some time now as the previous administration turned a blind eye to what was taking place. Our Government will regularise the use of these sites and ensure that future allocations of space are made in a transparent and fair manner.

The development of lands to be utilised for value added economic activities is critical if we want to encourage and expand secondary productivity and support new employment opportunities for the people of Guyana. This is what we promised the people of Guyana when we wrote in the APNU/AFC Coalition Manifesto that we would manage the economy in such a way as to produce more entrepreneurial and job opportunities and more equitable outcomes so that our entire population, and not just a small elite, can enjoy the good life. This is precisely what we are doing in relation to the use of our industrial estates and we anticipate that by the end of next year, these estates, combined, will create some 1,500 new jobs, a figure that is expected to increase as occupancy increases over the years.

The Ministry of Business's capital budget also allows for the completion of some projects begun by the previous administration under the title "Rural Enterprise Development". We were forced, last year, to put a hold on these projects so that we could have had them reviewed. As a result, we have made some modifications and will complete three of the four projects that were begun by the previous Government under "Rural Enterprise Development" back in 2014. These projects initially comprised the construction of two call centres, one in Tuschen and one in Enmore, and two chick factories, one in Wakenaam and one in Leguan. We are unable to proceed with the chick factory in Wakenaam, which was built on land which was deemed by the Sea Defence Board to be prone to flooding and erosion and therefore poses a risk to the entire operation. The building in Leguan was constructed with no consideration for how either a person or a plantain could get from the main roadway to the factory when it became operational. It, therefore, required an additional contract for a road and a bridge to be constructed to enable access to the premises. This will also be completed by our Government, so that within the first half of 2016, the factory can become operational and provide some benefits to the community in which it is located. The call centres also need to be completed and operationalised and we will make the necessary investments in order to make these facilities ready and attractive to potential operators. *Budget 2016* provides \$195 million for the remaining works on these Rural Enterprise Development projects and will allow us to complete them by June of this year. Potentially, they can create more than 600 jobs altogether and impact positively on the rural communities in which they are located.

Our National Exhibition Centre in Sophia is in desperate need of an upgrade and the \$55 million budgeted for works in the compound will provide a new stage, a trestle, drains and an almost brand-new building. These could be ready for use for GuyExpo in May, 2016, possibly saving millions of dollars in tent rentals. The improved site will allow that facility to be better utilised throughout the year and to earn revenues for our Government.

The Guyana National Bureau of Standards (GNBS) has a valuable role to play in developing and promoting the use of standards in businesses. Standards are important tools for business development and product development also. The Bureau will need to build a strong partnership with the private sector in order to provide relevant standards for expanding businesses. *Budget 2016* will allocate \$35 million of the capital budget to the Guyana National Bureau of Standards which will enhance its capacity to serve our industries. These funds will be used to purchase accessories for a hydrostatic pump that was purchased a few years ago and has never been used because it lacked the necessary accessories. The device will be used for testing PVC pipes to determine the amount of pressure they can withstand before bursting. Our Government understands the importance of independent testing of critical products such as pipes through which our people and our businesses receive water on their premises. Some \$9 million have been budgeted to purchase these accessories. More will be requested next year so that this device can be fully functional. The Bureau's capital budget will also fund the acquisition of a state-of-the art gold testing device. The amount budgeted for this is \$11 million and with the Bureau's plans to monitor the jewellery industry for compliance with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) standard specification for gold articles, this testing device will allow instant non-destructive verification of the gold content of these items of jewellery. This investment will therefore provide much needed support to the technical regulation that has made it mandatory for jewellers and goldsmiths to comply with this CARICOM standard. The use of x-ray fluorescent technology will significantly improve the efficiency and the effectiveness in monitoring the industry when compared with the Bureau's currently used testing methods. Additionally, the Bureau will be replacing one of its unserviceable vehicles, this year, with a four-wheel drive, double cab pickup truck. This will cost \$8 million and will increase the mobility of the Bureau so that it can promote the use of standards to more businesses in and around Guyana.

2.03 p.m.

The work of the Small Business Bureau will also improve with the upgrade of its stock of office equipment. Two million dollars, this year, will be spent in acquiring new computers and communications equipment.

For the first time since its establishment, almost a decade ago, the Small Business Bureau will be presenting its annual small business procurement programme. This is a legal requirement under the Small Business Act which is designed to lend support to an important provision in the Act, requiring Government to procure 20% of its goods and services from small businesses. The small business procurement programme will address this provision in a comprehensive and systematic way. This has clearly not been a priority for the previous administration. However, our Government is committed to the development of a sustainable and successful small business sector and will ensure that small operators are given a space in the public procurement pipeline.

Small businesses must also be given access to credit and, to this end, the Bureau will continue to improve the performance of the micro and small enterprise development programme, which it executes through a US\$10 million project which is funded from the Norwegian low carbon development moneys held in the Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund (GRIF). Marketing efforts by the Small Business Bureau will be carried out to raise awareness of the services of the Bureau, so that more small businesses will be able to access the various services of the Bureau, especially those outside of Region 4.

The Hon. Minister of Finance was absolutely correct when, in his *Budget 2016* presentation on 29th January, 2016, he lamented the fact that too many small businesses do not factor into their business models the aspect of taxation. It is important for any Government to ensure that its businesses pay their taxes. This year, through the Micro and Small Enterprise Development (MSED) programme, business training will be provided to more than 400 small businesses to help them prepare for accessing finance and for successfully managing their businesses. This training will assist them also to understand their obligations under the tax laws of Guyana. The project is to be executed in two phases, each to the tune of US\$5 million. We are currently still in the first phase of this project and are seeking to accelerate disbursals of loans and grants to small businesses, so that we can successfully conclude phase one and advance into the second phase. The Small Business Bureau will be playing a bigger role over the coming years than it has done in the past.

The Guyana Office for Investment (GO-Invest) is a key agency for advancing Guyana's economic growth and its capital budget this year is \$26 million. This amount will facilitate the purchase of a vehicle for the agency to properly perform its functions and carry out field trips and other out of office duties. The agency will be decommissioning two of its unserviceable vehicles, so this is a critical requirement. This budget will also provide for the purchase of much needed office and communications equipment.

The GO-Invest is an agency which lost its esteem during the previous administration when it was allowed to stagnate under the Office of the President. It now enjoys the benefit of a competent Board of Directors and will soon have a competent Chief Executive Officer (CEO) whose job it will be to lead the transformation of GO-Invest into a high performing investment promotion agency. The GO-Invest now functions within the purview of the Ministry of Business, where it will receive the attention it needs in order to attain the prominence and high regard that such an institution must command if it is to become successful.

Starting this year, the Ministry of Business will assume responsibility for the Guyana Competition and Consumer Affairs Commission as well as for the Consumers Affairs Division, formerly within the Ministry of Tourism. Some \$62.3 million have been allocated for the current expenditures of these entities for 2016, and it is expected that with a functioning Commission in place, both businesses and consumers will benefit from the protection offered under the Competition and Fair Trading Act of 2006. In total, the Ministry of Business' current expenditure for 2016 is budgeted at \$668,564,000 and this figure represents the sum of current expenditures for the Ministry, plus its four subvention agencies. The impact of the current expenditure of the Ministry of Business will relate directly to the achievement of the Ministry's five main strategic goals which are as follows: (1) to improve the ease of doing business in Guyana; (2) to attract increase foreign investments into our economy; (3) to support the development and exports of value added industries; (4) to increase the economic opportunities and capabilities of vulnerable groups; and (5) to expand the Ministry's capacity to develop and promote sustainable business friendly policies.

These are the goals on which the Ministry of Business' 2020 strategic plan will be based, and these are the goals that all our activities are designed to contribute to. For the year 2016, these activities will include the completion of the Ministry's 2020 strategic plan. This project is

currently receiving technical support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and will be completed in May of this year. Once completed, it would provide a road for how the Ministry of Business will achieve its goals.

Secondly, there would be greater output from our strategy and policy unit in contributing to national, economic policies and business policies that will help to improve the ease of doing business and promote investment in Guyana.

Thirdly, there will be the addressing of Guyana's ranking on the *Doing Business* 2016 index through collaboration with the Guyana Power and Light (GPL) Inc. to reduce the time it takes for businesses to access electricity.

Fourthly, there would be ministerial outreaches to all ten regions of Guyana with at least two visits per region per year. Representatives from the Ministry or its sub-agencies will be invited to provide information and guidance, especially, for micro and small enterprises in the hinterland areas.

Fifthly, there would be collaboration with Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs) to promote investor ready projects in the regions. This is premised on the fact that each region in Guyana should understand its own investment opportunities and can benefit from collaboration with an investment promotion agency which can promote those opportunities to investors.

Sixthly, the National Exhibition Centre will play a greater role in the generation of revenue for the Government through the promotion of its site as a suitable hosting venue.

In closing, I would like to commend the Hon. Minister of Finance for a well-prepared budget and a well-presented budget speech. In particular, I would like to commend him on his measures to improve tax administration, which I believe will see businesses taking their tax obligations more seriously and making more valuable contributions to our economy in the future. I support *Budget 2016*.

Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Mr. Ramson: May it please you, Mr. Speaker. Batting at number three today, I rise to make my contribution to this budget debate. Allow me to say, at the outset, that I believe that the word

debate is a misnomer and, after my experience in this House, thus far, I think that the most appropriate word would actually be a discussion. This is because regardless of how persuasive we on this side of the House are, regardless of how sensible our suggestions or amendments have been, it has not been accepted by this Government on all but on one occasion.

The Hon. Minister of Finance, when he said that there is a lot of rhetoric in relation to unity, I believe that he was adopting a position or the Government was adopting a position of peril when they are intransigent. Unity, as we know it, starts right here in this very House. Consultation starts right here in this very House. Inclusive democracy starts right here in this very House. That has not been happening, despite all of the lofty addresses that we have heard thus far. That is surprising because the arrogant attitude displayed by the Government when one considers the declared results, if we accept them to be truthful or an accurate representation of the vote, the margin is just a mere 0.2% or a swing vote of just 2300. When they lost seven out of 10 regions they had every reason in the book to show this nation that they could have proposed a better way. That is what this nation wanted and it has not happened. The unfortunate thing is that sometimes when trust is lost, it is sometimes never regained.

Now, let us look at the economy. It is all well and good to come and say that the economy has grown by 3% but if the people on the street are not feeling the benefits of that 3% growth or their personal circumstances are not improving, it defeats the purpose. It also means that there is a qualitative disconnect between what the budget states and what they are feeling. This means that it affects creditability and, in the end, that affects their legitimacy.

I was very surprised when I heard in the budget presentation, thus far, that there were no reports of job losses. It means one of two things. It is either that the Government is not speaking to business people or business people are not speaking to them, because we are speaking to business people all the time and they are also speaking to us and they are complaining every day. They are saying two things. One: they are saying that nothing is happening; two: they are also saying that money is not circulating. Why is this happening? The real information is in the Bank of Guyana figures. Those are much harder to fudge. There are three indices which paint a clearer picture. One: narrow money had decreased; that is M1; two: broad money has increased, that is M2; and three: there is deflation in the system. For the first time in recent history, there is deflation in the system and that is a big deal.

Why has this happened? If one were to take the time to read the book, *The Ascent of Money: A Financial History of the World* by Niall Ferguson, one would understand that finance is a concept in action and it is based on one thing – confidence.

Actually, that is exactly where the word credit comes from. The word credit comes from the word *credere*, a Latin word which means to believe. If there is low confidence or no confidence, finance just does not work the way that it is supposed to. And if finance does not work the way that it is supposed to, it means that people do not spend, borrow, or invest and this causes a reduction in the amount of money in circulation. People are putting their money in their banks instead of using it for productive use. That is why there is higher M2s, which means more money going into savings, and this causes deflation. If this continues on a longer term basis, it is the tell-tale signs of two things.

2.18 p.m.

One, there could be a deflation re-spiral which most economists would tell you is actually worse than hyperinflation. Two, there could be capital flight. People would then transfer money out of the country or store money in United States (US) currency which they feel is safer.

Why has there been this sudden loss in confidence? This is one of the reasons: The Government's actions and its signals are destroying confidence every single day - the uncertainty about change, the pace of change; the uncertainty about a clear and articulated vision for the future. If one wants to question me about that, ask the people on the street this one question about vision: Where are we going? They would not be able to tell you. In fact, if one asks some people on the Government side they would not be able to tell you or they might have divergent views about where we are going.

Then there is fear being created as well. For example, the passing of laws giving the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) the power to investigate bank accounts, or the fear about moves being made to take away land or property; the fear of higher taxes and increased fees and collections; the requirement for certificate of compliance before Government services are received; the fear of the re-emergence of the People's Militia; the fear of military officers seeking to unlawfully detain you or your family members then chasing them along the road in high speed, dangerously

and recklessly, ended with three persons dead and the Government was saying there is no need for a probe.

Another reason is that there are too many shocks in the system to handle. Persons with institutional knowledge to effectively run the system are being replaced, being replaced oftentimes by political hacks, persons who are ill-equipped to fill those positions. Persons are sent on leave for extended periods of time.

I will give you an example of what I mean. The Government budgeted \$221 billion last year, 2015. Of that amount, \$30 billion was not spent. Essentially, the Government is still acting as if it is in the opposition. It is still cutting the budget, but this time it is cutting its very own budget. All in all, it cannot work.

You have just written about how to extract confidence from an economy and the consequences for the private sector and the people. Do not come and feed the people with the perpetual propaganda that it is the fault of China.

- (i) China is still growing at 7.5%.
- (ii) The IMF is predicting that 2016 will be the fastest year of growth than was had in the last five years.
- (iii) There is a 4.4% probe which is higher than last year was projected by you yourself.
- (iv) The People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) while in Government navigated through the world's worst economic and financial crisis that was seen since the Great Depression. During that time we had not only seen our fastest growth but we also saw the highest velocity of money in circulation, the highest degree of construction and renovation to property, buying and selling, cars being registered at 100 a day, with the registration series finishing in eight months.

Those are the kinds of things that were seen under our Government, under terrible global circumstances. You had better hope and pray every single day that oil prices do not spike but remain high, because immediately the balance of payments would be thrown out of whack. Once

your balance of payment is thrown out of whack you will end up eating into your reserves; once you start eating into your reserve, the currency would start to depreciate very quickly.

Turning to youth, I simply cannot stand here and support a budget which states it will increase and promote youth unemployment. This is not me; this is not the People's Progressive Party (PPP) saying that. This is the very budget speech on page 60. It states:

“Mr. Speaker, a part from youth unemployment this budget seeks to promote youth health and safety.”

I cannot stand here in all honesty and support a budget which promotes youth unemployment. Maybe, it was a slip, a Freudian one I would argue. That is what the people on the street are complaining about, the lack of attention to detail by this Government; the lack of professionalism. Then it said that a National Youth Policy was laid; there is a National Youth Policy completed. Why has it not been shared in the National Assembly? Why have we not been consulted about it? We are still the representatives of everybody in this nation just as you are. It should have been placed here. It should have had consultation right here.

I, along with a lot of other people, want to know why it is young people were never appointed to the Cabinet. Now we finally have the answer. In the budget presentation, on the same page 60, it states that young people are not ready for leadership. That is the same kind of insouciant attitude that is being displayed with regard to youth. In the same speech, on the one hand it is stated that there are a lot of ideas from young people but on the other hand it is said that young people are not worthy enough to be appointed to a cabinet. Stop using young people to get elected; stop using young people for our ideas and then when it comes time to make the appointments you leave us out in the cold. This nation is left with a real GOG, a government of geriatrics.

We, on this side of the House, the People's Progressive Party/Civic, did not just speak, we did. We had some of the youngest Ministers in this nation. When Irfaan was appointed he was 28 years old, Priya was 30 years old, Anil, Robert...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the mode of address is Hon. Member or Comrade.

Mr. Ramson: My Comrades were in their early thirties when they were appointed.

Let us look at the budget for the youth sector. The contract employment for youth and culture has moved from \$26 million to \$150 million. When you were in Opposition you claimed that the employment of contract workers was based on corruption and cronyism, but now you are in Government contract employment has jumped over 150%. It is just becoming ridiculous. Now that we are on the issue of corruption, this is where the corruption starts or continues. People are being employed without advertisements, without public programmes...

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Member be given five minutes as required under the agreement. He has 20 minutes in total.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira, I would be thankful if the request for extension be made before the time has expired. If it is made after the time is expired it means that the Speaker must come back. A request for the extension, the plus five, which has been agreed, must be expressed to the Speaker before I tell the Member his time is up.

Ms Teixeira: With your guidance please, I would just like some clarification.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have the five minutes. The Hon. Member is on the floor.

Ms. Teixeira: I need your guidance when he is finished speaking, Sir.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Ramson: I am most grateful, Mr. Speaker. I shall conclude in that period.

I wanted to say what bothers me most so far is the disrespect and disregard shown to ministerial parliamentary obligations. When we questioned the honourable sector Minister for culture, youth and sport during the consideration of the Estimates last year in no fewer than ten instances we were promised to be provided with certain information. To this date, we have not received any. Getting back to the issue of corruption, when we see persons getting employed without advertisements or a public programme of why so many persons are needed, and without going through the Public Service Commission, and a lot of contracts being awarded without tender, works going on and the public does not know what is going on, all of that is corruption.

Where is the Public Procurement Commission that was promised in the 100-day plan? In fact, 16 out of the 21 promises of that 100-day plan were not delivered, and we are going on to 300 days. If only \$1,000 was budgeted for the Public Procurement Commission then there is no intention to establish it in 2016. We are going to move well beyond 500 days before we even hear anything again about the Public Procurement Commission. There is no intention of actually doing anything about corruption except perpetuating it, because, as you say, it is your time now. When you make commitments to people, you keep them; when you make promises to people you keep them. It is the honourable thing to do and that is why we are called “Honourable.” It is a reminder to do the honourable thing.

It is as just as schools without headmistresses, you lack principles. You have adopted every single project the PPP/C has pursued, including the speciality hospital. It is just a matter of time before the Amaila Falls Hydroelectricity Project comes on stream. It is just becoming a big joke and people are laughing at you. I will conclude by saying that you have a very big problem on your hands. Prior to May, 2015 you sold this nation a message, the propaganda, that the reason why the citizens of this country are not as rich as they should be, or poor, is because the PPP/C ‘thieve out’ all the money. Now time is running on you and when people look at their personal circumstances, whether it is three months from now or one year from now, and they do not see that improvement they would realise either one, that you are “thieving out all the money” or, two, it was all a lie. Old people always say...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I would ask you to use language which is more in consonant with where you stand.

Mr. Ramson: Yes Sir. I am guided by what old people always say, “*not every crab hole gat crab*” and you can fool some of the people some of the time but you cannot fool all the people all the time.

Thank you very much. [Applause]

2.33 p.m.

Mr. Carrington: After listening to the Hon. Member Ramson and the Hon. Member Irfaan Ali, I had to put my written speech aside because I realise that I have to deal with them differently.

We are laying the foundation to *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*. It will be a success. With this budget, we shall create development in this country, this year. As I listened to them, they two Hon. Members kept condemning this budget. It seems like nothing in this budget is good, everything in this budget is bad.

I listened to Hon. Member Irfaan Ali, claiming that there is a downturn in the economy. We did have a downturn in the economy which they created. We are in Government seven months and this is our second budget in seven months and I must give us a ‘big’ clap. We have done well in these seven months in this country.

We have fostered development in this country - look at our streets, look at Georgetown, Region 3, the canals that are digging, Region 2, you could go and you will see a lot of canals...Mr. Patterson is doing well. I must congratulate him. The Hon. Mr. Patterson is doing well in nearly all the regions – he is helping in all the regions.

To condemn this budget without going around and seeing the reality... I am travelling all around this country, every weekend, and I am seeing the reality. I am seeing development all over Guyana. The only persons that cannot see the development have to be blind.

I would like to deal with the downturn of the economy. There is a financial sector that we are dealing with, that is, the banking sector. The people owe the banks \$20 billion. They cannot pay the bank. I was made to understand this from the Hon. Member Irfaan Ali, that they cannot pay the bank. The reality is that over the years we continue to have very high bank interest. If there is high bank interest, then it becomes difficult for you to pay your loan. There is a high bank interest and there is also compound interest. It may be difficult for business people to pay their loan.

We inherited that. We inherited a financial system in which borrowers are not protected. If the Financial Institution Act is read, there is no part in it protecting the borrowers. There is a situation in Guyana in which many persons in Guyana take loans to build their house, buy cars and open business. If there is a high interest rate, it then will put you in a bit of difficulty to have additional money to spend. What is there, in many situations, is that a lot of persons are repaying their loans for their cars, house and their business, so there would not be that large amount of additional spending. By not having the large additional spending... I am talking about party

spending. There are a lot of infrastructural works taking place, lot of homes built, but it is from the people's money that they borrow and are now paying it back.

There is a situation in Guyana in which they create a situation where we have to pay high interest so it is difficult to have the large set of extra money to spend. That is the reality. They know what the cause of this economy is today and tomorrow. Tomorrow if all the salaries of the people are raised in Guyana, you are faced with other difficulties - you are faced with what is called exploitation. Every year the money is raised, wages are raised every year in this country, but there is exploitation. We will stimulate development in this country. We will get development. After we spend this \$230 billion, Guyana will blossom. The biggest fear with this Opposition is the fear of us spending this money.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to be in this Parliament and I wanted to be here a long time. I wanted to speak to my ordinary people out there and I am telling you as long as we put proper financial system in place to have low interest, to remove the high compound interest then persons will be able to invest. It is difficult to invest now, to borrow loan and pay such high interest. We will put systems in place so that persons will be able to have low interest rate and we will be able to develop this country and create jobs for the people.

I would like to speak about rice a bit, because recently I am getting calls from all of the regions about rice and some of the problems that there are. In terms of our conversations with the rice farmers in Essequibo, rice farmer in Region 5, what I discovered... Our honourable brother here said that we are not paying and we are not keeping our promise to pay the rice farmer \$6,000 a bag. The reality is that when we were taking rice from Venezuela, it was getting a \$100 for a barrel of oil. After the oil price plunged to \$27 a barrel, Venezuela did not have that money to pay us for that rice anymore. Where would Venezuela find that money to pay that money to pay that high price for rice? If the oil price drops from a \$100 a barrel to \$27 a barrel, where would it find that money to pay Guyana that high price for rice?

We are now forced to sell the rice on the world market at a cheaper cost and it creates a difficulty, in terms of us to fulfil that promise, because what we will have to do to fulfil that promise is to take out money from the treasury to put with the other money that we are getting from abroad to increase that price of rice. If the oil price did not drop and Venezuela did not

remove...My honourable brother, I must say to you that many things contribute to where we may look as if we broke our promise but we did not break our promise. The reality is that Guyana is not earning the amount money on the rice and definitely we cannot pay.

In my opinion, the rice industry needs a system to be put in place where there is a bridge in finance. A system in which the farmers take the rice to the rice miller they must be able to be paid and when the rice miller collects the money, when he sells the paddy, it goes back into that funding. We need to have a system such as that. I do not know if it was there before, but there is the need to have a bridge in finance so that the rice farmers, when they sell their paddy to the miller they could end up getting paid right away whilst the miller wait to collect his money and put it in that fund. I am presently working on the project... There is a project officer working on the project to see if there is a possibility if we could create a fund, in terms of bridging that gap. We will try and I am sure that we will be successful because I am made to understand that sometime before now they had thought about the bridge in finance and we will try and work with that. As long as we have that system put in place for the rice industry, we would be able to have payment for the paddy in an early stage.

Travelling to Region 2 and Region 5...They are condemning this Government, but which is the Government for Region 2? The Government for Region 2 is the PPP. It is local government authority for Region 2, Region 3 and Region 5. While we are central Government, they are the elected local government authority for these regions. Being the elected local government authority for the region, they have the duty to come up with development plan for their regions. They had failed this year, in terms of coming up with such development programmes for those regions - economic development plan to create jobs for the people in the regions. There is a region producing rice, and rice alone. There is no value added products. For the 23 years that you were in Government and there were no value added product in Region 2, something is wrong.

In Berbice, there is a lot of production of rice. It is not producing chick feed, cereals or anything. Why? It is because you just did not educate the people to produce jobs for the people. Over the years you never educated the people of Region 2 or Region 3. There is a sugar factory there and you are condemning that we are closing it down, but you never even educated the people around there to even produce a sweetie, chocolate or candy. Now you are here to condemn this budget. Basically, I cannot understand what you are doing. You have to be conscious less to do that.

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

Mr Carrington: Thank you Mr. Speaker. The past Government is condemning this Government which has eight months in Government. Let me tell you something. You bet by time this year end when they see the beauty of this city...When we are finished with the city and all local government authority areas...We are going to walk and work and this place will be a beauty. Guyana will be a far better place to live. Nobody would want to run out of Guyana, instead they would want to come back to Guyana. At the present moment, there are many Guyanese who are saying that they will come back to help us in Guyana. The A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) did not destroy this country, we came and meet it that way, but we will correct it.

I love my country, and I will stay in my country, and I cannot be a hypocrite. When I see wrong, I will say it is wrong. When I see right, I will say it is right. I think that the other side should look at this budget and the Members, themselves, should support this budget because they, as the Opposition, should not want to see a country destroyed. In condemning this budget they are actually saying not to worry with this budget, but this budget have to be passed because people have to work, live and have development. Why condemn it? Instead, you should support it and wish that by time we fixed the thing properly if you get in Government you will get a better country to run. Your duty is to ensure that Guyana is managed properly; your duty is not to try to destroy this country or try to destroy a budget which will create jobs for the people. We are going to have persons trained across this country. We would have skill training and create jobs. I am just from a place called Maraikobai, a beautiful small village. [Ms. Manickchand: Did you give back the people their gas?] I was just there. I did not borrow any gas. Something I saw that I could not just believe it. The PPP Government gave Maraikobai a big generator and it will cost \$500,000 to run per month at six hours per day.

2.48 p.m.

The village cannot afford it. The generator was just left there as a white elephant. It cannot afford it. The villagers tried paying \$6,000 each, every month to pay. I told them that when I come down here, if I have to reach the President and talk to him, we are going to fix that problem, a big generator is in the place.

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

Mr. Carrington: Thank you very much. [Applause]

Mr. Hamilton: On 29th January, 2016, I sat and I listened to the Hon. Minister of Finance Mr. Winston Jordan for over three hours while he delivered his budget presentation. During his presentation, Sir, I reflected on two incidents that transpired in the politics of the United States of America, one in 1994 and the other in 1984. During both periods, the American economy was faltering; people were losing their jobs and their homes; factories were being closed and other businesses were also affected adversely by this downward spiral of the economy. Unemployment and joblessness had increased by the tens of thousands; homelessness was increasing and the drug epidemic was wreaking havoc on the population, mostly in the urban centres, with the rapid increase of crime, violence and death.

In 1984, during the democratic primary season to select the presidential candidate of the Democratic Party, there was a debate between the two front-runners, that is, Mr. Gary Hart and Mr. Walter Mondale. During the debate, Mr. Gary Hart was asked to make his opening remarks first. He talked for about 20 minutes and after he was finished Mr. Walter Mondale was asked to make his opening remarks, and to respond to some of Mr. Hart's comments. Mr. Mondale's responses were short and swift, Sir. He asked Mr. Gary Hart one simple question, "where is the beef?" Today I would ask the Hon. Minister of Finance a similar question, where is the bake and salt fish? Where is the pepperpot? Where is the cook-up rice? Where is the curry? Where is the chowmein which you spoke about during your budget presentation?

I read this budget presentation several times during the last week and kept looking for the bake and salt fish for the poor people of this country. It could not be found. I was forced to look for the bare minimum, that is some *sada roti* and *baigan choka*; that also would not be found. It was elusive for the ordinary people. I submit that most of the budget measures will make the lower middle class, poor and the poor, poorer.

The second incident I referred to earlier, in 1994, was the George Bush (Snr.) administration. At that time, he was still focused on the Iraqi Gulf War and his victory, whilst children were going hungry and the ills I mentioned earlier persisted. The Clinton Campaign was not able to get him to respond to the economic and social crisis, as we are unable to get this Government to respond to the economic and social crisis, that are facing our country. No political or economic

arguments were working to get George Bush to focus on the economic crisis that the country faced. The Clinton Campaign tasked its chief campaign strategist Mr. James Carville to come up with an appropriate slogan to cause George Bush and his administration to make the economy their priority. The slogan Mr. James Carville came up with was a simple and effective one: “It’s the Economy, Stupid, is the Economy.”

Before I am accused of making derogatory comments about the Hon. Minister of Finance, or accused of breaching the Standing Orders, I will respond to the Hon. Minister of Finance this way, “Is the economy sensible, is the economy?” That is what has to be fixed and it cannot be fixed by measures that will make citizens poorer. It can only be fixed by policies and measures that create wealth – wealth creating measures. Not measures to pick people’s pockets. They already have the wealth in their pockets. You have to put more; you will be taking it out of their pockets. Further, it can only be fixed when the Government put before the Guyanese citizens a coherent economic plan for national development. That is missing.

The Minister of Finance and his Government apparently believe that they can fix the economy with fanciful rhetoric and questionable numbers, as indicated by my colleague earlier. They also apparently believe that the masses are asses. Their first awakening will come I submit, very shortly on 18th March, 2016, at the local government elections.

On page 2, paragraph 1.5, the Minister had this to say, and my colleague alluded to it earlier:

“It is a tribute to this young Government’s prudent management of the economy, including timely policy interventions that the economy’s growth trajectory continued; that there were no reported job losses;”

When you read that statement, Sir, you are forced to reflect on a calypso made popular some years ago by Lord Nelson. The name of that calypso, Sir, is *King Liar*. It follows that if you have a contraction and decline in several sectors of the economy there will be job losses. How could you come to the National Assembly and say, “there were no job losses”? The Minister is well aware that there were hundreds of job losses in 2015, in the public and private sectors. Further, apparently, he has conveniently forgotten that 1,972 Amerindians young men and women lost their jobs because they were fired unceremoniously by the callous and discriminatory Government decision, at the time.

The issue of women in business... Earlier the Minister of Business spoke, and his big ticket item he spoke to was fixing unserviceable vehicles. It is the Minister of Business of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. Other big ticket items were fixing some trestles and two bridges and some polyvinyl chloride (PVC) pipes. A major big ticket project is doing some rehabilitation to the Sophia Exhibition Centre.

Mr. Gaskin: On a Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: You have the floor, Hon. Member.

Mr. Gaskin: I am being misquoted by the Hon. Member. I do not think that I ever spoke of “big ticket items”. I said that our activities for 2016 include, and I mentioned a few items, not at all big ticket items. Also, I never spoke about servicing unserviceable vehicles. I spoke about decommissioning unserviceable vehicles, as a justification for the purchase of new vehicles.

Mr. Hamilton: I am thankful that the Minister of Business has indicated, and he has corrected me, that one of the big ticket items was not to fix the unserviceable vehicles but decommission the unserviceable vehicles. The issue of women in business, and their economic development was just glossed over in the budget presentation. The Minister on page 17, paragraphs 4.8 and 4.9...I know my colleagues Dr. Vindhya Persaud and Mrs. Gillian Burton Persaud will deal with it more extensively. When you read what is stated there, what is it saying to women? That there is no economic development programme. The Government will initiate, on your behalf, no cash incentives for women in business, no upgrading or retooling of economic development programme that the PPP/C left. That means, as I said earlier, there will be no bake and salt fish for the poor women and their children because there are no programmes outlined in this budget.

For that matter, if you check all the budgets in the last 23 years you would see women were always mentioned separately. What measures are there to deal with alleviating poverty among women? All of us are aware that a lot of our children are supervised by a single parent. This budget cast women aside and wraps them up in gender affairs. It is the first time in the history of a budget where women are cast aside. There is not even a mention about what the Government will do for women – shame. More so, double shame on all the females who are in the Government – double shame.

The vexed question of youth, youth unemployment and youth in business development, page 59, paragraph 4.1.20, the Minister, again, spoke about broad outlines about youth development. If you go to the Budget 2015 speech and Budget 2016 speech, it is the same language, actually the same words, the Government is saying to the young people. I submit that in the budget there is no meat on bone for young people. It does not say how much money will be invested, how many youths will be trained, how many youths and other persons will be employed, how many youths will be facilitated with start-up grants and low interest loans to venture into businesses and investments. That is not mentioned. [Mr. Harmon: You will get all of that. The Minister will tell you about that.] He should have said it on the 29th January.

3.03 p.m.

The young people do not want to hear about some broad policy statement in 2016. They heard that from the Government in 2015 and since then their financial circumstances have remained the same and for a large majority, it has become worse since the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) came in to Government. You could continue to bury your heads in the sand, but you are aware, as you travel through the length and breadth of this country and engage with your constituents, they are saying to you that nothing is happening, business is slow and that no money is turning.

Go to South Georgetown into the communities and to the rural villages, talk to the people on the corners and they would say to you that no money is turning.

The APNU/AFC Government has presented, in this Budget, no plans and programmes to integrate our differently-abled citizens in the economic life of the nation. I suspect that the Government sees them as charges of the State, persons who are only to receive hand outs. For the information of the National Assembly, the 2002 Census indicated that, in this population of 750,000 or thereabout, we had at that time, around 50,000 disabled persons. That is a large sector and I suspect that when the 2012 Census comes out, we will have a larger population of citizens who are differently-abled. The Government could talk to them, I interface with them. They want to become productive citizens; they do not want to be seen as charges of the State. I, therefore, recommend to the Government, that it must put plans and programmes in place that are the type of economic development programmes and project so that our citizens who are differently-abled,

can be engaged meaningfully; that they can be exposed to low interest loans; and that they can be exposed to grants, so that they can become involved in the economic life of this country.

[**Mr. Williams:**] Why did you not say that last year? You had no voice.] The Attorney General speaks like he is in the Opposition.

This Budget is what I call a “vampire budget”. When one looks at the measures to increase fees, it is clear to citizens that the Government will be sucking the life blood out of the poor and powerless. Not even the donkey cart man, the horse cart man nor the dray cart man is spared. The only person they did not seek to include is the person who rides the pedal cycles. [**Mrs. Chandarpal:** It is there.]

Oh it is there. Whilst the APNU/AFC Government seeks to suck the life blood out of the poor and powerless, with the increases of nearly 150 licence fees, on the other hand, they have proposed measures in some sectors to benefit their political investors.

The decrease in Excise Tax on new vehicles, the banning of vehicles over eight years old and the ban on used tired have nothing to do with the ‘greening of the economy’. It has everything to do with payback to political investors. [**Mr. Williams:** Is something wrong with that?] Nothing is wrong with it. Say it loud and clear Attorney General; nothing is wrong with that.

Further, the proposed amendment of the Excise Tax Act, No. 11 of 2005: “To provide for a new basis for the imposition of Excise Tax on alcohol for consumption based on alcoholic strength...” has nothing to do with manipulating the values of the goods for the purpose of taxation, but again, everything to do with the lobbying of their political investors.

I submit that any adjustment of taxes on alcohol should have been upwards. If one checks other jurisdictions, this must be the only one that is lowering taxes on alcohol. All other jurisdictions have raised taxes under what they call “Sin Tax”. That is two for one, which is to get revenue and secondly, to try to discourage citizens from abusing.

We are aware of the dire consequences of alcohol use and abuse have wroth on our country. The death toll from drunk driving and murders continue to rise. When one reads the newspapers, most of the murders that are committed, are committed at rum shops and at wedding house brawls from consumption. The death toll from drunk driving and murders continue to rise. The incidents of spousal abuse and family abuse are out of control. Again, alcohol use and abuse contribute significantly to abuse of women and children.

Further, the continued deaths of persons, brought on by excessive alcohol abuse and the costs associated with these ailments to the public health sector, the two Hon. Ministers of Health are very much aware. I could not understand how the two Hon. Ministers could sit at Cabinet knowing the consequences and the bill that the public health system has to face every year, dealing with persons who are consumers and abusers of alcohol. How could the Government support such a measure to lower taxes on alcohol? [Mr. Williams: You should be smiling] I do not drink so I would not smile. Recognising these factors, alcohol use should be discouraged and not encouraged by Government's tax measures and that is what the Government has been doing. The cheaper the spirits, the more the spirits will be drunk. There will be more drinking of spirits. But, as I said earlier, the consideration was not the Guyanese people or the public health system, the consideration was the lobbying of political investors.

Both Ministers of Health are public health officials. They participated before they became Ministers in the medical field and so they know what I am saying. They know of these dire consequences, and yet they would support that.

Henceforth, when the Ministers of Health and their Government speak of policies and programmes to curb the incidents of chronic non-communicable diseases, we cannot take them seriously anymore. The Government cannot be serious about laying out programmes and plans to deal with non-communicable diseases, and at the same time, the Government is lowering the taxes on alcohol.

The Hon. Minister of Finance spoke glowingly about local government and local government development at page 38, paragraph 4.6. One would think that after those glowing sentiments, the Minister would have put his money where his mouth is. The citizens of those villages and towns that he spoke about were expecting his Government to start transferring funds to their communities from the Central Government, utilising the Fiscal Transfer (Amendment) Act, but there is silence, not a word, N-O-T-H-I-N-G. You all could continue to laugh; you all will get serious very shortly, when the anger and wrath of the Guyanese people come down on the APNU/AFC Government, you will get serious. You came here to laugh; continue to laugh.

This Act was passed in this honourable House some time ago. Instead, what we had from the Minister and his Government was silence regarding this matter. The Members on the

Government side, when they were in the Opposition benches, made heavy weather about the need for fiscal transfer legislation and the need for towns and villages to be properly resourced, to give citizens effective and efficient services. Yet, today, they see no need to implement this legislation. Not a dollar, not a conversation, not a line in the Budget spoke to the issue of fiscal transfer to municipalities and Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs).

On page 31, paragraph 4.44, the Minister spoke about developmental partners and about a donor. He started out in the same paragraph, and let me read what the Minister said. Maybe when he gets up to speak, he will clarify:

“An alternative link to Bartica and other hinterland communities would be created when on-going negotiations with our development partners to construct the Parika/Goshan road are finalised. Additional resources have been made available to expand efforts currently being undertaken to improve farm-to-market access road to Parika, Ruby and Laluni. We are in discussions with the same donor for new farm access interventions in Triumph, Buxton and Ithaca...”

The Minister started off with a developmental partner and by the time he closed the paragraph, the developmental partner became a donor.

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

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker, there are three issues. There is the issue of proper procurement and transparency. As I said, the Minister starts off at Goshen with a developmental partner and by the...

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for the extension of the five minutes in addition to the Hon. Member’s allotted time.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. The Hon. Member will speak for five minutes over the 30 minutes allotted to him.

Mr. Hamilton: Thank you Sir. As I said, whether the developmental partner or donor is one of the political investors, maybe, when the Minister responds later in the week, he will clarify for the benefit of the National Assembly.

When the APNU/AFC Government came into office, it established a Ministry of Business and that Hon. Minister spoke earlier. After nine months, I recommend the renaming of the Ministry. This Ministry should be renamed the Ministry of No Business because this Ministry is like a still born child.

3.18 p.m.

With a Ministry of Business, the Minister is saying this to us and I want to quote him, but basically what he is saying is that there will be a decline of investments from \$89 billion in 2015 to \$11 billion in 2016, with a Ministry of Business. That is why I said the recommendation must be it is a Ministry of No Business. Because a \$78 billion decline with a special Ministry to look after the issues of business and business development in this country, a Ministry of No Business that is what it is.

Instead of the Minister outlining to us the interventions with international financial institutions and with direct foreign investors and so forth, the Ministry is regaling us about trestles and drains. Trestles and drains is what the National Assembly was reduced to when the Minister of Business spoke.

This Ministry should have been the most vibrant and the most visible because all of us are aware of the difficulties facing the economy and the difficulties that businesses are faced with daily. Instead, the Ministry is invisible and dormant. Apparently, the Minister thinks his portfolio means he must mind his own business. Apparently, he believes that, when he collected his instrument, it meant that Hon. Member you must mind your own business. I submit to you that you need to mind the business of the people of Guyana. If you were minding the business of the people of Guyana you would not or could not say, when you stood up to speak, that Budget 2016 has raised the spirit of the Guyanese people. You could not have said that if you were minding the Guyanese people's business.

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

Mr. Hamilton: The performance of this APNU/AFC Government, I submit... Mr. Speaker let me say, do you know when the toy companies make toys, they deliberately make toys to suit age ranges of children. That is why we have toys for children three years and under; toys for children three years to five years old; toys for children five to seven years old; toys for children five to seven years old; toys for children seven to nine years old; and toys for children nine years to twelve old. The performance of this APNU/AFC Government is likened to three years old children trying to fix toys that were made for children who are nine to twelve years old. That is their performance. Mr. Speaker, how else would you describe their nine months in the seat of Government? Let us focus briefly on some of the key sector Ministries.

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, after nine months of the APNU/AFC Government, it is yet to appoint an Ambassador or High Commissioner to represent the interest of this country, so much for economic diplomacy.
- The Ministry of Education, with two Ministers, the latest policy decision to come out from there was about some steel pan corruption.
- The Ministry of Public Security, the Minister after promising dogs to the nation is yet to deliver puppies.
- The Ministry of Agriculture is yet to present to the farmers and the Guyanese people a coherent agricultural plan; closing down an estate and do not know what they would do with the employees and the land.
- The Ministry of Housing, one of the most dynamic Ministries in the last decade that has empowered poor people, and also one of the drivers of our economy was brought to nought in eight months by incompetence and ineptitude. One Minister has already failed and the nation holds its breathe about the newly appointed.
- The Ministry of Public Health with two Ministers, patients cannot get aspirin at Health Centres. I am told that there are rationing of HIV/AIDS kits.
- The Ministry of Public Infrastructure with two Ministers plenty talks and no walk. Yet to conceptualise a projects of its own, living on projects initiated, conceptualised, and executed by the PPP/C Government.

- As I said before, the Ministry of Business should be renamed to the Ministry of No Business.
- As regards the Ministries of Communities and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, I submit that they are silent lambs. Apparently, they are two passengers just enjoying the boat ride.

In conclusion, many of my pseudo spiritual Comrades on the Government side have a propensity to quote from the scriptures. Today, I would direct their attention to Matthews 7:24-27, for their enlightenment and edification. In the interest of time I would only read verse 27.

“And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell, and great was the fall of it”

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Minister with the Ministry of Natural Resources [Mrs. Charles-Broomes]: I rise to congratulate my Colleague the Hon. Mr. Jordan for presenting a budget that charts our Government course in pursuit of a ‘Good Life’ for all Guyanese.

Before I go into my budget presentation, allow me please Sir to respond. I want to say on record that there is no shame to befall the women on Government benches, but there were much shame that befell the women on the Opposition benches. We the women on this side of the House would not condone abuse. If the Hon. Member wants to look for the men who abuse women, he is on the right side of the House. Let me not give much credit to him by saying how proud I am that my President and Prime Minister have wives. I just mentioned that to note the kind of men that we have on this side of the House.

The other things mentioned by the Hon. Member, I will not waste time, since I have some competent Ministers coming behind me. Last year the Hon. Member talked about rats and cats and this year he talked about bake and salt fish. There is nowhere along our budget room for idle time because we are a Government of legacy.

By now, this House is well aware that I have spent much of my working life in the mining sector. So I come to this honourable House with much knowledge of the thousands of ordinary

Guyanese people in the mining sector. For my unlearned friends over there, gold mining is one a number of areas of what we collectively describe as the natural resource sector.

Mr. Speaker hit gavel.

Bishop Edghill: On a Point of Order, Content of Speeches. I heard my “unlearn” friends on the other side. It is “unlearn” I heard sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members are asked to remember the obligations under which they address this House. The Standing Orders apply to all Hon. Members in same quality. Please let your speech be restrained, even though it is spirited.

Mrs. Charles-Broomes: Mr. Speaker, I am talking about mining. We believe that together those subsectors can do much to take our economy and our country forward. The mining sector is of course not without its challenges. For some time now, the falling price of gold has been an issue in which the global gold mining community has had to contend. That is something that we in Guyana have simply had to live with. Of course, these are things that we can and must change. We must work towards an improved environmental profile in the sector. We must also move, and urgently, to improve the safety records in the mining sector. More than that, we have to ensure that the men and women who are employed in the natural resources sector, as a whole, are rewarded with better treatment.

Then there is the environment on the whole. Our natural resources are a god given asset. They are linked to the environment in a manner that imposes upon us a particular responsibility to treat with those resources, sensitively and sensibly. Unless we do so, we will destroy ourselves in the quest to enrich ourselves.

I have gone through the Budget Estimates and all of the allocations pointed to an effort to raise the level of attention that this Administration seeks to give the natural resources sector. It is my view that our subject Minister of Natural Resources, the Hon. Mr. Trotman, has grasped what are the needs of this sector and to correct the path. I have no doubt too that he is aware of the challenges that lies ahead.

I will confine my remarks to some of the particular areas of importance of the sector. For me, one of the real challenges in the natural resources sector lies in the changing of old habits. Even

now, the pockets of poor administration, lack of attention to safety and health, and corrupt practises, in the areas of the sector continues to unfold. In some respect, it is a situation in which the more one peels away the layers of decay the more one discovers.

I say again that bringing a sense of order to the natural resources sector, is one of the serious challenges of this APNU/AFC Government.

As the custodians of Government, we have a responsibility for the accountability of the natural resources sector. We need to turn around. Rolling back the tides of gold smuggling is a priority. It is must be surely disturbing to this House, as whole, that as a nation we appear unable to benefit directly from more than half of the gold that we produce. That surely is unacceptable.

3.33 p.m.

We must retain our resources for our development for our country and our people. This Administration must set its face against corruption and corrupt practices. We must close the loophole; we must ensure that we work towards redirecting that which we have been losing overtime. What we must do as well, is to continuous trained our people, the people who served the natural resource sector so that the performance standard of the sector could be enhanced.

In that regard, it is good to see that there are generous allocations in this year's Budget for training. Of course, training alone cannot bring about the transformation that we seek. I strongly believe that we must provide the incentive and encouragement that contribute to the chartering of committed professionals. We have to, and will find new and workable ways of fending off corruption.

I have already made some passing comments on the natural resources sector and the environment. What we need to be mindful of, in all of the areas of the natural resources sector, is an attitude that shows a lack of concern for the environment. We must begin by admitting that there are those companies and individual operators whose only concern is with the profit that they can make from mining and logging. That has to change.

A commitment to the environment is a commitment to the future of our country and to the well-being of the international community of which we are a part. In my opinion, those who

demonstrate a lack of concern for the environment ought not to feel entitled to the assets of this country's natural resources.

Not far too long, we had talked about the billions that the mining sector is worth, without giving much thought to those thousands of small miners and workers who continue to struggle to make a living, often at a great risk in the industry. Mining can be difficult, frustrating and dangerous work and it is often not as rewarding as is sometimes led to believe. That has to change; miners have to get their just rewards.

As was pointed out by the Hon. Minister, Mr. Jordan, in spite of the 13.4% downturn in Bauxite production and a 0.3% downturn in quarrying, the mining sector, as a whole, grew by 9%. It was gold with its 16.4% production increase that propped up the sector. What makes me particularly proud is that our own local miners, through their hard work, in the face of many challenges, worked and made their own important contribution to that production increase. Our own Guyanese miners accounted for more than 90% of the 451,490 ounces declared last year end. The increase in the declarations was due to the change in working conditions, as well as the incentive granted in the sector by the APNU/AFC Administration.

I have it on good authority that more good things are in store for our miners. There is another change that we intend to make in the sector. The Government intends to ensure that all the players in the sector are treated fairly. As I said earlier, our aim is to ensure that the corruption that has been a part of the sector, for so long is minimised and hopefully, in time, stamped out.

For far too long, small miners have been operating in a discriminating environment that must be fixed. For many years, our mines officer had been denied the tools to do their work thoroughly. That too has to change; it will change. All of this is about creating and enabling environment in which the sector can grow and prosper. The winds of change are already upon us.

Amounts have been allocated in the Budget for investments in Global Positioning System (GPS), noise metre, radiation monitoring system, cameras, and environmental monitoring systems, among others. This Budget points the way for our natural resources sector. It signals the turning of a corner. When we married the development set out in the Budget with the fact that the two new foreign companies are now part of our mining sector, there can be no doubt that gold has a shining future in Guyana.

This Administration also intends to invest in educating miners. The priority, of course, is safety. Speaking as much for myself and for the Government of Guyana, I want this House to know that we must simply find a way of putting an end to the tragedies that causes life and the blighting of the mining sector. Let me say too that, it is my view that most, if not all, of the recent accidents in the sector have been a function of managerial incompetence and indifferences. This Government intends to keep miners honest as far as safety for workers is concerned. In that regard, there will be training put in place to teach managers how to prepare their mining pits in accordance with the occupational, health and safety practices. We will have these training sessions for the miners at their locations, where they work, not at the Arthur Chung Conference Centre.

Up until now, I have said rather less about the forestry sector. What is observed is that there is a strong connection between the mining and the forestry subsectors for a single natural resource sector. Both subsectors seek out their representative resources in some of the same regions of Guyana. I have seen instances in which they have appeared to be in conflict with each other. Both are wasting resources and are environmentally sensitive resources.

For this Administration's, managing our forest resources is to ensure that we adhere to an enabling environment, and that standard is priority. Accordingly, the priority of this Government has to be the focus on responsible timber harvesting. This is the message that we will continue to send to those who work in the industry. If we are to do so, we must create a stronger monitoring mechanism. We simply must ensure that those who seek to harvest our natural resources work within the framework of rules that are set by us.

This Government is only months old, but we have done a lot in the natural resources sector. Even so, I stand here this afternoon to promise that much more is in store. Much more, I say, is in store because it is the intention of this Administration to ensure that the natural resources sector works for the development of Guyanese people as a whole. It would no longer exist for the prosperity of a handful.

We, at the Ministry of Natural Resources, are in the process of establishing a compliance division which will be tasked with ensuring that all agencies and sectors under the Ministry are compliant with the relevant regulations and policies. That is where the process of effective

management has to start. Effective management cannot be built on a free for all foundation where people simply do as they like, ignored the rules and regulations entirely, and simply proceed as though everything is normally. Much of that has been happening in the natural resource sector. The position of this Administration is that all of this has to change.

To return, specifically, to the compliance division, this division will be staffed with skilled personnel. They would be directly responsible for ensuring that the operatives in the sector, under the Ministry of Natural Resources, are in compliance with the law. That is a promise.

During my own brief tenure at the Ministry of Natural resources, I have already seen clear indications of the determination to seek to repair a system, which in some respect has been for the longest period filled with corruption and indifferences. Our task is to create a vibrant natural resource sector, one which the people of this country could look forward to a period ahead. We are about legacy.

Let me say in closing that, the task ahead of this Administration does not allow for politically confrontation over the past and the APNU/AFC Administration is looking ahead, so that those who anticipate long and pointless discourse will be disappointed. We shall, of course, be accommodating constructive discourse, and it is my personal wish that such discourse starts right here in this House, during the course of this Budget debate. I thank you and the people of this House for this opportunity and I thank God. [Applause]

Mr. Dharamlall: Good afternoon everyone. I would like to commend my Colleagues in the Opposition ranks on their debates so far; the issues that they have brought out on the Budget. There are two things I want to, before I proceed, share with this Hon. House, my take on Budget 2016.

The first thing is, I wish to bring to the attention of the Hon. Member, Mr. Carrington, that, no less a person than our Opposition Leader, who service this country for 12 years as President and also the Minister of Finance, shared with the public on 4th February, 2016, a number of measures which this Government could benefit from, in alleviating the contentious issues that circulate around the tax reforms that the Government is proposing.

The second thing that I wish to bring to this House's attention is that, as the Hon. Minister, Ms. Charles-Broomes was speaking, one of the things that the Hon. Minister did not mention was that, many of the things that her Ministry would like to accomplish, the Minister is practically grounded. Travel budget of the Ministry of Natural Resources is only \$5,150,000, so I just would to share that with the Hon. Minister.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing is, too, I wish to share with you that, as we speak out against corruption, one of the things that I expect that this Government would do is to take action on its Leaders, including Ministers of Government who are in conflict of interest regarding Amerindian lands. I hope that coming out of the 2016 Budget, and actions that this Government will be perusing, I hope, too, that this Government will be returning to some semblance of honour.

My take, especially on this Budget, for me, fundamentally it indeed as it is, classified as one of the biggest or if not the biggest budget ever. There is good reason for it. The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramson, had earlier spoke about the \$30 million deficit on the 2015 Budget, where the spending is rounding over into 2016. One of things too, that came out of the 2015 Governance of this country was the massive incompetence, as it relates to the implementation of the programmes, projects and activities of the Government.

3.48 p.m.

Indeed, it is the largest budget because there was a lot of unfinished business, a lot of incompleteness and, of course, massive incompetence.

The other issue that I wish to share is that the budget platform on which that the Hon. Minister of Finance laid his budget – national unity, national infrastructure, national institutions, national security and public services – was disjointed and disconnected from what the Hon. Minister presented.

When words are spoken but are not translated into actions, the dictionary of Mr. Nigel Dharamlall calls that deception. For me, this is what this budget is; it is one of the biggest deceptions to have occurred on our people. Even before implementation of activities outlined in the budget, the budget is premised on failure and doubt. I refer to page 5 of the Minister's speech, in paragraph 2.3, when the Minister spoke of the great paradox. This is what he said:

“As a result, global growth, in 2016, is now pegged at 3.4 percent. Growth in the Advance Economies is projected at 2.1 percent; Emerging Market and Developing Economies, 4.3 percent; and Latin America and the Caribbean, -3.3 percent. It is this challenging environment that Guyana’s economy will have to navigate and subsist.”

This is the great paradox.

Another criticism that I have of this budget is that it is designed to strangle and destroy the farmers and the productive people in this country. There is no genuine support in this budget for rice farmers. There is total destruction of the sugar sector. There is no meaningful intervention for bauxite workers. There is especially nothing in this budget for the gold and diamond industries. We cannot continue to wait to see what will happen. This budget, for me, lacks vision. It is a cynical plan to entrench the Government and a haphazard approach to strengthen the economy. It is, as Mr. Hamilton said earlier, pauperising the poor, making the middle class poorer, discriminating against the rich, and colluding with special interest groups. For those of you who know what that means, it is called cronyism - a form of corruption. It is what Bernie Sanders would call a Wall Street budget. It panders to a select few but it disregards the masses.

The expenditure highlighted are counterproductive and are irrational to the medium and long term development of our hinterland peoples, especially our Amerindians.

I put all of this into context because I want to share some specific things about this budget. In the area of public infrastructure, it was noted by Hon. Hamilton, earlier, that absolutely nothing new has been proposed in this budget. It means therefore that, in building this country, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure is operating without vision. What I can talk about are the ‘bling projects’ that are being pursued by this Government as part of its infrastructural development. Last year, \$300 million was spent on the Georgetown Restoration Project. This year, 2016, under the Ministry of Communities, an additional \$200 million will be spent. Also, under the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, an additional \$133 million will be spent on the Georgetown Restoration Project. All of this is being done without any form of public procurement which, of course, is one of the things that this Government continues to go back on.

Another issue that occurs, very significantly, in the Ministry of Public Infrastructure is that, in 2016, there are five additional contracted employees in the Public Works Department and the

difference in wages and salaries for contracted employees has increased by \$25.3 million over the last period.

Additionally, in 2015, \$60 million was spent on the Prime Minister's (PM's) house, on the Umana Yana and on buildings which houses various Ministries. This year, an additional \$200 million is to be spent on the PM's house, on the Umana Yana and on buildings which houses Ministries. I pay a significant part of my Member of Parliament (MP) stipend towards electricity. The Government will be investing over \$2.5 billion in the Guyana Power & Light (GPL) but the electricity rates continue to violate us. The electricity rates continue to be unaffordable to the people of this country.

I would like to applaud the Government for continuing the expansion of the Lethem Power Company to make electricity available in Culvert City and other areas. One of the things which I hope that the Hon. Minister will defend, if not the Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, is the extent to which free prior and informed consent was pursued in discussions on the Mokomoko hydro project and projects in other Amerindian areas. One hundred and sixty million is to be spent on photovoltaic systems for the hinterland. I wish to inform this House that, before we left office, in excess of 17000 photovoltaic systems were procured and distributed to our people.

Seventy two point eight million is budgeted for lighting in Linden, Ogle, Coverden and Corentyne. I would like the Hon. Minister of Finance to also think about Bath Settlement and other villages including Bush Lot and Cotton Tree in the West Berbice. Street lights were removed from those villages during the course of last year by the Ministry of Public infrastructure.

There is also \$1.3 billion for boardwalks and other types of projects. It is my only hope that the proper technical studies are being done in the Ministry of Public Infrastructure to ensure that while they seek to beautify, they are not doing so at the expense of our rivers and seas defences.

In 2014, more than \$182 million for hinterland airstrips were cut from the budget when the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) was in Opposition. Today, the Minister of Finance is presenting \$241 million for the development and expansion of those very airstrips. That is called hypocrisy, if I am permitted to use that term.

Over \$4.45 billion is budgeted for the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA). Last year, the Hon. Minister of Public Infrastructure came to this House and agreed to share with this House the redone contract for the CJIA. That contract has not been presented to this House as yet. It is a noticeable fact that the Hon. Minister of Infrastructure has a proclivity for deception. Last year, also, the Minister spoke...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I do believe that you are aware that the language that you employed ought not to be employed in this House. I hope that suffices.

Mr. Dharamlall: I think that the Hon. Minister of Public Infrastructure has a proclivity for satire. Last year, the Hon. Minister went to lengths to discredit one of the top officials of the Transport and Harbours Department (T&HD). Up to today, the Hon. Minister has refused to come to this House and apologise to that woman, having significantly destroyed and discredited her character.

As it regards the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, I wish to reaffirm that 1,972 young people have been removed from their jobs. Whilst all of this has been happening, the Government came with the Hinterland Employment and Youth Service (HEYS) Programme. This Programme has only kicked off in some villages in Region 8. There is \$1 billion to be spent this year. One of the good things about a good Government and good governance is continuity. What we have noticed is that the Government has not been continuing in the development of the Amerindian people. There are two Ministers of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs and a number of advisers. As a matter of fact, the Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs does not even have a vote in this House. The Vice-President does not even have a vote.

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I apply, on behalf of the Hon Member, for his additional five minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member will have five minutes beyond the 15 minutes to which he is entitled.

Mr. Dharamlall: Thank you. I also wish to bring to the attention of this House that under “National and Other Events”, there has been a 110 per cent increase or \$527 million more in 2016 over 2014. There has been a 64 per cent increase over 2015, \$393 million.

The electricity bill of the Government has increased by \$2.4 billion in 2016. Dietary: the fat cats - Government will be eating way more. The budgeted amount has increased by 18.1 per cent, \$740 million. The dietary needs of this Government have increased.

In terms of security, there is \$435 million or 13 per cent increase over last year with a \$650 million over 2014.

In terms of “Other” – and I hope that this is investigated since this is where a lot of skulduggery takes place – over \$2 billion...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I think we have been doing well so far. If I may be allowed to observe, you have been doing quite well. Let us not ask the Speaker to intervene.

Mr. Dharamlall: Under “Other”, over \$2 billion of the 2014 amount...In 2016, it is over \$700 million more than the amount for 2015.

Under “Print and Non-Print Materials”, the amount is more than \$500 million more than the 2014 figures.

Under “Drugs and Medical Supplies” – there are a lot of sick people in this Government this year – there is a \$1.2 billion reduction and this is just for the Ministries’ and the agencies of the Government.

We speak about agriculture. In Region 5, there is a reduction from \$91.5 million, in 2014, to \$57 million for capital programme. In Region 2, the amount decreased from \$53 million to \$45 million. In Region 3, there was a reduction from \$59 million to \$48 million. In Region 6, there was a reduction from \$136 million to \$106 million. When that is coupled with the land seizure, the 690 per cent increase in land rents and lease fees, the closure of Wales Estate, the contraction of rice, the low prices and the mismanagement of the irrigation systems, the year 2016 is dire for agriculture.

I also wish to inform this House that the Hon. Prime Minister's Office, in 2014, had a capital budget of more than \$4 billion. It is now denuded to \$156 million.

4.03 p.m.

In closing, I wish to state categorically that this budget legitimises the abuse of state resources. It dims on the drivers of the economy. It is blind and mute. There is incompatibility on the growth indicators, *vis-à-vis* the actual investment in the productive sectors. It is high on Government, low on people.

I am suspicious about the tender limits also outlined in this budget. The last Appendix in the budget speech states that the tender limits are to be increased at the Ministerial and the Regional Democratic Council (RDC) level.

I also took the opportunity to speak to some of my friends on Facebook and this is what they would like to share with the House. Dave Lall stated:

“You cannot kill the populace to boost your figures to look good on paper. Boosting Government capital has to be gradual.”

Maria Cindy Paul stated:

“Please address the concerns of poor people who protect us and who care for us, including our nurses, police and teachers”.

Sarah Brown stated:

“Bring back the Youth Entrepreneurship and Apprenticeship Programme. Amerindian youths are suffering”.

Gonsalves Anthony stated:

“How will the unemployed be able to renew licences without having jobs to pay for them?”

Dean Anthony Chandra stated:

“No new taxes on new tyres; no duties on new cars; used cars should now be ten years to the current year with a lower duty; VAT should be 8%; and public servants salaries should be increased.”

Finally, the Government’s reliance on tax administration to augment its revenues flows at the expense of harnessing the productive sectors is legitimising our fast track to a criminal state. The Administration is not afraid to spend money - money that it does not have and money that it has no means of earning”. There is a great fanfare about it being the biggest budget, but I wish to forewarn the people of our country that our children are being mortgaged by this APNU/AFC regime. The Government is operating on a live today and not think of tomorrow policy. This Parliament has a responsibility to the people of this country. We cannot sacrifice the future of our children at the altar of a regime characterised by old people hung up on super egos.

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

Mr. Dharamlall: Thank you.

Sitting suspended at 4.05 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 5.07 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before we resume our debate, I beg leave to bring to your attention the fact that a former Member of Parliament passed away. She died on the 4th February, 2016 in Queens, New York. That person is Ms. Bagmatee Latchminaryan who was a Member of Parliament who served from January, 1981 to June, 1987 as a representative of the National Congress of Local Democratic Organs. She represented Region 5. I will ask the Hon. Members to arise and observe a minute of silence in memory of that Member.

The National Assembly observed one minute of silence.

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Minister within the Ministry of Communities [Mrs. Adams-Patterson]: Mr. Speaker, permit me, before I go into my debate, to refer to the Hon. Member Mr. Joseph Hamilton who spoke lengthily on the issue of reduced taxes on alcohol and the effects of such reduction. I want to refer the Hon. Member to page 67 of the budget speech, paragraph 6.3, and to point out his

misinterpretation. Due to his misinterpretation, he has misled the Guyanese public because his statements were not accurate. I will leave it there for now. I do not want to waste most of my time on what the Hon. Member said.

The expression *Rome was not built in a day* is a French proverb from the late 1100s, but was not recorded in English until 1545. The phrase is said to emphasise the idea that one cannot expect to do important things in a short period of time. Truth be told, if Rome were built like the houses that were built under the PPP Government, our citizens who have paid their hard earned money...I am afraid that Rome would have lasted for a day. What I can assure the citizenry of this great nation is this: we will fix the housing problems in Guyana; and we will not only fix them but we will fix them with lasting solutions.

Mr. Speaker, let me give you a sample of the odious housing programme that my Government inherited. All of my references are verifiable. I will refrain from using actual names. Some of the stories that I have encountered in my short sojourn would make any caring leader cringe. It is to the extent that I and staff, on our public days, have been working until the hours of 9.00 and 9:30 p.m. because people refuse to leave until they are satisfied and until they have gotten the satisfaction that they did not get in the past. I said that I am not going to use actual names but permit me to share two stories. Della Mendoza told a staff – and this is an actual statement by one of our applicants – “Ah run to housing till ah lose meh eye and me one foot”. The only pursuit of this sweet little old lady was the opportunity to access affordable housing where she could spend the twilight years of her life. A young man broke down in tears as he spoke to my Personal Assistant. He was working for \$75,000 per month and, after trying for years to meet the former Minister as he was not satisfied by the staff, he was allocated a plot of land by this Minister. This is after he had received a letter from a Minister of the former Government which stated that, with a salary of \$75,000, he had been allocated a house lot for \$1.2 million. This letter was sent just a couple of days before the 2015 Regional and General Elections – and we have evidence of many such cases – and he had four days to pay \$600,000 or he would have lost the allocation. When the young man was reallocated a more affordable piece of land, he, again, broke down in my presence and this is what he said:

“I cannot leave this office without taking a picture with this APNU/AFC Minister”.

I have it and I can send it to you on Whatsapp.

I agree that those who can afford to pay a bit more should do so and we do have Guyanese in that category but I am speaking of our teachers, nurses, and our men and our women in uniform. We know what salary they earn. Thank God for the APNU/AFC Government that they have had two salary increases. These people are allocated house lots for \$1.2, \$1.5, \$1.8 and \$2 million. Are we sending them to steal?

On my visit to the ancient county of Berbice last week, I met a member of the uniformed services. He told me that, for fourteen years, he had been trying to get a piece of land to build his own home. How can this be when, in Berbice, there are so many unoccupied house lots? In Fort Ordinance alone there are 589 unoccupied house lots. He was waiting for 14 years. We have not been in office for 14 months. That officer who has served this country has had his confidence shattered.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, consider this with me. We tell our young people that they can get married at 18 years old, they can obtain a driver's licence at 18 years old and they can vote at 18 years old, but they cannot own a house lot at the age of 18. They have to be 21 years old and over. This is what I term a Stone Age policy. Well, I am here to let the young people know that the disrespect will be over and this APNU/AFC Government will change every policy that disrespects and disregards our young people.

On my first public day – that was the 20th January, 2015 – 95 persons, mostly from Georgetown, were enlisted to find out the status of their applications, some as far back as 1990.

5.22 p.m.

We were nowhere in Government in 1992, 1995, 1997, and 1998. All over the country it is the same story. This situation is replicated in Region 10. In Region 6, it is the same story. It must be corrected and it will be corrected. Let me make this clear. This is not a complaint. We now own the problem. We are going to fix the problem. This Government will fix it and resolve the housing woes of the people of Guyana. The people want real housing solutions and they have placed us here to provide them with those answers, and answers we will provide.

It is in that context that the budget presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance, Winston Jordan, is without comparison and for which I offer to you, Minister, my heartiest congratulations. I want to reiterate what was said by the Hon. Member Carrington. This budget does not have content alone, but it has history. This is the first Minister of Finance to present two national budgets in six months. It is history that only the APNU/AFC could repeat. Sir, it is a job well done.

As we consider the President's vision for our Ministry when the Ministry of Communities was established, it was and still remains firmly rooted in the desire of this Government to build cohesive, empowered and sustainable communities all across Guyana. The President, in his address at the Ceremonial Opening of the Eleventh Parliament, said these words:

“Your Government aims at providing accessible and affordable housing in sanitary and safe communities, with the necessities for wholesome and dignified living, for citizens in need. We shall ensure that all state-sponsored housing developments are provided with recreational, educational and sports facilities in addition to basic infrastructure and services such as electricity, telephones, roads, solid waste disposal and pure water supply.”

This takes time but let me reiterate that we are not about handing out house lots, some of which cannot even be accessed. I have met people in Linden who have received allocations in the Amelia's Ward. I have met people in Berbice who have received allocations; I have met people in Georgetown who have not seen their house lots because they cannot get near the lands. There is no access road. Two years persons have been allocated land and they have never seen the house lots. Some of them requested us to have our surveyors take them to the land. We are not in the business of handing out house lots. Our goal remains to provide service lots, access to electricity and water. It is so that when we give the people the house lots, they can begin to build.

Our Ministry is working assiduously to restore the confidence of the populist. They have lost confidence in the housing sector. Those who had dreamt of owning their own house will dream again because we will make their dreams a reality.

Mr. Speaker, let me give you a little story that is so disgusting that it is beyond comprehension. On Friday, 27th January, 2016, I met with 15 home owners who had received turnkey homes and who had come to see me about the state of their houses. These structures were completed before

11th May, 2015. Upon hearing the story, I sent a team from the Ministry to investigate. I am going to give you a little snippet of that report. This is the report of the Project Manager:

“It is felt that this home project should remain a favourite project of Guyanese if the problems that developed on these houses can be controlled. Defects arose in every one of these 14 houses, regrettably so. We have verandas moving away from the building, shrinkages on external doors, cracks on curb walls, cracks on the floor...”

One woman said that when she stood and proceeded to walk, it was like an earthquake. The report outlined:

“...improper construction of septic tanks...”

There are a range of houses, all with septic tanks that had cracks and were leaking. Buildings develop defects for a number of reasons and these are some: design flaw, incorrect site preparation, a lack of firm site supervision, the client or the contractor cutting costs to maximise savings, and the use of defective materials. These were houses that were built before May, 2015.

That situation will not continue under the watch of this APNU/AFC Government. We will ensure that people get value for their money. People must have that faith and confidence that when we say we have built them a house of \$4.9 million, they receive their money’s worth. Many or all of these people are paying bank loans and do you know what? The defects in some of these houses were identified even before the people moved in. There are some to which repairs have already been done about four times and we have to do it again. Under this Government and the ‘fresh approach’, we are going to deal with this kind of corruption and deal with all who have given poor quality work.

Mr. Speaker, could you imagine that, in this technologically advanced era, people still have to come to the office to find out about the status of their application? We are going to change that. We are currently looking at a system where someone can stay in their home or office or go to an internet café and go online and find out the status of their application. This is going to happen very soon. It is a fresh approach.

Another situation that must be remedied is the failure of alloties - I hear my Comrades over there talking - to occupy their lands. The former Government did land preparation in Kilcoy, Chesney,

and Bloomfield and the people of Berbice do not want to occupy. It was not done to satisfy the people of that county. It was done as a political strategy. Go into the town of New Amsterdam. There are no house lots available to give people of that town. We now have to look.

Some of these people have had lands for 10, 15, and 20 years and are not using it. There are overgrown bushes in which reptiles and thieves are hiding and people in these communities are complaining. I heard my fellow Members across the floor talking about repossession. We are going to do it but we are going to it sensibly. Some people who have these house lots were being protected by members of the former Government. We cannot have some people having three, four, five, six house lots and there are people who do not have one. It is transparency and accountability. We will make affordable house lots available to all Guyanese throughout every region. Everything we do at this Ministry is done with a regional focus.

To accomplish all of this, we will spend approximately \$5.279 billion in this sector, with most of the funds, 98.3% of it, going towards community infrastructure such as installation of electricity, pure water supply, and distribution network, construction of roads, drains and drainage in eight regions. We know, as we went around this country, what we saw in the past. It was roads being built with no drains. We are going to change. It is because we have a competent Ministry of Public Infrastructure. It is a fresh approach.

The budget for the fiscal year 2016 was prepared based on the Government's strategic outlook which outlines strategic direction and the programme for the next five years. The budget's submission is linked to the sub-programme, sustainable human settlement development, and these sub-programme activities, with respect to the housing programme, include: community participation, planning and design, community infrastructure development, land divestment and squatter regularisations.

There are squatter settlements all over this country. Everybody is now coming to the Ministry for regularisation. Do you know why? It is because our Government is a Government of order and so we are going to put order in place. These activities will see: (1) the consolidation and expansion of the 1000 homes project at Perseverance, East Bank. The installation of infrastructure will commence in six regions- Regions 3, 4, 6, and 10; Region 3, Stewartville;

Region 4, Prospect, Perseverance, Cummings Lodge; Region 6, Williamsburg; and Region 10, Amelia's Ward; 66 on-going contracts in areas across Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10.

Targets for 2016: the proposed targets provided for by *Budget 2016* are as follows: Under the community participation planning and design programme, \$90 million; designs of community facilities, shopping centre or markets, multi-purpose complex and bus terminal.

5.37 p.m.

Under community infrastructure development we would commence infrastructure in the areas mentioned before, across four regions, to have approximately 1,000 house lots available for allocation in 2016.

There would be the installation of electrical distribution network in 16 areas. These areas are across Regions 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7. I will call them – Lust En Rust, Zeelugt, Phase 2, Eccles, Perseverance, Peter's Hall, Farm Phase 1, Farm Phase 2, Covent Garden, Diamond Commercial, Diamond Industrial, Hope, Experiment, Kilcoy/Chesney, Baltyrock and Bartica.

There would be the constructing of housing solutions - this is a fresh approach – at Perseverance, inclusive of turnkey houses, duplexes and condominiums which we will introduce to maximise on space.

The approach of A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government will be different. A new approach would include among other things a remodelled core house. Currently, the core house, which are there, has two sides of concrete and two sides of wood. Even though it is a core house we do not want it to look like a ‘poor’ house. We are going to change the image of the core house.

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

Minister of Social Cohesion [Ms. Ali]: May I move that the Hon. Member be given a five minutes extra as an extension to her original allocation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mrs. Adams-Patterson: The new approach will include among other things a remodelled core house and turnkey housing programme. This initiative will be based on a consultative, participatory and competitive process which will see private sector developers put forward their proposed solutions to a low to moderate income bracket. This will increase the range of options available to Guyanese. We are not going to put or push anything to them. We will give them an opportunity to participate and select what they would like to pay for. To facilitate this, the Ministry is planning a housing exhibition in May 2016 where these developers will showcase their ideas of housing solutions for patrons to view. We give it the name “Housing Solutions 2016 and Beyond.” This will enable Government to withdraw from the construction of houses and to focus on providing oversight of the industry with a view to ensuring quality of the product.

Other strategies to achieve targets, we are going to facilitate greater involvement with local authorities in decision making and plan/projects implementation. We are going to expand the scope of the public/private partnership. We have already begun this. We are going to deepen the participatory element of inter-agency coordination; embrace mechanisms for participatory monitoring and evaluation; promote greater efficiency in the processing of land titles. You would have seen recently on television there was an upsurge in titles and transports being made available to the people of Guyana. Many of these were in the coffers of the Ministries and their regional offices.

We are going to facilitate access to affordable financing by low moderate income earners and regularisation of squatters, as I said before.

Hinterland housing project implementation: The Hon. Minister Jordan, in his budget speech indicated, that in the hinterland regions we will spend over \$644 million to expand the hinterland housing project - Hon. Member Pauline Sukhai, take note – which will provide housing subsidy for the construction of houses and the replacement of roofs in Regions 1 and 9.

Based on the lessons learnt from the Hinterland Housing Pilot implemented for 2009 to 2015, under the second Low Income Settlements Programme (LIS-2), the Ministry of Communities will implement the Sustainable Housing in the Hinterland Project. This project will be financed through a US\$3.1 million loan from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). This

programme will serve to improve the liveability of low income families of the hinterland through better access to housing, potable water, sanitation and the promotion of women's empowerment. Under this project 12 communities in Regions 1 and 9 will benefit from the delivery of full house replacement subsidy, one-storey elevated timber building in Region 1, or flat burnt brick building in Region 9, measuring 500 square feet with four rooms and front and back stairs (not like the turnkey ones) with zinc roof, guttering and a 400-gallon water tank and a pit toilet.

Roof replacement – zinc sheets for a house measuring no more than 500 square feet complete with guttering, fittings and a 400-gallon water tank.

Housing project impact on our economy, these are our outputs: Seventy-five low income housing solutions, 1,000 new house lots, electrical distribution networks in 15 areas of four regions, upgrades to 2.5 kilometres of roads to service 200 house lots, upgrades to drainage to service 361 house lots, 50 home improvement/upgrades. Let me say this: As we are doing this for the 50th Anniversary of Independence celebrations, we are going to give 50 homeowners in our schemes \$300,000 each to upgrade their homes - a fresh approach.

The impact: The proposed spending will result in direct investment in the economy of \$5.4 billion with value-added impact of \$1.9 billion. The total impact of the spending approximates \$6.88 billion.

There will be employment opportunities for more than 1,500 persons with various skills (skilled and semi-skilled). We are going to be employing engineers, architects, surveyors, and so on. Fifty low income house lot owners will benefit from home improvement subsidy creating over 200 jobs across ten regions. The 50 homes we would select would be from throughout the ten regions. The impact would be increased demand for construction materials, sand, loam, laterite asphalt, and so on.

In conclusion, Budget 2016 presented under the theme *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons* tells us we can look to the future with confidence, with audacity and with hope. It tells those who dream of owning a home that the APNU/AFC Government is a viable partner and has put the prerequisite measures in place that will put them on the path to realising their dream.

I recommend Budget 2016 for passage in this honourable House. [Applause]

Ms. Teixeira: May I ask for his extension of five minutes before he begins so I would not interrupt him while he is speaking?

Mr. Speaker: I wonder if you anticipate the requirements of the Hon. Member.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes Sir. All of the speakers on my side have asked. They intent to and will use all the extensions of five minutes. If they could have more they would love it to death. They would absolutely use their five minutes extension. They have asked me to represent them properly so I am trying to do that, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. I understand you to be saying when the Hon. Member Zulfikar Mustapha exceeds his 15 minutes another five minutes should be accorded him.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, and it is for all our speakers.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Mustapha: I rise to make my contribution to Budget 2016. I rise with a sense of disappointment. I am sure that the majority of Guyanese must be feeling the same way.

Before I go into my main presentation, I want to just respond to a few points that the Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Communities just raised. If there is one success story of the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, it was housing. Twenty-three years ago when we took over the Government, before 11th May, 2015, there was no Ministry of Housing. One dollar was budgeted for the Ministry of Housing. In 1993 the PPP/C started a systematic programme of housing and as a result over 190,000 Guyanese were able to own their own homes. One should not come into this honourable House with rhetoric when one belongs to a party that destroyed the housing sector in this country. One should give kudos and say one will improve the sector, but it is not to come and criticise it, because in every single region one goes to in this country there are dozens of housing schemes that were constructed.

I can speak for an area where there is a vibrant, good housing scheme, and that is Bloomfield. I belong to Bloomfield. That area was a wasteland but today hundreds of young Guyanese are living there in a modern housing scheme. I can go on and on and rebut the Hon. Member. I will

tell the Hon. Member when one comes here one must come with a programme. Do not say we will give affordable housing to people, but it is to say how we will do it. We have shown over the last 23 years, when we were in Government that we delivered, we delivered to young Guyanese in this country.

As I said, many Guyanese were expecting that in eight months Guyana would have been in overdrive. As I speak here, today, a large percentage of those who supported this Government in the last elections are not only disappointed but are hopelessly disillusioned. They are angry with themselves that they voted as they did after looking at the economy today. Today, hopelessness and despair has taken over this beautiful country, a country that has seen phenomenal development over the last 23 years prior to 11th May, 2015.

5.52 p.m.

This Government is about to finish nine months. What is its achievement? All it is doing is having a bunch of Commission of Inquiries (COI) and forensic audits filled with insinuation of wrongdoings and scandalous outburst from a bunch of top-heavy bureaucrats. The Members have no moral right to talk about corruption in this House because we had given them a chance a few days ago to make every single Member of Parliament income tax declaration public and they refused and voted against it. They have no moral right to come to this House and talk about corruption.

When one looks at this budget theme, *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*, it is very misleading. This budget has once again failed to address the welfare needs and concern of the poor and ordinary people of this country. The Hon. Minister of Finance has done an excellent job in giving an overview of what this nation can expect. Let us be practical. Flowery languages resonate with applause would not take out Guyana economic crisis. We had a lot of flowery language during the budget presentation.

I am putting it to this honourable House that Guyana is in a state of retrogression. The economy is flattening and the business sector is in a state of uncertainty. Whilst all this is going on the people are suffering. Even their own supporters, as I said, are disappointed that all the talks of a “good and green life” was nothing but a sleight of hand to fool them. Their own supporters today

are experiencing the economic crisis and they are criticising this Government. If a poll should have been taken today, they would have lost lots of grounds now.

As I said, Guyana has taken a nosedive downhill. Is this budget going to turn things around? The answer is a big emphatic no. Why? It cannot turn things around because the measures in it are harsh and it will become burdensome on the back of the Guyanese people.

Let us look at one of the measures. For example, the proposed ban on used tyres. Today, in this country, more than 90% of taxi, hire car and minibus drivers purchase used tyres. An average cost for a used tyre is about \$4,000. With the intended ban these people will have to find approximately \$20,000 to purchase new tyres. If the Government had this foresight with the downturn in the economy, every single where you turn – go to Regent Street, Stabroek Market, Bourda Market, Port Mourant Market - every business community you go to, people are lamenting about the economic crisis in this country.

Port Mourant is one of the largest open air markets in the Caribbean. That market used to commence as early as 12 to 1 o' clock in the morning and used to end by 5 o' clock in the afternoon. Mr. Speaker, I know for a fact that many times you would want to traverse that roadway and you would have to take a lot of time to traverse it. Mr. Speaker, I am challenging you and challenging this House now that if you go there around 10.30 a.m., in the day, the market is clear. That is sending a message that people do not have money to go and purchase...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I know you would want to leave the Speaker out of the challenge. Let us try not to allow our thinking and our expression, we use, to get the better of us. The Speaker wishes to remain where he is.

Mr. Mustapha: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I will leave you out of the challenge. As I was saying, the cost of new tyres now will be passed on to the consumers. Who are the vulnerable groups? The vulnerable groups are the schoolchildren and pensioners. Remember when the Minister presented his budget he boasted that for the first time in less than a year pensioners are enjoying an increase of 38. 7%. He failed to minus the two year consecutive subsidy for water and electricity. If we take out the subsidies, we will see what the pensioners will receive.

The Hon. Member Minister Jordan failed to tell this honourable House that the Government took away the schoolchildren cash grant. Then the Hon. Member is coming to this honourable House and to say a “Good Life Beckons.” How can the “Good Life Beckons? When all it did was to take away benefits that the populists were enjoying. Any party that goes to the people and campaign, when it gets into office it would try to improve what the people were receiving. It is not going to take away. This Government is taking away benefits that the PPP/Civic Government had given to the people.

I would like to turn my...because my colleagues over on this side of the House already spoke about the draconian measures in the budget. I know for a fact that over the court...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is courteous to allow the Speaker to speak without interruption. I believe that some Hon. Members do not realise that their voices carry and that the Speaker is disturbed by their exchanges. Let us try to be courteous, if it is nothing else. Please proceed.

Mr. Mustapha: As I was saying that over the course of the budget debate more of these draconian measures will be debated by our side of the House. I would like to touch on some development in the regions of this country.

I would like to deal with these issues. Before I go into the real issue I would like to say that the records of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government in regional development is a proud one. During its 23 years in office, we have seen exceptional transformation in all the regions of Guyana and every citizen was given equal opportunity to benefit from Government’s intervention.

Unlike what is happening today, we have already seen the new Government started to take control of regional development centrally. It has removed suitable, qualified, competent and experienced persons such as Regional Executive Officers (REOs). These persons performed their duties with professionalism and due diligence. What we have for replacement? We have people who are found to be unsuitable; people who lack the experience and people with hardly any qualification. Imagine a *bush doctor* becomes a REO for a region – imagine that. The standard of the regional administration and development is now being stifled.

This Government is using REOs as political lackeys to do their political works, usurping the roles and functions of elected bodies and officials. These practices are taking place, especially in those seven regions that the PPP/ Civic has won. Some of the action of these REOs ...Imagine I am Regional Chairman, I am like a Governor for a state in the United States, and the REO of a region refusing to meet with me. That REO should be fired immediately if this Government wants to uphold standards. They are refusing to meet with the Regional Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen; they are not submitting reports, for example, financial reports. I will come to that just now. I will tell how much money came back to the treasury because of that.

They are not attending statutory meeting. They do not have respect for the Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs). They are sending their Deputy Regional Executive Officers (DREOs) instead, because they have no respect. Another thing, which is very petty, is that they are limiting funds and even fuel to Regional Chairman and Vice- Chairman so that those persons cannot carry out their work. They are even going so far in changing secretaries and other staffs that are assigned to those people without their knowledge and that is the kind of interference we are speaking about. It was because of the lack of experience and the attitude of those people a number of regions were unable to expend their budget.

For example Region 2, \$79 million came back to the treasury, Region 3, \$97 million, Region 5, \$109 million and Region 6, \$66 million. Those moneys could have been expended but because of the attitude and the sidelining of experienced people they were unable because they have no experience to expend these moneys. Those moneys were budgeted to buy basic things, for example drugs. If you visit the New Amsterdam Hospital there is a shortage of basic drugs; visit the dental clinic in Port Mourant there is no 'cocaine' to do an extraction. That is the kind of way this Government want to run the region. I want to make an appeal to this honourable House that the Members should allow democracy to prevail and the region should be controlled by the elected officials.

I would like to touch on two other very important sectors. I would like to say something: Matt and Jeff could go to the sugar worker today but not the man who is swelling up his chest. He wanted to go, but he was refused and chased away by the sugar worker. Two sectors in this country I would like to speak about, and these two sectors are being treated as step-children by

this Government. I am referring to the rice and sugar sectors. In the APNU/AFC, it is stated, and I quote, about rice:

“This sector is in grain in the fabric of coastal, rural Guyana from the Corentyne to the Essequibo, engage over 12,000 farmers, supports and additional 10 % of the country’s population directly and many more indirectly”.

This Government is today disowning the rice industry and disowning the farmers in this country. A high official from this Government went on television and made promises to the farmers that they will get \$6,000 to \$9,000 a bag per paddy.

6.07 p.m.

Today the farmers do not have any markets. The farmers have no markets.

This Government will destroy the rice industry. Remember in 1992 when we took Government, rice production was a mere 171,000 tons. When we left Government last year, rice production went over 680,000 tons, so it continues to destroy this industry. We, as a party, will not allow them this time. Their days are numbered.

We have heard a lot about sugar but let us talk first about the sugar workers. According to the Minister of Finance, the sugar sector has achieved its target for 2015, and yet for the first time in 31 years, the sugar workers did not receive an increase.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have one minute remaining to wrap up.

Mr. Mustapha: I want to say that this budget has failed the Guyanese nation. The Minister should go back and come with the right theme for this budget. Instead of “Stimulating Growth”, it is stifling growth. Instead of “Restoring Confidence”, it has removed the confidence of the Guyanese people. The “Good Life” does not beckon for the Guyanese people; it beckons for the Ministers over on that side. The “Good Life” buries the Guyanese people with this budget.

Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Rajkumar: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker for giving me an opportunity once again to speak in this noble House. I rise in support of the approval of the budget for the financial Year

2016 presented to this honourable House on the 29th January, 2016 under the theme *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*, by our Honourable Minister of Finance Mr. Winston Jordan.

Budget 2016 sets out the Government's plans for the continued development of our beloved country and demonstrates its efforts to improve the quality of life of all our people. The APNU/AFC Government intends to spend this year an estimated \$230 billion on education, public health, public security, public infrastructure and housing and water, in an effort to provide "a good life for us all."

Our senior citizens have expressed their appreciation for this Government for its continued effort to provide the good life for them. As of the 1st April, 2016 over 50,000 pensioners will benefit from an increase in pension. They will now receive a monthly pension of \$18,200, Your Honour. Public Assistance has been increased to \$7,300. APNU/AFC Government must be complimented that just within a few months of taking office this Government has been able to increase old age pension from \$13,125 to \$18,200. Public Assistance has been increased from \$5,900 to \$7,300.

Some people referred to the subsidies being taken away from the pensioners last August, but only 6,000 pensioners alone were benefiting from the subsidy. Now, all we did was to take the subsidy and put it so that everyone could benefit. We are not a discriminating Government, Your Honour. Every person must benefit; every person must enjoy this "good life." We made promises which are continued and kept by this Government in providing a "good life" for our senior citizens and less fortunate. It is a promise that is kept and will be continued to be kept.

I wish to note that this year the income tax rate remains at 30%. The income tax threshold was increased from \$600,000 per annum to \$660,000 per annum. Sixty-eight thousand workers will be exempted from paying taxes this year. Indirectly, there will be an increase in salaries for those persons earning above \$55,000. Right away, they will be exempted from tax and \$5,000 would be an increase in their salaries.

In this year's budget, the public servants were not given any increase in their salaries. [An
Hon. Member (Opposition): You just said that.] I am talking about public servants.

In the APNU/AFC manifesto of the 2015 Elections, we had promised that the restoration of collective bargaining throughout the public service in increasing salaries for public servants, Your Honours. This was a promise made to the people of Guyana in our manifesto. Today, this promise is fulfilled. All we are asking the public servants is to give the collective bargaining process an opportunity to work. The General Secretary of the Guyana Trades Union Congress has hailed this action by the Government as the greatest victory for the humans of Guyana and recognised that the Government is acting in accordance with the Constitution of this land. These unions, representing the workers, acknowledge that this is a good thing for the people and the workers.

APNU/AFC Government recognises the importance of education, more particularly tertiary education to our country. This year a sum of \$32 billion is allocated for tertiary education at the University of Guyana, in an effort to improve the quality of education offered to the students, and consequently producing quality graduates to help in the development of our country.

I stand here representing the people of Region 2 and it is my duty to highlight to this House some of the things which my region will benefit under this Budget 2016, under the hands of our Government.

Region 2 is heavily dependent on agriculture, the majority being rice farmers. Despite the challenges faced by the rice farmers they were able to increase their yields, but unfortunately the drop in the price of paddy placed the farmers in some serious financial situations. Farmers were made between \$1,000 and \$1,700 per bag for paddy. Some of the farmers are still owed by the millers and are forced to purchase inputs on credit from the millers at higher prices. The prolonged dry spell, which we are now experiencing, is threatening the industry. There is presently a shortage of fresh water to irrigate the fields. To alleviate this problem faced by the farmers, the Government, in January, just last month, provided resources for pumping water from the Pomeroon River into the Dawa canals. This had to be stopped due to the presence of salt water in the Pomeroon. We are concerned about the situation in which the farmers find themselves. This Government will continue to access markets for the rice producers in this country and actively pursue markets with good prices and hence bettering the price now offered to the farmers.

In an effort to improve agricultural yields, drainage and irrigation capacity and access to farm lands and providing better environment for cultivation, this Government has committed to spend more than \$102 million in Region 2 to construct revetments, sluices, irrigation checks and culverts throughout the region, necessary investments for agricultural sector in Region 2. In January this year, we in the Government commissioned a drainage pump at Lima which was at a cost of \$191 million. Over 3,000 acres of land will be drained and residents will no longer be affected by floods. These are the good things that we in Region 2 are experiencing. These are the things that we expect to have “a good life” with.

Education: The APNU/AFC Government recognises that education leads to prosperity and hence a good life. This year over \$233 million will be spent in improving the learning environment in Region 2. There would be a new building to house the students attending the Aurora Primary School. This will be done at a cost of over \$114 million. A new nursery school will also be built at Akawini. Rehabilitation works will be done at the Anna Region and Cotton Field Secondary Schools. Classrooms will be upgraded to create a better environment for learning. Eighteen point five million dollars will be spent to acquire furniture and other school equipment in the region. This Government is committed to continue to improve the accommodation and educational facilities to our students by providing suitable environment for them to learn and excel. Our children must also enjoy the “good life” too.

Health Services: The incident of suicide has hit Region 2 in an alarming rate. The Government recognises the negative impact it has on our society and intends to have counsellors, secondary school teachers and even students trained to be able to identify persons with the propensity to harm themselves and offer counselling to these individuals. In continuing to providing a high quality of health services to the people of Region 2, the Government intends to establish an Accident and Emergency Unit at the Oscar Joseph District Hospital, construct a maternity waiting room at Suddie Hospital Complex and also construct the long overdue health post at Onderneeming, on the Essequibo Coast, at a total of \$92 million. An excess of \$176 million will be spent on acquiring pharmaceuticals and other medical supplies to be used in the regions to alleviate diseases and other ailments. Our region will also benefit from the supply of much needed dental chairs, and dental equipment, enhancing the quality of dental service to the people of the region. Government is committed to improve the quality of health services in the region.

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

Minister of Public Infrastructure [Mr. Patterson]: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes more in addition to his allotted time to conclude his speech?

Question put, and agreed to.

6.22 p.m.

Mr. Rajkumar: Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: The speaker will resume his speech and will continue to speak for 20 minutes.

Mr. Rajkumar: Mr. Speaker, apart from the construction and rehabilitation of school, hospitals, health posts and health centres, our region will also benefit from the construction of bridges, upgrading of roads, construction and rehabilitation of river and sea defence. Sixty-seven million dollars will be spent on the construction and upgrading of roads in Anna Regina, Adventure, Henrietta and Dartmouth.

The ‘Good Life’ does not only includes improved health services, better schools, learning facilities, better roads and better salaries, it is also about leisure, recreation and relaxation.

Recreation plays an integral part in human development. This Government is committed to spending the sum of \$10.5 million to establish recreational parks in Exmouth, Anna Regina and Fear Not, to provide a place for people to spend their leisure and have a place for relaxation.

I must also give my part on the issue of the used tyres. A used tyre normally lasts for about two months. A new tyre lasts for a year. We are asking our people to be satisfied, to purchase vehicles that are eight years and older. Why must the Guyanese people only be satisfied with old vehicles? We must emancipate ourselves and target our minds, that we can afford good things. We ought not to be thought as second-hand people.

Lastly, the people of this country, for 19 years, have been starved for Local Government Elections (LGE). This year on 18th March, Local Government Elections will be a reality and no longer a promise. I had said in my last speech that this Government always delivers on its promises. Under the circumstances that I have just mentioned about the plan for the future

development of our country, under the theme *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*. I wish to congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance for a careful and well planned budget. Mr. Speaker, I have no hesitation but to call on my fellow Members to support this Budget and see its approval. Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Damon: Mr. Speaker, let me take the initiative to congratulate the *Essequibian* teenager who has now become the Junior Calypso Champion of Guyana.

I sat here and I listened to the Hon. Member, Mr. Rajkumar, belting out his voice from the back, across there. I am shocked and I am wondering where all these developments in Essequibo are? The Hon. Member, Mr. Rajkumar, spoke about things he might have imagined, but he did not speak about things that are present in Essequibo.

I stand before this honourable House to give my opinion of this 2016 Budget presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance. I sat here and listened to President Granger deliver a long synopsis to this Parliament.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I will not allow speakers to get to the line. The President's name is not to be employed in this House in the context of this debate.

Hon. Member, we have a Standing Order that guides us in this respect. This applies to all who address in this House. Please proceed.

Mr. Damon: I sat here and listened to the President deliver a long synopsis to this Parliament... **[Interruption]** I did not call his name. Everything the President said about co-operation and unity was all in vain. The walls might have listened to the President asking for co-operation from this side of the House, but all were ignored by his Ministers and Advisors. All that is contained in the 2016 Budget will have a negative outlook on the masses of this country. What the Hon. Minister of Finance has presented for a budget is a bundle of papers that are telling the masses that they must live in hope. I am shocked and dismayed to understand that, in eight months, a Government cannot work out a living wage for our public servants, but in three months this APNU/AFC Government could have worked out the living wage for the Hon. Prime Minister and all the other Ministers on that side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, is it true that this APNU/AFC Government has no respect and regard for our Public Servants? We on this side of this honourable House are saying a loud “No” to the APNU/AFC Government’s approach to our hard-working public servants. Our public servants are tired and fed up of hearing about on-going negotiations. Let the union and the Government take this issue to arbitration.

There is not a major project stated for Region 2. I am forced to ask: What happened to the continuation of the Mainstay/Tapakuma asphalted road; what happened to the Lima Sands Road; what happened to the Pure Water Supply for the Lima Plant, where there is no water to drink; and what about drinking water for the residents of Wakapau and many more areas in the Pomeroon?

A lot of spending will be taking place in the APNU/AFC strong holes. This is nothing else but marginalisation by this APNU/AFC Government. In Region No. 2, we are blessed to have the worst Regional Executive Officer (REO) in this country. The masses in Region 2 have asked that this REO be sent to Region 3 and we would do very well with the REO from Region 3. This REO is nothing else but a waste of time. He has caused 75% of the rice lands in Region 2 not to be cultivated. This REO made no moneys available to purchase fuel to pump water from the Dartmouth Pumping Station, although the request went to him two months earlier. This REO that the APNU/AFC Government forced on us in Region 2 cannot manage the finances of Region 2 properly. There are two instances where contracts were given out by this REO in excess of the figure that he is authorised to expedite without the Tender Board process.

These issues must be investigated because they are serious issues. This REO is incompetent. This REO came back to Guyana and opened two reading centres: one in Georgetown and one in Berbice. Both reading centres were a dismal failure. How then can the APNU/AFC Government put a 61 year old man, who is a failure for his own investment, to manage the affairs of Region 2 as the Accounting Officer? The REO and the APNU/AFC Government have brought our once thriving Essequibo to its knees. Rice is dying a natural death and every industry is going with it.

In Sunday’s edition of the *Guyana Times* newspapers, the people of Queenstown are asking for aid and food relief. Members can ask the Hon. Prime Minister and his team who went to Essequibo. Everywhere in Essequibo, the cry is “*Things hard. Wah dis Government a do?*” This

REO must go. Trench cleaners cannot get their moneys on time. What is happening in Region 2? I heard nothing about the opening of the Rice Crib Centre, that brand new spanking building that was built under the PPP/C Administration.

Unemployment is on the increase. Our children need jobs. Where are the jobs that this Government spoke about? Our children and people are losing faith and suicide is rampant in Region 2, under this APNU/AFC Administration - this *I do not care* Government. We need jobs for our young people of Region 2 to help avoid this suicidal epidemic that the APNU/AFC Government should take blame for. This Government is responsible for the wanton destruction of our region. When the Region 2 rice industry was flourishing, families could have met the needs of their children and families. With rice taking a *licking*, frustration and hard times are new destructive elements of the lives of most people in Region 2.

The Institute of Private Enterprise Development (IPED) is the first lending institution in Region 2 that is seizing the farmers' tractors and this APNU/AFC Government just sits back and does nothing. I wonder why this Government is not negotiating with IPED on behalf of our farmers.

[Interruption]

I enquired about what you and your Government are doing about the farmers. Our farmers need some fertilisers to help them. They also need some diesel and gasoline to assist with pumping of water to save their crops.

I call on this Minister of Agriculture to stop neglecting our farmers. I wonder, is it because that 90% of our farmers are Indo-Guyanese, is that why no help is forthcoming? The Hon. Prime Minister, Moses Nagamootoo, has also found himself in a similar position, renegaded to watch over the Parliament that being demoted as an Indo-Guyanese. The Hon. Member should stand up as an Indo-Guyanese and demand help and justice for all and not for a few as the Prime Minister of this country.

6.37 p.m.

To marginalise our Indo-Guyanese brothers and sisters, which is glaring by this APNU/AFC Government, will lead huge migration and the loss of our skilled people, just like what happened before the PPP/C came into office, after the 1992 Elections. All that we hearing about are

forensic audits and public servants being removed from their posts, it is time this Government stop these nonsense of marginalisation and live up to what the President said.

Mr. Speaker hit gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Damon, the Speaker has been very lenient with your misuse so far. I believe that you should pull the reins in now. I would not wish to rule you out of order. Please proceed.

Mr. Damon: To the Hon. Minister of Agriculture, all the rice farmers of Region 2 would like to see the head of the Rice Producers Association (RPA), a man of merit and vast experience, be immediately placed on the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB). He will be an asset to that Board.

I wonder, is it right to tell a Guyanese that they have to pay \$8,000 or \$25,000 for a firearm licence to protect themselves and their families? Well, the Guyanese firearm holders are saying a very loud “No” to this. What is the message that we are sending to the criminals? Is it not true that we are telling them that we intend to take away half of their firearms? I want to believe that there are more than 40,000 applications for firearm licences with the Ministry of Public Security and the Commissioner of Police. If 60% of the firearms are approved, more moneys would be netted into the taxes and more persons would have a firearm to protect themselves, their business and family from criminals. The person or persons who suggested these large increases on firearm licences did not stop to think that these increases were very disgusting for firearm holders and must be adjusted. It is too much.

For months our sea sluices have been silted up and the residents of Region 2 call on the subject, Minister, the Hon. Minister Patterson, to make sure that these sluices are cleared. Let me remind the Hon. Member that the Government has pumps. I think that the subject Minister should travel to the Region to help with his expertise advice in the clearing of our sea sluices.

Let me also say that, at downtown in Region 2, 65 loads of earth were removed from the sea defence embankment by the REO.

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

Mr. Damon: What is really happening? The residents of Region 2 continue to complain about a terrible drugs shortage in the Region 2 hospitals. Many times sick residents...

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, can I ask for the Hon. Member's five minutes please because according to my clock, he still has five minutes more after the expiration of his two minutes. I thought that when I did it earlier for all the Members that it would be easier that way, instead of me interrupting.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, be assure that the Speaker is not tired hearing you ask for five minutes. I am suggesting that you do it for every speaker.

Ms. Teixeira: I thank you Sir that you do not mind hearing my voice, but I really feel very bad about interrupting my Comrades who are speaking. I have to try at times when I think I can interrupt them and it becomes a little difficult.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Damon, you may continue for another five minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Damon: Many times sick residents are called upon to buy drugs because both of our hospitals many times run short of drugs. Many times there are no anti-snake venom injections at the Charity and Suddie Hospitals; many times, patients have to take the long trip to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, which is a risk sometimes. I call on the Hon. Minister of Public Health to make sure that, at all times, drugs must be available at our hospitals in Region 2. The Charity Hospital must be upgraded urgently. That was the Minister's promise when he last visited Region 2. To-date, Hon. Minister, nothing was done.

I want to remind the Hon. Minister of Public Health about accidents that sometimes occur to some of our new born babies during delivery at the Suddie Hospital - sometimes broken shoulders. I hope that the Hon. Minister can remember the death Ms. Yonette Grey from Somerset and Berks, where there was no oxygen in the ambulance from Charity to Suddie, which caused her death. Hon. Minister, this was very disgusting and warrants an investigation.

Last year, we heard about the *A Good Life For All*, but once again, the poor public servants are left out of the 'Good Life'. Shame on them! In the Budget Speech by the Hon. Minister of

Finance, he mentioned the three Bs, but it is four Bs. It is Boots, Bicycles, Boats and Buses. This 2016 Budget crafted by this Hon. Minister is unfortunate, bias and misleading. I am confident that the six farmers of the Anna Regina Secondary School could have crafted a better budget than this one the Minister of Finance has crafted. I thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you Mr. Speaker and with your permission, let me from the onset endorsed and commend this \$230 billion people's budget to this honourable House. I encourage the former Administration, Members of the minority in this House, fellow Guyanese, and hopefully patriotic Guyanese to find a just nerve and support the Budget under the apt theme, *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons.*

The architect, the expert, the best at budget presentations and stewardship, the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Jordan, must be commended for this prize to the Guyanese people. I wish that he conveys the appreciation of the people of Region 10 to his diligent team.

Similar appreciation is in order for all Guyanese, except perhaps the Hon. Members on the other side of this House who chose not to participate in Budget 2016 talks. It is not too late for the Hon. Members to get on board, for the train to prosperity, equality, and equity is moving rapidly a-pace.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to offer some debate on the last speaker, the Hon. Mr. Damon's address or maybe his misaddress to this honourable House. The PPP backbencher, the Hon. Mr. Damon selected the worst possible place to get into racial talks in Guyana. I want to, in no uncertain manner, condemn him and I know this House will join me. He did provide very little information to this honourable House. In fact, he misinformed us, when he suggested that four pumps were neglected under this Administration. He should be well informed that these pumps were neglected under the PPP/C regime and were reactivated when the Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture visited Region 2. Several pumps in Region 2 were sabotage. Sand was thrown into them and we are working to get them working in the best possible condition. This Coalition will fix those issues.

This Budget needs no selling and unlike what some think, we did not set out to craft a poor people plan. Guyana is wealthy, thus all Guyanese are at least potentially wealthy. Our patrimony belongs to all. The Budget is hinged on our covenant with this Nation - our Manifesto.

Guyanese chose to change the country's political culture and I daresay, fortune, when our multiparty coalition was elected in May, 2015. This Budget will realise the mission, as set out by His Excellency in his New Year's Address:

“The New Year 2016 is time for renewal. This is a time for reform. This is a time for national renaissance, the prospects are bright.”

This New Year, as His Excellency said, is a time for chart our course for the next five years to 2020 and beyond. Budget 2016 will provide the fuel for this. This Budget brings vision were ignorance and arrogance loam. In keeping with His Excellency vision and Coalition's mandate, which is to link urban with rural and coast to hinterland, notable allocations have been made for improved transportation in all three of our major rivers: In Berbice, by subsidising on the toll to cross the Berbice River Bridge, and the distinct possibility of a river boat in the Berbice River; in Essequibo, by seeking to have a more efficient and effective vessel there and; in Demerara, by doing what is long overdue, a feasibility for a new Demerara Harbour Bridge.

Complementing this, most of our wharfs will receive much needed rehabilitation. Our rivers are not a hindrance to our development. In fact, they are a blessing, as a source of water for agriculture and domestic use and most importantly, transportation.

Over the years, very little dredging was done, resulting in navigation difficulties, added transportation costs, thus adversely affecting our residents, particularly those living on the banks of our rivers. Budget 2016 makes provision for the dredging and desilting of our rivers.

Some other projects in the Budget for the Ministry of Public Infrastructure that would directly impact the lives of the people of Region 10 are as follow: Major rehabilitation to the Linden-Ituni/Kwakwani fair-weather road; the upgrading to the embarrassing Linden/Soesdyke Highway; the upgrading to the Linden-Mabura/Lethem road; and bridges and culverts along the Lethem road will also be given due attention.

Further, allocations for boardwalks, pedestrian, and vehicle overhead crossings are simple, but transformative projects coming from the \$14.4 billion public infrastructure allocations. This Administration is conscious of the need for an educated citizenry and has been allocated \$40.3 billion or 17.5% for the education sector. Noted is the attention placed on the country's lone State

University which will receive \$3.2 billion and an additional \$500 million subvention. Thus, the people of Region 10 look forward to improved service from the University of Guyana's Institute of Distance and Continuing Education. Equally committed, staff of the University of Guyana awaits their increase wages, salaries and allowances that are intended to come from the \$500 million subvention.

6.52 p.m.

Budget 2016 has no direct budgetary allocation for agriculture in Region 10. Region 10 is not considered an agricultural region. In time and in the near future, we are going to change that. The recent announcement, by the Regional Chairman, Mr. Morian, that the region was about to sign an agreement with Alesie Company to supply cassava for export, is a step in the right direction. Agriculture programmes at Moblissa, Ebini, Caricom, Dalliwala, West Watooka, *et cetera*, must be given the required impetus. The people of Region 10, particular sub-region 2, look forward to making their contribution to the country's Food Security Programme.

There is no denial that, under the previous Administration, large amounts of parcels of land were allocated to our people, but I say "parcels of land", since in the 21st century, house lots must have basic infrastructure. Our Administration will fix this. Our people must have potable water, electricity and better roads. I am testimony to living in a community that, in the first place, one was given more or less a jungle for a house lot, materials removed from that house lot was capable of making lots of coals. The roads continue - and we would fix that - to be mud tracks and there are no telephone services in that area, but this Administration, conscious of the needs of our people, will fix that.

Region 10

Without Region 10, what would Guyana be? A land with a hole in the middle and limited access to our interior, this beacon of our beautiful country touches all except three regions. It is the source of our aquifers. It is this region that was singled out for hardship, but we endured and this Administration, conscious of our riches, has made budgetary allocations to give us the 'Good Life'.

Agriculture

As previously mentioned, the Region is not considered an agriculture region, but in its wisdom, the Administration has caused allocations to roads, bridges, culverts and the maintenance of drainage and irrigation which would impact the region's agriculture growth. Additionally, the Guyana Livestock Development Authority will support activities in the Berbice River. We are grateful for that.

Administration and Finance

Conscious of the overcrowding and poor state of the Region's administrative building in Mackenzie, an allocation of \$22 million will enable the upgrade of the faulty electrical system, provision for a new building and air conditioning units (AC) to our hard working workers of the Regional Democratic Council (RDC).

Public Works

The region's infrastructure will benefit with over \$51 million allocated for the rehabilitation of bridges and revetment at Katabulli Creek, Blueberry Hill and Industrial Area.

On 11th May, 2015, that blessed day for this Co-operative Republic of Guyana, we inherited almost all the roads in Region 10 in disrepair, both internal and external: Linden-Soesdyke, Linden-ltuni/Kwakwani, Linden-Mabura/Lethem, we have started to fix them and we will continue this year with both the Ministry of Public Infrastructure and the regional budgets reflecting this.

Upgrading of roads in Amelia's ward, Republic Avenue and Constabulary Compound entrance, will all be done.

Block 22, a community, existing as long as the previous Administration was in office, was completely off the developmental agenda, they are now on. We will not only upgrade their roads, but this Budget makes provision for a survey of the poor drainage system. We will fix those.

The drainage systems will also be upgraded at Pine Street, Dageraad and Independence Avenues. These projects of \$64 million will improve access and drainage systems. Guyana is a land of many waters, but Region 10 is the source of much of our potable water. Attention to the Dakoura watershed, with budgetary allocation is much appreciated. Additionally, \$30.8 million will help

improve drainage and irrigation, revetment structures and desilting of creeks at Wismar, Hymara/Kumaka and Old England.

The fleet of vehicles we inherited is embarrassing, some are unserviceable and others are limping. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of sub-region 2 were all without vehicles. We believe that this is unacceptable, and so to improve transportation or operational efficiency, over \$12 million has been budgeted.

Residents of sub-region 2, in particular, suffered grave burden on the Kwakwani fair-weather road. We propose to in time, pave this road, but much relief will be added with allocation for the purchase of a grader. This grader would also service the Mabrua Hill area.

Education

Our schools are of utmost importance to this Administration, and that is why we will upgrade roads at St. Aidan's and One Mile Primary School. Continuing on education, three of our secondary schools, namely Mackenzie High, Christiansburg and Wismar Secondary Schools and Linden Foundation Secondary will benefit from much needed rehabilitation, while One Mile Primary will have a trestle constructed all to the tune of \$82 million, which would improve user comfort.

Our education delivery is also adversely affected by lack of transportation, and the sum of \$6 million would bring much relief, particularly to our schools in the wider reaches. The further allocation of \$15 million for furniture and equipment in our schools will not bring an end to the woes, but will improve operational efficiency and educational service delivery.

Health Services

The challenges in the region's health sector are many. The \$615 million allocation to the region is welcomed. With astute management and value for money, this Administration will bring much relief to our residents. We have allotted \$64.2 million for construction of incinerators at the Upper Demerara Regional Hospital, the River View Health Post, the Vivienne Parris Health Centre, the Amelia's Ward Health Centre, the Christiansburg Health Centre and the Wisroc Health Centre, to name a few.

The condition of the inadequate number of vehicles in the regional health sector is appalling and as such, to improve health services delivery, \$6.4 million is budgeted for the purchase of vehicles. To complement this massive revamp of health services in Region 10, \$20.3 million is budgeted for the purchase of furniture and equipment, inclusive of incubators, refrigerators, beds, autoclaves, water dispenser, *et cetera*.

Labour

The budgeted financial support to our unions is much appreciated, however, the dedicated labour force, both active, inactive and those made inactive, look forward to celebrating the country's Golden Jubilee with all issues resolved.

I conclude by giving my support to Budget 2016 and I have every confidence that, together with the Plan of Action for Regional Development (PARD) programme which is being piloted in Region 10, Region 10 will shine and lead the way in the *Good Life For All Guyanese*. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Dr. Mahadeo: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I want to start off by quoting my Colleague Member of Parliament who spoke just before me, who said that this Government did not craft - was it a poor party plan? Well let me expand that, they did not craft a plan for the poor at all because this is a special interest plan, only special interest would benefit from this Budget.

I come from a region that has a lot of persons depending on rice and sugar, two of the industries that helped, in a major way, to develop Guyana and contributed to who we are as a nation today.

Here is a Government that says that they would help the sugar industry. A commission of inquiry (COI) was set up and millions of dollars to the tune of about \$75 million was spent on this commission of inquiry. The commission was set up and moneys were paid to the experts to, I presumed, look at the situation as was and as is and to make expert recommendations known to the Government, who set up the commission in the first place, so that the Government could be guided on what was the best direction for the country.

Low and behold, the same Government ignores the recommendations of the expert team it chose. The Wales Factory is being closed. Yes, a lot of us were fooled by the statement that the closure would happen at year end. It has started. Mr. Komal Chand, the Hon Member, sitting on my

right, was correct. The timeliness of his motion cannot now be disputed. Workers have been sent home already; lands have been abandoned. This begs the question, why was the commission of inquiry set up in the first place? Why were millions of tax payers' dollars doled out? One cane harvester said to me that the COI was to pay off some people.

The sugar workers are fearful. They do not trust this Government. The promises made to them about increased salaries and benefits were what it was, "empty promises". They were not even given the Annual Production Incentive (API) that they earned, through their sweat and tears. Even in days of our previous Presidents, that did not happen. It is a notorious first over the last 30 years and that, with this Government being less than one year in Government.

Our solidarity is with all sugar workers, especially those at the Wales Factory at this time. We will stand by you. All Guyanese who belong to the working class and all progressive Guyanese take note. Now is the time for the Wales Factory workers, which estate is next? Who is next? Are you?

The budget debate we had for the 2015 Budget saw many speakers from the Government benches make, I would consider memorable comments, statements and promises. Please allow me to refer to some of them that I took from the Hansard because I think they need mentioning and evaluating.

Hon. Jennifer Wade said:

"The cost of seed paddy fertiliser, fuel, the chemicals, labour, transportation, machinery, spare parts and harvesting are also very high. Yet, the farmers are receiving low price for paddy. The previous Administration had an obligation to stabilise the process to benefit farmers and ensure that the necessary systems were in place to protect the livelihood of the rice farmers. They did not do that".

That was referring to the PPP/C Government. Then the Member loudly declared:

"It is very necessary that this..."

This referring to the APNU/AFC Government.

"...Government ensures that rice farmers are protected."

Let us evaluate. Under the PPP/C, the average price in 2014 and early 2015 that farmers received was \$2,800 per bag of rice. What did they get for the last crop under the APNU/AFC? They got \$1500 per bag, if they were lucky. So if \$2,800 was low under the PPP/C, how does \$1500 compare under the APNU/AFC? The Hon Member also said:

“We must understand the language because Guyanese are following the debates in here and when we look like jokers, they will judge us”.

Who has turned out to be the joker, everything comes out in time.

I did not know we had a representative to explain for President Maduro why he could not afford to buy our rice. Just to let the honour gentleman know that our neighbour, Suriname, continues to enjoy the same terms we had, from the same Venezuela at this time.

Not only has the price for rice fallen to the lowest it has been for over a decade, but the cost of fertilizer, chemicals, labour and other input have risen. In Region 6 alone, over 10,000 acres of rice lands were left abandoned. The price cannot pay. A lot of the farmers have huge mortgages with the banks and they have other debts. Even worse, over 20,000 acres of land that were cultivated are now under threat as I speak. The rice industry is in dire straits and we need to debate and come up with workable solutions. A rice farmer from No. 64 Village said that he was told the rice industry is not Government’s business. Who said that the rice industry is not Government’s business? Rice brought into Guyana, US\$1.8 billion between 2004 and 2015.

7.07 p.m.

Which normal right thinking person with a clear conscience could say that it is not Government’s business when it affects the lives of over 100,000 Guyanese?

Moving on to health, my good friend, the Hon. Minister, Dr. George Norton, referring to early 2015, stated:

“Fifty-seven per cent of the population had access to a random blood sugar testing. This we, from the APNU/AFC, are setting out to correct.”

In the last months of the year 2015, there were no sticks available in some institutions. Testing moved from 57 per cent to 0 per cent. How great! What a travesty. What a shame.

The Hon Minister of Public Health said in his 2015 budget speech:

“It is unbelievable that persons want to blame this new APNU/AFC Government for the state of health in this country. Already, we have eight maternal deaths for this year.”

That was in August last year. From August to December last year, there were nine more maternal deaths. Yes! As a qualified Obstetrician-Gynaecologist (OB/GYN), I say that no woman should die giving birth. But how does eight deaths in eight months compare to nine deaths in four months, Hon. Member? It is not only because of incompetence but it because medications are not available, blood is not available and sometimes oxygen is not available.

In Region 6, quite a number of patients were transferred to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) because of the unavailability of blood. Two persons died in the ambulance whilst on their way to GPHC. One was a young woman with a ruptured ectopic pregnancy. If there is reason for a Commission of Inquiry (CoI), there it is. It is to investigate how in a few months the Ministry of Health could have been brought to its knees. Over the last years, there were no recorded cases of persons dying because of the unavailability of blood.

Let us look at this booklet that reflects the speech of the Hon. Minister of Finance. Referring to suicide in Guyana...and, indeed, there has been a definite rise in suicides since August, 2015. This is a very important issue that needs to be tackled head on. Hon. Minister Jordan said that the Government intends to mount a Commission of Inquiry. What is this? Is it more millions? Enough data is there. Ask the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). Ask the Chief Medical Officer (CMO), if he has not been moved as yet. Strategies that worked are many. For example, Black Bush Polder used to be the hub of suicides, for those of you who have been collecting data. It was once called the capital for suicides in Guyana. It is no longer so. The numbers have drastically reduced. Why? Something had to work.

Page 59 of this same document states:

“\$1.9 billion which includes mobilisation for the construction of the state-of-the-art...”

I think a word is missing here. Every time Hon. Bheri Ramsaran spoke, they called him the ‘Bheri speciality hospital’.

I am amazed. Let me quote the Hon. Minister of Public Health in his last budget speech:

“This speciality hospital happens to be one of the so-called transformational projects of the past regime...”

He was referring to the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C).

“...that had to be abandoned due to poor conceptualisation, in the first place, no consultation with local medical fraternity or other stakeholders. What was more shocking, however, about this whole project was the tendering and awarding of contract...”

The Hon Minister continued:

“...I go no further, only to say that one cannot help remembering that famous quote from Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 4, when Marcellus said, “Something is rotten in the state of Denmark”. Something was rotten in the state of Guyana with regards to the Surendra Engineering Corporation Limited and the speciality hospitality.”

At least, Surendra Engineering Corporation Limited (SECL) went through an open tender process. What open process did Fedders Lloyd Corporation Limited go through? Oh Yes, the speciality hospital is back on track, but how? What tender did Fedders Lloyd Corporation Limited go through? Now the quote is applicable. Yes, the Hon. Dr. Norton, something is rotten in the state of Guyana and it stinks to the high heavens.

I would like to remind this House what our exuberant Member of Parliament (MP) from Region 2 on that side of the House said in his last budget speech:

“Our health system in Region 2 is in dire need. Pensioners and poor people cannot receive basic medication at the hospital pharmacies. With the injection of this amount of money ...”

He was referring to the \$97 million in the budget.

“...I am certain that the people of Region 2, especially the pensioner and the less fortunate, will get the required treatment at the hospital.”

I want to ask, where did the money go? From the budget document, I can see that it was spent. The residents of Region 2 were, however, worse off than ever before. There were no medications. So, the moneys were definitely not spent on the residents of Region 2.

Region 6 had \$195 million and that appears to have been spent, according to the budget document, but not for the residents of Region 6.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have three minutes reaming.

Ms. Teixeira: May I, at this time, ask for the extension of five minutes?

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. Mahadeo: The Hon. Minister said that the Ministry of Public Health will ensure that the Guyanese population's access to medication and medical supplies be improved. The best word to describe that statement is an unparliamentarily one and so I would not use it. We all know that the availability of the medical supplies and medications in Guyana, at this present time, is worse than it has ever been for over two decades, even when the Hon. Gail Teixeira took over, in 1992, as Minister of Health.

A 65 year old patient of the Skeldon Hospital Medical Clinic, who had a complex case of many medical conditions, had a prescription for ten different medications. Do you know how many he got? None! He was told to go and buy. He is a pensioner. The \$1,700 increase cannot buy a one month supply of one tablet for that pensioner. The gentleman asked me not quote his name because he is afraid.

Fear has started stalking our beautiful Guyana. The patients are scared to complain to the authorities for fear of recrimination. The man selling egg balls on the stand is afraid to complain because he said that they will break up his stand. The visitor is scared to walk. The small businessman is scared for his life. The small restaurant owner is scared to open in the evenings when business is best in the countryside, scared of being shot and killed like the one who was killed last night at No. 56 Village, Corentyne. Now, it seems that we must be scared to go to our mandirs or places of worship because only a couple days ago, a 21year old who was returning from the mandir was murdered. The person has not been buried as yet. It brings to mind the poem by Martin Carter. I will quote a part:

“It is the season of oppression, dark metal, and tears.
It is the festival of guns, the carnival of misery
Everywhere the faces of men are strained and anxious
Who comes walking in the dark night time?
Whose boot of steel tramps down the slender grass
It is the man of death...”

It is fear. It is sad and dangerous at the same time. Fear has returned to this land on our 50th birth anniversary.

Going back to health, on page 84 of this document it talks about vaccination coverage. For measles, mumps, rubella, and yellow fever there was 100 per cent coverage in 2014; in 2015, it was 90 per cent. For every 15,000 births, 1,500 children were not covered for vaccine preventable conditions. And we say that the good life is beckoning, not for those 1,500 children.

The health system in Region 6 is a special case. The Minister picked the person who is there. The person has no experience and no qualifications. Some \$39 million was sent back last year from Region 6. From that, there was a large amount for repairs and maintenance of equipment. The laboratories are not functioning in Skeldon and Port Mourant; in New Amsterdam, the equipment is down and has not been repaired. They have been down since July and moneys were sent back. That is incompetence.

Nearly \$1 million was used to purchase suites, *et cetera*.

We left 11 functioning vehicles. Now, the Skeldon Hospital does not have an ambulance. I understand that the ambulance is at the Ministry of Health, for the past two weeks, waiting to be handed over. What happen to the patients?

The Hon. Dr. Norton said:

“As the necrobiotic saying goes, the fish rots from the head downwards.”

Rot has set in in Region 6.

Let me draw an analogy. Consider health services as a plane to wellness, a huge plane with over 750,000 passengers whose health and lives depend on the pilots. This Guyana health plane has

two pilots, who were appointed by this Government in May, 2015. This health plane is in a nosedive heading to a crash. Urgent measures need to be taken because time is short. Do not play with people's lives and health. If the pilots do not have the knowledge, the capacity or the know-how, then they should get help or get out.

Pages 64 to 88 show us over 120 different additions to the burdens on the backs of the poor people of Guyana with the increases and fees. I know a brilliant person who once said that a promise is a comfort to a fool. There were so many promises, from increases which were promised to the sugar workers, to the reduction of VAT, to substantial salary increases, to abundant drug supplies, and the list goes on and on. It seems that those who made the promises think that Guyanese are fools. Think again. The honeymoon is over. The honey and the moon got divorced.

Let us see what the local government elections will reveal. Then again, it seems as though the Government does not want the presence of independent and international observers. Is there a sinister motive for this? What can it be, I wonder?

Where is the East Bank public road in Region 6? There is no mention of it in this budget. There are a lot of things such as the Health Centre in Fort Ordinance. The Region 6 capital budget was cut by 80 per cent by this Government.

In closing, this is an unconscionable budget. This budget is a sick budget. It is a parasitic budget that is all about sucking the poor in over 125 ways by increased taxation, even to the animal cart owners.

If the last budget brought us no drugs, loss of lucrative rice market, loss of jobs, big jobs for the boys and girls, square pegs in round holes, increase in suicides, low prices for rice, dramatic increase in crime, and deaths from the unavailability of blood for transfusion, I shudder to think what the new hardships introduced by this 2016 budget will bring to the poor people of Guyana, the working class and the young.

In his budget speech, the Minister stated that youth unemployment will be promoted. As my Comrade said, it may have been a Freudian slip. It is more like, *mouth open and story jump out*. The Wales Estate has already being closed. Workers have been sent home. We heard about the

encouragement of alcohol use and abuse. It is a sad beginning to this the year of our 50th Anniversary.

I thank you. [Applause]

Mr. C. Persaud: I rise to present arguments in support of *Budget 2016*. *Budget 2016* was presented to this honourable House by a veteran in the field of budget preparation, a man who, in the past, assisted the now Opposition in presenting several budgets; a man who has shown that he has the interest of Guyanese at heart; a man who is trying to please all of the people of this wonderful country; and a man whose efforts were supported by a very competent team. This is no *ad hoc*, overnight budget.

Before I delve into my budget debate proper, and I wish to emphasise the word “debate”, I would like to draw attention to a country that we have all have some respect and admiration for - Canada.

There is a resort called the Horseshoe Resort. I received a call from my brother last December, 2015 who told me that there was no snow at the Horseshoe Resort and that the operators had to pay to have artificial snow brought in and so it was much more expensive to ski.

7.22 p.m.

At the same time, a sister of mine had said that she did not have to wear winter boots because it was so warm. The God Almighty cannot please everybody at the same time. When the Minister, the Hon. Winston Jordan, presented his budget, I shook his hand and I was distinctly convinced that he is a human being. How can this Minister please all of the people at the same time? The budget may seem like a tough budget but it speaks to us as Guyanese that nothing comes easy.

I will now move to the debate. The word debate was referred to as a misnomer by the Hon. Mr. Ramson in his address. He chose to call it a discussion. I am very impressed. I am wondering, though, whether he may want to call the Assembly a ‘get together’, but we will wait and see. A debate, in my view, is where arguments are presented and there is rebuttal. The rebuttals are rejections of arguments that were presented.

So, I will look, very quickly, at what the immediate past speaker, the Hon. Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo, said. He delivered what is typical PPP propaganda. He emphasised that the Wales Estate has been closed. If one asks him now, he will tell you that it is not closed but it is proposed that the Wales Estate will be closed. That is something in the future. The Hon. Member failed to tell the Guyanese public that the Wales Sugar Estate was not making money; it was running at a tremendous loss. The merger of the Wales Estate with Uitvlugt Estate will have the workers absorbed. Some may move off but a lot of jobs will be saved, a lot of people will continue to work, and it is not as dismal as the PPP propaganda machine is trying to present it to be.

The propaganda machine is working tremendously hard 24/7. I will try something again. I recall, vividly, that I did this in the 2015 budget presentation. I heard that subsidies to pensioners were taken away. I will deal with only one – the subsidy from the Guyana Power and Light (GPL). It was \$20,000 and not \$30,000 or 40,000 as was mentioned. The subsidy was paid to people who were of age but they had to have the metres in their names; if not, they could not have gotten it. In Region 6, Canje Creek, Orealla and many other areas - I am speaking of densely populated areas where there is no electricity - the pensioners did not get the subsidy. That is not mathematics; that is a simple practical experience. It applies to about 40,000 Guyanese who are pensioners - I will stand corrected - give or take a couple hundred. Let us take a round number. Forty thousand Guyanese are pensioners and only about 7,000 qualified for that subsidy. Yet, they went out and told the people that this Government took the subsidy from them and some of the poor people, because they have no time to go out and get details, believed that.

The question was asked: what happened to the Guyana Power and Light (GPL) bill? When they were given their subsidy, they still had to pay their light bills. It was \$20,000 per year. The difference is – and this is where mathematics may puzzle some of them - it was \$13,125 - I have it written down and I am asking that they grab a pen and paper to get the details. We had a lesson in Latin earlier. I am giving one in Mathematics – and it has increased to \$17,000 for every pensioner. That is a difference of - are we writing - \$3,875 per month. Multiply that by 12 and it is \$46,500. From the money that they were getting, this \$46,500 presents a considerable increase in their pension. All pensioners are in receipt of that now. With this budget, an additional \$1,200 would be added to their pension. If the subsidy was there, would they have increased the subsidy? Would they have given it to everybody? One still would have had to receive a metre

and then go through a bit of a struggle to get the subsidy. Why are they still complaining that this Government took money from the pensioners? The subsidy from the then Government would have applied to \$7000 people only. This Government's increase applies to all - 100 per cent of the pensioners. That is what they do not understand. That is what they are trying to sell to the people 24/7 in the hope that they will buy it.

Budget 2016 has made allocation for several areas in Berbice, Region 6. Many of those areas are particularly East Indian occupied areas, not as my friend on the other side referred to as racial and ethnic...I am simply rebutting. This is what a debate is about. It is about rebutting what is offered to this honourable House. In Region 6, there will soon be the construction of a primary school at No. 36 Village. One of the other difficulties that I have with the Hon. Members of the Opposition is that they expect the Government to have the Midas touch and everything will happen. We have been in Government for a measly eight months and we have to clean up 23 years of mess. Yet, they want to see what progress we have made. Well, walk around Georgetown and if you cannot see, you can smell. You will know that it does not stink anymore.

There is rehabilitation to be done at the Skeldon Line Path and the Mibikuri Secondary Schools. There is an extension to Cumberland Nursery School and my alma mater, The Berbice High.

A Health Centre will be built at Mara and yet the Opposition is saying that this Government does not have insight and future plans for the Region. It is difficult for me to understand why 23 years were spent in Government by Members who are coming out today to do battle with a Government that is trying its best to make the people comfortable when, in fact, what we can see, glaringly - it is for all to see – is the three ‘F’s’ that were referred to - friends, family and favourites of the past Government. Look at where they are sitting and they are the ones talking about who got a 20% increase. They are saying that the increase was given to Ministers. The increase was given to all of us, including Members of the Opposition. Why are they not accepting that they got the increase too? We heard about their increase going to some charity. We will see which charity it would go to.

The health sector in Berbice, Region 6 in particular, would be having a High Dependency Unit at the Outpatient Department and the reconstruction of a building at the New Amsterdam hospital.

The budget caters for the purchase of ultrasound machine, x-ray machine, cardiac monitors, infant warmers, ventilators, air-conditioning units, beds and other essential.

Prior to May 2015, I lost a nephew and when I went to the mortuary to have the pathologist perform the post-mortem, even my dead nephew wanted to run out of that place. That is what the stench was like. Again, stench is common, so if they could not see, I do not know if they had problem with their smell.

There are plans in the agriculture sector. Before I mention the plans, I want to say that I will not deny – and I will expect that the Members of the Government side will not deny –that rice is in some trouble and so rice farmers are in trouble. That is a fact. How can we, as a Government, after just seven or eight months in office, be blamed for the collapse of the rice industry? It is all subject to market fluctuation and that is very difficult for some people to understand. The PetroCaribe deal died, but where was the PPP in April when that deal died?

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

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Speaker, with your permission, can I request that my Colleague, the Hon. Member Mr. Persaud, be given an additional five minutes as per the agreement?

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. C. Persaud: When we look at the PetroCaribe deal, at the time of the expiration of that particular deal or contract, there was no Government. The party had prorogued Parliament and were waiting to reach the three years so that they could have collected their parliamentary pension. That is something that they are missing. We were nowhere near these benches as Government; we were fighting to win an election at the time. Thank God we won the election and we are looking now to salvage the rice industry which they allowed to collapse, and they are going around and telling people that we cannot give them \$9000 a bag or \$5000 or whatever the number might be. I cannot take the money out of my pocket and go and buy a bag of rice for \$9000. One bag of rice will last me a whole year. Markets have to be found and that is what this Government is assiduously working towards.

Very quickly, since I think I am running on limited time now, there was mention of the ban on used tyres. I will refer to what was said earlier by one of the Hon. Members of the Opposition. A

used tyre would cost about \$4,000 or \$5,000. A new tyre would cost about \$20,000 or \$25,000. The life of a new tyre – and I have had that experience. All of us who have been driving have had that experience – will last four or five times longer than the used tyre. It is safer and has no risk or very little risk of a tyre blowout. The money that one will pay four times over for the used tyre will give one a new tyre and it will last a lot longer. That is, again, simple mathematics.

7.37 p.m.

When we buy used tyres, we are taking tyres that other persons condemned. Why are we taking it? Why do we want to be second to the big boys out there? Let us create our own used tyre industry and this is how it will be done. We can buy new tyres. When someone, like my Hon. Friend over there, Mr. Damon, uses it for six months, he could put it out and buy a new one. It is so that people like me will go and buy that as used tyre but we know that it is a good used tyre. Guyana will have its own tyre market. It is a simple example. How could that hurt the economy? Money-wise, the same is being expended. We would get better service and people like me would get to buy a used tyre from people like my Colleague. It sounds very simple but it is very simple.

In conclusion, I will say that this budget presents us with hope but it also presents us with the idea that we cannot get things easy. If we want to get things easily, then we are looking in the wrong place. We have to sit down to work. I heard someone mention sugar. If the Hon. Members cannot come to grip with the fact that there are all kinds of sugar, such as beet sugar, and all kinds of sweeteners such as honey... People do not use cane sugar as much anymore, so the market for cane sugar is really not as lucrative as it was many years ago. That, again, is something that they have to come to grips with and sell it to the people, rather than selling to the people that this Government is trying to bury the sugar industry.

I wish to commend this budget to this honourable House and ask the Hon. Members in the Opposition not to oppose just to show the people that they are representing them. They can do that in another way. Do not run out of the Parliament when it gets heated.

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

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member for his statement. Hon. Members, the clock tells us that we are 25 minutes to 8.00 p.m. It is past 7.30 p.m. The Sitting is suspended for half of an hour and we will reassemble at 8.05 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 7.35 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 8.13 p.m.

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Mrs. Persaud: Mr. Speaker, permit me to respond briefly to some comments which were made by the Hon. Member, Minister Broomes, in her presentation. I would like to indicate that we the women on this side of the House are just as dignified and proud as the women on that side of the House, since we too were born out of a rich and dignified political legacy. Like true mothers, we are here to safeguard the interest of the people of Guyana and we will not reduce our presentations to un-debateable levels. We are strong, wise and focused enough not to become diverted from the business at hand or to be disrespectful to our fellow sister Parliamentarians. We are proud of our brothers and our Hon. Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, and all our Comrades on this side of the House. I would have hoped that the expressed sentiments of abuse by the Hon. Minister would have been made a few months earlier when a Member on the Government side of the House was verbally abusive and disrespectful, publicly, to a female Member on this side of the House. It went further as he was even more abusive to female women's right activists and even female Parliamentarians on this side of the House when it was stated that, if an apology was to be had from that Member, the female activist and Members of Parliament had to kiss a certain part of that person's anatomy, which I will not mention. It was in the press. It was public, so you need to read it Hon. Minister. However, I would leave the matter with one creole proverb, *When you got glass windows do not throw stones.*

Budget 2016 captioned *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons* is a big fat untruth. In fact, *Budget 2016* is not labour friendly at all. Instead, it continues to be a fresh approach to deception. The workers of Guyana continue to be deceived and duped by this Government. I say so because in the campaign in May, 2015, the workers of Guyana were promised a 20% increase. By the time *Budget 2015* was read, it had gone to 10% - a substantial increase, but when the mathematics was done, it was a mere 5% increase. The Government did

not adhere, at the time of the presentation of the 2015 budget, to the collective bargaining process. No union was consulted. In the 2016 budget, there are no increases and we were told by the Hon. Minister of Finance that that was due to late submissions by the Committee and that negotiations are still on-going. I say that is unacceptable. It is unacceptable because the Government knew the deadlines for the budget. The Government knew that increases to public servants in this country are something that they always look forward to, regardless of who happens to be the Government of the day. I heard sentiments expressed that we need to give it a chance to work. I would say that the Government officials got a hefty increase after a mere three months in Government. In labour terms, three months is considered a probationary period. We all know that during a probationary period no one is entitled to any sort of increases in salaries or benefits. They did not give the process a chance to work in their case but they expect the public servants to give it a chance to work. Well, *sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander*. The very Government, when in Opposition, used to dub persons who received certain sums of moneys as “fat cats”. They have now become the new “fat cats” of Guyana.

Many contract workers were terminated after 11th May, 2015. Many of them were young qualified Guyanese; many of them were single parents; and some were even disabled. However, recent evidence has shown that there is an increase of 577 contract workers, who have been employed after 11th May, 2015. The Ministry of Presidency alone has had an increase of 207 persons with an added employment cost of \$849,989,000. This is unbelievable when taking into consideration that over 40 persons were terminated from the One Laptop Per Family (OLPF) Project, which came under the very Ministry, and that 90% of those who were under the age of 30 years were highly qualified and they were youths - so much for the advancement of youths in this country.

The sugar industry is under threat. The closing of the Wales Estate will have dire effect not only on the workers of that estate, but also, to the communities, the persons that live there and have their businesses there. Families will be affected; private persons who have their taxis, who have their shops, and who operate their small businesses will be affected. Then, I heard the Hon. Member say that the merging of the Wales Sugar Estate with Uitvlugt Sugar Estate will be able to cushion some of the effects.

I have spoken to persons working at the Wales Estate, many of them women, and they were boasting about how they were able to educate their children, send them to universities, locally and overseas, and that they were proud of the outcome of those children. That was done while they were working in the sugar industry. If that industry is closed, many children will not have a chance. There were mothers who were crying as to what will become of the future of their children because that was where they got their livelihood. Mortgages will be affected. The very land that we boast about that being able to give people to build homes will not become a reality for these persons at Wales Sugar Estate.

I heard that the pensioners' having to own metres to gain subsidies is no excuse to take it away. Pensioners would have served their due to the Guyana society and the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) sought a way of repaying them not only by their old pensions, not only by their National Insurance Scheme (NIS) pensions, but by giving relief to those who own homes and had the metres in their names. I also heard a Hon. Member of the Government side, Mr. Rajkumar, say that the Government had the right and that, instead of just giving the subsidy to one sector of persons – and the figure was touted as 7000 persons – why not give it to everybody? I am saying to those on the Government side of the House that the ball is in your court now. Instead of taking it away and giving the measly increases that they have given, give everybody the subsidy. Let them get a chance at the good life and the fresh approach that you are talking about.

The sugar industry is under threat and so we need to look at it. We need to pay attention to it because, at one time, it would have been noted and it would have been said that sugar is king in Guyana. That king needs help and I think that it is the right of the Government of this country to give the help so that that king could stand up strong again. When we talk about beet sugar and the various types of sugar, I happened to be at the European Union (EU) conference when the Caribbean countries were discussing the effects of the sugar industry and it was said that beet sugar should be the way to go. Today, Guyana is the only country that has a vibrant sugar industry remaining. All of the rest in the Caribbean, so far, have closed.

The rice industry is dying under suspicious circumstances. What is the impact of rice? The impact of the ailing rice industry is that persons are losing their homes. The banks are repossessing their equipment; they are taking away their homes.

8.25 p.m.

Persons are becoming hopeless; they are becoming despondent; they are becoming depressed. In Region 2, which is one of the most viable rice producing areas in this country, we see the devastating impact it is having in that region. A motion was brought to this National Assembly for us to discuss the issues of sugar and rice. The purported statement that it is not the Government's business...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I do believe that you should stick closer to what is intended here and not to seek to import into the debate matters with which the Speaker dealt with directly.

Mrs. Persaud: If rice or sugar is nobody's business, it is not the Government's business, whose business is it? The business of the workers in the non-traditional sector is now hard-pressed with the various licences and taxes and the haphazard removals. The small enterprises will die a natural death. Many of them are owned by youths who are hoping to acquire and own their own homes, as was stated by the Hon. Minister Valarie Patterson. I am asking: How will they own these homes? How will they pay for these homes if they are burdened with taxes and licences that will eat away at the profits they are making? Therefore Budget 2016 will not allow them to do that. It will put them under severe pressure. It is not the Government that will repossess the homes and lands, the banks will do it. They will go to the banks to get the money to pay for the homes and when they cannot pay - it is business not busyness with the banks - the banks will take away the homes. Their dreams will die quicker than they start to live.

The repossession of homes and lands, the restriction of used and reconditioned vehicles, the ban on the importation of used tyres, the restriction on the importation of used and heavy-duty motorised vehicles will in no way stimulate growth. These are things that add to the lives and well-being of the ordinary man in Guyana.

We heard about teachers being able to acquire things with their salary increases. It was the People's Progressive Party/Civic administration which made it possible for some sections of the teaching society to be able to get duty-free concessions for vehicles. We know their salaries. How will they be able to maintain those vehicles with the salaries they have and buy new tyres? Those with the money can. Those who do not have it will then have to sell their vehicles or leave them parked under their houses.

It is impossible for the ordinary citizens to achieve the “good life” that the Government says beckons. The Government has aborted all its promises to the workers, but it is not surprising, since the labour sector is now being treated as an abandoned child.

I heard the comment, from the other side of the House, during the Hon. Member Mustapha’s presentation, “to stay out of we business.” Let me emphasise that this is not private business in this House, it is Guyana’s business, and as the Opposition we have the right in Guyana’s business. Governing a country is not child’s play. Maybe, it might be the Government’s feeling. Maybe, it might be the mindset that is reflected in the many playgrounds being established across Guyana, the only new initiative of the infrastructure work being evidenced. All the other infrastructure works are PPP/Civic initiatives negotiated, signed and sealed. Let me remind the Government that all play and no work makes Jack and Jill dull children. I think if the Hon. Members on that side of the House would just cast their eyes north to see the many empty seats since they last entered Parliament, it is an indication that persons started to have a change of heart.

Our public servants are continuously marginalised by way of the unfulfilled promises of substantial increases in wages and salaries.

I speak to tourism. In the budget presentation the Hon. Minister of Finance stated on page 36:

“Destination Guyana

...this Government recognizes the immense value to be garnered from further advancing Guyana’s tourism. Momentum is being built through both public and private sector investments. Already, the cleaning of our city has begun to restore its beauty and attract new visitors. In 2015, the Government continued to support the tourism industry through product development and marketing, under the new initiative ‘Guyana, South America Undiscovered.’

We are still to arrive at the touted destination Guyana since tourism continues to take us on a tour to nowhere. The tourism sector is barren of fresh initiatives. However, it continues to photocopy those of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic administration. The revision of the National Tourism Policy remains unaccomplished. Proposed initiatives in Budget 2015 are yet to

materialise. Heritage and culture tourism are marginalised events. In 2015 the Christmas tree light-up and the Christmas jamboree were allocated \$10 million, while the Rupununi Expo was given a paltry \$500,000. Yet, we talk about eco-tourism; yet, we talk about looking into the interest of the hinterland and our Amerindian sisters and brothers, our Indigenous Peoples; yet, festivals, which are of their culture, festivals, which come out of their initiatives, are being marginalised. The tourism plans are more projected to visitors from overseas. What about local tourism which will allow Guyanese, especially the workers, the public servants, at home to enjoy their wonderful sites of the country? Our cultural diversity is evident and we must protect it.

Our public servants continually work hard and we need to look at ways in which they can enjoy all the aspects of our country. We need to put systems in place since they are not only marginalised by the way of unfulfilled promised of substantial increases in wages and salaries, but are marginalised in ways they cannot effectively see the beauty of this dear land of ours.

I had hoped that the budget, which was read to us for 2016, would have had something more for the children of Guyana. If we look at page 17 of this budget, under “Gender Equality”, it states:

“...promoting gender equality has been established globally as a development strategy for reducing poverty levels among women and men, improving health and living standards and enhancing efficiency of public investments. Our Government is working assiduously to develop society in which all girls and boys, women and men live together in safety and harmony, with dignity and mutual respect.”

When we were looking at the budget of the autonomous agencies, the agency that had the largest cut in its budget was that of the Rights of the Child Commission. It is so much for the youth, the future of tomorrow.

I do hope that when the national gender policy is launched we will see, included, a section addressing not only women in leadership but also women in Parliament, because we need to recognise, as females parliamentarians are role models for the women outside of this National Assembly.

In closing, let me say that Budget 2016 is backward and empty. It is reflective of the Bible verse which states that to those who have more shall be added and to those who do not, even the little shall be taken away.

Thank you. [Applause]

Minister within the Ministry of Social Protection [Mr. Scott]: Today, I rise in this honourable House to submit a portion of a much larger budget than we ever had before. This budget was planned and developed to liberate our country from the social, economic and political morass which we inherited over the last nine months.

I wish to congratulate the Hon. Winston Jordan and his staff for having worked tirelessly to produce a budget that has addressed all classes of our society. Indeed, the private sector, trade unions, churches, the Chambers of Commerce have heaped praise on this budget. When the union, the Trades Union Congress (TUC), has come out in fulsome praise it could be understood that Mr. Jordan has succeeded in being able to address the ills of society at all levels.

I would wish that the PPP/C had taken up the invitation to be part of the consultation process. Had the Members done that, today, many of the speeches, which we are hearing, would have had a different tenor. Rather than just going through the motion of saying what they feel they have to say, in attacking for the sake of attacking, they would have been about to say what ought to be done to improve it, while at the end of the debate we could look forward to them joining with us to having a unanimous decision to carry it forward.

This, therefore, is a very good budget. It is one that offers a workable, reasonable and strategic road map for brilliant future for all Guyanese. I, therefore, commend such a budget to all society, and this includes to the PPP, if the Members, at the end of this debate, can see the light.

My remit is to address this honourable House on matters of labour. The compartment of that programme is as follows:

8.40 p.m.

- Labour Occupational Health and Safety
- Central Recruitment and Manpower Development

- Statistics which includes the Labour Market Information System (LMIS)
- Industrial Training under the superintendence of the Board of Industrial Training and
- Co-operatives Department

I have listed Co-operatives Department last, that is not the least important. In fact, on the contrary, it is the most important sector. This is both a deliberate and strategic point and decision of mine. Deliberate because it was discovered that during the immediate past decades, the philosophy and practice of *co-operativism* was disgracefully stifled. In this new dispensation we are determined to reverse that shameful situation of the past and put back the co-operatives movement as one of the three pillars that underpinned this nation as the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. This Government is, therefore, committed to ensuring that the economic development of this country, and this nation, is underscored by doing our best to once more bring back coops from the level of the schools unto the level where there will be having builders co-ops, fishermen co-ops that are really and truly co-ops. To that part, we have an allocation of \$445.3 million out of our allocation of \$13. 7 billion to our Ministry, as a whole. We will be using part of that to restructure and reorganise our co-operative department which has become dysfunctional.

Sir, a small team of individuals to that end with an aggregate of over 100 years of experience in co-operatives and the management of co-operatives has been put in place starting from 1st February, 2016, to conduct a forensic audit of the co-operative function... [An Hon. Member

(Opposition): Again.] I know that is a word that strikes a lot of fear in the hearts of some people but we must know where we are so that we can go forward. We are convinced, that the audit will advise us on the crafting of policies designed to repair the numerous breaches and create an entity capable of advancing national development.

A key and critical aspect of the aforementioned audit is a determination of the number of co-operatives that are in existence. We believe that there are certain organisations out there, at this moment of time, masquerading as co-ops. It was always so. Do you remember when Mr. Burnham started the co-ops...? Many businesses suddenly became co-ops and we know what went on under that guise. It still exists and we are looking into that.

The main efficacy of illicit activities that are fuelling money laundering among the co-ops, this we intend to expose. Sir, we have recently commenced, and intend to continue, training and to conduct awareness sessions for our co-ops. Those persons who are engaged in anti-money laundering and countering financing in terrorism for personnel in that sector will be exposed. During that latter half of 2015, a total of 65 such sessions have already been conducted. Not only are they being taught about co-operatives, but we are also focusing on the illegal aspect in which people, who engaged in money laundering, have been using the co-ops as a cover. Piracy should give a pointer to where I am heading.

We are also going to be decertifying those co-ops, which we find, are dysfunctional. On that note, I wish to disclose that just two weeks ago our labour officers were exposed to a course, in-house, in which there were attorneys-at-law and experts from the State Assets Recovery Unit (SARU) who came and lectured to them so that they are now sensitised as to what to look for when they go about their duties in the field.

Additionally, we are also working along with the Board of Industrial Training (BIT), Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET), Kuru Kuru College and Critchlow Labour College to position these people to understand that co-ops must be on the front burner, where it will once again play a meaningful role in the economy of this country.

On the 24th, October, 1970 at the inauguration of the Guyana National Co-operative Bank, the head of state at the then time, Linden Forbes Samson Burnham had said:

"We have chosen the vehicle of the co-operative as the means whereby we, the friendless of the earth, the disinherited...[**Interruption**]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I would ask you to stay focused on your presentation. I will ask the other Hon. Members that they too are subject to the Standing Orders about distracting speakers.

Mr. Scott: As I was quoting from Mr. Burnham,

"We have chosen the vehicle of the co-operative as the means whereby we, the friendless of the earth, the disinherited those who for centuries have been kicked and spat upon, should be combining our resources, bring to our country economic independence. In this way our political significance and predominance, in this community, in this nation of

Guyana, should be reflected in economic terms. Through the Co-operative Division of the office of the Prime Minister in consultation with the Ministries of Economic Development and Education, we shall undertake the necessary training, using from time to time, the agency of the Co-operative Union which is basically a federation of co-operatives."

[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have relied on you to be faithful to the rules which guide us here. Sadly, some Members seem to forget that they are under an obligation to observe those rules. I would ask those Members, who know who they are, to kindly remember those rules and do not require the speaker to go beyond talking.

Mr. Scott: Strategic because philosophically we are committed to give true meaning to the name of our beloved country which is the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. Since 1992 we experienced a national disaster in the form of a change of government which among its legacy was the almost total obliteration of the Co-operative Division. For want of a better description, *co-operativeism* in Guyana is almost none existence.

Mr. Speaker, you must remember that the co-operative college produce many people. It did one purpose, if nothing else, that is, it served to educate those persons whose mothers and fathers forgot to give them that bit of culture. They were able to be rescued. In some cases, I wish when it comes back, so that we could send some more people back to that college for rehabilitation. In China, there was a system where a person had to go back to relearn. There is still need for that.

The focus of the co-operative moment is hereby summarised:

- i. The formation of co-operatives as serious economic and business entities in all ten administrative regions. Even in the remotest parts of our country co-operatives will once again emerge and breathe afresh again.
- ii. Explore and take every advantage of any and every opportunity to engage strategically with the Ministry of Business for marketing services and other economic purposes.

iii. Working closely with the Lands and Surveys Department so that the access to Lands for economic ventures can be pursued.

iv. The resuscitation of the thrift societies in schools.

I need not emphasise the tremendous benefits which can be derived from a revitalised co-operatives department, but I wish to let it be known that the same interest and energies to be devoted to the co-ops would be likewise directed to the Friendly Societies in so far as efficiency in their management is concerned.

Permit me, Sir, at this juncture, to direct our attention to what is commonly known as Labour Administration, which at the moment, encompasses both Industrial Relations and Occupational Health and Safety. Unhesitatingly, let me say that traditionally these disciplines were practised and managed by two separate and distinct departments, staffed by professionals and specialists in their own right. For some strange reason, after 2007, the upshot was that these two departments were merged, not only were specialists converted into generalists, but also a serious decline in the effectiveness with which services were delivered to the public happened. The performance indicator indicates that the department leaves much to be desired and be improved. For example, at the end of the year 2015, that department received a total of 1,833 complaints which represent 47.34% or 589 more than in the previous year. Of the complaints received, only 1,122 or 61.21% were completely resolved.

This reflects a decline of 1.22%. In terms of Labour Inspections, a total of 597 were completed representing an increase of 12.64% over last year. With respect to the management of industrial accidents, the fortunes of the department were also abysmal. The department places a high premium on the prevention and investigation of accidents in the workplace. During the just concluded year an aggregate of 492 work place accidents resulting in 24 fatalities were reported to the department, but only 40 % or 201 of those accidents were investigated.

Indeed, while all the fatal accidents were investigated and corrective recommendation submitted to the relevant authorities, the shortcomings of the department, in so far as its ability to monitor for preventative purposes, continues to prevail. This is as a consequence of a lack of resources, including financial and material.

Most of the fatalities referred to above occurred in the hinterland in the mining areas which are not easy to access. Even though we have been greatly assisted by the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) and we are grateful to it, our ability to effectively monitor workplaces in the hinterland regions is limited. Fortunately for us, our Government has recognised these shortcomings and have now initiated further action, through Ministry of Natural Resources under the Hon. Members Trotman and Hon. Member Broomes to help along in that area.

8.55 p.m.

We expect, therefore, to see a greater investigation and effectiveness as in time goes by. We are grateful to them for our ability to monitor those places now, better. Further, the fact is that our department is now staffed by generalists rather than specialists. Those shortcomings are made even more manifest but, again, we are moving to correct that. The department's performance over the years, under the merger, has never been impressive. We have been unable to meet our inspection targets but we believe that it will now be reversed, seeing that we are now about to delink from the two together. Once again, specialists will have a chance to rise. We are going to make sure that it is done not in a hurried up way, but incrementally. For starters, the delinking is intended to give rise to the development of specialist officers capable of delivering a better quality of service. In addition, they would be exposed to professional training, both in local and international environments.

We, therefore, anticipate positive outcomes from these initiatives and expect a higher level of compliance from employers as we move through those who we know have a proclivity for not obeying the laws. Of significance, is the fact that some regulations, which are governed under the Occupational Safety and Health Act, Chapter 99:10, need to be finalised with some degree of urgency. For example, mining, noise, chemical, forestry and manufacturing have to be looked at, again, and updated. It is our belief that as we are moving to have changes, positive change will be the result.

Because of the age of many of our labour legislations, we are contemplating on extending those laws into the area where not only mining and the interior will be looked at, but also the Labour Act will be revised. The Termination of Employment and Severance Pay Act will be revised, the

Minimum Wages Order No. 5 of 2013 will be looked at again and other significant amendments, which we know, which are needed in this current environment, will be looked at. After all, we are heading towards a position where we are dealing with oil coming on stream. There are other investors who are now telling us that our country is the country to do business with. Investors are now expressing relief that this new Government can give them that feeling of the climate is right for investment. We are thinking in terms of making sure that our people are protected. Exploitation will now end and we are therefore moving to have those laws be adjusted accordingly.

Conflict and Dispute Resolution are a key and critical function of the Labour Department. It is for this very reason that conflict resolution has been given the kind of permanence that it had been afforded in the last year. Comrade Trotman is one of those persons who spearheaded the idea to improve conflict resolution. The reason why you may be seeing some disputes maybe dragging along is because there were not enough skills at the level at my department. That has been addressed. We are doing in-service training right now and conflict resolution is on the front burner. Hence, those persons who are out there, who were silent in the past and are making noise now about having disputes come to an end... We are here only nine months and in those nine months we have moved this country from 23 years of nonsensical corruption to a level where these things are being addressed. We are saying that the situation for it to have persuasive skills and high-powered attorneys on our side of the table will now be put on board, so that when we have to go to court to meet up with lawyers such as our erstwhile Attorney General, we will have people capable of being able to defend the issues that we are defending. Some disputes may drag on for years. For example, the dispute between the company of Russian Aluminium (RUSAL) and the Guyana Bauxite and General Workers' Union, which has been going on for years, will now be on the front burner to be properly addressed with our labour officers. Let me make it clear that those things are to be addressed at the level of labour officers. That is why we are going to make sure that they are properly trained and prepared for.

The Industrial Court is one of the reasons that we are saying it is to train our people. We do not want to have us going to court all the time and spend years 'bugged down.' We are pushing to have an Industrial Court on stream. In that regard the tripartite committee established against the backdrop of the International Labour Organization (ILO), Convention 144, was asked to explore the most

appropriate model so that we can move forward, as quickly as possible. We have every confidence that this tribunal will be in place shortly. We intend to maintain calm and stable industrial climate, conducive to investment, not only to those overseas but to those Guyanese who want to come back home and also invest.

I need not comment on the economic cost of strikes. Suffice it to say that they have had a negative impact on the national coffers, particularly, when they occur in any of the industries which add significantly to our Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In the year just concluded the department recorded a total of 191 strikes, which consumed 71,591 man days. Interestingly enough, the previous year 2014 had 197 strikes, which accounted for 32,064 lost man days. An analysis of these figures mean that while in 2015 there was fewer strikes, the duration of those strikes were much longer and, therefore, it is a cause for concern. For example, the approximate man days lost per strike in 2014 were 163, while in 2015 the average man days lost was 375. This is just another form of saying that in 2015 striking workers were more than double resolved than they were in 2014. I take no comfort in such a situation.

We are merely examining the traditional early warning system with a view of strengthening it where possible, and introducing it in other areas for the first time. If there is an early warning system, anybody who wants to go on a wild cat strike, there will be people on the ground who can address those concerns immediately and, therefore, we can prevent strikes that just pop up, just like that. The early warning system worked on the sugar belt years ago. We are bringing it back again so that we can address workers concern on the spot and help prevent, not only doing that, prevent people riding on the backs of workers and taking what is not the case to be the case. Once they are identified they will be eliminated.

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

Ms. Ally: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes as an extension to his time allotted to him.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Scott: That apart, we are examining the generous amounts allocated to sports, education, Culture, transportation, health and other social services. We cannot avoid the manifestation of growth in our

economy. We have been addressing the fact that we have these allocations, \$40 billion going to education, because we are thinking that our society has to be brought back to a level where we can prepare people to fit into all sectors. If we can get this through, we would be in a better position to fulfil our manifesto, end of fragmentation and restoring solidarity as well as making sure that there are no longer dropouts in the system.

We are trying to bring about trade union unity. To this end, our manifesto had pledged to end the fragmentation and restore the solidarity and dignity to the labour movement. It is necessary to heal the long festering disputes between the unions. To do that, every single opportunity to bring about any unity must be taken, without it being seen as political. We have invited unions to get together, asking them to forget the past; not to remember the bitterness that they all feel at the end of each Labour Day and to move to the point where they can organise their own Labour Day rally. We have no interest in it. Our interest is to see that the workers come into their own, at last – unity. Unity therefore, is what we are encouraging.

We have nothing to gain. If tomorrow the workers decide to go on one platform, and to that end they have already issued a press release that 14 out of 17 unions have said that they are determined to march as one on Labour Day, what more can you ask for? We are inviting you on the other side to be with us and understand. Let us demonstrate that there are some areas that we can all think as one. We can think as one as a nation; we can think as one as one people. We can encourage others in the trade union movement to get back to being one as they were under the great hero Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow. We have heroes; there was one.

Let us observe and take away and throw away those persons who wish to perpetuate division in the process. Let us get rid of those persons who are bent on destroying the labour movement and destroying the political movement and remember that we want to have One Nation, One People with One Destiny.

I invite you, therefore, to see the budget as the beginning of where you can get together, where you can heal the nation. This nation has a future. It is time that we start to think as Guyanese. We have to stop thinking, in terms of race. There have been bad things that happened to our society. Those bad things will have to be paid for. Nobody can kill people or steal and get away with it. We must be able to recognise that we are not looking for revenue; we are looking for coming together and

looking after the bad parts. Let us do that and stop behaving as if we are still children. When we talk seriously we try to make it look light, but we have commitment to everything we say.

I commend to you, again, that the budget is one of the ways that we can be pointed forward. We can go forward into something progressive.

I thank you very much for listening. [Applause]

Ms. Selman: I rise to offer my contribution to this year's budget debate. The budget theme is captioned *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*. The theme brings to my mind, one of my favorite hymns sung by Jim Reeves, *This world is not my home*. The words of this hymn offer consolation and hope. Regrettably, the public pronouncements and a thorough examination of the proposed expenditure and policies of the APNU/AFC's coalition leave a large section of the Guyanese population in a state of despair and sorrowing state of disappointment. These pronouncements include:

The restructuring of the importation of used and or reconditioned vehicles to under eight years old from the date of manufacture to the date of importation.

9.10 p.m.

Such a restriction would therefore mean that a single mother who earns a meagre salary cannot dream of acquiring a car, as now, a car now that is younger than eight years old will be sold at a higher cost.

- The notice of intent to ban the importation of used tyres - what one wonders is whether the APNU/AFC Coalition Government made any attempts to ascertain the impact that this would have on drivers, particularly business persons who use vehicles to transport goods?
- Amendments to a raft of legislation to increase the fee paid to obtain various licences, including Regulations under Hucksters Licensing and Control Act. An increase in hucksters licensing would certainly create an additional burden on the small shop owners and the ordinary man who sells his sweets on the streets.
- The \$1,200 addition to the Old Age Pension – what can this do? Three taxi drops and that money is done.

Premised on the foregoing, the *Good Life* of which the Hon. Minister of Finance spoke so glowingly about in his Budget Presentation, certainly does not beckon to thousands of Guyanese. For many Pensioners, their pension is the only means of survival and as such, the *Good Life* certainly does not beckon with the addition of \$1,200 to their Old Age Pension, neither does the thousands of men and women – young and old, whose income permit them to be able to afford to purchase used vehicles older than eight years.

The *Good Life* certainly does not beckon to the public servants who earn meagre salaries and who were anticipating the announcement of a package by the APNU/AFC Coalition, including of course, a much deserved salary increase, not comparable to the increase received by the Ministers of the Government a few months ago, but a living wage.

The *Good Life* does not beckon to the countless owners of vehicles, including the pensioners and the taxi drivers, who perhaps will find it difficult to purchase new tyres for their vehicles. It is time for us to lift the bar when formulating and implementing policies and programmes, so that all Guyanese can benefit from the combined energy of a dynamic democracy at work for and on behalf of the people of Guyana as we celebrate our 50th Year of Independence.

I wish to appeal to the Hon. Minister of Finance, through you Sir, since it is not too late to move amendments to increase pensions to \$25,000, in view of the escalation in the cost of living, to remove the proposed imposition of the ban on used tyres and the restriction on the importation of vehicles eight years and older, so as to make a reality of the Budget Theme: *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons.*

I wish to turn my attention to tourism, and in so doing, I would like to take this opportunity to commend the APNU/AFC Coalition for recognising the need to continue the policies and programmes of the PPP/C of eliminating the barriers to tourism growth. These barriers include, but are not restricted or limited to, the absence of well-developed infrastructures, which involves the expansion and improvement of our country's infrastructure, for example, the increase of our airport's capacity, construction and modernisation of airports, roads and tourist facilities.

Tourism has the capacity to become one of Guyana's most economical industries as it can be a source of billions of dollars in revenue, annually.

Our landmarks, monuments, countryside and rich culture are magnets for visitors from all over the world. It can clearly be seen that there are still opportunities to grow the sector, making it more productive, competitive and profitable than it is today.

The APNU/AFC Coalition Government has to work to ensure that we harness the full potentials of this industry, building on the foundation left by the PPP/C, while also addressing the weaknesses left in the sector.

Let us not be euphemistic with buzz words abounding, such as, empowerment of local communities, local participation and control, equitable income distribution, benefits to nature conservation and bio-diversity protection. Let us strive to make it a reality.

I would like to use some of my time to focus on the tourism policy. The Hon. Minister of Tourism, Mrs. Hughes, in her 2015 Budget Presentation, had this to say:

“Our APNU/AFC Government’s commitment and priority to tourism is undoubtedly evident by the fact that tourism today is a separate Ministry with responsibility for consumers’ protection and for the first time in history has given unwavering focus for this sector to grow as an independent stand-alone Ministry.

Tourism, therefore, is best poised to deliver to this nation on our 2015 budget theme by journeying on *A Fresh Start To The Good Life In A Green Economy.*”

One of the concerns which arises from the foregoing statement by the Hon. Minister, in reference to the Ministry of Tourism being an independent and stand-alone Ministry, is whether we are to assume as Guyanese, that the Ministry would no longer be poised to deliver to this nation, as a result of the telecommunications sector forming part of the Hon. Minister’s responsibility.

Another concern is whether less priority would be given to tourism and what are the implications for tourism. Perhaps, the Hon. Minister, whose portfolio now includes public telecommunications, will be kind enough to tell us what happened to the stand-alone Ministry, which the Hon. Minister had, less than a year ago, boasted about.

Should Guyanese assume that the APNU/AFC Coalition wakes up and alter its policies in a capricious manner to suit itself and without any consideration for the populace? Given the huge

task ahead to transform this country's tourism sector and tap into its economic riches, would additional work not be too much for the Hon. Minister? In my mind, it is either one or the other.

The Government cannot make it a separate Ministry, and then all of sudden want to attach another onto it. Now that the Hon. Minister has the additional responsibility for public telecommunications, I anticipate that the Hon. Minister, during her presentation, will tell this National Assembly, when the Telecommunications Bill will be laid in this House, since all Guyanese are looking forward to the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector.

The Hon. Minister of Finance, on page 28, paragraph 4.37, referred to the "Revised National Tourism Policy". He stated:

"Going forward, the Government will develop an operational plan to realise the intent of the recently revised National Tourism Policy, which will lay a foundation for tourism development and ensure collaboration between Government and all stakeholders. It will focus on areas such as bird watching, eco-tourism, adventure tourism...entertainment and events and heritage/cultural tourism".

I anticipate that the Hon. Minister of Tourism and Public Telecommunications, when she delivers her budget presentation, will highlight the policies and programmes which will be designed or have been designed to facilitate a participatory approach, involving the Indigenous people who reside in the hinterland regions. I am hopeful too, that the Hon. Minister will inform this National Assembly whether there has been or will be direct discussions or education and practical training or a holistic approach.

It is the view of the PPP that Indigenous groups should be empowered to start their own tourist ventures in a small and manageable way. After all, they are the ones who reside in the centre of our tourism industry.

Permit me, Mr. Speaker, to ask the Hon. Minister of Tourism and Public Telecommunications, through you, Sir, whether the revised Tourism Policy to which the Hon. Minister had referred, was laid in this National Assembly, and if so, when was it laid? If it was not, is there any intention on the part of the Hon. Minister to do so? I assume that this revised Tourism Policy is

future-oriented and comprehensive, as it should incorporate the interests of a wide diversity of stakeholders.

I wish to turn my attention to another area which requires continued attention. It is indeed true that tourism can provide the stimulus for economic developments and growth. The APNU/AFC Coalition Government has recognised this. This is demonstrated with the introduction of a destination management approach and the development of collaborative partnerships, which would allow for better tourism consideration in the planning for public infrastructure. We are aware that adequate infrastructure is critical to delivering a world class visitor experience and is the platform for private sector investment.

I wish to submit that, there is the urgent need to establish a task force on infrastructure development, to identify local leisure, destinations, way-side facilities and provision of tourist information centres at major tourist destinations.

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, at this point, could I ask for an extension so that Ms. Selman will have her full 20 minutes, as we agreed? Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. Hon. Member, you may continue. You now have 20 minutes to speak.

Ms. Selman: Thank you, Sir. Wayside amenities are important for passengers and tourists, alike. I wish to turn my attention to another area of concern and that is, the safety and security of tourists, which are vital to providing quality tourism.

The APNU/AFC Coalition needs to make a concerted effort towards ensuring the safety and security of tourists in Guyana. I wish to recommend that the Coalition considers the establishment of a Special Tourist Police Station or a Special Task Force, within the Guyana Police Force, to ensure the safety and security of tourists.

The task force should work in conjunction with the tourism industry, and by extension, the industry to identify and address crime-related concerns. Police representatives should also

participate on tourism boards and work with hotels and resorts. Budgetary provision should also be made to train police and private security staff to recognise and address tourist-related safety concerns. They should be aware of what particular crime risks tourists face, what resources are available and how to access these resources. They should also be prepared, in cases of emergencies to help tourists to access transportation systems and embassies, high commissions and consulates, and help them utilise the various criminal justice processes.

The Ministry of Tourism should also seek to establish a 24-hour Police Information Counter, installing tourists' telephones and broadcasting precautionary messages at airports. These could be done almost immediately, with little or no cost attached. There is also the urgent need to establish a tourist hotline for reporting crimes and related problems that tourists may encounter in our country.

Tourism industry employees need to be skilled in hotel and catering operations, tour and travel agencies services, guiding tourists, *et cetera*.

The Hon. Minister of Tourism and Telecommunications, during her presentation in the 2015 Budget Debate, referred to the establishment of the Hospitality School. Perhaps, at the appropriate time, the Minister will be kind enough to update the National Assembly, and by extension the nation, on the progress that has been made with respect to this institution.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to remind this National Assembly that the former Administration left a work-in-progress and that the spirit of continuity, requires purposeful and focused application of tried and true principles of good governance, that overtime will engender the confidence among all of our stakeholders in the investment community, to feel good about investing their time and energy in the tourism sector.

In concluding, I wish to reiterate the following: tourism provides something extra which few other industries can offer, an opportunity to showcase our country's great heritage and national assets in a way which does not just delight our visitors, but also improves our everyday quality of life.

9.25 p.m.

We need to have a unified Parliament which has the maturity to look at the national interest as oppose to sectorial interest. Let us forget what our parties are. Let us be reminded that we are elected to look after the interest of all the people of this country, so let us do so without fear or favour.

Finally, as we celebrate our 50th Independence Anniversary, I urge all Members of this National Assembly to rise to a new political plane, where we are able to appreciate that no one party has a monopoly on workable solutions and take on board all practical suggestions and recommendations, so that indeed growth can be stimulated, confidence can indeed be restored, and the *Good Life* would indeed beckon to all Guyanese. May the spirit of cooperation and independence prevail; may God bless Guyana. I thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Allen: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for allowing me to speak on this Budget. This Budget of the Coalition Government is the second budget within an eight-month period. At this time, I would like to congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance and his hard working team for such a job well done.

I stand to give my support to this Budget, which is a budget for all Guyana and not just a part. Before I get right into my piece, I would like to give a little come back on my fellow MP's statement. I would like to refer my Colleague to pages 32 and 33 of the Budget Estimates, which signifies that there is \$2 billion for the upgrading of airstrips and it is not that there is no money there in our budget for such a programme. We can find those aerodromes by name.

I also would like to rebut to the statement which continually featured in our newspapers that the APNU/AFC Government is using our, and that is the PPP's, policies and plan. I would like to let the Hon. Members know clear that, while they were in Government, they were paid to work. It was not their personal business they were doing. So whatever projects are left there, are there for the Government to use.

I heard from my fellow Colleagues, that is the Opposition benches, that there is nothing new in this Budget. Everything in this Budget is just a piece meal that keeps recurring. I would like to ask them whether they have really studied the proposals and what is there? I have seen...

[**Ms. Manickchand:** Who is them?] Hon. Member, Ms. Manickchand, I am sorry. The Hon. Members across to my right.

In the Budget, we have seen an increase for our senior citizens. Twice within eight months, our senior citizens have received an increase to their subsistence. It is not a salary; it is not a wage. This Government shows that we are a caring Government and that we will take care of our senior citizens. While we prolong on hearing about “We cut subsidies”, I would have been ashamed to be on that side of the House and knowing that moneys were given in a lump sum for our senior citizens and I was a part of that group, which took that money and siphon some off. Over 40,000 senior citizens were there to receive benefits and not even a third received the subsidies that they keep crying about.

Ms. Teixeira: Point of Order. This is an accusation of siphoning off. This is a matter that is serious. There was an audit and the gentlemen may not have been in Parliament, but it was a matter that was debated in the Tenth Parliament. The findings that he is referring to are non-existent. I would ask the Member to withdraw his statement about siphoning off, particularly about saying that only one-third of the pensioners got any of their pensions.

Mr. Speaker hit gavel.

Mr. Speaker: I would like to thank the Hon. Member for helping the Speaker do his job. The Speaker determines what happens here. Hon. Member, Mr. Allen, if you have, as pointed out to you, misinterpreted information which came to you, this is your opportunity to correct it by withdrawing the error and then proceeding with your statement.

Mr. Allen: Mr. Speaker, it is in our *Hansard* in this Parliament that not all of our senior citizens received or was eligible to receive the subsidies. Our youths in our regions are now, having an opportunity...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, are you continuing to explain the comment you made earlier or is it that you have moved to continue your statement?

Mr. Allen: I have moved to continue my statement.

Mr. Speaker: Then, you have not satisfied the Speaker, in his request.

Mr. Allen: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw whatever statement I made.

Mr. Speaker: I thank you. Please proceed.

Mr. Allen: Our youths now have an opportunity to receive skilled training and to be given a certificate upon completion of those trainings. This is not training...

Mr. Speaker hit gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I do believe that you can do better than you are doing. I would like to hear the Hon. Member. Hon. Member, Mr. Allen, please proceed.

Mr. Allen: This is not a training that is just for a selective few in our outlying regions. It is not a salary that is given to persons over a period and at the end of the period they have no skills or they are not marketable. After this training that this Government is giving to our youths, they will be marketable. They would be coming out of those trainings with certificates.

Our children are attending school with less stress of getting to school because of this caring Government and not *because we care*. It is being shown. Children are attending school and parents are much more relieved now because transportation is being provided. They have meals which are being provided and that is by this Government.

The Ministry of Public Infrastructure will improve the standard of living for all our citizens across the regions, not some citizens or some communities, but all of our citizens.

For the first time, the people in Region 1 are experiencing pure water coming from their taps. This Government has shown the ability that we care.

Mr. Speaker hit gavel.

Our road network will be seeing vast improvements. While we do the work, across the region, I can assure the citizens and this House that, this Government, will not skip any community. We are not going to drive past, in some alley way and leave communities undone. We are going to do a complete job because we care for all the people of Guyana. We will now see a road rehabilitated from Port Kaituma to Barometer. Mathews Ridge will not be left on an island by itself or other communities.

Our poor electricity supply - we are going to fix it. We will start by capacity building. We will ensure that all the staff are properly trained. We will ensure that... [**Mr. Nandlall:** Start by dropping the light bill too.] Yes, you started it at \$100, the highest that we paid.

The people in Region 1 will benefit. This budget has in it...

Mr. Speaker hit gavel.

9.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall, I taught you were miming and the Speaker cannot read minds, while Mr. Allen was speaking.

Mr. Nandlall: Sorry Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Allen, please continue.

Mr. Allen: Mr. Speaker, this Budget, in keeping with the Government's policy and the Theme, *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence*, the Ministry of Agriculture, now embarked on the programme, is working very hard to reconstruct and improved the agriculture production in the region. Getting to the Estimates Hon. Members would see how he is doing it.

Works on infrastructure and selective communities - we will see benefiting. The Ministry of Communities, in the budget it is shown that provision is there for job opportunities, employment, and access to training, all catered for in the Budget.

This Budget is a Budget for all Guyanese and I have no reason for not commending this Budget to this honourable House for a safe passage. [*Applause*]

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this concludes our work for today. We will resume tomorrow. I think that we are well within the time and god willing, we would continue in this mode tomorrow. May I invite the First Vice-President and Prime Minister to move the adjournment?

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: Mr. Speaker, I beg that this House be adjourned until tomorrow 9th February, 2016, at 1.00 p.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 9.42 p.m.