

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

25TH Sitting

Tuesday, 9th February, 2016

The Assembly convened at 1.08 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

GOVERNMENT 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: We will now resume the debate on the Budget for the year 2016. Before we commence today’s debate, I would wish to make a short statement. Yesterday, during the debate, a Hon. Member and that Hon. Member is Mr. Damon made remarks in his statement which the Speaker ought not to have permitted. The Speaker ought not to have permitted references to a serving civil servant in a manner which conveyed impressions that would otherwise have been answered elsewhere, but cannot be answered in this Chamber. The Speaker ought not to have allowed that.

There are other comments which the Hon. Member made, which the Speaker, on reflection, feels he ought not to have allowed. I say this only to alert Hon. Members that the Speaker would wish them to be guided by his view in relation to those speeches. Thank you Hon. Members.

Mr. Neendkumar: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members of this House. I rise to contribute to this year’s 2016 National Budget debate. In so doing, let me commence by bringing to Hon. Members’ attention one critical observation that should not be overlooked and demands a deeper internalisation.

Let us examine, what are the implications of this Budget for the poor people in our country. I would like to make reference to page 1, paragraph 4 of the 2016 Budget Presentation, where the Hon. Minister made reference to the scriptures where it is written in the Good Book, in Psalm 118:24:

“... let us rejoice today and be glad.”

Today, there is a lot for which we should be thankful and glad. Thanks solely to the positive establishments inherited by the current *de facto* Government. From the numerous schools, hospitals, health centres, roads, bridges and sea defence structures...

Minister of Natural Resources [Mr. Trotman]: Reference to *de facto* Government, there is no *de facto* Government. There is a legitimate elected Government of Guyana and it ought not to stand on the record, Sir, with the greatest of respect.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the Speaker presides over an Assembly of elected Members. The Speaker presides over an Assembly which comprise of a Government and Opposition. The Speaker would wish that you bear that in mind in any reference to Government. The Speaker would not wish to have to rule you out of order if you insist on doing otherwise. I would suggest that in speaking you correct yourself in relation to what you just said. Please, proceed.

Mr. Neendkumar: There is a petition in the Court.

Mr. Speaker: Then Hon. Member you ought not to the import into to this Assembly anything that is in the Court. It cannot be both ways. If there is a petition, as you said, then you ought to correct yourself. If there is not a petition, then you correct yourself. Either way it ought not to be uttered by you.

Hon. Members, let me say this. Freedom of speech is enjoyed by all of us in this Assembly. It is an untrammelled right, but it is always exercised within the four walls of some rules, whether we are outside of this Assembly or within here. Within the Assembly, the Standing Orders, decorum, decency and respect for institutions and practises apply. We cannot continue to pretend that it is otherwise only when it suits our purpose.

I said that because Hon. Members must impose upon themselves the restraint that the freedom gives them; it is a paradox. But Hon. Members enjoy that freedom of expression only because the Parliament says that Hon. Members are free to say what they want to say here. But by the same token, Hon. Members have an obligation to observe those unspoken rules that make things work. I suspect that matters which outside would attract the attention of the law should give Members cause for pause, before they use them here. I do not know that I need to speak in these terms. Unfortunately, I felt that I ought to. Please proceed.

Mr. Neendkumar: Mr. Speaker, I say with a sense of pride, all conviction and confidence, that the outline achievements listed above are the achievements of the People Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C)...

Mr. Speaker: May I interrupt. I take it that you would wish what you said before to be removed from the record.

Mr. Neendkumar: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Well please say that for the record so we could have it.

Mr. Neendkumar: I withdraw the term *de facto*.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please take your seat. I am sorry that the Speaker is feeling himself obliged to speak in this way. But look, if we made a mistake it is so difficult to withdraw? I do not understand this reluctance in Hon. Members in this House to acknowledge an error and to simply put it right. Surely, it cannot be a difficulty if a Member, in the heat of exchanges, says something that he/she knows he/she ought not to say. Why are we losing so much time in this debate? I believe that it would be entirely helpful to all of us if we do not seek opportunities only to give offence or to, so to speak, goad another Hon. Member in responding to something that contributes nothing to the debate, but everything to some form of disregard. I do not know. Please proceed.

Mr. Neendkumar: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw, right. I say with a sense of pride, all conviction and confidence, that the outlined achievements listed above are the achievements of the PPP/C Government. There is certainly no doubt that all these honourable achievements were done under the PPP/C's tenure in office and they should be recognised as such. During that tenure, as a party in Government, we never sat idly by, rather we always sought for ways and means to improve the lives of our people.

It is quite obvious and much too early for pretentious, devious claims to work not done to be used and packaged in an attempt to deceive our people, by pulling wool over their eyes. I am certain the nation could see this glaring attempt and the woof of short comings in keeping with the adage, *He who feels it knows it*; and many are feeling. How could this nation be glad when the victims of the coalition Government are firstly our pensioners and our children?

This Government removed the water subsidies of \$8,900 for pensioners; removed the electricity subsidies of \$20,000 for pensioners; removed the education grant of \$10,000 for our school children; and to add insult to all injuries, this irresponsible Government closed down the first call centre that was built by the President Jagdeo's Government in Linden. As a consequence, more than 200 students and workers' lives were shattered in Linden.

Approximately 2,000 of our Indigenous sons and daughters of this soil were dismissed and denied their jobs. How could our people be glad? Their tears and sufferings are at the feet of the A Party for National Unity and Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government.

The elderly who gave their best to the development of our country were duped to believe that they would be getting a \$1,200 increase per month on their pension in 2016. However, the deceit is widely recognised as in one case, an elderly pensioner, granny Abel Seetram, recently said to me that the increase would be from 1st April, 2016, All Fools' Day and they only would be getting a mere \$900 a month for the year 2016. What a shame, the poor and elderly and our nation's greatest assets, our children, are being given less under this Budget advance by the APNU/AFC Government.

Let me turn to sports, this year 2016's Budget lacks any vision for the development of sports in Guyana. Last year, the Hon. Minister of Finance, in his Budget Speech, failed to mention the word 'sport'.

1.23 p.m.

It is indeed sad that, this year, when our powerful neighbour Brazil will be hosting the world's most prestigious games, the Olympic Games, again, this A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government is visionless. It has failed to tell this nation about its plans for the development of sports in our country. It seems that our sportsmen and sportswomen will have no opportunity to develop themselves in the field of sports.

The annual National Sports Awards ceremony is a signature event in the sports calendar in every country. This is an activity that all top achievers in sports eagerly look forward to. It is unacceptable for us to know that this incompetent Government is trying to politicise this national activity. All of the countries in the Caribbean have already announced their 2015 top achievers in

the field of sports. We have all heard about Usain Bolt of Jamaica. Could the Hon. Minister tell us when we will know who the top achievers in sports for the year 2015 are?

Our young sportsmen and sportswomen eagerly look forward, annually, to competing at the Inter- Guiana Games. Sad to say, there were no games 2015. The protocol signed among Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana clearly states that the Games should be played among the three countries in seven specific sport disciplines in two phases, annually. The Inter-Guiana Games is a sport event that our students prepare and look forward to competing at every year, since it is the first time in many athletes' life that they are given an opportunity to wear our national colours. Let us urge the Government of the day to make sure that the annual Inter-Guiana Games be a reality.

The APNU/AFC Government is fortunate to have benefitted from several state-of the-art sport facilities. However, it is sad to know that little attention is put in place to maintain and sustain these facilities. As for the Cliff Anderson Sports Hall, the roof is leaking and the floor is being damaged as a result. I want to sound a warning that the stands in the Sport Hall desperately need repairs. It is important that the stands be repaired immediately before we hear that spectators and athletes got injured.

The National Gymnasium on Mandela Avenue hosted international sports events such as International Hockey Festival and Caribbean football tournaments. It is a serious indictment since the roof is leaking and the sanitary facilities are not in good condition, while the lights at the Gymnasium are poor.

The National Sports Resource Centre was built with the main objective of being the forerunner for a national sport institute. However, it is a pity that it is now a white elephant. The National Sport Resource Centre was built to create opportunities for our athletes and sports administrators to be exposed to information via the print and electronic media. The resource centre must be put into operation and it must provide guidance, training and certification to the stakeholders in sports. It is imperative that our athletes, coaches, umpires, referees, scorers, journalists, managers, chaperones - all of the technical persons - and the general public benefit from continuous training. When the Resource Centre was launched, it was very delightful to see the now Minister of Education, Dr. Roopnarine, present there. We had set up a library; there is no

library any longer. I do not know what is happening there now. When I asked what was happening, I was made to understand that what is happening will only be happening for a short time.

This APNU/AFC Government must continue to develop the playfields and grounds around the country. Our youths must continue to benefit from better sporting facilities around the country.

[**Ms. Wade:** What did you do?] I will tell you what I did. The People Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government developed over 300 grounds around the country and, today, only a few months later, the APNU/AFC is in Government and some of these grounds are pastures for animals and grounds for reptiles and snakes. The construction of the Guyana National Stadium at Providence, the Synthetic Track and Field facility at Lenora and the National Aquatic Centre are all state-of-the-art facilities, which were built by the PPP/C Government, and they must be maintained so that our sports personalities can make the best use of all and produce medals for our country. The PPP/C, during its tenure in Government, is proud of its investments that were made in our youths and students and, as such, we are asking for this regime to maintain and sustain what we have. Guyana must not be allowed to reverse to pre-1992.

Let me ask the Minister of Finance what this budget has for the further development of bauxite, rice and sugar. In one loud voice we can say that it has zilch. The APNU/AFC promised the rice farmers big increases in the price for their crops and it gave them nothing. They promised the sugar workers a better living and is now closing down one of the sugar estates, while the Government has failed to give them any increase. Now, moneys that the sugar workers worked for and earned are being taken away from them. Our sugar workers and their families are now the target for political and other discrimination in our country.

I would like to remind this nation that the Valedictorian for 2014/2015 from the University of Guyana (UG) was a son of the soil and was a son from Wales Estate. His father was a cane harvester. I congratulate him and ask this Government to take into consideration what the people of Wales can do and ask them not to close the Estate. Let us work together with the most powerful union in this country, the Guyana Agriculture and General Workers Union (GAWU), for inclusiveness so that the issues can be resolved and the estate and the lives of the people can be kept intact.

As for bauxite, the PPP/C Government took over a sick bauxite industry from the People's National Congress (PNC). It was the astute leadership of the PPP/C, under President Bharrat Jagdeo and Comrade Samuel Hinds, through which BOSAI came to rescue the Upper Demerara operations. Further, it is the PPP/C that brought RUSAL to operate the Berbice operations. Today, we can say that, over the last six years, BOSAI has been running the Linden Mining Enterprise (LINMINE) operations at a profit. Do not chase them away; keep them, as they are now critically responsible for the livelihood of thousands of people in Linden. BOSAI is now employing approximately 600 workers directly, while more than 1000 persons are employed on contracts and otherwise.

With respect to operations in Berbice, the Berbice Mining Enterprise (BERMINE) died under the PNC Administration. However, under the leadership of the Hon. Bharat Jagdeo and Comrade Samuel Hinds, the Bauxite Corporation of Guyana (BCGI) and RUSAL came and rescued the industry in the Berbice area.

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

Ms. Teixeira: Can I use the opportunity to ask the Hon. Member be given his five minutes extension?

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Neendkumar: RUSAL considers development to be one of the main aspects of the company. The development of Kurubuka deposits means that there are 33 million tons of bauxite reserves presently. Hence, the operational life of the Kurubuka deposits is 15 years still to come. While there will be stable jobs for more than 1,000 fulltime workers, sub-contracts will attract more than 2,000 workers. Let us save the Bauxite industry. Again, the PPP/C did more than it could have done to save bauxite.

In Region 4, the PPP/C Government enhanced the lifestyle of our people in all the communities. There were significant developments in agricultural infrastructure and roads to improve the quality of life of our people. Water, housing, health and education were indeed successful. Our people's lives were transformed from depressing poverty to a promising civilisation.

It is, therefore, necessary for the APNU/AFC Government to implement its campaign promises

to improve the current standard of living and not lay acclaim to development that it did not achieve.

I could recall vividly that the 1989 budget, which was presented in this Parliament by the PNC, was described by the Working People's Alliance (WPA) as a vampire budget while the PPP described that budget as an anti-working class budget. This budget is a visionless anti-working class budget. It is a budget that has nothing for the poor and nothing for our youths. Let the Minister tell us where the job opportunities for our young people are.

Thank you. [Applause]

Minister within the Ministry of Education [Ms. Henry]: Distinguished Members of this honourable House let me embrace this occasion to contribute to the debate on the national budget for the year 2016. The theme of this budget *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good life beckons* assumes special significance because of the fact that it is taking place in the year of renaissance as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of our Independence. We have a lot to celebrate, for no one can deny the genuine advancement that our country has made over the past 50 years.

It would be remiss of me if I were not to begin by first congratulating the Hon. Minister of Finance on his genius budget presentation.

Generally speaking, the objective of this year's budget addresses the needs of our people and beckons a good life under five interconnected pillars, namely: national unity, national infrastructure, national institutions, national security and public services. Focusing on these pillars, undoubtedly, will encourage productive activities in the areas of health, education, housing, agriculture and, of course, youth, sports and culture.

I wish to posit that, as this Government rolls out these productive activities contained in this 2016 budget, a number of supportive measures are also being implemented for the protection of our environment and the safety of our citizens. My contribution to this debate will focus on culture, youth and sport in the context of this Administration's vision for the fiscal year 2016.

Throughout this year, the Ministry of Education, Department of Culture, Youth and Sport will engage in the promotion, protection and preservation of Guyana's culture. This Government will

promote national cohesion and pride using culture and heritage. In this respect, the Ministry of Education is committed to developing a cultural policy which takes into account our rich and varied heritage, and which works to employ culture not as a means of division but as a catalyst for mutual understanding and social cohesion.

As was stated in our Manifesto, the cultural policy will aim at an on-going public campaign that seeks to equitably promote the various threads which together form the Guyanese tapestry.

1.38 p.m.

Towards this end, *Budget 2016* is skilfully crafted to finance programmes in culture and studies at the University of Guyana. In addition, this budget provides funding to enhance delivery in all our educational and training programmes, particularly strengthening cultural education at the secondary level and the launching of a new creative writing programme.

This budget also provides support for consultation with experts and all stakeholders to form a consensus-driven policy and execution mechanism inclusive of clear and unbiased channels for monitoring and evaluating.

This national cultural policy and accompanying action plan, which will be formed after meaningful consultation, is in keeping with this Government's commitment towards policy formulation as set out in the APNU/AFC electoral Manifesto. A national policy has become an imperative, both in terms of our national priorities and heritage conservation and creative industry development, and also from the perspective of our need to mainstream culture into development in keeping with various international commitments. For instance, under the community of Latin American and the Caribbean States Declaration of Havana 2014, Guyana committed to a regional action plan that includes the commitment to undertake actions, to reorganise the merit of cultural policies, and to formulate public policies and implement United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) conventions as tools for development.

I wish to point out to this honourable House that the Department of Culture, Youth and Sports' action plan 2014 - 2018, which predates May 2016, lists its key priorities as committed to review, enact and implement policy and legal framework for culture and national development.

With this in mind, 2016 is slated for the development of cultural policy and public consultations. I have to say that one does not have to be a mathematician to realise that we are behind the curve on this one. This Government cannot afford to drop to sleep at the wheel and it is for this reason that *Budget 2016* makes provision for strategy development and implementation of policies relating to cultural development.

This policy will speak to three areas of culture: Firstly, mainstreaming culture and development. The principal focus will be the role of culture in human and social development as distinct from economic development with the focus of three sub areas, namely education, environment and citizenship.

The second area is cultural heritage. The focus will be on tangible and intangible heritage with recommendations for research, preservation and discovery going forward.

The third area is development of the creative industries. In this case, the focus will be on a blueprint for green housing the creative industries in Guyana in keeping with best practices that are both economically and environmental sustainable.

The 2016 budget makes provision to promote Guyana's cultural heritage through increased opportunities for research, learning performances, and competitions as promised in our Manifesto. This year, we will have a number of cultural festivals that will feature aspects of our heritage in a respectful and authentic way as promised in our Manifesto. Greater efforts will be made to promote cultural diversity in our country.

I now turn my attention to youth. The Government of Guyana has a clear vision for the youth of Guyana. When the Minister of Finance, the Hon. Winston Jordan, noted that we intend to develop youths who are creative, industrious, skilled, ambitious, and qualified to fulfil career and vocational aspirations while enjoying their youth, he encapsulated the vision of our Government. All of us on the Government side envisioned building a youth population that is united, educated, trained, happy, healthy and competent to play an integral role in making critical decisions for our country. The measures in this budget are only the first step aimed at creating an environment to ensure that the aforesaid is realised so as to ultimately create politically, economically and socially empowered young people.

This budget is aimed at empowering our young people. There are many measures that will create employment and opportunities for our youth. To this end, the Minister of Finance noted that, having consulted with the youth of Guyana:

“I want to let them know that I listened attentively to them, I considered their request and, in addition to the millions allocated within various sectors to support youth development, we will work to establish a more permanent structure for youth entrepreneurship and micro-lending to persons under age 30 as a special youth investment fund.”

This, no doubt, will benefit the youth of Guyana and therefore should be both commended and supported. Our young people have not realised their potential in the last two decades because the previous Government took a piecemeal approach to youth development. They lacked vision and had no youth policy and no useful plan for youth development. We, in the APNU/AFC Government, are rectifying this situation. We have a clear vision for youth development. We have completed the National Youth Policy in consultation and collaboration with the Guyanese youth, international community and other relevant stakeholders.

We are now working to complete the National Youth Empowerment Action Plan. I wish to point out for the benefit of the Hon. Members on the other side, who claim to have not been consulted, that these national consultations for the National Youth Policy were done over more than a five-year period and, certainly, its inception predates my being in office.

The state of the Guyanese youth must be addressed and remedied in a holistic way since youth emerges over a period of time. This Government recognises that we need an appropriate system of pre-nursery, which is largely referred to as early childhood education. We also need an effective and efficient nursery, primary and secondary school system and mechanisms to counsel, guide and mentor our young people so that the society can produce a high quality youth population that realises its potential and contributes to the development of themselves, their communities and their country.

This budget provides the resources necessary to begin to utilise a holistic approach and to surmount the challenges faced by our young people. It is against this backdrop that this budget provides for a pilot project in early childhood education. This pilot project is aimed at ensuring that our children begin the education process on the right footing. This project will also provide

valuable information which can be studied and used as the basis to support and, of course, launch a national early childhood education system, and provide the opportunity for young parents to go out and work while being assured that their children are well taken care of. It is useful to note that the early childhood education centres will be built to international standards. This, together with the reforms being undertaken in the education system, will go a far way in ensuring that the kind of youths that this Government envisions is produced.

We recognise that, in the long term, we have to address many of the youth problems through the education system. However, the reality is that, in the last two decades, many of our young people have fallen out of the education system in particular, and from the formal system in general. What this means is that a large section of our youth population are out of the formal system. Coupled with this fact is the reality that they also tend to receive minimal, if any, effective guidance, be it at the state, community or household levels to rectify their situation. Consequently, this has created a situation where our young people are not only disorganised in some cases but in many instances they also lack the basic skills needed to contribute to the advancement of self, family, community and this country. As I said, many of our young people, both within and outside of the formal system, lack the requisite skills to propel them to higher engagements. It is for this reason that this budget makes provision for them to be trained. It is so that we can develop a cadre of well-trained young people who are able to return to their communities and provide leadership for other young people. This is a clear signal that the APNU/AFC Government not only cares about the youth but is acting to bring our vision to reality. We believe that the youth need direction, they need advice and counselling and the best people to do that is the youth themselves who are well trained and involved in youth development. This Government believes that it is critical for suitable youth organisations to be formed, existing ones be reinvigorated, encouraged and developed further, and that a core of young leaders who can lead these organisations and the youths to ensure development of self, community and country be trained. This work has begun and the Department of Culture, Youth and Sport will be reorganised to be able to undertake this task. It is in this context that this budget must be commended for providing the resources necessary to ensure the training and development of our youth.

Significant focus will be placed on youth leadership and training with the aim of professionalising and recognising youth work. Of our many youth across the 10 Administrative Regions, many of them are teeming with potential but need assistance to elevate themselves to the required level.

I wish to inform this honourable House of the difficulties faced by those in need of skills training. Last year, out of the 950 applicants, the Kuru Kuru Training Centre was constrained to only accept 350 applicants. Why should we deny 64% of our young people who apply for a programme the opportunity to advance themselves? They are our future and we ought to prepare them now in the best way we possibly can, so that they can contribute to the development of Guyana. It is against this background that we have allocated \$60 million for the rehabilitation of the Coldingen workshop to transform it into a training centre with workshop and other training facilities. This signals the Government's intention to provide a conducive and comfortable environment for young people to gain skills which can lead to their empowerment.

In addition, we have allocated a sum of \$30 million to improve the facilities at Kuru Kuru Training Centre which is located on Soesdyke/Linden Highway. Our Government's interest in the youth is manifested and demonstrated in the allocation of resources to improve the Madewini Youth Camp, develop a new skills training centre at Coldingen on the East Coast of Demerara, and rebuild and equip the Den Amstel youth camp, which the previous Government abandoned, to the tune of \$30 million.

1.53 p.m.

Our youths across Guyana can begin to look forward to the good life, as promised by His Excellency, Brigadier David Arthur Granger. This Government holds firm to the view that communities across the ten Administrative Regions should have access to youth friendly spaces where members of the community can engage in educational and recreational activities.

We believe that the development of our youth has to be done in a comprehensive way - education, sports, culture and the arts. To this end, the Government will rehabilitate, upgrade and maintain community grounds all across the country, including those that were developed by the previous Government and have been underutilised and, in some cases, never utilised under the dubious President Youth Choice Initiative (PYCI).

The sports department is ideally poised to be a key driver of community mobilisation and engagement in 2016. In 2016, this Government will continue to refocus, reshape and reorganise the sports department. Let me address the Hon. Neendkumar's concerns on sports. I urge him, first of all, to read Volume II. For the last two decades the sports department has lost its way to the extent that we have Guyana's only modern training facility for our track and field athletes situated at Leonora. We all know where most of our elite track and field athletes live and train. Because of this gross anomaly, this Government now has to put a system in place to transport our athletes at a cost that could have been avoided, had the initiative been well thought out.

I have heard the idiom that *there is a method in the madness*. I am still to see the method in this instance. The Ground Enhancement Programme has the potential to be a flagship programme and it is for this reason that this Government would ensure that this programme is refocused for efficiency and efficacy. In 2016, the sum of \$154 million has been allocated for ground enhancement. This is approximately half of what was budgeted for in 2014 but, nonetheless, this is in keeping with this Government's approach of high impact, low cost.

On my appointment as the Minister within the Ministry of Education, I had the opportunity to review this programme which had no oversight, no measurable outcomes, no strategic direction and certainly no impact. I am happy to report to this honourable House that the slush fund days are over. No longer will \$1 million be given in a flippant manner without a clear understanding of what and how it will be used for community development.

In 2016, this Government will implement a strategic phased approach to ensure that all grounds which are funded under this initiative meet the minimum standard of a functional community ground. The days of *ad hoc*, fragmented and piecemeal approach are behind us. The focus, in 2016, will be on quality rather than on quantity. The sports department will also, for the first time, develop a national database to adequately track and equip federations and associations to monitor athletes' training and development.

Before I conclude, let me turn my attention to Guyana's Golden Jubilee, which offers the perfect opportunity to rally this nation around the shared identity of being Guyanese first. I speak about the significant of 50 years as a benchmark of reflection, celebration and inspiration. The question has, perhaps, understandably been asked by some of our weary and cynical citizens: what do we

truly have to celebrate after 50 years of independence? If one looks only at the trials and the divisions we have had as a people over 50 years, the temptation would be to say nothing. But if we are to focus on what we have before us today, the answer is easy. We have our young people who we must inspire to have renewed confidence by providing them with the tools to support them to dream bigger and reach higher in the next 50 years and beyond. That is why our children are the best embodiment of our diversity, the best hope for true national unity, and the best reason for us to redouble our efforts at ensuring our sovereignty does not come under threat. Our children, those who will be participating in the activities of the 50th Anniversary over the next few months and those who will not be participating, regardless of race or religion or ability, whether or not they travel to school in a green or yellow bus, are the reason for celebrations.

This budget allocates \$300 million for the Golden Jubilee celebration which requires us to be extremely frugal and financially prudent, given the magnificent and grandeur of this occasion and, also, not forgetting our country's track record of spending millions of taxpayers' dollars on previous national and other event such as Cricket World Cup and the Caribbean Festival of Creative Arts (CARIFESTA IX), neither of which this House have seen the reports of.

A part of the Golden Jubilee celebration, the Government of Guyana has commissioned Hansid Publication Limited to design, print and publish the Golden Jubilee Marquee Publication: *Guyana at 50: Reflection, Celebration and Inspiration*.

This edition will depict Guyana, its people and its resources in all their glory. It will reflect on the 50th Anniversary of our rich socio-economic and political journey from colonialism to independence, and 50 years since becoming an independent state. *Guyana at 50: Reflection, Celebration and Inspiration* is a joint effort of a united Guyanese people which will be used to promote our country, our culture, our people and our enterprise to be used as an investment tool. The publication will be of the highest quality in hard cover coffee table style with approximately 240 pages. It will include non-English synopsis in Chinese, Portuguese, Hindi and Spanish and our first people's dialects. This book will be launched in Guyana on 23rd May, 2016. It will also be at the World Travel Market in London in November of this year, at the German Travel Market in Berlin in February of 2016, as well as in all our overseas offices.

Guyana at 50: Reflection, Celebration and Inspiration is intended to showcase Guyana, our people, our resources, our enterprises, celebrate our achievements and telegraph a design for an even brighter future. I take this opportunity to invite all Guyana to join together to put our country and our collective achievements up for the world to see and admire. We are stronger when we are together. The 50th Anniversary will allow our academics, intellectuals, students, community leaders, and the general public to share knowledge, to exchange ideas, and to launch sustainable initiatives that will support the building of trust and national cohesion in Guyana.

As we reflect on the past 50 years in the context of learning pertinent lessons from the past for our future and celebrate in the history, the heritage, the pioneers and the achievements of the past, we will be required to discuss four inter-related questions. These are: Who are we? What has been our journey? What can we become? How do we get there?

As I conclude my presentation this afternoon, I would like to inform this honourable House that the Department of Culture, Youth and Sport will fulfil its obligation as outlined under the section of social integration, human development and youth in the APNU/AFC Manifesto. These initiatives, though bold, will be undertaken by the Ministry of Education, Department of Culture, Youth and Sport and will impact positively on the socio-economic fabric of our society and assist this Government in promoting human development, people's participation and national unity.

In keeping with the theme of this budget, *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*, and as the Minister in the Ministry of Education with responsibility for youth, sports and culture, I say to the people of Guyana, those of you who are listening on the radio, that I am ready to face the challenges of meaningful change in innovativeness, confront the issues that lie ahead and mitigate the risk that may arise.

I commend and support *Budget 2016* for its passage through this honourable House.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you and Happy 50th Anniversary to this dear and green land of Guyana.
[Applause]

Mrs. Pearson-Fredericks: As I rise to make my contribution to the budget debate of 2016, I wish to thank God, firstly, for allowing me this opportunity to be in this honourable House and for giving me the strength and courage to be here this afternoon.

I would like to make a few remarks. After listening to the Hon. Minister Nicolette Henry talk about the National Youth Policy, I have one question for the Hon. Minister. The Hon. Minister said that consultation was done. Hon. Minister, could you tell this honourable House how many Indigenous youths participated in that consultation? [An. Hon. Member: They are too many to mention.] There must be a register somewhere, Hon. Minister, so I would not accept the words, “too many to mention”. Thank you.

As I said, I would like to make a few remarks. The Hon. Minister, Ms. Valerie Patterson, in her presentation yesterday, in referring to the APNU/AFC Government, said the Government has taken the problem and has to fix it.

I totally agree with the Minister. When the new Government took over the country, of course, they inherited the good, the bad and the ugly. I wish to step back a little because I am old enough and I have lived through many years, even before independence. In 1992, when the People’s Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C) took office, they took all the problems too and they had to fix them. What I would like to say is that any Government which takes over a country and is talking about development would have things to fix.

2.08 p.m.

In order to further enhance development, things have to be fixed. It is no strange thing with the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government now. I totally agree with the Hon. Minister, that you have to fix it because your Government promised this nation, the Guyanese people, “a good life for all Guyanese.” Fix it.

Hon. Member Mr. Audwin Rutherford, in his presentation, said “We did not set out to craft a poor people plan.” [Ms. Teixeira: Is that what he said?] That is what he said. I agree with him. He has said it. I said it in my mind that this is not a poor people budget but Hon. Member Rutherford...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you must address your remarks to the Speaker.

Mrs. Pearson-Fredericks: My apologies Mr. Speaker. I totally agree with what the Hon. Member said, that this was not a poor people plan. It was said by a member of the Government side. If I should say this is not a poor people budget or the budget fails to address the needs of poor people, I do not think I will be wrong.

The Hon. Minister Ms. Simona Broomes boasted about her experience in the area of mining. I am happy that we now have a Minister in this House who is very experienced in mining, who has an interest in mining and who said - I wish to repeat what the Minister said - that the natural resources of this country are God given. I totally agree with her that they are God given, and that is why we, the Indigenous Peoples, also should fully benefit from the natural resources of this country.

What I do not agree with is what the Hon. Minister Simona Broomes said. I found it very insulted. I found it very offensive when she looked on this section of the House and said the words “the unlearned people”. The word “unlearned”, what does it mean? With my limited education I had to go and check my dictionary. I went to the Oxford Dictionary to check the word “unlearned.” It tells me that the word “unlearned” means “to cause a thing to be no longer in your knowledge or your memory.” I find it offensive. I am old. There is no problem with me saying that I am old, but I have not lost my memory. Many things are still in my memory and I have a very good memory. I found it very offensive when the Hon. Minister looked over here and said the word “unlearned”. That includes me. I refuse to accept such a word. If I should go back, while the Hon. Minister boasted about her experience in mining, I would wish to let this honourable House know that I am a grassroots person and have nothing to be ashamed of. I am also experienced in mining, forestry, agriculture and indigenous culture, which I am proud of. I am offended.

Fresh in my memory, in this honourable House, is a Member of the Government, who has interest in mining, has mining blocks within our Indigenous lands. I find that offensive also. That is very fresh in my memory, in my “unlearned”... I wish to say that we have to be careful with our words because our words can come back to haunt us.

Minister with the Ministry of Natural Resources [Mrs. Charles-Broomes]: Mr. Speaker, on a Point of Order, Standing Order 40(a). I do not own any land that belongs to Amerindian people. I

am asking that the Hon. Member retract that incorrect statement. Mr. Speaker, I am standing here on a Point of Order and saying I do not have land own by Amerindians.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I thank you for the intervention, but you must tell this House what is the Point of Order and the matter you are questioning. Please go ahead.

Mrs. Charles-Broomes: Mr. Speaker, I said Standing Order 40(a), because the Hon. Member is claiming that I have Amerindian lands... [*Interruption from the Opposition Members*] Hon. Member, she said Minister Broomes. [**Hon. Members (Opposition):** She never said that.] She said Minister Broomes. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will not do this by voice, a preponderance of sound. The Hon. Member is speaking. The Hon. Member can say what she said. The Hon. Member has challenged a statement she said she understood to have been made by the Hon. Member. Let the Hon. Member explain herself. She does not need the whole House to prompt her into that, surely not.

Hon. Member, the Hon. Minister Broomes has said that there is something which you said which she takes objection to. What is your answer?

Mrs. Pearson-Fredericks: Mr. Speaker, I wish to repeat what I said. I said, in this very House, an Hon. Member of the Government side, who has mining blocks in an Amerindian village. That is what I said.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I do not form the view that in doing so the Hon. Minister is engaged.

Minister of Natural Resources [Mr. Trotman]: Sir, may I be heard on a Point of Order? Prior to the statement that a Member who has blocks in an Amerindian territory being made, it was clear that the context in which the Hon. Member Ms. Pearson was speaking was a reference to the Hon. Minister Broomes. Sir, in an instance such as this, the Government will ask that Your Honour obtains the transcript of the proceedings. That is what is recommended. The context in which the statement was made was clearly meant to impugn the character and honour of Minister Broomes. There is no doubt about that, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am speaking to the Hon. Member Mrs. Yvonne Pearson, so the Hon. Member will rise. Is it your wish that you would say something further to make clear or should we, as proposed by the Hon. Minister Trotman, rely on the transcript of the discussion so far? If you are of the view that there is room for you to further explain what your context and statement is then you may do so, otherwise we rely on the information provided by the context of the recording.

Mrs. Pearson-Fredericks: Thank you Mr. Speaker I would rely on the *Hansard*.

Mr. Speaker: I thank you. I thank the Hon. Minister for his suggestion. Hon. Members, we will act on that suggestion. Hon. Minister Broomes we will return to this matter once we have got hold of the *Hansard*.

Mrs. Charles-Broomes: Thank you Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Please proceed.

Mrs. Pearson-Fredericks: I wish to turn my attention to the subject matter, Budget 2016 under the caption *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*. Before I go in more details on the Budget 2016, I wish to say that the Indigenous Peoples have lost confidence in the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples Affairs' under the stewardship of Hon. Minister and Fourth Vice-President and Hon. Junior Minister Mrs. Garrido-Lowe. Many of our Indigenous brothers and sisters throughout the length and breadth of Guyana were all looking forward for "a good life." However, our two Hon. Ministers have failed to address the issues affecting our people.

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I move to ask for her normal extension, the five minutes which we agreed to because she has had several interruptions as well. In addition to the time that is still pending, we are adding the five minutes that was agreed to between the two Chief Whips.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mrs. Pearson-Fredericks: We cannot forget the action that was taken against our young people – the firing of almost 2,000 of our youths and women. What I wish to say, as we question this

very House, is that during the 18th and 19th August, 2015 when we used the words “ethnic cleansing” we were condemned. However, Hon. Minister Mr. Sydney Allicock responded. I wish to go to the *Hansard* to what he said.

“Toward this end the effect from 1st September, 2015 the Youth Entrepreneurship and Apprenticeship Programme (YEAP) will be replaced by the Hinterland Employment and Youth Service (HEYS).”

2.23 p.m.

It was 1st September, 2015. That was promised on the 19th August, 2015. Later on, the same day, the Hon. Minister said again:

“The good news is that the depressing issues are behind us. It is time that we look to the future. In this regard, I am pleased to announce a programme which takes skills training and the life of skills of our people, where they live, will be launched on the 1st October, 2015”.

Right here we have conflicting statements. I guess our Hon. Minister was very much confused on that day. I think our Hon. Minister is still confused because I wish to ask if the Hon. Minister could bring us up to date on where this project is presently. While we know that it was launched in Region 8, we would like to know how many other villages, how many of our youth, women and boys are employed under this project. We can no longer accept these kinds of actions and decisions against our people.

On Monday 17th August, 2015, in this very House, the Hon. Minister Valarie Garrido-Lowe in her presentation stated:

“Budget 2015, with its 20/20 vision, gives Guyanese much hope. It gives much hope to hinterland population, especially our Indigenous Peoples who have suffered from starvation year after year. Starvation from a non-existing village economy; starvation from trained teachers, starvation in our schools; starvation from poverty, trained health personnel in our hospitals, health centres and health huts; starvation from lack of proper roads; starvation from lack of proper housing”.

This is a lot of starvation that the Hon. Minister mentioned about. I wish to ask Hon. Minister Garrido-Lowe, in this Budget 2016, how the Government aims to solve all these problems of starvation that she mentioned in Budget 2015. How are we going to address them in Budget 2016? This is not a poor people budget

I wish to say that added to this list of starvation, I would think that some of our people are really faced with starvation now. Why am I saying this? I am saying this because the little they had was taken away. With the issue of *El Nino*, and all the other issues, I would like to feel that our people might be starving for food now. I ask the Hon. Minister and Fourth Vice-President Hon. Sydney Allicock and Minister Garrido-Lowe, what provisions are put in place to feed our people or to stop starvation in our villages and community?

As I attempt to look and examine what has been proposed or what has been said by the Hon. Minister of Finance, Hon. Member Mr. Jordan, with my limited time, I wish to say that on page 18, there is..., and I will quote:

“The sum is inclusive of grants for 211 Indigenous communities that will build village economies and fund eco-tourism projects specifically for our nation’s 50th Independence celebration. It also includes support to women’s groups, the construction of community centres and the procurement of musical instruments, sports gear and sewing machines”.

I need some clarification here. Funds will be provided for 211 communities and villages. I wish to ask the Hon. Minister of Finance, are we talking about the Amerindian Development Funds where every village had to prepare a community development plan? Or are we talking about another project?

Secondly, under the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) Government, we use to assist villages and communities with health centres, community buildings, sewing machine, transportation and all-terrain vehicle (ATV), and, at that time, in this very House, I sat in the gallery and heard that those things were deemed as handouts to our people. It was said that those things are handouts. I remember clearly that the Hon. Minister of Ministry of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs, and at that time he was Opposition, said that they will no longer give handouts but they will teach the people to fish and they would not give them a fish every day. In so doing, I wish to say that when

you are teaching people to fish you might still have to give the rod, bait and even show them where to fish.

I wish I had more time. I wish to turn my attention to the issue of land because land is our life and it is our culture. I wish to ask the Hon. Minister and Fourth Vice-President what happens to our Amerindian Land Titling project known as the (ALT). Six villages are awaiting their title and 32 villages are waiting extension. When I examine this presentation I need to ask that question, particularly when I look at the plans for agriculture in riverine, intermediate savannah and in the rural areas...

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

Mrs. Pearson-Fredericks: Thank you Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Minister within the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs [Mrs. Garrido-Lowe]: I would like to thank the Hon. Member Winston Jordan, Minister of Finance, and his very able team for crafting a budget that caters for the long-term growth and development for all Guyanese. One which is so structured to help our people experience the good life that they truly deserve.

This Budget 2016, *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*, is exciting and it is a ration. It speaks of development on a large scale, which again is beneficial to all Guyana.

I would like to address the statement made by Mrs. Pearson-Fredericks when she said that the Indigenous population has lost confidence in Vice President and Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs Sydney Allicock and I, myself, as Minister of and within the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs. I would like to remind the Hon. Member that on May 11, 2015, the people of Guyana, including our Indigenous Peoples, expressed confidence in the APNU/AFC coalition. We continue to enjoy this confidence. Our people expressed no confidence in, and rejection, the party of the Hon. Member Mrs. Pearson-Fredericks. It was demoted from Government to Opposition.

In my portfolio as Minister within the Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, I must say that I am pleased with the allotment towards our Indigenous Peoples. I am excited that at long last the hinterland, home to our Indigenous brothers and sisters, is getting its fair share of the pie.

Besides the \$776.5 million allocated for the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs current budget and the \$1.4 billion allocated towards the capital budget, the hinterland is further provided for within all five pillars of this budget. This budget offers much hope to our Indigenous brothers and sisters, the majority of whom have been living in poverty for too long.

What is also exciting is the fact that this Government is not just looking to financially support the residents in hinterland, but is looking to make them self-sufficient. Investing in agriculture, tourism and other sectors would help our Indigenous communities to help themselves out of poverty, returning pride and resolve that which is embedded in the psyche of our first peoples.

Support to Education: In keeping with our manifesto, our Government will work tirelessly to bridge the gap between the hinterland and the coastland, so that development and prosperity can benefit all and not just one section of this country. To this effect, not only better roads and bridges will be built, but more emphasis will be placed on education to help develop our human capital within the Indigenous communities.

Youths in every Indigenous community are suffering from the lack of jobs and our Government is very concerned about this. How can one earn if one has no suitable skill? For example, how can the community's tractor be taken to the mechanic for repairs when no one in the community is trained in motor vehicle repairs? How can a modern water system operate efficiently when there is no plumber to service it? How can we expect our youths to produce desks and benches for the schools if they never had any training in carpentry or joinery?

2.38 p.m.

They do not have the money to purchase their tools. How can we expect them to become young entrepreneurs when we do not extend such training to them?

Hon. Members Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Dharamlall, yesterday, mentioned that 1,972 Indigenous youths lost their jobs in 2015, but the truth is that the YEAP, a scheme developed by the then Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, came to an end at the leisure and pleasure of the then Ministry in April, 2015. What jobs, do prey, are the Hon. Members referring to? These Community Support Officers, as they were called, did not have real jobs. They received \$30,000 per month for doing next to nothing, at all. On most days, they disrespected community leaders, and

campaigns for the PPP for the 2015 Elections. These youths were, in all fairness, PPP politicians. That is why a request for a further sum of \$796 million in 2014, for the continuation of the YEAP, was denied.

I would like to commend Hon. Member Pauline Campbell-Sukhai, for coming up with a plan for the hinterland and Indigenous youths to earn \$30,000 per month. I simply disagreed with the formula the Hon. Member chose to arrive at the \$30,000. To eliminate poverty and develop our Indigenous communities, to maintain expensive equipment and infrastructure, and not continue the previous Government's trend of wasting our taxpayers money, we need to train our Indigenous young people. We need to start preparing them for the world of work; we need to prepare them to be young entrepreneurs; we need to prepare our young people for leadership roles in their communities. This, I am proud to say, is what our Government, through the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, will be doing. Actually, our Ministry has already started in this direction.

I am happy to say that the Hinterland Employment and Youth Service was launched on the 1st October, 2015 in Paramakatoi in the North Pakaraimas Region 8. This one-year programme entails six months of classroom training, four contact hours per day from Monday to Friday, and six months of practical training under mentorship. Youths are entitled to \$30,000 per month of which \$10,000 will be saved, and which they will receive at the end of the course. Through collaborated training with the Skill and Knowledge for Youth Empowerment (SKYE) project, a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) initiative, they will also have the opportunity to develop viable business plans and will benefit from a start-up grant of \$50,000. Youths will also have the opportunity to proceed to further training if they so wish. To date, there are six villages in the programme - Paramakatoi, Mountain Foot, Bamboo Creek, Monkey Mountain, Taruka and Tuseneng - and 108 youths are benefiting from training in Mathematics and English, carpentry and joinery, garment construction, eco-tourism and hospitality, entrepreneurship studies, agriculture, capacity building and life skills. Computer training will be added during the course of the year. Emphasis is also placed on training that directly links with the community development projects that are funded under the Guyana REDD-Plus Investment Fund (GRIF) so that these projects can have a chance of becoming success stories instead of

being added to the long list of failed projects and millions of dollars gone down the drain, yet again.

I visited Paramakatoi in late November, 2015, almost two months after the HEYS project was launched, and it was a joy to see what the garment construction class produced. They were so proud of their work, and I was proud of them. It is a testimony to the APNU/AFC Government's commitment to the rounded development and empowerment of our Indigenous youths across the ten regions of this country, that in this Budget 2016 \$997 million is provided for support to youth education, through the Hinterland Employment and Youth Service. From which over 100 villages across the hinterland, across the ten regions and 2,000 youths will benefit. We will target villages with a high youth population to begin with.

One hundred and ten point seven million dollars is budgeted for the Hinterland Scholarship Programme this year and almost 500 hinterland students will benefit. Eighty-nine point four million dollars budgeted for school uniforms and over 30,000 school children across Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9 will benefit from this allocation. Provision is also made in this Budget 2016 for design of a new dormitory in Liliendaal to accommodate students desirous of accessing institutions of higher learning in the city.

I cannot help but mention that in this modern age of information technology, our Government is working to provide information and communications technology (ICT) services in hinterland communities and has seen it fit to invest approximately \$3.1 billion for the ICT Access and E-Services for Hinterland, Poor and Remote Communities project, all of this is in keeping with the APNU/AFC manifesto. We will start with the schools so that our youths can be exposed to programmes that will enhance their knowledge and keep them up to date with what is going on in the world today.

Support to village economies: Through our Ministry's eco-tourism and agricultural drive, jobs will be created that will bring revenue into the villages and comfort and hope to hinterland and Indigenous Peoples. Our Ministry will work closely with the Ministry responsible for tourism to assist the newly trained young entrepreneurs to get the opportunity to establish their own tour guiding companies. They will have the opportunity to develop businesses such as photography, catering, garment production and design, art and craft and food processing, to name a few.

The soil is very fertile in many parts of Region 8 and residents have long been producing organic herbs, greens and fruits. In pursuit of a green and sustainable village economy, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs is now in discussion with the Institute of Applied Science and Technology for the growing, drying, packaging and marketing of organic tomatoes produced in Paramakatoi. This project will benefit the whole community which is comprised mostly farmers. The farmers will be the backbone of this project.

In Monkey Mountain, Kato, Tuseneng, and several other villages in Region 8, there is an abundance of semi-precious stones - jasper, amethyst and quartz. When one stumps one's toe on a rock, more often than not, it is because of a semi-precious stone. The Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs will work along with these villages to establish an industry to cut and polish these stones, produce jewellery, coffee table tops, clocks, and so forth. A lapidary will be set up and an expert, who already visited the area, is standing by to do the training. Semi-precious stones can also be found in Aishalton in Region 9, amongst them topaz, garnet, milky white quartz, banded agates, fire agates and tourmaline. In Region 1, there are black pearls, amber and soap stones, while villages in Region 7 also have these semi-precious objects. These areas also will benefit from lapidary training.

Support to women: The APNU/AFC Government believes in gender equality. Last year, under the Indigenous Women's Small Business Initiative, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs supported 14 small businesses in Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, and 9. This year, a further \$4 million is provided for the support of business projects for two women's groups in Regions 1 and 8. In collaboration with the Small Business Bureau, in support of green and sustainable initiatives, another 20 women in Monkey Mountain will be supported with small grants for the growing of kitchen gardens to support the schools' hot meal programme with fresh vegetables and fruits on a daily basis. Besides earning an income for their families, these women will also benefit from a cookery and nutrition class from which their families will benefit from flavourful and nutritious home-grown food. Needless to say, in the near future we will have a whole village of healthy people. For the first time a situation analysis for Indigenous women and children will be carried out in collaboration with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the results of which will provide valuable information, especially for the designing of better programmes for the empowerment of our women and girls.

Welfare: Our Government is very concerned about the high rate of teenage pregnancy in Indigenous communities, a trend that is in existence for years with nothing significant being done to reduce it. In 2015, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs embarked on a sensitisation programme together with the Ministry of Social Protection, where workshops were held in Regions 1, 7 and 8 in which village leaders were taught about the Sexual Offences Act, trafficking in persons, domestic violence and alcohol and drug abuse. For this year, Region 9 will benefit from this sensitisation programme.

Many times our Indigenous workers also suffer from poor wages and work conditions. The workshop also exposed the labour laws and highlighted routes that Indigenous workers should take in dealing with unscrupulous employers. These village leaders and representatives, who included a number of females, promised to take back the information to their respective villages. For the first time in 11 years, a visit was made by an Indigenous Minister to Camp Street, at the prison, to meet with Indigenous inmates.

2.53 p.m.

This is according to the Superintendent of Prisons. There I met with 100 indigenous inmates and it was sad to see, since many of these inmates, with proper representation, would not have to be there.

A subsequent visit was made to the New Amsterdam Prison where I met with female inmates, some of whom, with proper representation, also would not be there. After these visits, the Ministry held a meeting with the Legal Aid Clinic on the way towards proper representation for these inmates. Additionally, the Ministry will use its Legal Advisor in the future to help these unrepresented inmates or anyone who were wrongfully incarcerated. We are also willing to collaborate with voluntary groups.

With the youths occupied in a useful way, together with their life skills training, it is expected that the problem of teenage pregnancy should be reduced.

Additionally, this year, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs has provided a fair sum of money to assist cancer patients.

Last year, for the first time ever, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, in collaboration with private sponsors, supported three Indigenous swimmers to attend the Goodwill Games in Trinidad.

Last year, swimming and archery were introduced to the Indigenous Heritage Sports. This jubilee year, the Ministry is looking forward to adding athletics to the games.

In 2015, we also collaborated with the Guyana Football Federation to promote football in Region 9. That region has benefitted so far from a Regional Football Conference held in Lethem, where four young men were chosen to be District Coaches for the four districts in the region. They are also tasked with the mandate to assist all clubs to register with the Guyana Football Federation so that these clubs can have their licences.

Additionally, we will collaborate with the Ministry of Education's Department of Culture, Youth and Sport to promote sports in communities, including the schools.

Mr. Speaker, \$2.5 million of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs' budget is allocated for the purchase of sports gears in 11 communities in Regions 1, 8 and 9. Further, chess will be taught in several schools.

No longer will the hinterland be left behind, as Indigenous peoples, we will take our places at the wheel of development and turn that wheel just as strong and as long as the rest of our Guyanese brothers and sisters, for the development of all Guyanese. We have survived as nine distinct and proud peoples, not because we are weak or because we are stupid, but because we are hard-working, innovative and we are distinguished scientists of the environment. All we needed was an opportunity to catch our footing in this modern world and now, we have that opportunity. This is the beginning of real development for our Indigenous population.

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

Minister of Social Cohesion [Ms. Ally]: Mr. Speaker, may I propose that the Hon. Member be given five minutes extension to her allotted time?

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. Garrido-Lowe: Last year, \$10 million was spent for the renovation of the Heritage Village in Sophia, since it was found in a dilapidated state. Our Government has restored the Heritage Village and Guyanese can now enjoy events that are held there.

It is a joy to stop and watch the Wai Wais at work on the Umana Yana. The Umana Yana, the pride of our first peoples, will rise and shine again and stand tall and proud in this nation's city because the APNU/AFC Government has seen it fit to have it reconstructed to the tune of \$66 million.

I would like to really crow about Bina Hill, but that I leave to the Hon. Vice-President and Minister, Mr. Sydney Allicock, because that is his dream becoming a reality so I hand that to him.

I am proud to support this 2016 Budget and I congratulate Minister Jordan and his team. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Charlie: *Yarmang Kaimen Kiidunwaihii.* I bring greetings from the Indigenous peoples of Region 9 to this honourable House. Before I commence, I would like to refresh the memories of the Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs that the Indigenous people solidly and collectively voted for the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) at the 11th May, 2015, General and Regional Elections.

Added to that one vote in Region 8, does the Hon. Minister have substantial evidence that the young people did nothing and disrespected village leaders? This is very serious and I call on the Minister to apologise to all the youths in the hinterland for a very distasteful statement. Hon. Minister, you will meet the faces of the youths.

It is with great privilege that I stand here today to speak on the 2016 National Budget from this side of this august House. This is how the Government is viewing Indigenous people. Here is an example. I have listened attentively to the Budget Presentation which was presented to this House and to the nation by the Hon. Minister of Finance. I have positively concluded that the 2016 National Budget is a repackage and hence, there is absolutely nothing new in the budget for the Indigenous people of Guyana.

I, like my Indigenous brothers and sisters of this country, expected that the 2016 National Budget would have had innovative ideas which could have represented the Coalition's 2015 campaign slogan of change, but it is the worst. Instead of change, it is a shame.

The sum of billions of dollars that was allocated for the hinterland's development is a demonstration of a complete absence or lack of vision and fresh ideas from the Indigenous leadership of this coalition Government.

Hinterland infrastructure upgrades, as it relates, school uniforms and hinterland scholarship programmes form part of this National Budget, as was the same under the People's Progressive Party/Civic Administration. Where is the fresh approach? **[Mr. Damon: Nothing new.]** Absolutely nothing new.

As it relates to the School Uniform Distribution Programme, can the Indigenous leadership of this coalition Government say why is it that the school children of Region No. 9 in North Rupununi received school uniforms in late December, 2015 and why other sub-districts received school uniforms in late January, 2016? When the PPP/C handled the School Uniform Distribution Programme, absolutely every school child in the public school system received school uniforms at the end of the school academic year, so given fact, the child had ample time to prepare for the new school academic year and hence attire in a new school uniform.

In comparison, this clearly indicates the competency of the PPP/C. When we talked about development; we talked the talk and walked the walk. Under the Indigenous leadership of this coalition Government, it is the opposite. Some schools in my region ended up receiving wrong school uniform materials. I do hope that this has been rectified in South Central Rupununi. The Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs boast a complement of two Ministers. Added to that, a Vice-President and three Advisors, and could you imagine, the time and execution of the distribution of the school uniform. Is this competency?

I call on the Indigenous leadership of the Coalition Government to say how many of the 1,972 youths that once served as Community Support Officers (CSO) and now involved in the Hinterland Employment Youth Service (HEYS) Programme? How many land titles will be issued this year? How soon will Sawariwau, Katunarib and Kaserini receive land titles?

The Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, in her budget presentation to this House in 2015, alluded that the main objective of the Ministry Indigenous Peoples' Affairs is to enhance the lives of the Indigenous people all across Guyana.

Could the Hon. Minister say how many Indigenous youths lives were enhanced during the nine months? Be reminded, Hon. Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, that Indigenous peoples' lives were already enhanced by the PPP/C Administration when they were in Office. The PPP/C had already set the developmental strides, policies and innovative ideas for Guyana's first peoples. No 'stimulated growth', no 'restoration of confidence' and hence, no 'good life beckons'.

It now seems that the coalition Government has awakened from its slumber and has restored the upgrading of hinterland airstrips, after cutting it while they were in Opposition and they are talking about restoring confidence. Apologise to the hinterland people for what you have committed.

3.08 p.m.

The Women in Business Programme that was brought to Lethem, do you know what Mr. Speaker? The APNU/AFC activists mobilised all of its women members to enrol for the programme and not a single People Progressive Party (PPP) or The United Force (TUF) woman was enrolled. What are you saying? Is your Government for all? Not in this case. It is one sided.

I call on the Minister of Public Security to pay much attention to public security in Region 9. Since this is a border region, one can imagine the activities. We can all talk about security strategies but without the requisite resources and manpower, where are we heading? To this date the Lethem Police Station operates and functions with one next to old All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) and five malnourished looking horses. Region 9, being the largest geographic region and this is what the Police Force in Lethem has. The Lethem Police Station is far from technology. There is no fax machine or computer, not even a typewriter. Security is everyone's business. Come on coalition Government, do better and strengthen the Guyana Police Force. Why I am alluding to this is because the buck stops at you. Do better for our police stations across this country.

Rupununians are disappointed as I am today. The Rupununi region, in particular the new town of Lethem, did not receive substantial budgetary allocations to fix our fragile and vulnerable infrastructures. Lethem was branded a municipality without the consensus of the people. Why is the Government making decisions at the top and the people have to swallow? It is time. Do not stifle democracy. The Lethem to Linden road has received a hefty budgetary allocation which will soon transform, once again, into poor maintenance and substandard upgrading.

I must commend the Minister of Social Cohesion for executing an excellent job on behalf of a donor, who donated a number of pairs of shoes and string straps bags to this Government for school children in Region 9. I would like to recommend that the shoes that grow big be distributed on a weekly basis given the fact of the terrains of the Rupununi Region. Where are we heading with the shoes that grow? It will definitely grow out and our school children in the public schools deserve better. Restore the *Because We Care* cash grant.

When the \$300 million budgetary allocation for the Golden Jubilee was announced, thousands of Guyanese breathed a sigh of discomfort. Tax payers' money for a jubilee, when there are hundreds of Guyanese living under the bread line? There are men, women, children, and even the young people living on the streets, and this Government celebrates. Very soon the Guyanese people will start singing the lyrics of the popular calypso, "I do not want to born". It is not surprising; it has been nine months now. They have already started singing the calypso tune, "King liar". Go out there among the masses and you will hear for yourself. I know you would not go. The Government of Guyana (GOG) would not go.

The word *Mashramani* seems to have lost its identity with the replacement of a Golden Jubilee. Even our national flag seems to have lost its true identical colours, with the colours of green and yellow being painted everywhere, even on Government buildings, school busses, and I can go on and on. I would not be surprised if the Umana Yana is also be painted in yellow and green. Where are we heading? [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker hit gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, green and yellow are the colours of our flag. Hon. Member, you will listen to me and then you will continue. The green and yellow are the colours of the flag of Guyana. It cannot be an object for lampooning. Hon. Members, it is usual that when the Speaker

is speaking Members listen. It cannot be an object for lampooning in this House. I am sure that Members can disport themselves in a better fashion, than seems to be the instance now. Hon. Member, you may proceed.

Ms. Teixeira: The colours of our flag are many colours. The issue being raised here by the Hon. Member is that, we cannot select only some colours of our flag. Therefore, the Member is speaking ... [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member.

Mr. Charlie: Other sectors in the Budget Presentation focussed on building on the PPP/Civic Administration's policies, such as investing in information and communication technology, sewing machines for the hinterland community, as well as alleviating transportation costs for the hinterland residents. The last point contradicts a new rule that was made by the Regional Executive Officer (REO) of Region 9, to stop the supply of fuel to transport school children and patients. Added to that, the same Regional Executive Officer has now limited the supply of fuel for the Regional Chairman of Region 9 to supply only five gallons per week and no issue of fuel for the Regional Vice-Chairman, as my Colleague, the Hon. Mr. Mustapha, alluded that the REOs totally disrespect the Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs). This is a fact. The Region 9 REO is an example - firing, hiring, victimising, and marginalising. Does this beckons a 'good life'?

Minister of Public Infrastructure [Mr. Patterson]: On a Point of Order. Mr Speaker, when you started the debate you made reference to [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, are you rising on a Point of Order?

Mr. Patterson: Yes Sir. Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of our debate, you made reference yesterday about impugning characters of Government Officials that are not here to defend themselves. You asked the Members to desist from that practise.

Mr. Speaker hit gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we can at least be courteous, however strongly we feel about a Member's view point. A Member has risen on a Point of Order and we should accord him that courtesy.

I believe that what we have manage to do is to give a new interpretation of the Standing Order which directs how Members, not speaking, should conduct themselves during a debate, when another Member is on the floor. It is probably the only Standing Order that Members have demonstrated a very serious unfamiliarity with. Hon. Members means Hon. Members. It means everyone in this House, and so perhaps we might want to look at that Standing Order and acquaint ourselves with it and feel ourselves to be guided by it. You have the floor Sir.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I was just reminding the House that when you started, just before you commenced this debate today, you made mention of the fact that we should not be ascribing or subscribing any sort of motives to officials who are not here to defend themselves. Sir, I am just reminding... [*Interruption*]

Sir, you made mention to that for the Hon. Member from Region 2 during his presentation. Sir, I am just recalling your instruction.

Mr. Speaker: It is not a Point of Order, but I thank the Hon. Member. Hon. Member Mr. Charlie, would you please continue.

Mr. Charlie: I call on this coalition Government to be awakened and have farmers and the Indigenous people be exempted from the proposed increased in gun licence fee. The livelihood of the famers and the Indigenous people greatly depends on the possession of the firearm. Do you think the proposed amendment to the Tax Act will stimulate growth, restore confidence, hence a 'good life'? I call...

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

Mr. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, can I rise to ask that the Member be given his full 20 minutes and therefore, the five minutes extension.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Charlie: I call on the Government to appositely reduce the fuel and electricity prices to reflect the true tumble in oil prices on the Global World Market. A five per cent rebate in electricity charges is absolutely a Guyanese joke. Why is it effected until 1st April, 2016, and besides on All Fools' Day? Why do the Guyanese people have to wait two months? The announcement made by the Hon. Minister of Finance has absolutely nothing to do with the 2016 National Budget. What the Government will be doing is taking money from the ordinary Guyanese people.

I, like my Colleague on this side of House, call on this Government to withdraw the ban on the importation of used tyres. Justifying the move, as an effort to boost road safety, is not completely factual, since most of the accidents on our road ways are caused by drunk driving and speeding. It would definitely be comfortable if Government withdraws the move to introduce a broad based environmental tax, which will definitely place greater burdens on a great number of the Guyanese people.

The Government has poorly justified some of the draconian measures as the move to green the local economy. In additional to raising additional taxes, we in the PPP have always sought to balance the green economy and the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) with the need to improve the people's lives and not bring additional burdens to them, as today.

A Government is about creating the environment for all of its citizens to do positively well, but the philosophy of this present Government seems totally and absolutely different.

3.23 p.m.

Rather than focus on the real productive sector, we in the PPP saw no help for rice, sugar, bauxite, mining, forestry and fishing, given that these are the real sectors that create wealth. What the entire Guyanese people saw was the filling of the coffers of Government on the backs of originally Guyanese citizens.

Guyanese will be undeniably hard-hit by these measures. What this present Government is doing is essentially taking away from the Guyanese people.

In closing, a closer analysis of the Hon. Minister of Finance's 2016 National Budget Presentation reveals that, while it is big on rhetoric, it is small on the much needed stimuli, policy outlook and

socioeconomic framework required to rebuild, reorganise and modernise Guyana. I thank you.
[Applause]

Mr. Figueira: Sir please permit me to crave your indulgence in granting me the provisions of Standing Order 38(6), if need be.

Sir, I stand with great humility and appreciation at this opportunity to make my contribution on Budget 2016. I am even more elated to be presenting from this side of the House; the side that brings real change and development to our country; the side that offers hope of a better and brighter Guyana, whereby bringing change that would have positive effects on the lives of all Guyanese, irrespective of their geographical location or their political or ethnic persuasion.

Before I get into my actual presentation, permit me Sir to offer profound congratulations to the Hon. Minister, Mr. Winston DaCosta Jordan, and his committed and dedicated staff at the Ministry of Finance, for providing the people of Guyana with an erudite, well thought-out and consultative budget. A budget that contains all the ingredients needed to propel us as a people and a nation to achieve our true developmental apex. It is my earnest hope that, in this the year of Guyana's Golden Jubilee, Members of the Opposition, even though some doubts linger, will let, good sense prevail and a collaborative and cohesive approach will be adopted to support the economic and social independence of the this beautiful country.

Hon. Members of this august body, Budget 2016 *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons* lays the foundation for the pride that we, as Guyanese people, will be celebrating in this year of renaissance. The transformation of a *Fresh Approach* has already begun and this year's budget will continue the good work and lead the way forward in our country's developmental quest. No honest, fair and true Guyanese would deny that Guyana, for the second time, has yet another budget that meets the expectations of countless Guyanese, be it the private sector, the trade union bodies and most importantly, the common hardworking and dedicated men and women out there.

Kindly, permit me to substantiate by citing several extracts from the print media. The *Guyana Chronicle* 31st January, 2016, Mr. Clinton Williams, immediate past President of the Guyana Manufacturing and Services Association (GSMA), a man the PPP/C Government bestowed tremendous confidence in, stated:

“A PEOPLE’S BUDGET...”

It is a “pro-working class” budget.

“It sets the stage for the good life the coalition Government has promised the people of Guyana”

Kaieteur News, 4th February, 2016, edition;

“PSC lauds Govt. on the Budget...”

This article went on to state:

“The Private Sector Commission (PSC) believes that Budget 2016 will generate growth. It is happy about the planned expenditure on infrastructure, in particular the \$2 bn that will be spent on hinterland airstrips. This will improve connectivity with the hinterland and allow for the access to markets in the city and beyond.”

The PSC posits that:

“The significant sums allocated for education, health, public security and agriculture reveal that the focus of the Government is on what is needed by the country and for the good of the people”.

Stabroek News 4th February, 2016, captioned:

“Private Sector says believes budget will spark growth”.

And finally, the *Guyana Chronicle*, 30th January, 2016, reported the views of the Guyana Trade Union Congress (GTUC) through its General Secretary- Mr. Lincoln Lewis, a man hailed as the voice of contemporary trade unionism in present-day Guyana, a harsh and constant critic of this Government, said

“Budget 2016 is the greatest victory for unions in Guyana.”

I repeat: “The greatest victory for unions in Guyana”

Words passionately put and profoundly felt. What greater truth can be unearthed from a staunch critic of Government? Budget 2016 is good for the Guyanese people and for Guyana's development in all aspects. I believe I have reached the place where I can conclude on my contribution, since Budget 2016 speaks for itself and the many positive feedbacks from prominent stakeholders demonstrate the profound support to this notion. However, I am compelled to make a few more observations.

I sat in utter dismay and I experience mixed feelings, genuinely mixed feelings, as I listened to the Members of the Opposition. Their contributions took my intellectual being and my spirit to an abject low and had I been prone to the phenomenon of depression, I would have been depressed today Sir. But you see, Mr. Speaker, I am a product of the community of Linden, blessed with resilient people, and we are built with a certain mental buffer that rejects confounded statements.

It is as a result of utterances like these from Members of the Opposition, one is encouraged and compelled to make representation for all Guyanese and give the Members of the Opposition a feral verbal blast or in Guyanese vernacular some good country boy language. But Mr. Speaker, out of great respect for you, and good parliamentary decorum, I will pacify that need.

Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons was seriously thought out and compiled. It was after months of historical and meaningful consultations and discussions, coupled with empirical research, that this APNU/AFC coalition Government coined this poor working class budget. We trod the hills and the valleys; we walked the highs and the lows; and we lived among the poor and dwell in the ghettos. Therefore, we know the needs of the Guyanese people; we know the needs our countrymen and women, their goals and their aspirations.

The Hon. Minister of Finance has taken on board the realities of our Guyanese people along with the promises made in our winning manifesto: "To fashion and bring to fruition, a budget that reminds and assures us of our independence".

The people of Region 10 have begun to realise the 'good life' and eagerly anticipate the stimulation of growth, the restoration of their confidence, as an *Fresh Approach* has beckoned.

The re-establishment of the Linden Enterprise Network, commonly known as (LEN) is a glaring example of stimulating growth and restoring confidence, referred to in Budget 2016.

With the allocation of \$40.3 billion dollars to the education sector, the residents of Region 10 look forward and welcome their Boats, Buses, Bicycles, Books and Breakfast, a true and real demonstration of a Because We Care Programme. Further, with the introduction of our school Counsellors and social support to our future leaders, the 'good life' certainly beckons.

I must add that, the commissioning of the two school boats for the residents of Region 10 by His Excellency was most welcomed and appreciated by the parents of school-aged children, particularly those in the riverine areas. This initiative has gained traction and has since motivated several businesses and individuals in the region to make similar contributions. Confidence is being restored.

It would be remiss of me if I did not say how shocked I became when I learnt of the cheap and bankrupt comment of stop greening and yellowing this country. This is profoundly regrettable, especially when we boast of celebrating the year of our renaissance, of our Golden Jubilee. To know that a person who occupied seats in Governance in this country could be so myopic and partisan, that our colours of our nationhood are now despised. But the patriotic people of Region 10 and Linden, love the colours green and yellow. They say it reminds them of Guyana Airways Corporation - defunct under the PPP and the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) – on life support under the PPP. In addition, we marvel at all sportsmen and women, proudly on show in these symbolic national colours. We are hopeful Sir, that those who are unfamiliar with the symbolism it carries or those who are ignorant of our country's history with those colours will be reminded as the Boats, Buses and Bicycles transport our children to schools and across this beautiful nation.

After 50 years of independence, it is the APNU/AFC coalition Government that has to provide this country with bold leadership, and according to the Hon. Minister of Finance, "Move away from being a second hand economy". But when an Hon. Member can conjure the courage and boldness to ask the Government to reconsider the ban on used tyres, it begs the question, how seriously concerned is the Hon. Member for the safety of the Guyanese people and its environment. I will not stand here and deny the arguments put forward, certainly not. To some,

they were good, but arguably good is always the enemy of what is best. When one speaks about the cost for a used tyre, I question, what value is placed on the lives of precious people who are being transported in those vehicles. Are not the lives of those people worth investing in new tyres? Used tyres pose enormous risks to the environment. One would have believed that, besides any other, a Hon. Member, once crowned Champion of the Earth, would have placed...

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

Ms. Ally: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes, in addition to his time allotted.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Figueira: When a Hon. Member, once crowned Champion of the Earth, would have placed the safety of the Guyanese people first, but surprisingly and regrettably so, he chose to score cheap political points. What a shame! What a shame!

3.38 p.m.

In the haste to deliberately hoodwink the Guyanese pensioners, they have left themselves exposed. In their 23 years in office...

Ms. Manickchand rose.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please proceed.

Ms. Manickchand: Thank you, Sir, for recognising me.

Mr. Speaker: Do you rise on a Point of Order?

Ms. Manickchand: Yes. I rise on a Point of Order under the Standing Order which disallows persons in the House from imputing improper motive and bringing another Member into disrepute.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, a Point of Order is a precise interruption. If you are clear about what you will wish to tell us, and I am sure that you are, the procedure is that you rise on a Point of Order issuing from the Standing Orders.

I will let you proceed as you have been doing, but let us be clear. Thank you.

Ms. Manickchand: The Standing Order is 41 (6). I believe that the Hon. Member said that the Champion of the Earth, which really only addresses one person in this country and in this House...

Mr. Speaker: I will be very lenient with your interruption, but please you have... Do you wish to continue with your Point of Order? Then please do so.

Ms. Manickchand: The Speaker, who is presently on the floor, said about the Leader of the Opposition of this House... *[Interruption]* ...Your Honour, if I will not be shouted at, there is one 'Champion of the Earth' who is a Hon. Member of this House. In law, as Your Honour would well know, if enough words are used to describe a person so that he can be identified, then it is just as libellous and it should be just as disallowed in this honourable House.

I am asking Your Honour to recognise that the person that was being spoken of in ill terms is...

Mr. Speaker: The procedure that has been followed by most Hon. Members in this House is that they rise, they say on which Point of Order they are interrupting the speaker who is on the floor, they give the basis on it and then they resume their seats and leave it to the Speaker.

The Hon. Member is clearly not interested in what the Speaker is saying.

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, the word 'hoodwink' was used to describe actions of the Leader of the Opposition. That is my objection. That brings this whole House into disrepute.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. Hon. Member, please proceed.

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Speaker, never in my life will I accept that as a Point of Order.

Mr. Speaker: I think that we are allowing this debate to deteriorate, Hon. Members. We must stay within the confines and let us avoid imputing motives to Hon. Members.

Mr. Figueira: In the haste to deliberately hoodwink the Guyanese pensioners, they have left themselves exposed since, never in 23 years in office, had the pensioners had received an increase of 38.7 %, whilst our "Fresh Approach" has seen this astronomical increase occur in a mere eight months of us being in Office. It must be noted that no subsidies were ever taken from

our senior citizens but those increases were given to all of our Guyanese senior citizens, including those who were denied this benefit under the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Administration.

When it comes to issues and matters and issues of senior citizens, I usually engage my 85 year-old grandfather. He said that old people were treated like the forgotten people under the PPP/C. Two increases in less than 12 months is reasonable, especially when one factors in the economic realities of Guyana as is, when all of our major export commodities - rice, sugar, gold, bauxite and timber - are all suffering from economic shocks and low prices on the world markets. He said that he now feels that his contributions to Guyana are being appreciated and respected. Confidence is being restored.

The people of the mining communities welcome *Budget 2016* as the concessions allocated for small miners and loggers will only breed hope and relieve them of the difficulties they once faced.

Region 10 is experiencing a renaissance, a resurgence of hope under this fresh approach to governance. The illumination along Burnham Drive and Winifred Gaskin Highway, for the first time, has literally provided our deliverance from darkness, hence restoring hope that a good life has beckoned.

Many of the deplorable internal and external roads have been identified for major rehabilitation. Additionally, the major access roads to several communities across the township have already been fixed. The fixing of these roads has brought great joy and deep comfort to the people who had suffered dreadfully to get in and out of their respective communities.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite members of the private sector, the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI) and even persons in the diaspora to come and rediscover and invest in Region 10. Our warm and hospitable residents welcome you under this fresh approach.

In conclusion, I, once again, would like to commend the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Jordan, for providing the people of Guyana with two budgets in less than six months. That by itself is

laudable. I would caution my Colleagues on the other side of the House that in their haste to embarrass us, they will only humiliate themselves.

Let it be recorded in the *Hansard* that we who support *Budget 2016* are mavericks, visionaries, and pioneers in chartering a new developmental path for Guyana.

To my fellow Guyanese, as we embark on a new beginning, let us endeavour to achieve the true sense of our motto as one people in this nation with a destiny of oneness as we propose to ensure, in our new deliberations under the APNU/AFC Government, that social cohesion be the benchmark in uniting all of us as Guyanese and the labels of 'Indo' and 'Afro' Guyanese will be no longer ascribed to us, for we all must be looked at as Guyanese as is.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member who just spoke did so for 18 minutes and 17 seconds. It was pointed out to me that I did agree for an additional five minutes to be accorded in addition to his 15 minutes. I just thought that I should explain to the Hon. Member that when I said that he had two minutes left, the Speaker ought to have added on the five minutes which was already agreed to.

Mr. Gill: Mr. Speaker, at the microeconomic level, which shows how individuals, households and firms are doing, the budget offers little hope of any short or long-term improvements to their trying circumstances. If anything, this budget has only added to their financial woes. There is no corporate tax relief for the private sector, no tax incentives for farmers, no pay increases for civil servants, and no reduction of Value Added Tax (VAT). There is only a meagre \$1200 per month increase for pensioners and a \$20 reduction on the price for a litre of gas.

By any standard, this is a strong condemnation of the 2016 national budget. Unfortunately, although I share the same views and express the same opinions, I cannot take credit for words written by a friend, who is a strong supporter of the APNU/AFC Administration, Editor-in-Chief of the *Kaieteur News*, Mr. Adam Harris, in his editorial dated 3rd February, 2016.

Under the PPP/C, Guyana recorded over nine years of consecutive economic growth at a time when many countries in the region were experiencing severe financial problems. Our economy grew, annually, by an estimated 5% then dropped drastically under this Administration by the

end of 2015. If all goes well, the Guyana economy is projected to grow by some 3.4% this year. So says the Hon. Winston Jordan.

Minister of Finance [Mr. Jordan]: I rise on a Point of Order. I think that the Hon. Member made a slip with the growth rate for this year and I think he can correct it right away. The growth rate is 4.4% and he said 3.4%.

Mr. Gill: I had it back to the front I guess. I apologise and I do correct that.

Mr. Jordan: I know that you did not mean that.

Mr. Gill: According to the 2015 APNU/AFC Manifesto, page 22:

“The APNU+AFC Coalition recognise that the achievement of a sustainable industrialization and development programme requires an average growth rate of at least 7%.”

If this is true, then by their admission, the entire country is heading for economic disaster at the end of this year. A 4+ % projected economic growth rate is a long way from the 7% that they projected, while in the Opposition, that the country needed.

Nothing in the budget indicates that they can achieve this. For those on the Government side, this is a good budget. It is good because the Hon. Members are all part of a privileged few. When one is raking in a Minister's salary in this Administration, one can afford to buy almost anything without worrying about the high cost of living and the increased taxation that this budget offers. But the ordinary people in this country are not among the privileged few. They are the ones struggling to make ends meet. But if, like most Guyanese, one is hoping for a that 'Better Life', as being touted by the APNU/AFC Administration, then this budget is nothing more than rhetoric and taxation. In fact, the increased taxes proposed in this budget and the determination by the Hon. Finance Minister to close loopholes in the system will make this financially unbearable for persons already suffering economic hardships.

3.53 p.m.

There is no compassion in this budget for ordinary folks. I have noticed a troubling tendency by this Administration to resort to the old People's National Congress (PNC) tactics of

discriminating against some communities. While much is in the pipeline for the APNU strongholds of Linden and Buxton, there is nothing of significance for the people of Region 5 who have been suffering continuously since this Administration took office.

Street lights have been removed in Cotton Tree, Bath Estate, Bath Settlement, Shieldstown, Bush Lot, and Blairmont, while over \$2 million dollars were spent on installing new ones in the Administration's stronghold of Linden. Is this not discrimination? Is this not payback to the people of Linden for their loyalty?

Region 5 has the largest agricultural area of any Region. It is the largest rice producing and cattle-rearing area as well. But Region 5 is being denied the resources to be productive.

Over 17,000 acres of rice cultivation in the Mahaica/Mahaicony area are under threat due to the lack of adequate fresh water and farmers are suffering heavy losses. Four thousand acres have already been affected because fresh water from the Mahaica River is being pumped into the East Demerara Water Conservancy (EDWC) from the Maduni River to irrigate cane fields and farm lands on the East Coast of Demerara (ECD), and salt water from the Atlantic Ocean is rapidly entering the Mahaica River. These farmers need help to adequately test the water for salt content. Excavators and other necessary machines are urgently needed in Region 5 to keep these canals clean, so that farmers can have access to fresh water for their farms.

The rice farmers are not the only ones affected. Sixty per cent of the approximately 200 acres cultivated for cash crop are also affected by the lack of fresh water. Farmers need fertilizers, seeds and pesticides, and there is little intervention by the Ministry of Agriculture to bring them any relief.

At the Blairmont Sugar Factory, there is a shortage of loading ramps during harvesting; there is inadequate compensation for labour; access roads for cultivation are in a deplorable state; and the period for National Insurance Scheme (NIS) investigation and payments is much too long.

It was said, repeatedly, yesterday that the Regional Executive Officers (REOs) in Regions won by the PPP are stymieing progress in those Regions. Region 5 is no exception. There is a political pawn serving as the Regional Executive Officer who seems to think that it is his duty to deny essential services to the people in a timely fashion. He does not attend meetings of the

finance and management committees. He does not execute Regional Democratic Council (RDC) mandate and decisions taken by the Council on a timely basis. He does not make available financial...

Minister of Communities [Mr. Bulkan]: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order under the Standing Orders and I seek your indulgence on a clarification on a point that was earlier raised by my Colleague. Mr. Speaker, it concerns the ruling that you gave at the beginning of today's session. The conduct of a high ranking public servant, who is not here to defend himself, is being denigrated.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Minister for his statement.

Mr. Bulkan: It is Standing Order 40 (b). Mr. Speaker, we have a public servant who is not present in this House and is unable to defend himself, but he is being subjected to attacks by the Hon. Member.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Minister. Hon. Mr. Gill, you must have given way so that I can hear [*inaudible*]

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I wish to be advised on what Standing Order is being used to say that one cannot refer to an official post in the Government. At no time did anybody refer to the name of the person. This is Parliament. We can raise concerns about the operation of Government officials and officers. Which Standing Order prevents Members of Parliament (MPs) in this House from raising these concerns without naming the persons? I just need your guidance Sir, because I cannot find it in the Standing Orders.

Mr. Speaker: The Speaker would want to be the one to treat with this matter. I thank Hon. Members who would wish to treat with it also, but they must leave it to the Speaker. Before we began our debate today, I did point out to Hon. Members that identifying, as the Hon. Member Harry Gill has just done, a serving officer and using descriptive phrases that can only be termed unacceptable to the Speaker would not be permitted. I would ask Hon. Members to be guided by that and I would ask the speaker to whom I will give the floor to be mindful of the Speaker's injunctions in that regard.

Mr. Gill: I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In Region 5, a number of projects budgeted for in 2015 should have been completed but were not. Over \$109 million was sent back to the treasury. This included the Neighbourhood Democratic Council's (NDC's) subvention - \$5.5 million; drugs and medical supplies - \$77 million; sports facilities and maintenance of the Burma Road and other streets in Region Five - \$15 million; and repairs to the Mahaicony Cottage Hospital - \$12 million.

In what appears to be crimes that are racially motivated, previously known peaceful Indian communities in Regions 5 and 6 are now being targeted for criminal activities and the Hon. Minister of Public Security seems clueless to find solutions that would end the surge in gun violence and murders across the country.

While the Guyana Police Force (GPF) must be commended for solving most of these crimes and bringing the perpetrators to justice, this is of little consolation to the dependents of the victims, many of whom must now be wondering where the next meal will be coming from.

Police officers are now asked to do more with less. Less because, while it is more difficult for them to supplement their pitiful salaries with bribe money, they have not been paid the 20% salary increase as was promised by this Administration last year, and there is nothing in this budget that suggests they will be paid this year either.

I have met several Police Officers who were transferred to other Regions far away from their homes and families without being given a travelling allowance to return home on their days off to reunite with their loved ones. Throughout Guyana, these transfers are taking place, forcing the families of our law enforcement officers to endure hardships from these long periods of separation, making them vulnerable and at risk of extramarital affairs that could easily lead to broken homes and domestic violence. There is nothing in this budget to adequately compensate our Police Officers for the risks they are asked to take. Yet, we expect them to serve with honour and dignity.

Like most, Police Officers at the Blairmont Police Station are working under appalling conditions. When it rains, documents get destroyed. The desks, chairs and filing cabinets in that building are so despicable that even the destitute would not pick them up if they were dumped outside as garbage. There is need for proper furniture and fans in that building but this is not

reflected in the budget. How can we ask the public to respect our Police Officers when our Government treats them with such disdain?

The Blairmont Post Office that is housed in the same compound is in no better condition. This building is in dire need of repairs, furniture, and a fresh coat of paint to inspire confidence in our administrative system. Yet, there is nothing in this budget for the Blairmont Post Office either.

This Administration is building a bad reputation of misleading the nation in order to boast of having fulfilled its campaign promises.

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the Hon. Member, in addition to his three minutes, be given a five minutes extension in accordance with the agreement. Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Gill: The 2015 APNU/AFC Manifesto promised the people of Regions 5 and 6 a reduction in the toll for the Berbice Bridge to \$500. Instead, it has been reduced by a measly \$300, a symbolic reduction to fulfil a campaign pledge. The actual savings to commuters who traverse the Bridge on a daily basis is equivalent to the cost of two Chico sweets. That is it. At this rate, it will take more than four years, costing the Guyanese taxpayers another \$144 million to subsidise the Berbice Bridge Company Incorporated (BCCI) in order to have the toll reduced to the \$500 as promised in their Manifesto.

In fact, the introduction of the water taxis plying the Rosignol to New Amsterdam route, which made this toll reduction possible, has brought severe hardships to the bus drivers in Berbice, many of whom are supporters of the APNU.

The 20% reduction in the price for a litre of gasoline is another example of a symbolic offering by the Administration for them to say that they have reduced the price of gas. Neither motorists nor commuters will benefit from this reduction. This is nothing less than a rip-off as gasoline prices have been trading below US\$30 per barrel for some time now.

In his budget address, the Hon. Finance Minister announced the ban on the importation of used tyres and vehicles eight years or older. The Hon. Winston Jordon also announced the removal of

the excise tax on motor vehicles under four years old that are under 1500cc. A Google search for cars with engines under 1500cc from Japan will produce only 4 models: Toyota Duet, Toyota Vitz, Toyota Raum, and Toyota Corolla. It is not much of a choice and not many Guyanese on the market for cars today would be inclined to buy one with an engine capacity below 1500cc.

4.08 p.m.

So, the removal of the excise tax for this class of vehicles is yet another symbolic gesture that would only benefit a few. If the Administration wants to make this meaningful, why not completely remove the excise tax on vehicles up to 5000cc? Now, that would be a benefit that most Guyanese would appreciate.

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

Mr. Gill: The ban on motor vehicles over eight years old is most entrusting. On Friday, 15th January, 2016, the Administration handed over two school buses to Region 5, buses it had solicited as donations from a businessman in the Region. By all indication, these buses, named David-G 1 and David-G 2, are over eight years old. If the threat of global warming and climate change inspired the ban on these eight-year old vehicles, then the school buses, David-G 1 and David-G 2, should not be on the road exposing our school children in Region 5 to a daily dose of carbon monoxide poisoning. The amount of black smoke emanating from the exhaust of these school buses often makes it difficult for vehicles travelling behind to see oncoming traffic. If these buses cannot be repaired forthwith, the police department should take them off the road until the problem is fixed.

Although I support the initiative of the Government to provide much needed transportation to students, I am convinced that these buses are being used as a political tool for the APNU/AFC as we approach local government elections. One does not have to be a rocket scientist to see the obvious, and I urge the Hon. Minister of Social Cohesion to take note of this racial discrimination that threatens to undermine her efforts in Region 5.

Each school day, one bus travels east and picks up students from APNU stronghold in Ithaca, but bypasses Blairmont and other Indian communities. The other bus travels west and starts picks up students from Belladrum, another APNU stronghold. By the time they reach the Indian villages,

they are already filled. Is this coincidental or a sinister scheme to reward the children of APNU supporters?

Ms. Ally: I rise on a Point of Order, Standing Order 48. The speaker on the floor is misleading this National Assembly. Sir, there is no bus assigned to Ithaca or which passes Blairmont and so he should not mislead this honourable House. Both buses, David-G 1 and David-G 2 – those beautiful yellow and green buses – move off from the Prophet/Naarstigheid NDC, if he would like to have that information.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, do you wish to abandon your Point of Order? You have done so.

Ms. Ally: No, Sir. I thought that you wanted to make a point, Sir. I am sorry.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the Speaker has all the time in the world. Now, is there a Point of Order or not? If there is not, I would like you to resume your seat. If there is, then please tell us.

Ms. Ally: Sir, the Hon. Member, Mr. Gill, is misleading this honourable House and I have given the facts. I ask that he withdraws his statement.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, on what are you are rising?

Bishop Edghill: I am rising on a point of clarification, Sir. As a Member of this House, I need your guidance, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: You will have my guidance. What is it that you want to be guided on?

Bishop Edghill: I want to be guided on the Standing Order which deals with Content of Speeches, Sir. The Hon. Member rose on a Point of Order and indicated that the House is being misled by information given by a representative.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, what is it that you wish to be guided on?

Bishop Edghill: I need to be guided, Sir, about whether, as representative of the people, the views that are given to Hon. Members by the people of a community cannot be relayed to this National Assembly.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member for his statement. I would say this: because an Hon. Member has the freedom to speak in this Assembly, I am sure that the Hon. Member would want to be certain that what he provides to this House can be relied upon by Hon. Members.
[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker pounded the gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Speaker is not seeking opinions on this. I am expressing a view which I would like us to be guided by. That view is that if a Member is going to tell this House anything, the Member must be certain that what he or she is telling this House, this House can rely on. Please proceed, Mr. Gill. You have the floor.

First Vice-President and Prime Minister: [Mr. Nagamootoo]: Mr. Speaker, may I crave your indulgence? On a Point of Order, under Standing Order 41(1), the Hon. Member Bishop Edghill has referred to the Content of Speeches and, like Your Honour, I have listened to all the contributions here, very restrained, unusually so, but I believe that... *[Interruption]* ...I need your protection, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members are having a private discussion and yet a Member is on the floor. Please proceed.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Standing Order 41, which deals with the Content of Speeches, states specifically that speeches ought to be confined to the subject matter under discussion.

The subject matter is the 2016 budget, not yellow and green buses. There is no allocation or reference by the Minister of Finance to blue and yellow buses, nor to the discriminatory reference to blue, green or yellow buses. I think that the Member is totally out of order in trying to introduce an irrelevance into the debate and to impute racial discrimination in this House on an irrelevance. He should be ruled out of order.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Prime Minister for his comment. Hon. Harry Gill, you have the floor.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For clarity, I never said that the buses originate from Ithaca or Belladrum. They may be stationed at the NDC but they travel each school day to Ithaca to the East and to Belladrum to the West.

The APNU/AFC Coalition has been in power now for nine months and, after two budgets, it has not lived up to the expectations it has created for itself. It has failed miserably to deliver benefits that are important to the average Guyanese, even to their own supporters.

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

Mr. Gill: This budget is no exception. I believe that the APNU/AFC ran a good campaign during the last election, and I must commend them for that. Now as Opposition Members of Parliament (MPs), we want to help them to keep the promises they have made to the Guyanese people.

The Coalition promised rice farmers \$9000 a bag for paddy. We support this and urge the Hon. Minister of Finance to find ways to include this allocation in this year's budget.

It promised to reduce the VAT. We are disappointed that in two budgets, this Administration has not addressed this issue that it found to be so burdensome on the people while in Opposition. We will unanimously approve a reduction in the VAT if it is included in this year's budget.

It promised to reduce poverty. We fully support this. That is why we are disappointed that job creation initiatives are sadly lacking in this budget.

It promised to reduce crime. We support every effort to get illegal weapons off of the streets and to put an end to the drug trade. So, we support better salaries, incentives and working conditions for our Police Officers.

It promised to significantly increase salaries for Government workers. [*Applause*]

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

Hon. Members, it was just drawn to my attention that we are now beyond the 4.00 p.m. hour, but we seem to have been enjoying ourselves so much and not caring much about the time. Reality has stepped in and so we will have the suspension now and we will return at 5.20 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 4.23 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 5.20 p.m.

5.31 p.m.

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Ms. Wade: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tabled before this National Assembly is the Budget 2016. It is before us for debate and passage, thereafter authorising the Government to expend these sums in the various sections. Region 5 welcomes the early presentations of the Budget 2016. Let me commend the Hon. Minister of Finance and his hard-working team for an excellent and comprehensive national budget to the tune of \$230 billion that was presented in the honourable House on 29th January, of this year.

This budget captures the intent and fulfilment of the promises made in the APNU/AFC manifesto. This budget has all the ingredients needed to transform this economy, and that we will do. I profoundly say it is a people's budget.

The Hon. Members of the Opposition are pretending to have all the answers to develop this great nation of ours which suffered under them for 23 years of one-party rule. They are angry and bitter because this eight-month old Government has begun to demonstrate that it is serious about “a good life for all Guyanese.” Let me remind the Opposition that the purpose and function of any government is to sustain the welfare and well-being of its people. The emphasis and objective is and must always be the happiness of the people. That is what we are going to give, “happiness to people.”

I wish to turn my attention to the Budget 2016 under the theme *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: the Good Life Beckons*. I am going to do my rebuttal as I go through my presentation.

Rice: I spoke about some critical problems affecting the rice industry on that side of the House. This Government inherited a broken rice system. I told the previous Government that in the rice industry there was a crisis. I said to it that it is time to recognise the plight of the farmers and that there is need for the implementation of a plan to aggressively market Guyana's rice. I also said then that despite claims of higher paddy yields and increase in production the rice industry is on shaky ground. This Government is eight months old. We are aware that we have an obligation to

assist in stabilising the process to benefit farmers and to ensure that the necessary systems are put in place for their livelihood. The crisis and the shaky ground are before us. Stop the blame game.

The Hon. Minister made mention, on page 27, paragraph 4.33:

“...rice - must not be forgotten...the rice industry remains challenged in terms of cost of production and competitiveness. The Government will continue to support the industry...”

There is no qualm about that.

“...to access new trade partners, following the collapse of the Venezuela market.”

Agriculture is our business in Region 5. This Government will make sure that there is an appropriate level of food security through a sustainable approach in addressing the key obstacles faced by farmers and stakeholders.

In years gone by the entire region and country was affected by the flood waters. This time it is the other way around, the current dry weather conditions are affecting several regions of Guyana including Region 5. In the Abary/Berbice area there is adequate water in the conservancy to sustain the rice crop. I want the Hon. Member Mr. Gill to take note. The Mahaica Mahaicony/Abary Agricultural Development Authority (MMA/ADA) was forced to introduce a system of rationing of irrigation water in the Mahaica/ Mahaicony/Abary areas. These two areas depend on the rivers for irrigation water. Sir, the rationing of water, in both areas, is not without challenges. Some farmers have blocked primary drainage and irrigation channels, diverting the water which is being pumped into the network for their sole use. I know persons saw the confusion in the news. The police had to be watching over the process. MMA/ADA field staff was threatened, even gunplay among farmers took place. All the farmers have to do is cooperate with each other and share the already limited water in order to save thousands of acres of rice.

The MMA/ADA, I must say, is doing a good job, in terms of pumping, monitoring and regulating the use of the water. It is ensuring that rice farmers have access to water from the canals to their fields. Regardless of the challenges, works are ongoing in Region 5. I said earlier that since taking office it has not been easy for this Government, but we have made good strides in stabilising the economy and restoring the dignity and integrity of this nation.

We inherited battles with farmers when the previous Government dismantled co-operative societies. Hon. Member Priya Manickchand can bear me out, families, villagers and friends are now at loggerheads because she is representing some farmers. There are some small farmers who did not receive payments for paddy over the years. How can this Opposition blame us? We are eight months old with a broken and shaky rice industry. We promise that we will clean up the mess.

Even Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo)... The Blairmont Factory is in my region and the managers of that estate had to hire an aircraft to do a flyover of the MMA conservancy to make sure that adequate water is there, to make sure the need of the crop is fulfilled. The amount of water, there is there, have will do it.

We have heard a lot about GuySuCo. I want to say that in 2016 the Government will inject \$9 billion to assist the industry in its recovery and modernisation programme, according to the Minister on page 27. This industry continues to be of concern to the Government, no doubt about that. The yearly bail out, the poor health of the industry, the aged machinery and building, high production cost, weakened sugar prices and the multi-billion dollar white elephant at Skeldon Factory are sucking the treasury dry. I said that and I continue to say it. Those are the things we have to look at.

I want to turn my attention to crime in Region 5. Safeguarding public security and rebuilding trust is very important. Since the launch of Operation Dragnet the security force is in full operation mode. While crime is still a case for concern, especially in Region 5, many of the perpetrators have, of late, been caught and some even confessed to the crimes committed.

I visited with the Hon. Minister of Social Cohesion the homes of some of the affected families, and those families are asking for justice. We assured those families that it will be done. "You do the crime, you pay the time," words of His Excellency himself. We are receiving lectures now from the Opposition on how to solve crime. I want to remind the Members that the crime spree started in the year 2000 and though the British Government offered its support to the then Government it declined or, must I say, refused the assistance. Do not come now and play the blame game. This APNU/AFC recognises that citizens, regardless of race, class, social status or

gender, have the right to access opportunities and make an important contribution to nation building and safety. Hence, this Government will make sure that people are safe in their homes.

We now have decent police vehicles in the region, riding smoothly with no noise. We will be having some more too. Policing groups have been formed in various areas. These men and women are in uniforms carrying out their duties daily working along with the Police in the Region. It must be noted that our Government is working assiduously to develop safety for all. As such, the sum of \$24.6 billion has been allocated for the development and modernisation of the security sector this year, silent in the past, but making noise now.

Mr. Gill spoke about police personnel not being given adequate payment.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I require the proper form of address if you are going to refer to an Hon. Member.

Ms. Wade: Thank you Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Member Mr. Gill spoke about the police personnel not being given adequate payments to cover the risk they are taking to travel when they want to visit their families on day-off. May I suggest to the Hon. Members that he should use his increase in salary to put in the Fallen Heroes Foundation of the Guyana Police Force and that will do good for the people.

Sea and river defence: Urgent corrective measures are in place to stop the breach at Belladrum foreshore for the residents who are threatened by the Atlantic Ocean. They were pleased by the prompt measures taken by the Hon. Minister of Infrastructure. Over the years we suffered poor quality of work done for large sums of money. In some areas the quality of work was highly questionable. The APNU/AFC Government will not condone such practices. During the time of the past Government work was done in selective areas in the communities. I want to say now that that is a thing of the past.

In subregion 1 – I want the Hon. Member Mr. Gill to listen – in the Abary/Mahaicony area, works were done in various areas. The infrastructure works were done in High Dam, Fairfield, Fellowship, Grove, Huntley, Good Hope, Calcutta, Campaign, Burma, Catherine and Adventure. Similar works were done in sub-region 2 at Belladrum, Ross, Trafalgar, Bush Lot, Hopetown, Bath, Cotton Tree, Rosignol, Blairmont and Ithaca. I can go on and on.

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

Ms. Ali: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Members be given five minutes in addition to her allotted time.

Question put, and agreed to.

Ms. Wade: The residents of Trafalgar are very happy because they now have proper main roads to access down to the No. 28 Line. Ten years it took them to get such a road. The sum of \$14.4 billion has been budgeted to continue the development work of public infrastructure in Region 5 and Guyana. I know that a lot of areas would benefit. This is a people's budget.

The Ministers of Health visited hospitals in Region 5 to determine the physical state and the level of service offered to patients. A complete inspection of facilities was done and the concerns of workers were addressed. The Government expects to spend about \$28 billion, which is 9% of the budget on the health sector. The regional authority will now have the opportunity to purchase its own supply of drugs. This will bring an end to large amounts of expired and unnecessary drugs in the region.

On 5th February, we witnessed the handing over the Experiment Health Centre, West Coast Berbice which was built by the Basic Needs Trust Fund. This facility will provide health services for over 4,000 persons from that community. This facility will be fully equipped in the next few days. The health system is being strengthened.

The time has come for the national conversation on suicide and its prevention. For too long there has been lip service for what is now a health crisis in Guyana.

5.46 p.m.

The Government will implement an education and prevention programme starting with our schools. The public health problem, which is causing this nation the large sums of persons killing themselves, will now come to an end because we are going to follow up.

A safe and efficient sanitation system is needed in Region 5 to bring an end to the indiscriminate dumping of garbage. However, local government elections is on 18th March, 2016, that long period that we awaited and it is expected that the villagers will take responsibility of managing

their own affairs, thus we will be seeing clean and better communities. Cleanliness is next to godliness.

With the allotted budgeted amount of \$15.8 billion for housing and water, Region 5 residents suffered serious problems in the past with the quality of water receive, that will soon be a thing of the past. Distribution of house lots is on the move, systems are in place and those who have been clamouring for years to get their areas regularised will now benefit. The Hon. Minister Valerie Patterson has put systems in place to remove the bottlenecks and red tapes that existed under the previous administration.

Region 5 residents who never enjoyed electricity in their homes, and certain sections of the public road, will now benefit. It is disappointing that during the national and regional elections campaign Bath Settlement received additional street lights while the residents of Number 30, back street, and Number 9, back street, were without electricity in their homes. Nobody spoke about this but I did. My village, Yeoville, does not have street light. While villages such as Yeoville, Ross, Tempe, Kingelly, Litchfield, Seafield are without public lights on the roads and they are dark as pitch. These are the type of things that we must address.

Guyanese women are hard-working. The APNU/AFC Government respects this and will place much emphasis on the empowering of women across Guyana and Region 5. Women will not be left out. Already they are involved in many skilled programmes creating employment for themselves and other villagers across Guyana. Mr. Speaker, time is against me and so I would like to go the commissioning of buses in Region 5.

His Excellency President David A. Granger and his Ministers came into the region and presented two 30—seater buses. The former administration did nothing and whether the colour is green or yellow, we put school buses on the road. Whether they are smoking or not, two, five or eight-year-old, the fact remains that we put school buses on the road. What did the previous administration do, Hon. Member Manickchand? I would like to say that it was a little girl from Trafalgar, on the West Coast of Berbice, who told the President, while campaigning in 2015, that her parents had to spend \$5,000 weekly for transportation for her to attend Berbice High School. It was on that ground that the Hon. President of this Co-operative Republic of Guyana decided to

come up with a five-bus programme to make sure that children are comfortable and parents get an ease.

Those two buses are taking children from Profit to Rosignol because there are 95-something children who are going across the river and have to pay \$5,000 a week and that is the purpose of the buses on the road. If the Hon. Member Mr. Gill does not know, it is to take the children across to Region 6.

National budget of 2016 is before the House and the debate is ongoing while the entire nation follows with keen interest. Guyanese have a right to know how their moneys are being spent and this Parliament will be meaningful in doing so. The Opposition's refusal to be a part of the budget consultation is shocking and it is ashamed and now the Members are coming to say things about this budget. I would like to say that is distasteful, however, Region 5 budgetary allocation will be spent wisely in all areas. I am proud and excited about the prospects of “a good life” for the people under this new Government. Guyana voted for change, “for a good life”. Budget 2015 was the first step towards the green economy. Budget 2016, *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*, will be delivered

Yes, the road is long and hard but what I know is that the APNU/AFC Government will get there by God’s grace. Sir, as Lay Minister in Anglican Diocese of Guyana, I would like to quote this scripture...

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

Ms. Wade: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Anamayah: I rise to make my contribution to these debates for 2016, but from the outset I must make the observation that the budget speech by the Hon. Minister of Finance, the contributions from that side of the House, is patent. It is that the Members on that side of the House and, indeed, the entire Government, have lost touch with reality.

The entire Government seems to be in, what political commentator and comedian Bill Mar referred to, a ‘bubble’. Republicans, such as Sarah Palin, are in this bubble. They are also in this bubble. I do not know how they will extricate themselves from it. The sad reality is that the entire country is going down because of this administration and the policies that it is trying to

implement. Enough has been said. We know the budget lacks vision. We know that instead of restoring confidence it is doing the exact opposite. It is eroding confidence in every sector - in the common man, in the business people, in the private sector, the people who will develop this country, who will turn things around.

A few moments ago, I listened to Hon. Member Ms. Wade and all I kept hearing about was systems in place. What systems are in place? What specifics are in this budget to tackle any situation that is confronting this nation? Foremost, there is the crime situation. Nothing is outlined in the budget, no concrete carefully crafted plan that will extricate us from this crime situation that is out of control. Our people are being slaughtered by marauding bandits and the Hon. Minister of Public Security and the entire Government have no answer. They have no answer for the crime situation. I will conceive that the PPP/C had a high crime rate but now it is out of control and the statistics from the Guyana Police Force tell us this. Murders are up and out of control, armed robberies, rape, you name it. All the violent crimes are out of control.

There are now calls in a nine-month Government for the resignation of the Hon. Minister of Public Security. Also calls are being echoed by the business community for the Hon. Minister's resignation. That is how serious this crime situation is. West Berbice and East Berbice, where I live, are bearing the brunt of it. Just two days ago a businesswoman of Chinese decent was murdered in her home at Number 57 Village. Prior to that there was the young man, Kishoon Dyal, who was a member of the Hare Krishna movement. He had just finished worshipping and he was gunned down in his home. What was he trying to do? He was trying to prevent the bandits from gaining access to the home where his parents live. He was killed because of that. He is cremated today and he is a hero.

Last Friday, a market vendor from Canje robbed in her home; taxi driver for Canje shot and is hospitalised, and the list goes on and on. For it to be said that the crime situation is under control, it is a gross misrepresentation of the reality on the ground. That is why I had said initially that the Hon. Members on that side of the House are out of touch with reality. They are in a bubble.

Operation Dagnet is an abysmal failure, but here is another shortcoming of the budget, and there is nothing to replace it. There is no plan. Where is the Special Weapons And Tactics (SWAT) team? Why is Berbice without a permanent SWAT team that is fully manned, well-equipped and

well trained to respond quickly to crimes? That is absent from Berbice. There is no crime plan and the police men and women of our country needs to be given the tools, equipment and the training to do their jobs and that is not being done also. It comes back to haunt us.

The Central Corentyne Chamber of Commerce has just issued a press release lamenting the crime situation. This is what it is saying:

“Instead of focusing on business development ...”

This is the fourth press release by this Chamber of Commerce in the last six months dealing with crime as the major issue.

“Berbice business community is sick and tired of the crime situation in the region. Who is next? Could we develop a country like this? Where is the Public Security Minister? The public is being decimated by bandits under extremely insecure. Where are you, Sir?”

In an environment such as this, the business community is focused on remaining alive instead of developing their businesses and investing and that is what we need to turn this country around. It cannot happen because the environment has not been created. The Government has the responsibility to provide a safe and secure environment for investment, both local and foreign. Unless that situation is addressed among many other situations, which have eroded the confidence in the economy and the Government, we will not see any progress. I do not know how we will achieve that 4.4 % growth that the Hon. Member spoke of. That is a myth. That will not happen with the current situation as it is.

The Hon. Member spoke about rice but the revert and the overwhelming success of the rice industry under the stewardship of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) administration is well documented. The facts cannot be denied. In 1992 we moved from 90 tons to, in 2014, 365 tons. It is a major contributor to the GDP and it is a major revenue earner.

6.01 p.m.

This great success story did not happen by magic. It took prudent management; it took insightful leadership; it took visionary leadership to intervene when it was necessary.

The rice industry was not without its problems from 1992 to the present time. As a matter of fact, in 1994 to 2000 it experienced continuous growth, but then the industry was hit by low prices. As it is now, in addition to the low prices, the farmers and the millers had all invested in new machinery, new equipment and recapitalised their entire operations so they were heavily indebted to the bank. There was it, a crisis loom. They could not make their loan payments, as is happening, right now. What did the PPP/C administration do? After being lobbied by the Rice Producers' Association (RPA), which highlighted the problem, the awardee of the Champion of the Earth Award, Dr Bharat Jagdeo, who was the President at that time, intervened. The caring Government, which the PPP/C is, intervened with a menu of measures – a plan, a White Paper. A ten-point plan was laid out to save the industry and to ensure that it did not crumble as it is right now. Among the measures implemented was that there were tripartite talks – the Government, the rice farmers and millers, and the lending institutions. They were in discussions, the problems identified and then the solutions offered. What happened: the accrued interest was waived on the loans, the interest, which was capitalised, was also waived and loans were rescheduled and renegotiated to allow the farmers to make smaller loan payments and at a lower interest rate. The loan amounts in some cases were reduced. In exchange, the taxes payable by the lending institutions on those loans, on the profits made, were waived, so the banks got to get those taxes. Government waived the taxes. That is a measure that is quite easy to implement in the present situation here.

The sum total is that there was a situation, a Government intervention, in which the brains of the scheme was that the Government did not have to go into its coffers. It did not have to go to the treasury. It paid for itself. That is a brilliant strategy that was a scheme that was implemented by the PPP/C that saved the Rice Industry from disaster. I am calling on the Hon. Minister of Finance, to do the same. The APNU/AFC Government, if it really cares about the lives of the rice farmers, the livelihood of our country, of our people, it will do the same. It did not stop there.

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member, in addition to the three minutes he still has due to him, be given his last five minutes.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Anamayah: The interventions did not stop there. In 2004/2005, when there was the inclement weather, the floods, the Government, again, intervened and gave the farmers \$400 million in cash. It was a direct intervention of \$400 million in cash to ensure that they went back into the fields and they could have bought fertilisers and whatever else was necessary to ensure that the rice industry survived. These are the kind of measures a caring government would implement. I said all of that to say this: that under the PPP/C, the people of Guyana were already enjoying the “good life”. The “good life” came to an end on 11th May, 2015. There is nothing in this budget to ensure that any assistance is given to the rice farmers. If the Hon. Members on the other side could point me to one measure in the budget that will assist the rice farmers directly, I will concede, but they cannot do that because there is nothing in this budget. It is not in the Budget 2016.

The Hon. Member spoke about the GuySuCo also. Well, it is said that \$9 billion will be pumped into the sugar industry, that is commendable, but we are not given any specifics. As it was last year, we do not know where the \$12 billion went. We do not know what will be done with this \$9 billion that will be invested in the industry. Would it be put to proper use? Would it be used to purchase, to do mechanisation? Would it be used to change the field layouts so that we get higher yields? Would it be used to save the industry?

Now, Skeldon Factory was referred to as a white elephant. I find it very ironic because obviously, the Members on that side are completely ignorant of the facts, which I will give them now. The last crop in 2015, the Skeldon Factory made its production target. Two weeks before the factory was scheduled to close, the estate actually achieved its production target. It produced sugar tons of cane to tons of sugar (TCTS) at 11.4. The problem that we will have moving forward with Skeldon Factory is that this administration has refused to engage the private cane farmers in the Upper Corentyne area. The Skeldon Factory, by itself, the cultivation, does not have enough cane to supply the factory. That is one of the biggest problems, continuous grinding. The solution lies with the cane farmers who have lands adjoining the factory and closer to where the estate cultivations are. The Hon. Member Mr. Holder was written to since 5th June, 2015. The cane farmers pleaded for a meeting with the Hon. Member, which has not materialised to date. We are now in February, 2016. Slowly but surely, the administration is going to ensure

that all the cane farmers in the Upper Corentyne area are wiped out. They are going into bankruptcy, as we speak, and the Government has seen it fit to do nothing about it. Its own Commission of Inquiry, which was commissioned by this Government, at such high cost, informed it that private cane farmers, for example at Wales, are producing better quality canes and they are having higher yields than the estates themselves. Therein lays a part of the solution to the Wales debacle, not to close it, but give it to the private cane farmers, as a solution. Keep the people employed. Do not retrench 1,700 workers. That simply cannot be right. Is this the “good life”, that the people were promised? It cannot be right; it simply cannot be right.

This economy, as we know, is on life support. This budget has dealt a death blow to several businesses, including the used tyre business; some auto dealers will go out of business, those who are unable to obtain these licences and tax compliance will go out of business. The promise of the “good life” is an illusion. It will not be achieved. There are no measures in this budget to achieve it. What this budget, the Government and the Minister, did, it has robbed the people of the “good life”. The role of the Government and the Hon. Minister of Finance is now likened to that of an undertaker. This Budget 2016 is the final nail in the coffin.

Thank you Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Minister within the Ministry of Finance [Mr. Sharma]: As I rise to participate in the debate of this motion for the approval of the estimate for the public sector and budget for the financial year 2016, I would like to just pause a minute to just react to some statements made by the Hon. Member when he spoke about crime. I refer to crime, since the year 2000, under the Jagdeo regime. Under the regime of the previous administration, crime became a nightmare between the years 2002–2008. Some 500 persons were killed by armed gangs; a Minister was slaughtered. For the benefit of the Hon. Members on that side, I will repeat my statement. I refer to the crime that was evident during the period 2000 to 2008.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Speaker will read, for what it is worth, of course, from the Standing Orders that all Hon. Members are wont to refer to from time to time. It is under Standing Order 45, “Rules for Members not speaking.” I think we need to be careful. A Member

“(c) Shall maintain silence while another Member is speaking and shall not interrupt, except in accordance with these Standing Orders;”

These are the Standing Orders of Hon. Members. When Hon. Members came to this Assembly, I think the Standing Orders would have been one of the instruments which enabled their presence here and their continued presence here. I only read it for Members to make what they wish of it. For the Speaker, it means that you will pay respect to the person speaking, whether from your side or from the other side. I have noticed that some Members do not care from which side of the House the Hon. Member is speaking.

6.16 p.m.

I do not wish to call Members' names at this time, but if Members must feel compelled to speak, then perhaps Members might speak within their immediate vicinity and not disturb the speaker. Hon. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, I was referring to the crime situation ranging from 2000 to 2008, where some 500 persons were killed by armed gangs: a Minister was slaughtered; a diplomat was kidnapped; there were extra-judicial killings; and there were death squads. Guyana became a killing field under the PPP/C. Peaceful unarmed citizens were killed and the Minister, who was responsible for the Ministry then, had refused to resign.

I will also enlighten the Hon. Member who spoke in relation to GuySuCo. The achievements he mentioned about GuySuCo in 2015 were under this Administration, with improved production. It is because this Administration, under the wise leadership of the Minister of Agriculture, allows managers to manage. So it was because of management expertise that the Skeldon's Factory was successful.

I now turn my attention to the substantive debate of the motion. I must say that I offer congratulations to my colleague Minister, the Hon. Mr. Jordan, on delivering Budget 2016 on 29th January, 2016, which was compiled in less than six months, after delivering Budget 2015, on 10th August, 2015.

Budget 2016 was presented under the theme: *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*. I have no doubt that our coalition Government will achieve these goals in

this our 50th Independence celebrations, our Golden Jubilee was designated *The Year of Renaissance* by His Excellency, the President. This simply means a revival of or renewed interests in our pledge to make our cherished homeland a place of unity, security and prosperity.

There are periods in the history of a nation, where historians from the vintage-ground of latter age, identifies as being the watersheds in the development of that nation. These periods could be said in a general way to mark the end of one era and the beginning of a new one. They would witness the changes of outmoded laws; the disintegration of alien value-systems; the triumph of more human concepts of social organisation and interrelationships; and emergence of new norms that are more of consistent with the prevailing national culture.

They are characterised by a upsurge of creative activities; a likely interplay with fresh and novel ideas; a spirit of bold experimentation and innovation; and a pervasive confidence that manifests itself in the enthusiastic and energetic way in which the masses involved themselves in the task of nation-building.

This surge of creative activities commenced with Budget 2015, *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*. Budget 2015 sets the platform for the Government's vision of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana for the year 2020 and beyond. It provides measures to ease the financial burden of the citizens while improving their livelihoods and conditions. Some of these measures are:

- An increase in the minimum wage from \$39,540 to \$50,000, representing a 26.4% increase;
- All public servants, above the minimum wage, received a 5% increase plus a \$5,000, allowing for greater increase in the lower income bracket;
- There was a 54% increase in the hourly rate paid to schools' Sweeper/Cleaners;
- Workers no longer have to pay Income Tax on National Insurance Scheme (NIS) contributions;
- Old Age Pension was increased from \$13,125 to \$17,000, representing a 30% increase;

- There was a 10% increase in the public assistance from \$5,900 to \$6,500;
- There was an increase in the uniform allowance voucher from \$1500 to \$2000.

These and many more were said in Budget 2015, the platform that this Administration built on.

Budget 2016 was crafted in keeping with the *Fresh Approach*, Vision 2020 and the policies of the APNU/AFC Government that was adumbrated by His Excellency's Address to the National Assembly on 14th January, 2016, under the theme: *Independence and resilience, our people's path to the economic progress*:

“There is time for a fresh start, a new beginning. It is time for us to redouble our efforts to eradicate poverty. Our Government is committed to promoting sustained economic growth with enhanced distributive justice that inequalities are reduced and opportunities are increased.

Our vision is for every Guyanese to be able to enjoy a ‘good life’. Achieving a ‘good life’ is not a wish or a dream. It requires greater equality of opportunities in order to attain economic growth. A ‘good life’ is about removing inequalities and providing opportunities for every citizen to be the best he/she can be”.

Mr. Speaker, as you would have realised, this is what this APNU/AFC Government is about. It is about breaking inequality and equal rights for one another. I noticed that when the Hon. Minister of Finance concluded his Budget Speech, the Hon. Members of the Opposition appeared confused and after listening to their presentations, the Hon. Members are still confused. They are trying to figure out what really happened. I will say the reason for this is confusion. This confusion stemmed from the PPP/C knowing for a fact that, when it had demitted office, it had left the Consolidated Fund bank account in an overdraft.

The old Consolidated Fund bank account had an overdraft of \$46.4 billion in 2004. The new Consolidated Fund bank account, at 8th May, 2015, had an overdraft of \$27.8 billion. My analysis of the Consolidated Fund bank account showed that the Consolidated Fund bank account was in overdraft, and a consistent overdraft, growing at the time of late December, 2014, approaching the elections. It meant that the PPP/C Administration was on a spending spree. Basically, they spent all of the money. There was no money for us. When we presented Budgets

2015 and 2016, we now know why they were confused. They wanted to know where all these good things were coming from.

The APNU/AFC budget measures are in the support of its programmes of 'greening' the economy and protecting the environment. One would have thought that Budget 2016 would have received the unequivocal support from the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, who received the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), Champion of the Earth Award and US\$40,000 in April, 2010. However, it appears that the Champion of the Earth wants to be the Champion of the poor. This kind of poor that this new Champion of the Poor is representing, apparently can afford to buy a vehicle that is over 12 years old that cost \$3 million and an SUV for over \$10 million, but cannot afford to purchase a new tyre at a reduced cost.

This Champion of the Poor I could say, never bought a 12-year old Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV) or used tyres for his vehicle. As a matter of fact, if the cameras can turn its lens to the vehicles outside, that the Hon. Member on that side drove in this compound, they will notice that they are vehicles under three years old and have new tyres. As a matter of fact, they are new vehicles with new tyres and the place look like New York. When these Champions of the Poor were in the Opposition, in office for 23 years, they never sought to make it possible for the working class to afford a new car and an SUV at a reduced cost, by simply reducing the Excise Taxes.

Under the APNU/AFC Government, the working class can enjoy a 'good life' of owning a new vehicle, with new tyres and having the sense of security at a reduced cost.

Today, before attending the Assembly, I decided to browse the internet and to check on the prices for vehicles because, because listening to the Opposition, I was confused and of the position that, indeed the removal or reduction in the Excise Tax would indeed cause hardship on people lives. They had me convinced too. So I checked the internet, and Mr. Speaker I could tell you this, I looked at a vehicle that the Leader of the Opposition had spoken about, the Toyota Premio. Believe it or not, a vehicle of that nature - 1500CC, with a Cost, Insurance and Freight (CIF) of G\$4,099,000 would attract customs duties of \$1.8 million, Excise Tax of \$1.7 million and Value Added Tax (VAT) of \$1.2 million. The grand total for such vehicle will be \$8.9 million.

However, this is the argument that they put to the people, so I was caught in that. When I checked an 1800CC Premio, the CIF is actually lower. It is \$2 million for the vehicle. These figures that I am giving the House are under the regime of the PPP, where the Excise Tax was applicable. In this case here, when the Excise Tax, the VAT and the Customs duties are applied, the vehicle will be \$5 million. A vehicle with a larger engine is cheaper than a vehicle with a smaller engine. This is because the people in the modern world are going for smaller vehicles and more gas and fuel efficient vehicles.

When I checked with the reduction in the Excise Tax, if one looks at that vehicle for 1500CC, where one would have been paying \$1.7 million, he/she will no longer be paying that. As a result of the removal of the Excise Tax, the VAT will also be reduced. When I compared the prices - and I will share this information with the media - for that same vehicle of 1500CC, the savings will be \$2 million. If one is buying an 1800CC vehicle [Mr. Nandlall: Is the savings \$2 million?] Yes, correct. If one checks the larger vehicles, under the present regime with the Excise Tax, which is costing our people \$5 million for a 2012 vehicle, will cause \$3.7 million, a saving of \$1.3 million. The information that has been peddled by the Opposition is untrue. I think they owe an apology to this nation for misguiding and misleading them, and not allowing the people to have a 'good life'. I will share this information with the media for those who are interested.

I turn my attention to the area of stimulating growth. One of the first steps in restoring confidence is to make sure that the country knows the Government's plans early in the year. This is why the Hon. Minister, Mr. Jordan, moved to present an early budget.

6.31 p.m.

There are a lot of implications for not having an early budget. Some of those implications are:

- The people of the country would be in a *wait and see* mood of what the budget will deliver, for almost three to four months of the year until the debate is over. We have experience this with the PPP/C Administration bringing budgets to the National Assembly in March, and persons have had to wait until April to see what was happening. With an early budget this would be removed.

- Budget agencies are enable to start new capital projects, only rollover projects, until the budget is passed.
- Budget agencies are left with eight months to deliver a 12-month budget, along with the challenges of rainy seasons and related infrastructural difficulties with contractors in accruing the related materials.

These are the difficulties and what we do not want is to have a late budget; we want an early budget. The Hon. Member, Mr. Ali, was also referring to implementation crisis. With an early budget, there would be no implementation crisis. With a late budget there would have implementation crisis.

This will also aid the private sector to organise their businesses and operation to take advantage of the opportunities presented in this budget early in the year. The private sector welcomes an early budget because they could forecast and do what they need to do.

Last year, our Government achieved positive growth against the backdrop of a domestic economy still recovering from uncertainty, surrounding the pre and post-election period. A relatively weak sugar industry and a rice industry that was artificially cushioned by the over-dependence on the Venezuela market, low prices for bauxite on the world market and also a few challenges that we had on our plate.

Our Government's deliberate policies for many of these key sectors that saw an unbelievable \$12 billion injection to maintain the sugar industry, also together, it serve to achieve a three per cent growth. A further \$9 billion injection into the GuySuCo will see us growing at an even higher rate in 2016, based on our coalition Government intervention.

This Budget will see a significant increase in expenditure on infrastructure, a more than 70% increase in expenditure on construction will serve to create jobs and increase disposable income. Those who are involved in the construction and in the supply of goods and services, they and their families will benefit.

In addition, small contractors will benefit from 20% of all contracts awarded, therefore benefiting from the national pie on an annual basis. This particular section of the law was

somehow not implemented by the previous Administration. This Administration will ensure it is implemented and this is one with creating jobs and helping the economy.

The implementation of this \$230 billion Budget will happen against the back drop of improved procurement systems and this will help with the implementation difficulties that the Hon. Member, Mr. Ali, was referring to. This Government has reviewed the tendering limits and has increased them to allow a greater share of public procurement to take place at Regional and Ministerial tendering level. What was not said by the many speakers who spoke was that the tender limit was also increased at the community level, moving it to \$5 million. It means that those Indigenous communities could tender for a contract for \$5 million, which would alleviate poverty in those communities. I refer to the Appendices XII and XIII on pages 89 and 90.

These ministerial and regional tender board are currently chaired by the heads of budget agencies, for example, the permanent secretary and regional executive officers (REO), and follow the structure as prescribed in the Procurement Act and regulations which preclude any ministerial or political involvement, which is contrary to what the Opposition was peddling, that there were increased tender limits and Ministers would be stealing. Ministers were not part of the Ministerial Tender Board.

In light of these revised thresholds, this Government is taking decisive actions to ensure successful implementation of the new threshold. We will:

- Conduct training of 400 procurement personnel, starting with the first batch of 50 on 11th February, which will focus on all 10 Regional Tender Boards;
- Conduct training for all regional and accounting personnel and sub-treasury officers;
- Conduct training in public procurement tendering, where contractors and suppliers will be trained in preparing documents. They will know the shortfalls and the loopholes that prevent them from being award with a contract. This is a serious issue. There are many contractors that are disqualified because they do not know how to fill out a procurement document;

- With effect from early February, an official Help Desk has been established with telephone number 227-0094 for everyone who has queries of procurement to call the Help Desk for information and guidance;
- The National Tender Board and the Procurement Administration Board (NPTAB) will be able to conduct ground monitoring and intends to visit each procuring entity, at least once per quarter. In addition, the newly formed Inspectorate Unit, within the Ministry of Public Infrastructure will complement the strengthening of the Government's monitory capabilities on the ground. Hon. Minister, Mr. Patterson, will speak further on that tomorrow;
- The National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) website will publish all awards value \$1.5 million and above, while budget agencies will be required to display, on their notice boards, awards below this value. Transparency was something that was lacking for many decades.

Another bugbear in the procurement system has been the absence of Bid Protest Committees, which has denied suppliers and contractors any immediate formal transparent process of redress. It is anticipated that this will be in place by 16th March. All of these improvements will serve to accelerate the pace of implementation, so that this Budget will see higher a rate of project implementation and faster growth.

Budget 2016 has allocated resources to construct, rehabilitate and maintain roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, health centres and drainage and irrigation infrastructures that were never done before in history. We are saying that these things were done, but the Government is focusing heavily on this and the Budget's numbers will support our position. This is a stimulus in itself. They are calling for stimulus and works. This is a stimulus for this country and they are not seeing this. I was just referring to one sector and that is the construction sector.

When we add the impact of the diversification of the agriculture sector, the investment in the tourism marketing initiative, expansion in the gold subsector, the billions being invested in our hinterland region - Indigenous people, the reform of Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) and GO Invest initiatives for youth employment and the expansion of the small business sector, how can

anyone doubt the realisation of the achievement of the goals of Budget 2016? I can go on, but I will leave this for the various sectorial ministers to elaborate further.

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

Ms. Ally: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given five additional minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Sharma: Let me focus my attention on accountability and transparency. Later this month, we will be receiving support from the Commonwealth Secretariat to improve our system and structure for internal audits across the Government. There will be improved strengthening of budget agencies, the Public Accounts Committee, and related stakeholders, in expanding the coverage of internal audits across Government. Strong systems of internal control will reduce mismanagement and corruption practises and help to build the robust public sector.

Forensic Audit- the audits identified many instances, in which the law governing the entity and its operation violated with impunity, the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act and the Procurement Act. These internal forensic audits, to say the least, were revealing and astonishing. The findings uncovered many instances of dishonesty, deficiency, discrepancies - some of which were never highlighted in the reports of the Auditor General. Consequently, the National Assembly and, by extension the people of Guyana never knew the truth about the financial operations, mismanagement and excesses that were taking place in these entities.

Therefore, my opinion is that there is sufficient evidence in these audits to suggest that there were deliberate premeditated plans of corruption. To support charges of conspiracy, it could be charges in relation to deceiving, fraud acts, misfeasance/malfeasance/nonfeasance in public office and political corruption. These audits will soon be posted on the Ministry of Finance's website...

Mr. Ali: On a Point of Order. The Hon. Minister is imputing that in some report that he has in his possession.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you should at least address the Standing Order under which you have interrupted the debate.

Mr. Ali: Standing Order 40 (a). The Hon. Minister is imputing that he is in possession of an audit report which suggests political corruption, dishonesty and premeditated acts to deceive in relation to public funds. We are not in possession of any such report.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, what is the Point of Order?

Mr. Ali: The Point of Order is that the Hon. Member is quoting from a document that is not publicly available. We do not know what he is quoting from. These audit reports were reported to the media as not completed and not made public as yet.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you will refrain from quoting from a document which is purportedly an unofficial document, but which is not available to other Members here.

Mr. Sharma: I am the Minister responsible and I am reporting on my portfolio. I said it is in my opinion. This is not the auditor opinion.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member if you distinguish between your opinion and a document from which you are quoting, I do not believe the Hon. Members would be disquieted about it. If you are using the document here to inform the House there is reason to object to that.

Mr. Sharma: There is no document here. It is my opinion. My job was to review and I did review.

Mr. Speaker hit gavel.

6.46 p.m.

To continue – Wages and Salaries - it was this coalition Government that raised the minimum wage to \$50,000 in August of last year, with some persons receiving a 25% increase on salaries as the result. It was this coalition that awarded a 5% increase, plus an additional \$5,000 to public servant in 2015. It was this coalition that awarded a \$50,000 one-off payment to all those public servants earning less than \$500,000. And it is this coalition Government that will engage the union in 2016 to help determine the salary increase to be awarded. These increases awarded to date to public servants have aimed to improve the disposal income of the lower levels and to increase the threshold complement so that the poor are not neglected. Our coalition Government

has kept its promise to improve salaries and salaries are improved and will be improved further in 2016.

In closing, I urge all Members of this House to support Budget 2016: *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*. Thank you. [Applause]

Dr. Ramsaran: Thank you Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Minister of Finance, on the 29th January, 2016, presented a Budget which he illegitimately laid claim to *Stimulating Growth*; it similarly lays illegitimate claim to *Restoring Confidence*; and similarly illegitimately laid claim to being the *Beckon* of the ‘good life’.

Rather, Mr. Speaker and Colleagues, the Budget stunts *Growth*, restricts *Confidence*, and to the contrary, it is the harbinger of hardships and difficulties to the working man and woman and the small businesses, signalling a reversal of their gains and advancements in personal, family and community wealth accumulation and wellbeing.

Many others of my Colleagues before me, on the Opposition benches, have demonstrated this with various examples from this said Budget and have illustrated this negative tendency or trend. Allow me, nevertheless, to refer to those I find most glaring - like the increases in the various taxes, the ban on the cheaper form of used tyres, and the importation of these cheap and more affordable reused tyres and vehicles. And of course, the closure of the Wales Estates

I have been asked by some of my Colleagues to correct the Hon. Member, Mr. Sharma, when he referred to the cost of new tyres being quite affordable. Well if someone wants to take the choice and buy new tyres, hooray! Go ahead! But, our estimation and argument is that that on a continuous basis is beyond the reach of the poor man and woman. So we are saying that we demand the continual importation of quality used tyres, which would be within the take of many persons.

Growth and Confidence? It was the Government’s benches which indicated that the investment portfolio of Go-Invest will decline from some \$89 billion in 2015, to a mere trickle of \$11 billion in 2016. I think it was the Minister of “No Business” who incorporated that in his discussion. Now, this revelation belies the claim that confidence of the business community in the present

dispensation is buoyant. That confidence indeed is shrinking! These key figures do so clearly demonstrate this. I refer to the drop from \$89 billion to \$11 billion. That is a telltale figure.

Growth and confidence in the various sectors, too, are not supported by this Budget. Adequate provisions are either lacking or do not reflect emerging needs and changes. Key pillars of the economy - rice and sugar - are shunned by the Minister in this Budget. While in the same document, the Hon. Minister posits that all of the main pillars of the economy are in trouble and more alarmingly, in trouble simultaneously - rice, sugar, Bauxite and mining, still no relief measures in the Budget, no reprieve whatsoever.

In the meantime, the social consequences are dire and tragic. The gloomy circumstances are so suffocating that the focus of the suicide epidemic has shifted to the rice growing areas of the Essequibo Coast. Not only has the number of suicides there increased, but the number of reported unsuccessful attempts and repeated attempts have also increased. This is a new glaring commonly recognise reality. The Government of Guyana, in the meantime, has officially refused any responsibility or obligation to the rice industry. What a shame!

Black Bush Polder, a few years ago, that is to say in the 1980s and up until the mid-1990s, used to be the capital of suicides in Guyana. The area was depressed: the single access road was practically impassable, except by tractor; no electricity, no recreational facilities, save and expect for the ever too many rum shops present. The economic and cultural changes were introduced by the PPPP/C from 1992 onwards. The main road, though a continuing challenge, was upgraded significantly, rice issues were addressed, and the hospital was upgraded and staffed with doctors and nurses and other health workers. The community spaces were upgraded and the Administration engaged the grassroots religious and cultural organisations. The suicide tag receded.

Unfortunately, the focus has now shifted to the economically depressed Essequibo Coast. Suicide is a complex issue. It demands the multiple actions of multiple sectors or should I say it demands multiple sectoral actions. The root cause of the *Essequibian* economic depression has not been addressed by this Government. The overarching issue of rice in crisis in Essequibo has not been addressed. There is a need for urgent intervention and this depression of the economic scene on the Essequibo Coast belies the claims by the Hon. Minister, Mr. Jordan, of stimulating growth.

There is simply no light at the end of the tunnel in Essequibo. Urgent State of intervention is needed to address the overarching rice problem.

The measures recommended are... and that is on a reflection of the suicide wave in Essequibo, we have linked it directly to the feeling of parents of being impotent; unable to provide for their children; and on the other hand, too many *Essequibian* children have been developing a feeling of helplessness and being a burden themselves to their hard pressed parents.

This Budget would batter, bruise and belittle all Guyanese with the exception of a few vested interests and the upper echelons of the coalition. Note already, the special provisions, the new approach they have to negotiating with their salary increases.

On page 57 of the Budget Speech, the Hon. Minister, Mr. Jordon, claims credit for the provision of some \$28 billion or 10.9% of the 2016 Budget to the Health Sector, a modest increase over the 2015 level of \$22.1 billion or 9.5% of the 2014 Budget for Health.

But let me say this, being able to use these moneys or lay hands on such glorious sums are welcome by this side of the House, but at the same time we need to look to see how we got there. Let us reflect a little bit and even go back to what we discussed during the last Budget debate. I had pointed out that, when we took office in 1992, the PPP/C could have afforded a health budget of less than 1% or just around 1% because at that time, as I said, and I am quoting from my last budget intervention:

“The PPP/C had inherited an economy which could only afford just less than 1% of the then People’s Nation Congress budget for the health vote”

That was way back in 1992, but now as we bequeathed the economy or the Administration, that is the APNU/AFC Administration, an economy which allows the Hon. Jordan, to allocate a whopping 10.5%. That was last year budget. The same argument stands, although we are already seeing the decline, for example, trouble in rice, sugar and Bauxite, those sums that we were able to put at their disposal still allowed the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Jordan, to put so much into health. We are happy while at the same time we reflect on certain decline in the area of health. We are happy that we are able to now discuss in this House, not a 1% for health budget, as we had inherited in 1992. Remember the then economy was ruined; there was no rice industry.

As a matter of fact the Ministry of Housing had been scrapped. Somebody was asking about the Ministry of Housing - we would like to remind you that the house lots that you were discussing were all 190,000 distributed by people like the Hon. Member, Mrs. Chandarpal and other Ministers of Health. The Ministry of Housing was reinvented under the PPP/C. That is to remind the media, the public and of course my Colleagues over that way, and at the same time to pat our Colleagues over this side of the aisle on our shoulders. We inherited a broken economy and we brought it to this stage where Mr. Jordan, correctly, the Hon., can boast that he has put so much into health. We thank him, but at the same time we would like to recognise what he said, on page 57, I think it was in his very first statement, in the first lines. He said that the APNU/AFC Administration, the health aspect of it, the health Ministry will:

“Embarks on implementing Health Vision 2020”

Last year, the Hon. Minister told us that they were already implementing it, while last year, indicating or insinuating that it was their invention. The Hon. Minister of Health, Dr. Norton, took umbrage with me staking claim for this. This document has been invoked since 2013, so last year they claimed that they were implementing it, and then this year they claim that they embarked on implementing Health Vision 2020. This is, of course, a slight of hand and it is implying that they were hoping that the Guyanese public and probably the international community would have forgotten over the past year - since we met here to discuss the previous budget, that they had presented the PPP/C's plan already. So we are not embarking on implementing this plan, this plan has been rolling for some time.

We are happy, but at the same we are sad. We are noting as the former Hon. Minister of Education, Ms. Manickchand said, when she analysed the approach of the APNU/AFC to the Ministry of Education - her sector. She said that they had plagiarised the entire package of plans from the Ministry of Education, but they were poor implementers. That is what makes me sad. We are happy that you are stealing this. I know that I am border line with Parliamentary language, Mr. Speaker, but please bear with me.

Mr. Speaker hit gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, if you know that you are on the border line you should not try to fall off, perhaps you should step over the line and go the other way.

Dr. Ramsaran: My Apologies. They have plagiarised stock and barrel, and hook, line and sinker, and bate. Of course, they have totally taken it over.

We are happy because it shows that we were doing what was correct; it vindicates us. As I come to the Specialty Hospital, just now, another very sick joke that we have been presented with by this very new Administration. We have indicated and I will take pleasure in waving our document once again – our document. We are sad by the fact that they are not developing, they are not adding to, like for example, the Specialty Hospital. It is going to be the same Specialty Hospital we would be getting after years of delay by people like the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, who is a special enemy of that project.

7.01 p.m.

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, could I ask that the Hon. Member be given an extension of five minutes?

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have an additional five minutes. You will speak for a total of 20 minutes.

Dr. Ramsaran: The derailing of our programme or the lack of initiative to add to it alarms us. Let us take, for example, the emergent threat, the viral disease - the Zika virus. We have noted a very poor response in terms of additional provisions in this budget. For example, mosquito destruction or vector destruction should be key and critical. What have we found? Check it and during the line item discussion later next week we will see it further. Only two regions, Regions 1 and 10, and not the central Ministry, are going to be equipped with minuscule amounts of moneys to purchase fogging equipment. There is none other. In one case, I think that it is \$19 million but that is bundled together with about 14 other items other than the fogging machines. That is to say, good people, especially the technical people, that the money that will finally go towards fogging machines or things to fight the Zika virus and the mosquito will be minuscule. This is unacceptable. What it means, Mr. Speaker and good Colleagues, especially the technical people, is that the Government is relying on the spray cans, the fogging machines and the other

equipment that the PPP/C had invested in in late 2014 without anything additional. [Mrs. Lawrence: What is the point?] The Hon. Whittaker had caused to be given spray cans to the 65 NDCs. That was only an initial step. The Government needed more, especially if such a vicious enemy as the Zika virus is to be fought. The Government has failed to do so. That is the point I am making. In the central Ministry, there are lots of moneys to be invested and there is nothing for vector control. That is a sick situation.

There is a good report in the *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper dated 4th February, 2016 which states that the “Government steps up fight to keep out Zika. Minister Cummings promises robust campaign.”

This virus has been around in Brazil and our pandemic environment for several months. Now, they are getting off to a step. Besides that, I am emphasising that this budget is unimaginative in reaching out to fight that battle in a more robust fashion, especially when we come to think that some of those equipment that Mr. Whittaker had caused to have been bought by the then Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, which is now the Ministry of Communities, have been continuously used. As he had said then, it was just the beginning. Unfortunately, the “Fresh Approach” says that once the PPP/C did it, it is the correct way and they do not have to add to it. That is wrong. That was just the beginning. I want to say, especially to the two doctors in the Ministry of Public Health, that you need to sit with the Minister of Finance, before this budget is passed and change the situation. It is unacceptable. It is unfortunate that I hear giggling and sniffing. This is a serious business. Babies are being born en masse with microcephaly.

Dr. Norton seems to not recognise...and he was even going on a collision course with the World Health Organization/Pan American Health Organization (WHO/ PAHO) when it was declared that there is a pandemic situation. He, unfortunately, equated the presence of one confirmed case with us not being in trouble. That was very bad from a public health perspective. I am certain that his well-schooled, intelligent and well-learned Chief Medical Officer (CMO) has been able to convince him to the contrary. I want to convince you, Hon. Jordon, that you need to spend some of the money, some of that windfall – I am told that it is as much as \$40 billion from the drop in oil prices – not only on salary increases for yourselves...That is good. Even if it is spent

on equipment for the Zika virus, I am willing to forgive you. Spend some of the billions on doing the following.

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

Dr. Ramsaran: You need to, for example, get specially treated mosquito nets to every Guyanese woman who is pregnant. The indication that they are “continuing” this distribution exercise is somewhat disingenuous because there is no indication that they ever started. My impression is that when we started to demand that, they suddenly found the resources to do it. Tell us how many, when it was started and so on. We need to ensure that every pregnant woman gets one of those nets, and, of course, repellent free of cost. The men have to fight for that too. The scope then needs to be widened to include every childbearing woman in Guyana. The moneys are there. What is being done with it? That is why I said that this budget is unimaginative. That is why I said that while we are happy that you have plagiarised - taken whole our plans – we are displeased on behalf of the Guyanese public, especially, in this case, the pregnant women, on how the Government is rolling out the practical aspects of it.

Those are some of the issues I would like to bring to your attention and, at the same time, we would like to look at other issues.

The speciality hospital project is suddenly back on the table. What I noticed is that they are finding all excuses why it should be back on the front burner. We welcome this but, at the same time, we would like to point out that it is indicative of vindication of our stance, it is indicative of the confusion in the camp of the APNU/AFC coalition and the public needs to judge them on this.

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

Dr. Ramsarran: Thank you. [*Applause*]

Minister within the Ministry of Public Health [Dr. Cummings]: Today, I stand before you as a proud Guyanese public servant, honoured to be a part of this coalition Government, which recently presented a national budget after eight months in power, indicating that this Government will continue to deliver contagious progress, and that the budget is primarily designed for the people of Guyana.

Yes, under the astute leadership of President Granger and under the guiding capable hands of the Finance Minister, this economy is cooking with gas; this economy is firm on two strong legs and, by extension, this economy is heading in the right direction.

At this significant moment, I take this opportunity to both encourage and challenge us to keep converting better into best as together we dance with economic vibrancy.

Indisputably, one can emphatically state that *Budget 2016* is the Guyanese people's budget. Once again, our Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, has crafted a budget that will bring about tangible relief to and opportunities for the working class people of Guyana. The rank and file, the masses, the ordinary man and woman will benefit in great measure from *Budget 2016*.

It is clearly evident that this APNU/AFC Government is determined to invest significantly in human development as a strategic approach to providing a good life for all Guyanese. Investing in the education and health of a nation is to, essentially, empower, and build capacity of its people, ensuring that they are healthy so that they can contribute meaningfully towards nation building.

The \$28 billion, an equivalent of 10.9% of the national budget, which has been allocated to the health sector, demonstrates the unremitting commitment of this APNU/AFC Government towards ensuring that best quality healthcare services are provided across the length and breadth of Guyana. A number of areas within the sector will be significantly improved with greater emphasis being placed on regularising the procurement procedures, leading to a more efficient and transparent model, as well as working assiduously with other stakeholders to address suicide prevention. This approach is grounded in compassionate economic practices as the Ministry of Public Health does not chase symptoms, we solve problems.

Health promotion will also form a big part of what we do this year at the Ministry of Public Health. Moreover, it is also imperative that we significantly reduce the maternal mortality rate. The Ministry of Public Health is set to promote healthy lifestyles through persuasive integrated communication campaigns, utilising all forms of media to get across key messages of healthy living and its benefits to all the people of Guyana.

I can guarantee that with this significant injection of financial resources from *Budget 2016*, the public health sector in Guyana is poised to make a greater impact on the health and wellbeing of the people of this beautiful country, thus realising the theme of *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*.

It is commendable, indeed, that senior Minister in the Ministry of Public Health and yours truly have set an admirable teamwork model to lift and uplift the achievements of this coalition Government in the area of public health. Our approach is simple but profoundly impacting. We plan to accomplish the following: streamline public health; expand regional development; increase maternal and child healthcare; downsize teenage pregnancy; revitalise good nutrition; reduce the prevalence of non-communicable disease and present the Tobacco Bill to the Parliament; fix the procurement challenge; minimise the spread of the Zika virus in Guyana; and overcome suicide amongst us.

Streamlining the public health sector: a work-in-progress: the public health sector is in the process of being reformed through a number of strategic interventions that have been crafted to realise national goals. In an effort to restore confidence among stakeholders within the public health sector, deliberate efforts are being taken by the Ministry of Public Health in all aspects of public healthcare to improve its quality as well as its delivery. We at the Ministry of Public Health will be making a number of systematic changes to primary care practices and public health systems to improve the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of the patient care that we provide. It is the moral responsibility of a caring Government to ensure that all the people are provided with proper healthcare. Thus, the Ministry of Public Health has embarked on such a course.

Regional development: the Ministry of Public Health is working assiduously at standardising the quality of healthcare services provided at all its health care facilities throughout Guyana. At the Ministry of Public Health, we are determined to provide the best quality universal healthcare and to narrow the gaps of inequality in Guyana.

7.16 p.m.

This year's budget will greatly assist in the realisation of this important goal. Every health post, health centre, district and regional hospital will be adequately staffed with competent human

resources, and be sufficiently stocked with the required pharmaceuticals and medical supplies. Regardless of the nature, any obstacle to achieving the aforementioned, I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, will be removed with alacrity.

In a few weeks, the senior management team will be meeting with all the Regional Executive Officers (REOs) and Regional Health Officers (RHOs) to ensure that we align our efforts and work together in a synchronised manner to achieve the goal of delivering the best quality healthcare possible to Guyanese.

We are currently building capacity in all the regions so that it will not be necessary for patients to have to travel to Georgetown for medical care, and with the new standard treatment guidelines, the quality of healthcare services provided in each of the regions will be enhanced and unquestionable.

Budget 2016 will also be integral in making the standardisation process a reality. In Region 1, there is a brand new state-of-the-art hospital being constructed at Port Kaituma. This hospital will be fully equipped with the latest and best medical equipment and will serve as a model for quality regional healthcare. The new Port Kaituma Hospital will house male and female wards, a fully functioning world-class operating theatre, minor operating room, maternal and child healthcare facilities, dentistry, laboratory, infectious diseases centre, pharmacy, radiology department, and modern storage facilities. The cost of the new Port Kaituma Hospital is pegged at GUY\$700 million. The contractor is R. Bassoo and Sons and the supervisory consultancy firm is Kalitech Inc. The commissioning of this new facility is scheduled for December, 2016.

Maternal and Child Healthcare: we at the Ministry of Public Health are cognisant that there is a definite link between maternal health and new born survival. While great strides have been made in reducing global child mortality, here in Guyana, we still have some preventable challenges with which to deal. Each year, new born and sometimes pregnant mothers needlessly die as a result of a variety of reasons. We are aware of the main causes of maternal mortality and we have in place a menu of measures to treat with these causes. While the Government has devoted additional resources in the tune of GUY\$89 million towards the expansion and rehabilitation of our only tertiary and referral health institution, efforts will be made to encourage, maintain and equip the maternal and child health facilities countrywide. The Ministry of Public Health has

embarked on training and retraining of maternal staff, inclusive of traditional birth attendants, which we normally call nannies. Doctors are also part of a series of training exercises geared to deal effectively with complications due to prematurity, complications during delivery, and complications stemming from infection.

We have engaged relevant staff throughout the regions in training in Emergency Obstetric Care - Advancement in Labour and Risk Management (ALARM). More than 100 healthcare personnel, including doctors and nurses from all 10 regions, participated in this training in 2015. The Ministry of Public Health will ensure that this training is continuous in a determined effort to better equip medical personnel to deal with obstetric emergencies and prevent maternal mortality. The Ministry of Public Health will deal with professional negligence condignly when and wherever it occurs.

Eliminating Mother to Child Transmission of HIV/AIDS: the Ministry of Public Health is consolidating its efforts to accelerate its programme to prevent the needless transmission of HIV to infants. Globally, we recognise the success in prevention programmes, with the global focus moving from prevention to the elimination of the transmission of HIV/AIDS. The Ministry of Public Health will provide funds for test kits for the general population, and to test all mothers and children exposed to HIV. In addition to the donor agencies providing funds for the treatment of HIV/AIDS, the Ministry of Public Health will be responsible for the procurement of 48.9% of the drugs needed to treat HIV and other opportunistic infections.

The Ministry of Public Health will increase its activities that focus on behavioural change of persons living with HIV/AIDS through training and retraining of religious leaders, teachers, social workers and other key influential members of society so that they can become advocates of HIV prevention.

We at the Ministry of Public Health will be intensifying family planning education programmes which are intended to have the much desired involvement of male partners. The programmes also ensure that women have the tools and information they need to make informed decisions for respecting their own bodies. This information will be shared primarily to prevent unwanted pregnancies among women living with HIV/AIDS.

Preventing HIV transmission from women living with HIV/AIDS to their infants using Antiretroviral (ARV) prophylaxis is also a measure that will be intensified. Pregnant women living with HIV/AIDS will also be placed on ARV prophylaxis or Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART) depending on their individual level of immunity.

Reducing teenage pregnancy: at the Ministry of Public Health, we will continue to address, robustly, the issue of teenage pregnancy. Pregnant teens would continue to benefit from our comprehensive teen-focused prenatal and antenatal care programmes. The Ministry will continue with its antenatal clinics for teenage mothers with emphasis on teen-focused programmes that address issues such as increasing the use of contraception to prevent subsequent pregnancies. The programmes will also provide nutritional counselling, teach parenting skills, encourage continued education, and identify available resources.

Non Communicable Diseases: according to a report from the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), non-communicable diseases (NCDs), particularly diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular diseases and chronic respiratory diseases, are responsible for 78% of deaths, and 76% of premature death in people 30 – 69 years of age.

The Ministry of Public Health will be engaging in a number of cost-effective, high-impact interventions recommended by WHO, which will include reducing and eventually banning all forms of tobacco advertising, replacing trans fats with polyunsaturated fats, restricting or banning alcohol advertising, promoting breastfeeding, implementing public awareness programmes on diet and physical activity, and preventing cervical cancer through screening. Through our strategic health promotion activities, the Ministry of Public Health will be engaging in population and individual-based approaches to increase access to education, to promote health literacy in children, adolescents and parents, and to empower women in tangible ways to reduce and eventually avoid the burdens of NCDs.

Very soon, the Ministry of Public Health will be tabling its tobacco legislation that will be in line with the strongest tobacco control policies around the world. This ground-breaking law will secure some of the toughest restrictions on the distribution, sale and use of tobacco products currently in place, and position Guyana as one of the leaders in tobacco control in the region.

Nutrition: our Manifesto states that a hungry child cannot learn as well at school. In light of that observation, the Ministry of Public Health will be working along with the Ministry of Education in a collaborative effort to provide nutritious meals to school children, particularly those in the hinterland Regions and other relevant communities. To this end, we have already collaborated with the Ministry of Education, as I mentioned before, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) to ensure that nutritious meals will be placed in the possession of the school children, including those from the rural and urban population.

Healthy eating can stabilise children's energy, sharpen their minds and enhance their moods. By encouraging healthy eating habits now, a huge impact on our children's lifelong relationship with food will be made, giving them the best opportunity to grow into healthy, confident adults. The Food and Nutrition Policy Department will work with the FAO to revise the food-based dietary guidelines and work with hospitals to ensure that there is the accreditation to baby friendly status. Presently, there are baby friendly hospitals in Lethem, Mahdia, Mahaicony, West Demerara Hospital, Wismar Hospital, and Davis Memorial, while we hope that the Georgetown Public Hospital, Skeldon Hospital, New Amsterdam Hospital, Charity Hospital, Suddie Hospital, and McKenzie Hospital will achieve the status by the end of 2016.

The Food Policy and Nutrition Division will also formalise the anaemia policy and protocol with the aim to manage anaemia in Guyana as recommended from the micronutrient study. Though in its draft stage, this department of the Ministry of Public Health will continue to work on a new National Nutrition Strategy. Efforts will be made to prevent iodine deficiency with the use of iodized salt, so we would not have many of our mothers developing the lump in the neck called goitre or we would not have mental retardation in children.

The Food Policy and Nutrition Division will develop a legal framework on the code of the marketing of breast milk substitutes. This department will commence consultations to extend the maternal leave from three months to six months, thus ensuring that we are serious in promoting exclusive breastfeeding for six months. We will also want to have collaboration and consultations to include a paternal leave for at least two to three weeks to assist in addressing the issue of postpartum depression in women. The Food Policy and Nutrition Division will also work with the University of Guyana (UG) to have a Diploma or Degree in Nutrition.

Fixing the procurement function at the Ministry of Public Health: procurement remains the bane of our Ministry. This system is currently being comprehensively reformed as we explore more transparent procedures, moving away from sole sourcing to open competitive bidding. The Ministry of Public Health has inherited an albatross in the form of the New GPC being the only supplier of drugs to the health sector. The Ministry of Public Health has plans to rid itself of this frightening monopolistic arrangement. That the previous Government would sell 90% of its shares in an entity that it owned and controlled, only to turn back and buy drugs from the same entity, which had become a private enterprise, is imprudent as much as it is appalling. Now, the health sector is burdened with buying drugs from a single source because the procedure of prequalification was decidedly skewed in favour of this particular private company. Open competitive bidding is on the horizon. Sole sourcing of drugs as we know it will end very soon! This APNU/AFC Government will ensure that it does not waste the hard earned taxpayers' dollars on enriching the pockets of the undeserving.

7.31 p.m.

Addressing the presence of Zika virus in Guyana: on January 12, 2016, the Ministry of Public Health was informed of the detection of Zika virus in a sample of blood that was sent to Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) Laboratory in Trinidad and Tobago. Even though this detection was in a single case, the Ministry of Public Health was galvanised into action. As a consequence, the Ministry of Public Health was immediately put into alert mode to ensure that this topical public health concern is kept at a minimum, and not contribute to any adverse economic and social burden.

The Government of Guyana's response to this potential Zika virus threat through the Ministry of Public Health will include the following:

In the immediate, we will step up the Ministry of Public Health's education campaign with the use of all forms of traditional and new media technologies, which include the production of audio visual materials for radio and television. The production will take the form of jingles, advertisements, infomercials, and public awareness messages. Social media will also be utilised, particularly, Facebook and WhatsApp, to get short compelling messages to large numbers of people. Text message blasts will also be employed. In addition, flyers, posters and brochures will

be created and distributed across Guyana. *Pro bono* television and radio interview programmes will be used and feature articles will be placed in the daily and weekend newspapers. In areas where access to mainstream media is minimal to non-existent, loudhailers will be used to get messages to the people of those communities such as in the hinterland

Continued schedule fogging in all ten Administrative Regions of Guyana: we are going to continue with the distribution of treated nets to members of the public across Guyana, with particular focus on the pregnant woman to help in protecting them against the mosquito bite.

We have implemented, within the last two weeks, the spraying of different infrastructure with insecticides to assist in controlling the vector. If the Opposition would like the People's Progressive Party's (PPP) Office in Robb Street to be sprayed, please feel free to ask us.

Introduction of the In2Care mosquito trap as a pilot project at selected health facilities and Ministries across Georgetown will be done during the next few weeks.

Sensitisation of relevant officers at the ports of health: there are ports at Brazil; we have our ports at Ogle, Timehri, and Suriname. In addition, we will strengthen the surveillance system at the said ports of entry to facilitate more public health promotion. That is what we are going to do in the immediate.

In the near term, we will strengthen the health promotion and communication unit at the Ministry of Public Health. Of course, when I went there, there was none. We have to now create one.

We will engage and work with stakeholders like the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), ministries such as the Ministries of Public Telecommunication, Citizenship, Foreign Affairs, and Natural Resources.

We are going to collaborate with representatives from the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and Brazil.

In the long term, we are going to build capacity of health staff at the National Public Health Reference Laboratory (NPHRL), including laboratory technicians, to test and detect the Zika virus by using the Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) testing which is deemed the only reliable

test for the virus. We hope that very soon we would be able to do the test, rather than sending it to CARPHA in Trinidad and Tobago.

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

Ms. Ally: Mr. Speaker, may I move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes extension to her allotted time?

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Suicide: with physically large, developmentally, Guyana, we are relatively a small country with a very small population. Therefore, to consider the beautiful country having the highest suicide rate in the world is frightening as much as it is worrying. Our people, in relation to our population, are taking their lives at an alarming rate. This situation needs to be arrested immediately.

Recent studies have shown the most vulnerable areas and groups as well as the most preferred methods utilised by persons to commit suicide. The Government has decided that, in order to combat this scourge of suicide, a national effort is required and has, therefore, engaged a number of Ministries. It must be multi-sectoral. We cannot do it. It is everybody's business. The following are some of the programmes and initiatives to be undertaken by the Ministry of Public Health in response to suicidal behaviour:

At the health centres, we are going to develop a protocol to provide guidance to our primary healthcare workers. We are going to train personnel, capacity building and health centres for health care workers and first responders. We are going to provide health centres with social workers and councillors who will visit at least once a week. We are going to improve our health literacy and public awareness campaign by using flyers and brochures.

We are going to develop a national trainer of trainers' programmes, which can then be expanded into the regions. Of course, we already know from statistics that the hub of activities have been in Regions 6 and 2 but, nevertheless, we are going to expand to other areas. We are going to develop an approach where trained mental health workers go into regions.

These initiatives can all be established using existing framework within the public healthcare system so that we can lower for capital cost.

We are going to also identify and train gatekeepers, be it the policemen or firemen, community leaders and religious organisations.

We are going to create social safety net programmes for vulnerable mental health patients. We are going to identify patient support needed.

We are going to create a crisis wellness centre.

We are going to create “youth friendly spaces” and encourage persons to attend the youth friendly forums.

We want to revise the curriculum for doctors and nurses so that they can appreciate persons with mental health illnesses.

We want to work with the Peace Corp and PAHO and the University of Guyana for a curriculum development consultant to revise our current curriculum.

Of course, we are going to create group therapy sessions for survivors of suicide.

We have a societal responsibility to protect our children and young people, particularly those at risk of experiencing mental health distress. Raising awareness and prevention through education is a vital part that we at the Ministry of Public Health will become involved in. The area of focus listed needs the commitment of every person and institution represented here today. We need to create a tidal wave of support and policies that will effectively deal with the issues identified.

At the Ministry of Public Health, we believe that suicide is preventable and that suicide prevention works. In order to accomplish our mission and goals, we will be using the public health model mentioned earlier, along with the media campaigns and education to raise awareness of suicide. We will be utilising a strong educational approach to dispel the myths about suicide, and let others know about the realities surrounding the national public health crisis.

It is important and imperative that, individually and collectively, we recognise that we are in a crisis situation in our country. Let us work assiduously to reduce and eventually eliminate, as far as we possibly can, suicide in Guyana.

As I conclude, permit me to say that as a result of the financial input from *Budget 2016*, the Ministry of Public Health is positioned on the brink of significant healthcare reform. At the Ministry of Public Health, we are committed to realising the goal articulated in this year's theme *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*. We do recognise that we have inherited many negative components from the past Administration, many of which have brought the health sector into disrepute. However, we only would look back with a view to correcting these ills. The key issues have been identified and prioritised. Moreover, strategic programmes have been formulated, relationships with relevant stakeholders have been established, and implementation processes will be rolled out using the money allocated in the 2016 budget.

In summary, the budget demonstrates in clear and concrete terms that we promise and deliver; what we say, we pay; and everything we do, is done to benefit all the citizens of Guyana. The Ministry of Public Health commits to ensuring that every Guyanese, despite their location, class, religion or ethnicity, will have the access to quality healthcare that is characterised with efficiency and effectiveness. This is more than a promise. It is a commitment.

As I sit myself down, when I was much younger, I use to play and sing songs fondly with my friends at the Bishops' High School where I attended. The game was "there is a brown girl in the ring." We all would shout "show me your motion" before "we tra la la". Today, I am happy to report that the APNU/AFC Government was placed in the ring by the people of Guyana. The good people have asked us to show them our motion. We are doing just that with *Budget 2016*. This budget is economically sound and methodically designed to benefit all the Guyanese people, including those on the other side.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: This is a convenient time, Hon. Members, for us to have a break for half of an hour. I ask that you return at 8.05 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 7.35 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 8.05 p.m.

Dr. Westford: Mr. Speaker, before I start my presentation, I would like to make one comment on the speech that was just made by the Hon. Dr. Karen Cummings. Towards the end of her speech, I sat here with bated breath waiting to see that motion she was speaking about, but none was forthcoming. I hope that all of the other activities she mentioned to us in the plans for the 2016 budget for health, we will not also have to sit with bated breath because I will be expecting to see a lot more activities and I will still await that motion, Colleague.

I rise to make my presentation to the 2016 budget debate. Let me Sir, congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance for an early budget presentation, but most importantly, I would like to congratulate the hard working public servants whom I know worked, tirelessly, to make possible, this early budget.

The public servants of this country are hardworking and have demonstrated, over the years, their dedication to the growth and development of this country. There is no denying that over the last ten years, there was renewed hope among our public servants, as a result of the progressive, social policies of the PPP/C Administration. Today, our public servants are suffering from anxiety syndrome. They are anxious because they are unsure whether they will join the scores of their colleagues who were unceremoniously dismissed from their jobs.

8.17 p.m.

This fear is justified, because it is common knowledge that public officers, at all levels, were sent packing simply because of their known or perceived association with the PPP/C. This practice is having adverse effects on our public institutions performances because most of the replacement employees are either unqualified for the specific jobs or inexperienced. It would be commendable if the Hon. Minister with responsibility for the public service could pay some urgent attention to this ill that is plaguing the public sector.

The public servants, who are contracted workers, are anxious. They are unsure about their fate. Currently, all contracted workers in Government agencies, who were employed under the PPP/C regime, are being issued with application forms to enter the pensionable establishment. Apart

from being told that their contracts will not be renewed and that they will be placed on the pensionable establishment, no other vital information is being divulged to them. This unilateral decision by the Government to discontinue contract employment is undemocratic and takes away the fundamental right of the workers to choose. There is something called the “Public Service Rules” which we inherited from our colonial era and which still forms part of our jurisprudence. Replicas of these rules are still operational in the United Kingdom and other former colonised countries today. The Public Service Rules can be deemed the as standard operational procedure manual of the Public Service. These rules dictate how employment issues such as recruitment, appointments, promotion, transfers, training, discipline, retirement and severance should be dealt with.

I mention these rules in an attempt to enlighten this House on their existence and, in particular, I would like to draw Members' attention to section A, which deals with the issues of recruitment. Section A, paragraph A08 captioned, “Employment on Contract”, states as follows:

“(1) Public servants in professional and certain other categories, may opt for contract employment.”

I repeat.

“(1) Public servants in professional and certain other categories, may opt for contract employment.”

As you can see, Sir, the employment of contracted workers by the PPP/C administration was not a plan concocted with sinister motives as it was pedalled by some of my honourable colleagues on the other side of this House. It was a long established policy which ensured that the workers' democratic right of choice was not denied.

For years this category of workers has been derogatorily called “PPP hacks” by Members of the current administration. I wonder what the new cadre of contracted workers employed by this Government should be called. Again, I would like to urge the Minister responsible to review this undemocratic practice with the intent of ensuring that section A, paragraph A08, is properly enforced. It will indeed create hardship on the affected workers if this is not done.

Another factor which causes grave anxiety among workers, especially, again, the contracted workers, is the fact that a large percentage of them are over the age of 45. According to the Pensions Act of Guyana, the age of retirement is 55 years. To be eligible for a pension a person must have completed ten years of unbroken pensionable service. You see, Sir, these persons will not be eligible for a pension when they attain the age of retirement, under the current labour law, should they be placed on the pensionable establishment. This could not be in keeping with the “good life” to which the Hon. Minister of Finance referred.

The Minister of Labour omitted to mention any measure or measures to amend the age of retirement as he outlined his list of measures to be undertaken by the Ministry for which he holds responsibility. I would like to recommend that the Pensions Act be considered for revision, in particular the section which prescribes the age of retirement and associated benefits. I hope that the Minister with responsibility for the Public Service will treat this matter with some alacrity.

In any country citizens pay keen attention to the budget on the aspects of salary increases and taxation. It was therefore shocking to the workers when the Hon. Minister of Finance announced that public servants will have to await the conclusions of discussions with the relevant unions before salary increases can be decided. The Hon. Minister said he understood their disappointment at hearing this announcement. I dare say that this announcement surpassed disappointment. It amounted to a state of profound shock and disbelief, since it was in breach of the 20% across the board salary increase for public servants which was mooted and used as a mantra during the campaign of the alliance.

I am overly joyful that the collective bargaining process is being given an opportunity to work, as was mentioned by the Hon. Minister of Finance, but I want to echo the sentiments expressed by the Hon. Member Gillian Burton Persaud and ask: Why these collective bargaining discussions could not be completed before the budget presentation, especially since the Hon. Minister of Labour announced during his speech that the relationship between the Government and the unions are amicable? Once again, we see the issue of a dangling “good life” carrot being removed.

We have heard a lot of comments from both sides of this House since this debate commenced in relation to the importation of cars above eight years old, and I know that many more comments

will be forthcoming. The reality of this policy decision is that it will create another layer of hardship for the working class since cars eight years and below will obviously be more costly than cars above eight years. This measure was announced under the budget heading “Measures in support of our programme of ‘greening’ the economy and protecting the environment.” Is the Hon. Minister of Finance contending that cars over eight years old are detrimental to our environment? As far as I am aware, Guyana is still a net zero emitter of carbon into the environment. Maybe, the Hon. Minister of Finance is thinking of our future protection.

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I seek your permission to move for an extension from the two minutes to plus the five minutes which she is entitled to.

Question put, and agreed to.

Dr. Westford: If that was the thinking behind this measure, we may soon see regulations banning citizens from driving vehicles over a certain age. This is a frightening thought.

Also, the ban on the importation of used tyres had several comments during this debate. Again, it is our working class who will be adversely affected. I am aware that improper tyres on a vehicle can create accidents which could cause victims to suffer disability or even loss of life. It is obvious that there was not any holistic vision when this policy was being formulated. It is a fact that the banning of used tyres will not stop accidents or pollution of our environment. Even the new tyres that are being imported today will one day become old or used and will pose the same safety and environmental problems being envisioned by the Hon. Minister. What is urgently needed is the enforcement of standards governing the importation of used tyres, and I dare say tyres in general, because even persons, who purchased new tyres, can attest to some being sold on the market which are of inferior quality. I wish to urge the Government to design adequate mechanisms for the disposal of old tyres. This is the type of progressive thinking that is needed, not banning. We have to be cautious, less we return to the past when banning was in vogue.

Permit me to say a few words on the increased licensing fees for shotguns. Shotguns are used not as recreational tools but as a tool of livelihood specifically in Region 7 and, to a larger extent, the hinterland communities in Guyana. Without a shotgun, residents, whose existence depends on

farming, would lose everything to wild animals. These residents to whom I refer mostly engage in farming to provide food for their families; they do not sell their produce, which means they cannot pass on the increased licence fees to any customer. To protect the livelihood of these vulnerable citizens of our country, the Minister of Finance must exempt them from paying these exorbitant prices. The Hon. Minister has the discretionary power to grant such exemptions.

All of the safety net provisions to protect vulnerable groups, which were implemented by the PPP/C administration, were deemed discriminatory by the current administration.

8.32 p.m.

Even in the much admired United States of America there are discriminatory policies in favour of disadvantaged groups. It calls it by a nice name - Affirmative Action. For whatever its worth, the safety nets, which were implemented by the PPP/C administration, benefited the vulnerable groups and should not be removed. Please do not throw away the baby with the bath water. Our people need to be given more, not have the little they were given taken away from them.

In the penultimate paragraph of his budget speech, the Hon. Minister of Finance spoke about leaving behind acrimony, partisanship and division. These are indeed comforting words but how can they be taken seriously when simultaneously, we hear phrases such as payback time, knock got knock back and the shoe is now on the other foot. Already we have a number of short-sighted politicians in our political landscape. If we do not get rid of our eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth mentality, definitely in the very near future Guyana will be replete with a sleuth of blind toothless politicians as a result of us digging out each other eyes and pulling out each other's teeth.

It is time for us to match our unifying words with actions.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Adams: As I rise to add my contribution to the Budget 2016 debate, I first must congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance Mr. Winston Jordan for being able to present another budget in less than one year.

Budget 2016 once again seeks to bring relief to the citizenry of this country.

Budget 2016, under the theme *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good life Beckons*, seeks to build on the many promises outlined in the manifesto of the APNU/AFC for the 2015 General and Regional Elections.

Our country is a far away from where our Government envisages it to be. We are also far away from when we entered office in May of 2015, but just over nine months we have stimulated growth and we have restored confidence. We are close to providing that “good life” and as Budget 2016 states “The Good Life Beckons.” This budget, pegged to the tune of 230 billion dollars, will certainly bring us closer to achieving our goal to provide “a good life for all Guyanese.”

As the parliamentary representative for Region 3, it will be remiss of me if I fail to mention that the residents of Region 3 have seen growth in every sector since the APNU/AFC Government has acceded to office in May 2015. I am confident that the allocations stipulated for Region 3 in Budget 2016 will see many new projects being completed in several parts of our region.

Infrastructure: The APNU/AFC Government has completed in excess of 208 miles of drainage works in the Region 3. Drains, which were not dug in years, were dug. Areas such as Pouderoyen, Malgre Tout, Chattos Land, Meten-Meer-Zorg, among others, had their main drainage trenches excavated and the residents are now happy since their communities are not prone to flooding. As we speak, an excavator is on Hog Island cleaning drains that were not excavated in more than 15 years. Much more infrastructure development will continue in 2016. Roads were constructed in several parts of the region, for example Leguan, Wakenaam, Stewartville, Vergenoegen, Den Amstel and Blakenburg, among others. **[Mr. Damon: Wales.]** I am coming to sugar, boy.

Health: The future of a health sector in Region 3 looks bright. In the year of 2016 will see the complete rehabilitation of the West Demerara Regional Hospital. The resident will once again be able to visit the hospital and access most if not all of the services being offered at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. This institution will return to its former glory when it first opened its doors decades ago. The West Demerara Regional Hospital now boasts a neonatal unit.

The Leonora Cottage Hospital will see some \$99 million being spent on refurbishing the institution. After many years of out of commission the maternity ward of this institution will be reopened. It will consist of two delivery beds, ten pre-natal beds, 15 post-natal beds and a two-room theatre. The re-activation of this facility at Leonora will certainly reduce the number of mothers travelling from Leguan and Wakenaam and other parts of West Demerara to Georgetown. This will certainly restore confidence in our health sector. “The Good Life Beckons”. I wish to inform this House that this construction is in progress.

The Leguan Hospital now boasts a spanking new physiotherapy department, first of its kind at that facility.

Region 3 has experienced fogging to keep out the mosquitoes. It was never before. We are going to be Zika free.

The Government of the APNU/AFC promised “a good life for all Guyanese” and we know that the health of a nation is the wealth of a nation.

Education and Education delivery: Our Government believes that with an educated population it will aid in the reduction in poverty. It is with this in mind that our Government has constructed a new primary school at eastern Leguan. The Department of Education has just acquired their own boat which will aid in monitoring and supervising our riverine schools and also aid with the distribution of materials and supplies in the riverine areas.

The thirty-five students from the West Demerara, Leonora and Stewartville Secondary Schools received bicycles from the First Lady of Guyana and the Ministry of Social Cohesion. I am certain that the parents of those 35 children are happy since they will spend less to send their children to school.

Though some say differently, our senior citizens are in high praise for our Government's decision to increase their pension by \$1,200. This can be equated to a thirty-eight per cent increase in less than one year.

I wish to place on record my commendation for the Divisional Commander of D Division of the Guyana Police Force, Mr. Mansel, and the members of the business community of Region 3 who came to the aid of our senior citizens and constructed a shed at Meten-Meer-Zorg and

another at Fellowship Post Office. Our seniors no longer have to endure the elements of the weather when they are going to receive their pensions.

Agriculture: Agriculture is still the backbone of our economy and the APNU/AFC Government has not and will never allow this sector to die. It must be noted, however, that some measures must be taken to stabilise this sector.

Rice continues to be cultivated on a large scale in Region 3. Notwithstanding the effects of *El Niño*, there should be no need for much alarm for there is a special committee set up in our region and headed by our Regional Executive Officer and which comprises key stakeholders in this sector that manages water. Through the efforts of this committee, which meets on a regular basis, the farmers of Region 3 will save 95% of this current crop.

Sugar is not sweet as it was in days gone by. Sugar has lost its sweetness. It is amazing to listen how the head of Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU), my fellow colleague, Member of Parliament, the Hon. Member Komal Chand will speak as if all was well with sugar until after May, 2011. We will remember the numerous occasions the then Minister of Finance came to this honourable House to seek approval for billions of dollars for GuySuCo. This alone told us that all was not well in the sugar industry and that sugar was no longer sweet as it used to be.

Our Government is aware of the happenings at Wales Estate and we will put things in place to bring some relief to those sugar workers at Wales Estate. It is a known fact that Wales was underperforming and the leader of GAWU knew this very well even those in management knew that it was underperforming. It planted less cane and buy more from the private farmers. We cannot continue to do business in this manner and the necessary steps must be taken to correct it. If these words are not unparliamentarily, I wish to quote them: “Wales is being closed for economic reasons”.

As “the good life beckons,” the residents of Region 3 eagerly wait for water from Hubu to Naamryck and for the canals. We eagerly await the new wells at Uitvlugt, Vergenoegen and Leguan; we await the beginning of the new housing scheme at Stewartville; we await the electrification programme at Zeelugt, north housing scheme.

The menu of measures stated in Budget 2016 will go a far way in making the citizens of this beautiful land of ours have a better life. The residents of Region 3 and, in particular, our youths, are in high praise for the 30 million dollars allocated for construction of the Den Amstel youth camp. A synthetic track was built at Leonora but when the athletes come from other parts of our country they have nowhere to stay but we now can house them at the Den Amstel Youth Camp.

In this year of renaissance, the year of our Golden Jubilee of Independence we must redouble our efforts to make a greater and better Guyana.

As I close my contribution to this Budget 2016 debate, I reiterate that call of the Hon. Minister of Finance:

“Let us embark on this journey together - stimulating growth and restoring confidence to build this great land of ours. The Good Life Beckons.”

8.47 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you and I now commend Budget 2016 for passage. [*Applause*]

Mrs. Chandarpal: Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, I rise to make my presentation on the Budget 2016 presented by the Minister of Finance, the Hon. Member Winston Jordan. Let me from the onset extend my congratulations to the Minister for presenting two budgets within six months. The first being titled, *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*, and the second being titled, *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*. The common theme running through both is the realisation, an aspiration, of a “good life”. “A good life” has been the dream of our fore parents, and yet, it is still elusive for many after spending their whole lives trying to make that dream of a good life, a reality.

The Minister, in his introductory statement, referred to the 50 years since Guyana attained its independence. I wish to quote from page 1 when he said:

“The path to peace and national reconciliation has been long and arduous, but we have weathered the storm to progress to where we are currently...”

He referred to some of the achievement and concluded, “We must strive manifestly, therefore, to keep it in tact.”

I believe all patriotic Guyanese share that lofty ideal of wanting to have a unified, prosperous and peaceful country. In this we must all take a united stand. These were the ideals of our young and vibrant leaders who wanted to replace colonial rule and domination with a young independent state. They were full of motivation. Even though some may have not shared similar commitments to country and cause, the reality is that they challenge the *status quo* which saw the emergence of the first political party in 1950 and universal adult suffrage, and the winning of 18 out of 24 seats in the Legislative Council.

As we observe, our 50th Anniversary of Independence, I wish to recognise the contributions of Dr. Cheddi Jagan, when in his capacity as Prime Minister of Guyana, spoke at the opening of the Independence Conference in 1962 in London. Mr. Speaker, I crave your indulgence in allowing me to quote from this important document, which I believe form an important part of our history. Once again,

“Once again, we need to consider what course the political development of British Guiana shall take. This conference is the culmination of a long series of events. A quick glance of this series may perhaps be of use now to set our problem in perspective. In June 1958, the Legislative Council of British Guiana passed a resolution requesting that British Guiana should become an independent state within the Commonwealth. A Constitution Committee made up of all the elected and nominated members of the Legislative Council examined this question and set out the views of all sections of opinion at great length. The request for independence followed on a majority decision by that committee. The committee went further and by majority votes, suggested that the British Guiana Constitution should provide a form of Government patterned after the British parliamentary system. Following on this request, the Constitutional Conference of March 1960 was held.

At this conference, I pressed strongly for immediate independence in the Commonwealth. We did not succeed in this, yet, from our point of view, the conference was not lost for it was stated that the principle of independence for British Guiana was accepted. Since this last conference, the political map of the world has changed very significantly. The pace of advance from dependence to independence status has been rapid. Almost the whole of British colonial Africa has been free and sovereign. In our own area, our neighbours

Trinidad and Jamaica have become independent sovereign states. In Guiana, independence was a major issue at the August, 1961 Elections. The opposition parties in appealing to the electorate made it clear that whichever party won the election would be leading the country to independence. One of these parties had actually suggested 31st May, 1962, as independence date.

It was in this spirit that in November, 1961, shortly after the formation of my Government, under the 1960 Constitution, a resolution was introduced and passed in both Houses requesting Her Majesty Government grant us independence in 1962. Our ride to Independence has already been conceded by Her Majesty Government. Now that this conference has been called the question, therefore, before us, is the transfer of residual power from Her Majesty Government to the Government of British Guiana and the fixing of a date for our Independence. I submit, Sir, between various political factions at home, should not properly form part of the deliberations of this conference, rather my Government conceives this to be a domestic matter, to be hammered out at home”.

Thank you Mr. Speaker for allowing me for such an extensive quote.

Interestingly enough, history is repeating itself as we observe the 50th Anniversary of Guyana being granted independence. Much can be said on all sides about the roles of different parties and governments in their respective tenure in office during these last 50 years. What I believe is critical in helping us to move forward is for all sides of the House to undertake an initiative where we can access frankly, based on the written and oral history as well as the declassified information by the United States State Department, on the role of outside interference and influence in dividing our country along ethnic lines. Unless, we can have this meaningful engagement, in whatever form or shape, to put to rest the hurt and resentment, we will forever be haunted by the past, which if not dealt with soon enough will become distorted.

We were informed by the Minister that Budget 2016 is anchored on the five pillars outlined in His Excellency’s New Year speech. I wish to deal with one of those pillars, which is national unity.

The leaders of the PPP, led by Dr. Cheddi Jagan and Mr. Forbes Burnham, were united in their quest to defeat our colonial masters, who for their part, were not going to give us independence

on a golden platter. They made sure that the divide and rule policy was part of their legacy given to us. National unity cannot be imposed neither can there be a time frame. It is time consuming and painstaking work which over time will see results. National unity can only thrive in an environment where people feel that their needs and their concerns are treated with the requisite understanding. When the democratic forces, in the late 80s, explored the options of working together, they realised that even though they had in common the need to remove the Government of the day, they were melding hurdles to overcome. Subsequently, the PPP/C alliance was forced to contest the elections of 1992. When the results of the elections were announced Dr. Cheddi Jagan cautioned his supporters not to engage in any celebrations. Many could not understand this advice because they felt that having suffered all manner of transgression for more than 28 years, they should have had the opportunity to celebrate since the yoke of misery was lifted off their backs. Again, he reminded them that in every election there would be winners and losers, and the party must avoid triumphalism because we had a nation to build.

Having emerged from a period of party paramountcy, the PPP Government recognised that in order to build cohesion, the symbol of the country must be used to unify rather than divide. It ensured that some of the building blocks required to build a cohesive society were laid.

The present Government has established a Ministry of Social Cohesion whose mandate was very vague and where no resources were allocated. Questions to ascertain the way in which the Ministry would undertake its work were not very clear. There exist a number of important commissions, such as the Ethnic Relations Commission, the Commission on Family, the Commission on Elderly, the Commission on People with Disabilities, the Women and Gender Equality Commission, the Rights of the Child Commission, the Indigenous Peoples' Commission, the Human Rights Commission, the Law and Order Commission as well as the four Parliamentary Sectoral Committees on Natural Resources, Social Services, Economic Services, and Foreign Relations, the Inter-Religious Organisation and, very shorty, I hope, the Procurement Commission. All of these entities have wide mandates and they are made up of a wide cross section of organisations, entities and individuals. Once these entities are provided with the human and financial resources, they will be able to provide the building blocks for social cohesion. This cohesion, which we are desirous of building, will not come out from the ministry which was created. Rather, it will be from commissions and institutions which I have

referred to. Unfortunately, the Government of the day, while hoping to create social cohesion has gone about it in the wrong way.

I must refer to a statement, which I had expressed in my previous presentation in the last budget debate. When the PPP/C Government came to office in 1992, the Public Service was basically a People's National Congress (PNC), outfit. We knew that, but we chose not to remove the workers because, at the end of the day, they were providing a service and they had families to feed. We did not go on vengeance to remove them and replace them with PPP supporters. Instead, we kept them, worked with them to improve their skills wherever necessary. The division of labour and social stratification were tied up with the philosophy of our colonial masters and it is by no accident that in order to have an education or a job, you had to change your religion or concur with the beliefs of the colonial master. That policy did not help the integration process, so it was only natural for certain ethnic groups to be classified in a specific way.

9.02 p.m.

An assessment of the Public Service, the police force, for all social sectors would have a bias to one group and the agricultural and productive sectors would see another bias. Overtime, all groups wanted their offspring to have a better education, and it was only a matter of time before they were prepared academically and socially to offer their skills in the public sector. Thus a new situation emerged, where all groups in society were vying for opportunities in the public service, which historically were available to one group in main.

The challenge we face as a nation is to find ways and means of ensuring that all groups have opportunities to be part of Government jobs. We cannot expect the same from the private sector since they will ultimately choose who they consider is most suitable for that position. Thus, with Government's actions in removing those professionals from their positions, it is not helping the thrust of national unity or social cohesion, but has created more disunity and the perception that only one group has the right to be employed in the public service, and the few others who are there, are mere window dressings.

We have listened *ad nauseam* to the rantings of some of the Hon. Members who, when in Opposition...

Mr. Speaker hit gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Rantings.

Mrs. Chandarpal: I beg your pardon. I withdraw “rantings”. We have listened to the ramblings of some of the Hon. Members, who, when were in Opposition, spoke about expansive government. I decided to do a comparative analysis and an assessment of the first five years of the PPP/C in office, in comparison to the nine months of the coalition. What did I find? From 1993-1996, I did not find any record of contract workers. However, in 1997, there were 27 contract workers in five ministries. These ministries were the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Industry, the Ministry of Public Works and Communications and the Ministry of Local Government.

In nine months of the new Government, an evaluation of the Office of the President and the Ministry of the Presidency will find that: In 2015 there were 596 contracted workers and in 2006, there were 1,004; from 1992-1997 there were 16 ministers; in 1994, there was an addition; in 1996, there were two more additions. At no time, were there more than 19 ministers. Thus, we had two Presidential Advisors in the first five years. Presently, we have 27 ministers and a whole plethora of advisors. I do hope that, at an appropriate time, we will be informed of the exact number. And, this was the first five years of the PPP/C in Government. What we would like to know is how many of these contract workers are retirees. We are aware that retirees are already in receipt of their pensions and gratuities, which are exempted from tax.

In perusing the expenditure for the ministry and departments for four ministries that stood out in Capital Expenditure, with the Ministry of Public Infrastructure topping the list with \$23.336 billion or a 59% increase. Since the Government has been touting the mantra of good Government, good governance and accountability, I would like to know how soon we can expect the setting up of the Public Procurement Commission. How soon will the Government amend the regulations to the Procurement Act to require the posting on the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board’s website of all contracts exceeding \$1.5 million?

What will be the role of the Audit Office of Guyana or will we see the selection of accounting firms as well as the case of forensic audits?

The Government in its election campaign spoke much about accountability, transparency and corruption. We expect them to observe all the requirements relating to these pronouncements. Thus, I would like to know how soon we can expect some answers regarding the complaint against the Acting Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL). I had also expected the Minister of Public Health who spoke earlier, to have informed this honourable House about the latest circumstances of the newly appointed Chairman of the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC). Perhaps, the Hon. Member, Dr. Norton, will provide that update at a later stage.

The public should also be apprised of the process leading up to the client of one of the ministers, having the go ahead to undertake the work of the Speciality Hospital. There is an allegation of a certain minister who is encouraging some CEOs to do single sourcing of security services, without going through public tender. There are also allegations of interference in the awards of contracts. If these allegations are true, then it goes against the promise the Government made of being accountable and transparent.

Mr. Speaker, the 'good life'- I am pleased by yet another clean-up campaign being undertaken by the Government in the City of Georgetown. Rip Van Winkle has risen from his slumber and has advised his followers that now was the time for them to wake up after 23 years. There is alacrity in the steps and yes, the city looks nice in some of the areas where the work was done. It is said that the Mayor and City Councillors (M&CC) waived \$40 million from a certain business and that no payment was made for a number of years. From what was reported, the sum owed was \$500 million and only a few months ago, efforts were made to recoup some of the payments. This is the story of the M&CC of Georgetown, who had responsibility for the affairs of the City most of the time, except for a brief period of the Interim Management Committee (IMC).

The M&CC officials are guilty of encouraging street vending. They are guilty of erecting small shacks on some streets and in the mall. They are guilty of shaking down businesses and vendors alike. One can ask the vendors of the different markets and they would tell him or her how much they have to give to the City Constabulary on a weekly basis. What about the nearly 900 staff who had been employed to oversee the work of the City? Even though the previous Government had provided millions of dollars, it seems as if the money was going through a black hole.

Why suddenly, has the M&CC found its motivation for cleaning and beautifying the city? Is that not what they should have always been doing? The story tells the mind-set of how a Government can try to do its best to improve one part of the country, but it is faced with non-cooperation by the politicians who are hell bent on embarrassing the Government by inertia and spite – so much for patriotism and love for country.

Can you guess who was in charge of the Municipality? Your guess is as good as mine. We heard yesterday, in the presentation of some of the regional representatives about the difficulties that they encountered while trying to manage the regions' affairs. These actions are counter-productive to the country's development and we will be stagnated as a nation, if we continue in this way.

Since the presentation of the Budget on 29th January, I made a special effort to get the views of a cross-section of Guyanese workers – farmers, hire-car drivers, housewives, some small businesses and even some shopkeepers. There is one common agreement among all of them and that is: “Things bad and money not circulating”.

There are some who said that they voted for a change and that within weeks of the new Administration coming into power, they saw the signs of what was to come. One young woman, who is an ardent fan of the AFC, expressed disgust with the manner in which some of its leaders were treated, as well as the violation of some important aspects of the Cummingsburg Accord. A farmer from Black Bush Polder who, along with two members of his family, voted for ‘Change’ because he thought the promise of \$6,000 per bag of paddy was real. He has since expressed a desire to go away to the United States of America (USA), but was reminded by his friends that should Mr. Donald Trump win the Presidency, he will be sent right back home.

The announcement by the Government regarding the new measures for the importation of vehicles and tyres is not going down well with many. While the argument of making the country green is something that is desirable in the long term, I do believe that the Government's timing is way out of bounds. The Government cannot impose these measures in an environment when the economy is not doing well, and expect that the 126 taxation measures will garner the resources to manage the country.

Over the years, the taxi service became viable because citizens were able to get loans from the banks to buy reconditioned or second-hand cars. With the establishment of taxi services throughout the country, many persons were able to buy cars, pay their loans, pay their base fees and take care of their families. The measures the Government is imposing by restrictions on both cars and tyres will hamper the livelihood of these persons who are using their taxis for gainful employment. I was told by the taxi drivers to tell the Government that “*Yuh deh pun stupidity*”.

As I am on the subject of the ‘good life’, how can we speak of the ‘good life’ when thousands of workers and their families are worried about their future, their future existence and well-being, following the decision taken by this current APNU/AFC Administration to close down the Wales Estate?

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

Mrs. Chandarpal: Thank you, Sir.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to, at the same time, ask for Mrs. Chandarpal’s five minutes so that the Hon. Member would have her full time. Thank you Sir.

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. Chandarpal: On 5th February, 60 workers were given marching orders by GuySuCo, even though the Minister had indicated that workers of the Wales Estate should not be worried, since their jobs were not on the line. On 8th February, another 50 planters were reportedly told by GuySuCo’s officials that, if they did not take up employment at the Uitvlugt Estate and did not agree to accept severance pay within employment at the Uitvlugt Estate, then within three days it would be regarded by GuySuCo that the workers have opted to leave the Estate’s employ. It seems to me that colonial days have come again.

To add insult to injury, the population is faced with bandits invading their homes, taking not only their life long savings, but taking their lives as well. It seems to me and others that there is a price one pays for working hard and accumulating something for his or her old age.

Mr. Speaker, I crave your indulgence once more, to respond to the Hon. Minister, Ms. Patterson, when she spoke disparagingly yesterday about the housing sector. I have had the honour, as one of the first Ministers of the PPP/C's Government, to have been involved in this process.

9.17 p.m.

I want to share some information with those of who do not recall, especially for the Minister's information. In April, 1993, Dr. Cheddi Jagan called his Ministers of Agriculture, Labour, Human Services and Social Security, Housing, as well as GuySuCo, and said to us: "I want you to go and find all the abandoned sugarcane lands that are not in use because we need to get involved in a housing drive and that is based on the PPP/C's Manifesto. That land had always been there. What we did was to take that land, and with the limited money that was available at that time, we ploughed all the lands that were abandoned and were not in use, and started the process of allocating pieces of land to the Guyanese people.

It may not have been done at that time, in the way we were hoping to have it done, that is with concrete drains and all of that. If one lives in a donkey cart economy, how can he or she live a Cadillac lifestyle? The money was not there; we had just come into office; the Ministry of Housing was closed down; there was no allocation for the housing sector; and thus, we had to start with what we had to begin the process of allocating lands to people.

What did we do? We looked at all those people who had more than four children because we realised, when a person had a lot of children, it was impossible for that person to find homes to rent. People do not want to rent a home to people with a lot of children. Thus, in the system that we employed, people with more than two children were given priority. Additionally, we also worked with the private sector. What we sought to do was, we sold the lands at the front for a higher price so that we could have done development for the people who were behind those lots.

In that process, lands were being sold at \$58,000 and people were allowed to pay three instalments in 18 months. Now, tell me, what was wrong with something like that in an environment where one did not have the money, when the Ministry of Housing was closed down and the people were so poor and we could not have done all the things we wanted to do? One has to remember that we came from an environment in which the people of this country were promised that they would be housed, fed, and clothed and that was just a broken promise. I

cannot understand how my Hon. Colleague, the Minister within the Ministry of Communities, with responsibility for Housing, in such a disparaging way, could knock a process that was something that everyone in Guyana looked forward to. The expectations and the hope we had created for the poor people in this country, were overwhelming.

Every day at the Ministry of Housing hundreds of people were lining up to get an application form. When one looks at what the PPP/C was able to do in the first five years of taking office, it was remarkable. I remember going to conferences overseas and talking to people about the housing drive and many people would say: "Can we come to Guyana to also buy a piece of land" because they had never heard of a piece of land being sold at that time for about US\$250.

Development as we know, in an environment when one does not have the resources, will have to be done incrementally, and that is what the PPP/C had sought to do.

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

Mrs. Chandarpal: Mr. Speaker, I must tell you that, there are people all over this country, thousands and thousands, more than one hundred thousand people got homes. One can walk the length and breadth of this country and people will talk about how the PPP/C Government gave them a piece of land and what a difference it has made in their lives, somehow they had hope and something to hold on to, before they had nothing.

I would really like to encourage the Hon. Valarie Patterson to read the International Development Bank (IDB) Report on the housing sector. It is something that all of us should be proud of. I do hope that, in the next five years, we will see comparable development, the same way we had started because, as was said before, every government will undertake a number of initiatives and it is expected that the others that follow will either make it better or make it worst.

I want to say, unfortunately, I will not be able to support the Budget as presented by the Minister of Finance because we believe that this Budget does not have the answers to move this country forward. Therefore, the theme of the Budget does not find favour with us because I believe it will make the people in this country much poorer and the 'good life' that we are hoping to have, we will not have. I see a lot of problems ahead for the people of this country. I travel everyday with taxis, two or three times per day, and every taxi driver has the same story to tell. Every person

one meets in the Stabroek or Bourda Market has the same story to tell. It is not a poor people Budget and I do believe that what the Government is hoping to do will only bring the poor people in this country more poverty and starvation. Thank you. [Applause]

Minister within the Ministry of Public Infrastructure [Ms. Ferguson]: Mr. Speaker, I proudly rise to tender my contribution and support to Budget 2016, under the theme: *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*, which has been prepared by the Hon. Member, the Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Decasto Jordan. It would be remised of me for not acknowledging and applauding the Hon. Member and his team of competent staff for bringing to this nation a budget just under six months from the last one. Hon. Member, I say well done!

Budget 2016 is anchored on five pillars: National Unity, National Infrastructure, National Institutions, National Security and Public Service. If one is to examine and analyse what is contained in this Budget, one will conclude that it is a people's budget. This has also been confirmed by many who were once critical of Government's budget and they have applauded this APNU/AFC Government.

Our Government has set itself achievable goals which will engender hope and confidence in the Guyanese populace. We have embarked on a campaign to rid the spirit of disunity. For no longer will we allow for division and divisiveness to reign, but through initiatives adumbrated in this year's Budget, will relentlessly pursue and develop a healthy nation and its environment which will be free from disagreement or dissent.

On 11th May, 2015, the Guyanese people expressed their lack of confidence in the PPP/C Administration and voted them out of power. Guyanese were fed-up with the high level of rampant corruption which had a destabilising impact on the country's natural and human resources. In this context, in spite of the many challenges, ...

Mr. Ali: Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: What is it Hon. Member?

Mr. Ali: It is a point of Order.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, are you rising on a Point of Order?

Mr. Ali: Yes Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Then, please state the basis that you are rising and then state the purpose for which you are rising.

Mr. Ali: Yes. The Hon. Member referred...

Mr. Speaker: What is the basis of your Point of Order?

Mr. Ali: It is Standing Order 40 (a).

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, would you like to do this when you are fully prepared?

Mr. Ali: I am prepared. The Hon. Member...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, what moved you to rise?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 41(6), Content of Speech. No Member should impute improper motive to any Member of the Assembly. The Hon. Member said, in her presentation, that under the former Government there was rampant corruption. The Auditor General's Report is the basis on which our expenditure...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I will not ask you to take your seat. What I will say to say though is that the process is not one where you make a speech. You say the basis on which you stand, you quote the Standing Order, you say the point in which you want make, and then you resume your seat. But please, you cannot make a speech. If you want to start again please do it, but certainly please do not make a speech.

Mr. Ali: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member is imputing that there was rampant corruption when we were in Government. We are disputing this and we are asking that the Hon. Member withdraws this or provide us with the evidence of this.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I did not hear the Hon. Member mentioned a Member. I do not know if you did, but if you did then I would immediately call on the Member to withdraw. Hon. Member, please continue.

Ms. Ferguson: Let me just put the Hon. Members at ease. What I said was that on 11th May, 2015, the Guyanese people expressed their lack of confidence in the PPP/C Administration and voted them out of power. Guyanese were fed-up with the high level of rampant corruption, and I am not imputing anything here, the Transparency International Report of 2015 shows that Guyana was still ranked high in corruption.

Mr. Speaker hit gavel.

Mr. Speaker: I think we need to be clear how we speak. I do not believe that the Hon. Member is on firm ground to argue, unless she makes it clear that she is quoting from a particular document, which is also available to or is known by this Assembly. If the Hon. Member spoke as she spoke just now, then the Hon. Member is making a statement of her own. I would suggest that the Hon. Member...

Ms. Ferguson: Okay Mr. Speaker, I can clarify that, just to say that I was just giving an opinion based on what I thought. In spite of the many challenges, our Government has embarked on a policy of rebuilding by creating conditions and atmospheres for the nation to be revitalised to attain the concept of oneness again in its true sense.

Mr. Speaker hit gavel.

9.32 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, a Member is on the floor. Please continue.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you, very much Mr. Speaker. This could be viewed by many, by way of the multiple transformations that would have taken place within the eight months of the APNU/AFC Government, which included, but are not limited to, paved streets and roads in communities that were neglected under the previous Administration. Thus, as a result, our Government has chosen the theme: *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*. To contextualise, the theme seeks to address to all Guyanese that their Government recognises the need for healing and process has commenced, where all Guyana have been animated to be progressive and productive to transform this land from a state of decay and ruin, and with firm conviction, instil in all, a new zeal to intensify growth and development. With this

new vision and great dynamism, the nation of Guyana will be propelled into a new era where the sky is the limit.

My presentation will posit arguments on what were achieved in the latter quarter of 2015 and what are the projects for 2016, for the agencies under my stewardship.

I now turn my attention to the Demerara Harbour Bridge. Briefly, examining the performance of the Demerara Harbour Bridge Inc. for the year 2015, the bridge continues to be a vital link for commuters between the East Bank Demerara (EBD) and the West Bank Demerara (WBD). The agency continued to ensure that maintenance works are conducted on the more than three decades old bridge, so as to ensure that services are not disrupted. The sum of \$90 million was approved as subvention in the fiscal year 2015. The sum was primarily used to assist in the procuring of wire ropes, rehabilitation of cluster piles and fabrication of connecting posts, through the awarding of contracts via competitive bidding. In the interest of time, a number of maintenance works were conducted in other areas by the Demerara Harbour Bridge Inc.

Since the upsurge in crime, the Demerara Harbour Bridge Inc. has collaborated with the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Guyana Police Force (GPF), where Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras have been placed at strategic locations on the eastern and western sides of the bridge and central Georgetown to aid in rapid response, both in criminal activities and traffic violations.

Projections for 2016 - the sum of \$150 million will be spent. This will aid in supporting Demerara Harbour Bridge Inc., in the purchasing of materials to ensure that continuance maintenance are executed. The budgetary allocation for 2016 is more than 2015 because we do not want a recurrence of what happened in 2012, when the bridge collapsed. Further, it is logical reasoning, that with an old bridge and greater usage because of the housing developments in Regions 3 and 4, the probability of downtime may be higher.

Notwithstanding our provisions, Government cannot continue to expend millions on maintaining a bridge that has expired its lifetime and therefore, the construction of a new bridge is eminent. In December 2015, expressions of interest were received from 23 companies for the undertaking of a feasibility study and design of a new bridge across the Demerara River.

The PPP/C Administration wasted the tax payers' money by investing in what could only be called 'dead projects', which could only have benefited a lucky few. A good example is the Marriott Hotel Guyana - a loss making venture. If that same money was invested in the bridge Project, Guyanese today would have been enjoying use of a bridge - a much needed facility that would serve the mass of Guyanese users.

Our Government would undertake projects that would benefit the people of Guyana and not just a selected few as practised by the former PPP/C Administration. Therefore, construction of a new bridge will be accomplished...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, do you wish the floor?

Mr. Ali: Yes, Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 40(1). In the interest of the Minister of Finance and the financial architecture,...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, what is the Standing Order here? What is the matter on which you interrupt the work of this House?

Mr. Ali: The Hon. Minister said that the Marriott Hotel Guyana is a loss making entity. This is not accurate. I think the Minister of Finance would understand that if he makes statements...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member you are to state the Standing Order on which you rise and state the point and resume your seat.

Mr. Ali: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 40(1) and the issue is an erroneous statement that the Marriott Hotel Guyana is a loss making investment. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please proceed.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. I was saying that therefore, the construction of a new bridge would be accomplished under the APNU/AFC Government.

I now turn my attention to the Transport and Harbours Department (T&HD), one of Guyana's oldest river transport agencies, which is celebrating 85 years of service to the nation, under the theme: *Transport for a sustainable Future: Restructure; Reinvigorated, Repositioned* and continues to offer scheduled services to the people who depend highly on river transport.

Despite, its old and rapidly aging fleet of vessels, the ferry services remain and will continue to ensure a vital link in the transport network, primarily in the riverine areas of Guyana at a reasonable cost to commuters.

In 2015, there was a significant increase in passengers, cargo and vehicles, as compared to 2014.

In 2015, the Transport and Harbours Department received a total capital allotment of \$602,500,000, which catered for the docking of four vessels, the acquisition of spares and the rehabilitation of stelling, commenced in 2015 and will continue in 2016. Focused was given in other areas for maintenance and corrective works, both on vessels and stelling.

In the 2016, \$904,155,000 has been provided for rehabilitative works to be done on the M.V. Kanawan and M.V. Sabanto. This allocation also includes a provision for works on the goods wharf and the completion of works already being done on the Parika and Leguan facilities, and for Phases One and Two of the Bartica Stelling.

Not only is our Government interested in repairing stelling and conducting maintenance works on vessels. This Government is also committed to ensuring that our people, who give of their years of services, are made to work in a friendly environment. During the past years, the staff were forced to work in conditions that are not in keeping with labour guidelines, which was heavily overlooked or neglected under the former PPP/C Administration. Hence, Budget 2016 gives provision for a total of \$50 million, which will be used to construct a spanking new building to house the staff at the Transport and Harbour's workshop.

Emphasis will be placed on the monitoring of the fuel consumption within this department. To avoid excess spending in this area, I am happy to report that effective 3rd February, 2016, a Cap System for fuel usage was initiated and this initiative will result in an estimated saving of approximately \$100 million per annum.

Our Government is keen on ensuring that un-served areas are given attention, which they will be able to benefit from solar panel energy and extension of electricity in Regions 4, 5 and 6, respectively and improved generator sets for Port Kaituma, Mahdia and Matthews Ridge. The sum of \$110,990,000 has been allocated in this year's Budget for the Hinterland Electrification Inc.

I now turn my attention to hinterland airstrips. The APNU/AFC Government in its 2015 Manifesto, promised to “Upgrade hinterland airstrips and key secondary roads –to mining areas, forestry sites, Indigenous villages and other communities outside of our main settlement areas, as part of a coordinated and phased programme of upgrading the air transport network to provide a level of ‘feeder services’ linking airstrips, mining areas, settlement communities and social services – particularly, health services”.

Our Government intends to deliver on our promise, as we understand that hinterland airstrips are a key infrastructure in facilitating connectivity by air, between coastland and hinterland.

As inherited from the PPP/C Administration, our Government is dissatisfied with the state of hinterland airstrips. Within the last decade, there have been two deaths of passengers walking into aircraft propellers and numerous occasions of animals walking and grazing on aerodromes. There is weak and non-existent security, non-existent navigational aids, no air traffic centres and poor infrastructure and inadequate maintenance. As we understand it, these challenges are of inadequate funding, absence of an aerodromes development policy, severe staffing constraints within the Hinterland Aerodromes Unit that provide administrative and operational oversight for Government aerodromes. In the 2016 Budget, \$241,586,000 was allocated to complete and rehabilitate airstrips within Guyana.

In addition, a study has been initiated for the development of a Comprehensive Aerodromes Policy and Strategic Plan that addresses the deficiencies and problems affecting all aerodromes.

9.47 p.m.

I now turn my attention to the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority. When our Government took office, the regulatory arm of the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) was grossly understaffed and this was reflected in the poor state of affairs of the regulatory agency when I assumed responsibility for the GCAA. Our Government, in its usual proactive response, adopted a posture that we could not have continued with business as usual and, therefore, since assuming office, our work mandate has been two-fold: (1) fixing the broken and (2) advancing the economy for a better life for all. It seems that most of our time in Government, so far, has been spent on fixing broken things.

When I assumed responsibility for the GCAA, Guyana, which follows the guidelines of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) South America Office, suffered the indignity of having the lowest level of effective implementation of the standards and recommended practices established to ensure the safe and orderly development of civil aviation in the South American region. It was a paltry 44%. The regional average stands above 70%.

I am happy to indicate to this entire House that under this APNU/AFC Government, Guyana will not be blacklisted. As Minister, I intend to fix the problems that were inherited from the previous Administration and to bring Guyana's compliance rating to 60%, at least, in a short time. The aviation sector is too critical a sector to be neglected as it was done under the previous Administration. The previous Administration owes this nation an explanation for the state of affairs of this key agency and many others.

This House will be shocked to know that critical regulatory departments within the GCAA were staffed with only one technical officer. Further, when I assumed office, the GCAA resembled Hollywood with many staff acting for over seven years and some were being mistreated by being placed on incorrect salary scales. Work has already commenced on improving the GCAA's oversight capability. Additional staffs were employed in the Aviation Security Unit and the Air Transport Management Department and recruitment is presently on-going to enhance the Aviation Safety Department. In addition, staff who held acting portfolios for several years were given substantive appointment. This was done in consultation with the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU). Also, staff who were on the wrong salary scales were placed on their correct salary scales.

I intend on getting the nation's business done properly. In November 2015, I attended the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) World Aviation Forum where a draft project document to aid Guyana's institutional strengthening of the Civil Aviation Safety Oversight System was discussed with donor and lending agencies for consideration. Evolving from these discussions, the International Civil Aviation Organization has committed Cdn\$80,000 for the strengthening of the Civil Aviation Safety Oversight System in Guyana.

The Personnel Testing and Licencing System of the GCAA, which is done manually and has numerous rooms for malpractice, are now being computerised and this will facilitate institutional

strengthening to improve Guyana's compliance level. This will bring Guyana on par with developed countries.

I am happy to inform this House that, on 12th November, 2015, the use of Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) commenced in the upper airspace, this being a milestone in Air Traffic Management (ATM) operations in Guyana. In the coming years, ADS-B will be commissioned in the middle and lower airspace.

Our Government understands the importance of civil aviation and we have demonstrated this in *Budget 2016* with the allocation of \$430 million for the continuation of the Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) project and institutional strengthening of the GCAA.

In 2016, the following projects will be completed: Economic Impact Study of Civil Aviation on the Economy. This study will determine the economic impact of air transport on Guyana's economy. This study will assist Government, industry, stakeholders and decision-makers to better understand what the air transport sector contributes to the economy. It will also help the Government to determine investment priorities and policy directives.

The second project is the completion of a National Aviation Policy to guide the development of the sector in an orderly and well-coordinated manner.

In examining some of the measures in *Budget 2016*, *Budget 2016* was a well put together budget that addresses the priority issues for our Government for a better Guyana. The issue of used tyres seems to have taken a considerable section in Members of the Oppositions' presentations, apart from the fact that they have all zoomed in on the minor consideration in the budget and made a major issue, they also spoke out of context on the issue. I am appalled that no one zoomed in on the intent of the banning of used tyres as a measure in support of our programme of "greening"...

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

Ms. Ally: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given a five-minute extension to her allotted time.

Question put and agreed to.

Ms. Ferguson: I am appalled that no one zoomed in on the intent of the banning of used tyres as a measure in support of our programme of “greening” the economy and protecting the environment.

I must say that the Leader of the Opposition, The Hon. Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, was touted as “Champion of the Earth” and a spokesman for Climate Change, yet when our Government proposed an initiative to stop making Guyana the “garbage bin” of the world, Members of the Opposition resisted that prudent policy. No one took the time to study the cost-benefit analysis of such a move.

Ms. Teixeira rose.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, do you rise on a Point of Order?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes. The Point of Order is that we are traversing the road we went before. The Champion of the Earth is the Leader of the Opposition and the comments being made are totally irrelevant. It has been pointed out already that Guyana is not a country which is contributing to carbon dioxide and...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, if the Speaker is addressing you, then you will cease what you are doing and pay attention to the Speaker. You have the floor to state the basis on which you will enter your Point of Order and then to make your comment by pointing out what the issue is.

You have the floor.

Ms. Teixeira: I am saying that we are traversing the road that we had already gone down in relation to the use of the term “Champion of the Earth” about a Member of the House. However, in relation to the Members comments to do with the tyres, it was already stated by an earlier speaker on this side that Guyana contributes zero to the issues of environmental and global pollution and therefore the argument that is given for the “greening of the economy”, *vis-a-vis* unused... is irrelevant.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. Minister, please continue.

Ms. Ferguson: No one took the time to study the cost-benefit analysis of such a move nor did anyone acknowledge the fact that such an initiative will give Guyana a positive rating in its climate change efforts in truly greening the economy. Rather, the PPP is stuck in the old mode of photocopying textbooks.

In conclusion, I appeal to my Colleagues in this House, more so the Opposition Members, to give full support to *Budget 2016*, under the theme *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*.

Renowned world leader, the late Nelson Mandela, once said:

“It always seems impossible until it’s done”.

Members of the Opposition may say that it is impossible and that it cannot happen but they will see the transformation when it is done.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, it is approaching ten o’ clock and a motion is needed to be moved for us to continue beyond that time.

Suspension of Standing Order No. 10

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: I move that this House continues, uninterruptedly, until the list of speakers for today is completed.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

Ms. Ferguson: There are many Guyanese who are confronted with the “wow effect” when they see the transformation in Georgetown. *Budget 2016* has all the right elements for a transformed Guyana and for the “wow effect” to be magnified on a national scale. We have transformed Georgetown and we will do it across Guyana.

Permit me to paraphrase His Excellency, the President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, when he addressed the National Assembly on Thursday 14th January, 2016 on *Independence and Resilience: Our people’s Path to Economic Progress*. This is what he said:

“We, the Guyanese people, this year, celebrate the independence we gained 50 years ago on 26th May, 1966. We were inspired then by our national motto – “*One People, One Nation, One Destiny.*” We are encouraged now by our efforts to make that motto a reality. We renew our pledge to make our cherished homeland a place of unity, a place of security and a place of prosperity.”

Budget 2016 is for Guyana.

10.02 p.m.

Just before I take my seat, let me say that I heard the Hon. Members from the other side lamenting that this Government is repackaging and cutting and pasting their projects. Let me say this: in this year, some £48 million has been allocated under the Department for International Development Programme (DFID) and we will see major projects being realised under this APNU/AFC Government. There will be upgrading of our stellingen and wharves, amongst other things. Therefore, as we celebrate 50 years of Independence, allow me to share this scripture taken from the Holy Book of Romans, Chapter 14:19:

“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification.”

I commend *Budget 2016* for its passage. Thank you and may God richly bless us all. [*Applause*]

Mr. G. Persaud: Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to the budget debate and estimates for 2016. As we continue this debate in this House, we will make all sorts of assumptions, as we have been doing all along, and we will tell all sorts of stories, some real and some imaginary. But to the people in this country, the bottom line for them is what this budget has for them and what it takes from them. We can continue to bring our illusions, we can continue to allow our imaginations to move and we can tell tales out of school. Whatever we do in here, the judge of *Budget 2016* will not be in here, it will be the citizens of this land. Each one of them will seek answers to two questions: What does *Budget 2016* have for me? What will *Budget 2016* take from me? Those are the two operative questions.

Out there already, over the past couple of days, we have gotten some little descriptors of *Budget 2016*. We have heard that it is a pick-pocket budget, a parasitic budget, and a vampire budget. The people out there when they ask those two questions, these are their conclusions based on

what they have heard and based on what they have read. If these are not important things for us, let me respond to some very good statements which were made by the Hon. Member Mr. John Adams. He spoke on behalf of the people of Region 3. Well, I am from there too. Maybe, we have not spoken to the same set of people. This is what my set of people in Region 3 had to say.

Mr. Speaker: All Hon. Members should address the Chair, including you, sir.

Mr. G. Persaud: My apologies, Sir. Maybe the Hon. Member has spoken to some of the residents in Region 3 with whom I have not spoken. What a lot of them have said to me is totally different from what the Hon. Member reported. They said to me that the drains can never be kept clean by being dug one time. That is what they said to me. So my friends can talk about 15, 20 or 30 years, but the drains will have to be maintained. That has to be a frequent exercise, as we are finding out.

Well, I am no stranger to the truth. We have talked about the West Demerara Regional Hospital (WDRH) and all the vision for it. At that hospital, presently, one cannot even get an x-ray done. That hospital is a fixture. It is a building now. There are no medical supplies in that hospital.

We have talked about agriculture in Region 3. My little understanding is that sugar falls under agriculture. In Region 3, the Wales Estate is scheduled for closure and we were told that it would be done by the end of the second crop for 2016, but the closure has already started. I had my little discourse with the Hon. Minister; it was an informal one and so I would not share what was discussed. Workers have already been sent home from the Wales Estate. So, where is this “good life” that exists in Region 3? Is losing one’s job a part of a good life? Maybe, whom I have spoken with, as I have said, the Hon. Member John Adams has not spoken with.

The Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson spoke about corruption and she quoted about the corruption in the PPP and she spoke about WikiLeaks and Transparency International (TI). All of us can quote things and pick things up. Then, she quoted some very nice words from His Excellency the President. I went to WikiLeaks too and recently I read a post that branded our President, Mr. Granger, as an anti-Indian racist. Am I to bring that information into this House and say that that is my opinion? We have to be very careful. We cannot bring information to this House without evidence to support it and pass it as opinions and views. Too much of it has already happened in this House today. We have to put a stop to it, somehow. It is not heading nicely.

The Hon. Minister of Finance on page 7 of the Budget Speech at paragraph 3.2 stated:

“The sugar industry returned a credible performance in 2015, with production growing by 6.9% to 231,145 metric tonnes.”

What a wonderful achievement. The Hon. Member Mr. Sharma stated that last year was a bumper year for sugar. My word! The sugarcane cannot be planted this week and be harvested next week. There is something called ratoons, which is annual. Maybe, a miracle cane has been found. My point is that if sugar has done so well and the sugar workers in this country are the only state attached workers, in 2015, who had not received a cent increase from this Government, what kind of reward is that? What kind of justice is that? My good friends, the Hon. Ministers of Government, wasted no time in paying themselves. They are “fat cats”. The people who normally chanted “fat cats” I am not seeing. The “fat cats” have paid themselves fat salaries. The chanters of *control freakism* are missing because what has happened is that they have control of the pockets of the poor sugar workers. What the sugar workers will judge this budget as having for them is zero. It is taking away their livelihoods and it is also digging deeper into their pockets.

The Hon. Minister spoke well about rice. He stated on page 7 at paragraph 3.3:

“In spite of the uncertainty that prevailed in the rice industry, recorded output was 687,784 metric tonnes, an increase of 8.3%.”

The Hon. Prime Minister and the Hon. Minister of State visited Essequibo last week and in their interaction, one rice farmer, Mr. Baharally – the Hon. Members could verify that – who has cultivated 176 acres of rice land said to the Hon. Ministers, “I got \$800 a bag for my paddy”. Where is the \$9000 and \$6000 that was promised by that side of the House to the very rice farmers?

I echo the sentiment. Minister of Finance, according to your Minister within the Ministry of Finance, you know how to find money because if you take an empty treasury from the PPP and you are able to present two huge budgets, then you can find the money to pay the rice farmers the \$9,000 and \$6,000 per bag.

The Hon. Member John Adams said that 95% of the rice, this crop, would be saved. I do not know how he did his mathematics but let me use his figures and say 5% of the farmers would have lost their investment in their crop. One only has to drive along the West Demerara Highway and one will see all of the rice lands that have now been ploughed because drought has taken it over. The people have lost their crops. We must bring the facts to this House. How can people then be happy? How then can the people of Region 3 say that they are so happy?

There is the water situation in this country. On page 39 of this Budget Speech at paragraph 4.66, it is stated that over 1,200 residents are receiving potable water in Ann's Grove, Angoy's Avenue and Friendship. That is so nice. Maybe, East Bank Essequibo is not in Region 3 or is not a favoured set of communities. Residents on the East Bank of Essequibo are calling for the intervention of the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) Inc., as they have to use water that is contaminated. Residents are complaining that the water coming through their taps is discoloured and full of sediment. This, residents said, is contributing to health issues and they cannot afford to buy water for domestic use. One resident said:

“I drank the water because the rain is not falling and I'm not getting rain water to drink, I also can't afford to buy water but that was a big mistake. I started to vomit and I got diarrhoea for almost a week. They really need to do something about this water”.

That is stated in the *Guyana Times* newspapers of 9th February, 2016. The Hon. Minister, Mr. Bulkan, stated on page 62 of the *Hansard* of 2015:

In this year's budget, to ensure that every Guyanese has access to reliable, safe and quality potable water, a total of \$2.9 billion has been allocated, of which \$690 million is allocated for coastal water;”

East Bank Essequibo is coastland.

10.17 p.m.

Maybe, the Hon. Minister needs to explain to them what he did with the money because they are not getting reliable, safe and quality potable water. They have not gotten it.

We have heard all of these nice things about how much our pensioners got. This is the second budget of this Administration. This budget is for 2016. Last year's budget was for 2015. The Government would not be coming back to this House with a budget for 2015 or 2016 in this year 2016. This budget that is being presented would take us to the end of December, 2016. When we talk about our senior citizens, it is not what they would be getting in six months; it is what they will get for two years come December 2016.

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, could I use this same opportunity to ask for the Comrade's five minutes extension?

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you will be allowed to speak for 20 minutes. Please proceed.

Mr. G. Persaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The subsidy of our pensioners was removed under the excuse that the number of pensioners who were receiving it was a small number of 6000 to 7000; however that figure was arrived at. I wish to ask the Hon. Minister of Finance: how many thousands will benefit from this airport departure tax? Will it be more than 6000 or 7000? I am not a pensioner as yet. How many of these pensioners will benefit from the rebate on driver's licence? How many thousands? Are there less than 6000 or less than 7000? Scrap it. This initiative is bad. It is not going to all the pensioners.

The Government removed the subsidies for water and electricity because they said it was not benefiting all. The Government failed to realise that if the pensioner is a male and the metre is in that male's name, then the female who is most likely to be a pensioner, they will both benefit from that same subsidy because they live in the same house. This mathematics or "magicmatics", I do not know how it is working.

We talk about education. Last year, the amount budgeted for education was \$633,389,000 for the 10 regions. There is so much emphasis on education and 27.2% of the money was returned to the Consolidated Fund. They did not spend. Some \$461 million was spent.

The total allocation, last year, for capital programmes for the 10 regions was \$2.1 billion. Some 20.9% of that was not spent. Very quickly, Region 4 failed to spend 46.3% of its allocation for capital works; Region 8 had 30.3% unspent; Region 10 had 37.4% unspent. They got too much money, apparently. This year, the total capital allocation for the 10 regions is \$32 billion. Out of the \$32 billion, 9.3% has gone to Region 10. Region 10 has gotten more allocation this year, again, than Region 1, Region 5, Region 7, Region 8 and Region 9. Compare the population density. It will tell another story.

The final bit that I want to talk about is the fees for driver's licences, private hire car provisional driver's licences, international driving permit, conductor's licence, dealer's licence, identification mark, competence failure. All have been increased by 100%. This is what we are taking from the people. For all motor vehicles, all fitness for tractors, trailers, and all licences for vehicles, 100% is being taken from the people.

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

Mr. G. Persaud: Thank you, Sir. There are increases like 468%, 500%, 474%, 376%, and 566%. This is what is being taken from the people. This budget, in answering the question of what it will give or what it will take, is taking more that it is giving. That is what this budget is seeking to do.

When we look at what has happened with regards to the allocations that were made in the budget, agriculture, with all of the drainage issues that there are, the amount of money that was returned is in excess of 19% of the capital allocation for 2015. That is the reason we are where we are. Yet, we are saying that the good life is there. The good life is nowhere. The good life is only with those who have paid themselves all that they have gotten.

Every year, the Hon. Minister of Communities, when he was on the Opposition benches as a Member of this House, lamented that Region 8 was getting the smallest allocation in the budget. I felt so sorry for him sometimes because he was so emotional. Now, this is the second budget that has come and I still feel sorry for the Hon. Minister this time. Region 8 has still gotten the lowest allocation. [Mr. Bulkan: It has had the largest percentage increase.] Well, I do not know what you are talking about.

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

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

Ms. Bancroft: Mr. Speaker, a pleasant good night to one and all in this august House. I rise to support my Colleague, the Hon. Winston Jordan, Minister of Finance, for presenting such an affordable budget for the Golden Jubilee in the year 2016. This budget is well-received by all because it has hope for all citizens of Guyana, whether they fall within the high, middle or low income bracket. *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons* is for one and all, and even more particularly, the hinterland people of this great nation of ours.

I am not oblivious to the fact that Region 8 is densely populated with forest and its geography makes it difficult to traverse, but it is the most beautiful region in Guyana. Having said that, I will now proceed with my given task. However, allow me a few minutes to make some comments.

I know that it is politics that brought us here but now is not the time for campaigning. We have some more time ahead of us. Having listened to what the Hon. Member Damon said yesterday, it told me that he was either injecting or reintroducing racism into this country. I want to attest to that fact. I am the mother of five children. If I were the father I would have had doubts. I have a Rastafarian daughter and those who know me in this House can attest to that. When one listened to what the Hon. Damon said yesterday, it told me another story of our people who are representing the Guyana populace in this honourable House. Are we still honourable?

This is our second budget in eight months or nine months as they said. When the first budget was presented, we were at the conception stage; we are still in the embryotic stage. I know that this budget has good things for all. I want to make a little addition to that. Come 2017, when we will be creeping and walking, life will be different and better.

I now turn to administration. In this new dispensation under the coalition Government, there are more meaningful discussions and consultation on issues which have resulted in better planning and implementation between the Regional Democratic Council and the Regional Administration. As I stand here tonight, I am happy to report to this noble House that our Government has

increased Region 8's budget significantly. So, I can report that progress that was on its way has arrived.

Infrastructure: there has been great improvement in the provision of potable water in the region with major assistance from the Guyana Water Incorporated and the Regional Administration. We now have solar water pumps in some villages in the region and the Salbora water system is being upgraded.

The roadways of Mahdia are set for major construction in concrete which will enhance the livelihood of Mahdia and its environs. As I mentioned in my last presentation, the rehabilitation of the hydro-station at Tumatumari will produce affordable electricity to Micobie, El Paso and it will enhance the Mahdia Power and Light Corporation.

I turn my attention to education. Communication is of utmost importance to the delivery of the education curriculum across the region. Having said that, I am happy to report that there is now internet connection at a few locations in the North Pakaraimas. I repeat in this noble House that it is in the North Pakaraimas. Who knows the North Pakaraimas?

Currently, the children of Region 8 enjoy much of what the children of the coastland are in receipt of, given that more is provided in this budget for the enhancement of the education delivery for the children of Region 8.

Currently, there is a hot meal pilot programme which was provided for the children at Kato Primary School. This has continued this year, since it had commenced last year. Similar projects will be commencing shortly.

I now turn my attention to health. As of December, 2015, Region 8 has had an increase of six doctors, one orthopaedic technician and one more laboratory technician, which has greatly enhanced the delivery of healthcare for the people of Region 8.

10.32 p.m.

I come to my pet programme. For the first time in history Region 8 has been given agriculture as an individual programme. Sir, you may or may not know of the fertility of the soil in Region 8. We, in Region 8, will continue to produce beans, corn, pumpkin, and spring onions just to

mention a few. Also in my last presentation I did mention Irish potatoes. That project is soon to come on stream. In this year's budget we are given shade houses in Region 8 for the first time. That is not all. For the first time ever strawberry is being produced at Maikwak on a small scale with plans to increase the acreage.

I am about to close with tourism. As I mentioned before, Region 8 has many potential tourist destinations and further development of that is shortly to come on stream. Please allow me to repeat myself, *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*. I now commend this budget to this honourable House.

Thank you Sir. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this brings to an end our list of speakers for today.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Nagamootoo: Mr. Speaker, I move that this House be adjourned until tomorrow Wednesday 10th February, at 1.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: The Assembly now stand adjourned to Wednesday 10th February at one o'clock.

Adjourned accordingly at 10.35 p.m.