

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2015-2016) OF THE TENTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN

26TH Sitting

Wednesday, 10th February, 2016

Assembly convened at 1.09 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Presentation and First Reading

FIREARMS (AMENDMENT) BILL 2016 – Bill No. 2/2016

A BILL intituled:

“AN ACT to amend the Firearms Act.” *[Minister of Foreign Affairs and Second Vice-President]*

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2016

“WHEREAS the Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana requires that Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for any financial year should be laid before the National Assembly;

AND WHEREAS the Constitution also provides that when the Estimates of Expenditure have been approved by the Assembly an Appropriation Bill shall be introduced in the Assembly providing for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet that expenditure;

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 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.

Ms. Teixeira: I rise to support the Members on the Opposition benches who came before me in presenting their analysis of Budget 2016. I have spoken on several occasions in this House about governance, what it means and how it is measured. Simply put, who holds power, whether in government, local government, legislature, judiciary, managing the economy, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and on whose behalf they govern and how they manage the available resources to ensure balance and fairness, equitable access to available goods and services in the various spheres of society – economic, social, administrative and rule of law.

This budget illustrates a lack of fairness and balance, and equitable access to the goods and services for all Guyanese regardless of their geography, religion, gender or ethnicity. This form

of governance is reversing the gains Guyana haltingly made during the last two decades under very difficult circumstances. The People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C)'s administration philosophy was a pro-poor, pro-growth approach to national development. Recognising it had to run on two tracks, to take a country that was bankrupt and create a viable microeconomic framework while simultaneously addressing the more than 60% of the people who are living below the poverty level on less than one US dollar a day in 1992.

The Budget 2014 and mid-year reviews of 2014 illustrate and are proof of what I am saying and the achievements we made. We succeeded in turning around this country and putting it on good footing. Poverty declined sharply; the debt was reduced massively; people's quality of life improved. We achieved universal enrolment in primary schools; we were almost complete with universal secondary education; 100,000 families owned a house lot and had built or were building a family for the very first time. These issues have been reported in our reports to the Universal Periodic Review. For statistics, they are all posted on official websites.

A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) coalition... Unlike when we won the first free and fair elections in 1992... took over a country that had eight years consecutive positive growth rate and was one of two countries in Latin America and the Caribbean that achieved that. The country had foreign reserves of over USD\$780 million; a debt burden that had been reduced to manageable proportions while continuing to be eligible for further loans by multilateral financial institutions. We also opened up South-South Cooperation with bilateral aid and loans as well as investments from China, Brazil, Japan and India, to name a few. This was achieved despite the then Opposition's, now Government, obstructionist role, particular in the Tenth Parliament, when the cuts of the budgets of 2012, 2013 and 2014 were by GY\$90 billion.

I find it amusing, but sadly amusing, that this budget is now putting back moneys for items that were slashed in those three budgets – hinterland airstrips, Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA), hinterland roads, subsidies to Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL), sugar, Office of the President, Amerindian Land Titling and the speciality hospital, just to name a few. The problem, of course, is how these are being implemented, with disregard to the procurement laws and regulations. Regrettably, the same obstructionist approach, instead of building on what was achieved before 16th May, 2015 and correcting what the new coalition thought were

inefficiencies, deficiencies - that is your right as a new Government - the Government threw out everything, the baby and the bath water!

In fact, I was wondering, with all the military advisers who exist in the Government, how come it did not follow normal military strategy. That is, to assess a situation and then move in. In fact, it went in as a bulldozer in a China shop. In the new Government's haste and preoccupation with revenge and retribution, it forgot that it was in the driving seat and it was a Government for all Guyanese, not only for those who voted for them. The Government seems to have forgotten that it now has to fix the problems, as Member of Parliament Madam Pearson reminded the Government's Members yesterday.

Time lost can never be regained. Regrettably, this Government is on the back foot now. In the last eight, almost nine months, this administration dismissed 1,972 Amerindian Community Support Officers (CSO), hundreds of qualified people with university degrees, professionals in the public service and state entities, including all staff of special programmes such as the One Laptop Per Family and the Amerindian Land Titling project as well as the Core Homes Project and the Climate Change Unit – all designed to bring greater equality to the poor and the vulnerable. Also dismissed were lower levels of the public service such as Cleaners, Clerks and Drivers who caught your eye as being “politically incorrect” by your definition. Contractors, who had been awarded contracts prior to the elections, were told to halt. They waited for months. Afterwards some of those contracts were taken away and redistributed them to those whom were thought to be “politically correct”. In the interim thousands of workers lost their jobs in the private sector, especially in the construction and mining sectors.

Transformative development projects, such as Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, the speciality hospital and e-governance, to name a few, were condemned. Projects that had taken years to negotiate and bring to the stage when the Government put a halt, again more jobs were lost. More highly skilled people had to look beyond our borders.

In eight months the Government contributed to the brain drain of this country which had been slowing down. It dismissed and refused new contracts for thousands of people.

Therefore the Government contributed to the unemployment levels that could only hark back the 1978 redeployment of public servants, the retrenchment of bauxite workers in 1976 and the 1986

and 1987 period and the closure of the Guyana National Service (GNS) centres in the 1990s. The public sector of almost 40,000 was reduced to 28,000 when we entered Government in October, 1992. This was done prior to that, by the Hoyte administration, in order to make the country eligible and credit worthy for the International Monetary Fund (IMF/ERP). For the young people who may not know what that is, it is the Economic Recovery Programme. This country has not seen this level of mass dismissals except in those times and yet the Hon. Member came to this House and, on page 2, said “There were no reported job losses.”

I do not know where my dear friend Mr. Jordan is right now. I have known him for a long time. I have known him to be a man who appears to be astute, so I cannot believe he wrote that in good conscience. I am not just blowing hot air. The United States of America Ambassador, in a recent interview, spoke about the number of visas being issued. For 2015 a total of 39,000 Guyanese were interviewed for non-immigrant visas and more than half of that number received visas. He said that five years ago the number of applicants were about 6,000. Therefore for the numbers to leap from 6,000 to close to 40,000 was incredible. Those were the Ambassador’s words not mine. I am not making them up. **[Mr. Greenidge: Where did you get that?]** Mr. Greenidge, the 16th May, 2015 - four months. We will give it, here or there, a four-month. I know you like me, like to deal with minutia. The cost of this retrograde action is phenomenally high. It is the loss of opportunities, loss of investments, loss of institutional memory, which is vital to any new government coming into office. It is in the billions of dollars that it would cost this country to recoup what was done by the signatures of pens and dismissals of people.

1.24 p.m.

There is nothing that that could compare with 1992 with what you did between 16th May, or whenever the Ministers came in in June 2015, and February 2016 the day we are talking on today. I would like to suggest that since the Government likes Commission of Inquiry (CoI), it is to appoint another one to analyse and assess the cost to this country of ‘x’ thousand people losing their jobs in the public and private sectors and figure out, Hon. Members, how to fix it. Again, Sir, time lost, investments lost, confidence and trust eroded.

The culture of fear is creeping in as a result. It is because of this myopic, vindictive and irresponsible approach to governing this country and disregard for the basic tenets of democratic

governance. The behaviour of this administration is an extension of its behaviour in the Tenth Parliament, scissors cutting and no care of the consequences for the nation and its people.

Now, the Members, on the other side, have to double up, as they lost not nine months but two to three years as a result of the \$90 billion from the budgets of 2012, 2013 and 2014. The slowing down of the development path and trajectory of this country started then before they got in Government. Now in this budget they have to repair the damage and make up for time lost. As my colleague said, fix it. They had a 'shoe in', as the Americans would say, but they blew it so far.

The hollowness of the call for national unity in the budget speech, it is repeated for several times. How can there be national unity? It is not an academic exercise. It is not imposed, as I believe someone said on my side here. It is something that takes time, efforts, the building of trust and confidence. How can there be confidence when they are discriminating in hiring?

They are repossessing people's property, especially poor people, in housing schemes, disregard for laws, including procurement law and regulations, implementing what they condemned, repeatedly for years, and at the same time let us look at the contract workers. I did not say it, and who said it was not a supporter of the People's Progressive Party (PPP), as far as I know, but a forensic audit recorded that there were a huge amount of money without a tender. He said that his review of the Budget 2016 ...In fact, he put out a press statement to qualify, to answer, what were some of the comments coming from the Government's side. In his press statement on 8th February, 2016, Mr. Ram said:

“The estimate showed the projected number of contract employees in 2016 is 5878 and is therefore an increase of 1,000 persons or 25. 5%, an increase of 18.2% in budgeted cost.”

I am not even going to go near the Ministry of the Presidency where there is an increase from 298 to 505 contract workers. Mr. Ram even went on to appeal to Mr. Harmon.

“There has been a clear direction by the President that it is an intention to return the public service to a professional one and contract hirers will be reduced to a minimum. We sincerely believe that President Granger has the authority to end this abuse and we look to him to act in this manner”.

They have attacked contract workers all these years; they have fired people who were on contract; they have said, to people on contract, no. All the personnel officers have gone to all the departments and agencies under the Government's jurisdiction and said to them that they have to join the Public Service fixed establishment. That might explain why certain documents in the budget estimates, certain agencies, have no contract workers listed at all. However those agencies are completely made up of contract workers. Are they going to be fired? Are they going to be told if they do not go on the Public Service fixed establishment they will lose their jobs?

The Public Service Rules allow for contract workers. If there is a problem with contract workers the Public Service Rules must be amended. The Government has to bring the changes for the Public Service Commission to adopt and then it will be done. It not as what it started doing from the time it got appointed in office, willy-nilly. I got terminated, as you know, and I did not need to be terminated because I was a President's lieutenant. As an adviser, you are President's lieutenant and when the President changes you automatically do not have a job.

I did not need to get a nice official letter signed by Mr. Harmon stating that I am dismissed. I have never got dismissed in my life. I was not even given me a notice or warning letter, I was just told that I am terminated, and "by the way, all your benefits have been forfeited." This was a template letter sent to people. I did not need that. I knew a new President is sworn in and I watched it on television. I knew my job was gone. Life goes on. I did not need that. I understand the need, on the other side, to show people who have the power. Let us bring them down and show them who is in charge.

Whilst the Government was firing people on contract because these were "politically incorrect", and that was its definition, at the same time, it went and increased the number of contract workers by a thousand. It will have some explaining to do when we reach the Estimates that is much I can tell you. Simultaneously, the PPP asked for certain documents when it was invited by Minister Jordan to talks on the budget. We asked for certain documents, neither confidential nor secret, to facilitate our contribution on the pre-Budget 2016 preparation. However, this request was denied.

The Private Sector Commission complained that it too made proposals to the Budget 2016 preparations but none were accepted. It was just as when it made proposals to amend the Financial Institutions (Amendment) Bill, it was ignored.

The Leader of the Opposition made proposals to amend the tax measures on Feb. 4, but no response has been given by the press. We knew he did a press conference, but we knew too that the Government responded to many things in the press. There was no response. Is that not an opportunity to find consensus? PPP/C does not practise what APNU/AFC did in Opposition, obstruct, cut and throw away. It contributes to the discussion on the developmental path of our country in the interest of all our people. They may not like what we say, but that is okay. This is about finding common ground, but they have dispensed.

In a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-linguistic nation, as ours, with a secular state ruled by the Constitution, governance is of utmost importance to ensure that balance, fairness and equal access are promoted and maintained for all citizens whether they voted for you or voted for us. It is not a matter or an issue. They are the citizens of this country and when you take on the mantle and the power and privileges of being in Government then you serve all the people.

Therefore the frequent quotation from one religious text in a multi-religious society indicates a lack of sensitivity, and worse yet a hegemonic approach to one religion at the cost of the other religions. The Rights section of the Constitution enshrines our right to freedom of worship. It enshrines that this is a secular state. For the first time in a budget speech, as also happened at the inauguration ceremony on 16th May, 2015, reference quotations is made to only one religious text. It automatically leaves out other faiths.

There is a reason why this Parliament after independence crafted a non-denominational non-specific faith prayer that is read at the beginning of each sitting in recognition of the fact that this is a multi-religious secular nation. We are very different from our English speaking Caribbean Community (CARICOM) neighbours but more like Suriname. That is why at the Republic and Independence events there is a prayer similar to the one in Parliament that is non-denominational. We are to be sensitive to these issues. They keep going through things as a “bulldozer in a China shop” all the time.

The debate on the greening and yellowing of Guyana's public and state property is another example of exclusionary politics not inclusionary governance in accordance with article 13 of the Constitution. They are speaking about national unity, but they are doing things that exclude people, exclude religion and exclude other things, all the time. How could they be speaking to two sides of their mouth? They want national unity but they are doing things to alienate people, to marginalise people. They do not have to like the fact that we are a diverse nation, multi-religious, and people speak different languages, but they do have to recognise that they have a responsibility and an obligation as a Government to serve all the people.

As I have said, this is a taxation budget, the only budget, in more than 23 years, to bring in so many taxes. I sat down and went through - Mr. Jordan may appreciate my efforts - all the budgets from the years 2008 to 2016.

The year 2008 focused on restoring the economy and provided support to the new and emerging sectors, modernising the traditional sectors, and so, in the measures that were brought in 2008. Remember that was the time of the global food and fuel crisis.

We increase of threshold that removed 36,000 people from paying income tax, increase in old age pension and public assistance. We exempt excise tax on alcohol used in manufacturing pharmaceuticals. This was to help the business communities and the pharmaceuticals companies.

We zero-rated Value Added Tax (VAT) on essential items and other items; we reduce cost of registering companies. Note, there were no increases in taxes but measures to reduce impact of the global crisis on the poor and help the business community manage.

The year 2009, there were no taxation; the year 2010, there was no taxation.

Budget 2011, and quoted by the Minister, was fully financed without any need to have any new taxes. What were the measures, and that was in 2011? The implementation of Women of Worth (WOW), where has it gone? They talk about women and entrepreneurship, where the programme is. The One Laptop Per Family (OLPF), it was commenced in 2011 with the aim of giving 90,000 low income households laptops over a four-year period. We succeeded in distributing over 50,000 laptops to low income families in this country. Then, what did they do? They cut

and fire all the staff of the OLPF and now they have changed the programme. They have not done anything yet.

Increase old age pension and income tax: Increase the threshold to now include 38,000 persons who no longer need to pay income tax. Reduce corporate tax rate on chargeable profits from 45% to 40%; reduction of non-commercial companies from 35% to 30%. With those kinds of measures, they could have even brought those taxes down even more in this budget.

In the year 2012, it removed taxes on equipment used for generating electricity from non-traditional or renewable services for both household and commercial purposes. That is what you are speaking about with a green economy, not greening Guyana. Green economy is to allow people to have access at a cheaper price for non-traditional alternative energy, whether it is solar or whatever. That was for the household and commercial. It was the removal of tariffs under the European Union–Caribbean Forum Economic Partnership Agreement (EU-CARIFORUM-EPA).

1.39 p.m.

Again, it doubled old age pension and public assistance. Income tax threshold increased now to benefit 60,000 people, again no tax. Whatever was the tax, there was a reduction.

In the year 2013, again, support for sugar, GPL and Linden Electricity... Old age pension and electricity assistance were now added for 20,000 consumers at GPL. The National Insurance Scheme (NIS), with the increase of 1% of the contribution for employed and self-employed, the Government agreed that it would meet the employees and employers share of the increase in the contribution rate. There would be no NIS deductions for those earning under \$50,000. Fifty-three thousand persons would have benefited.

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

Mr. Ali: Mr. Speaker, I humbly move to seek your permission in granting the Hon. Member the agreed additional five minutes.

Question put, and agreed to.

Ms. Teixeira: I could go on with the taxation but let us go ahead. All the taxes in 2014, there were reductions in income tax.

The issues of 2015, there were no new taxes but regrettably, the Government withdrew the Government's financial support for the NIS.

In the year 2016, it was full of taxes. After this glimpse of 2008, now do you get it Members on the other side? It is how to reduce inequalities, how to assist people, while at the same time, investing in the private sector to help them to go and expand. Do you get it now?

Mr. Speaker, as you know, these taxes, which have been brought in,... I heard that the Minister said, and the budget speech states so, that a person has to have all these compliances with the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) before that person could have access to certain licences. Why? There is already the Taxpayers Identification Number (TIN). Why was TIN introduced? Everybody, who is working in this country - a huckster, a cleaner, a taxi driver, a public servant - has to have a TIN. Therefore GRA knows who are paying and who are not; they just have to use their systems to track it. Why you have to make more delays, now – time lost. They are reversing time.

This is not how you try to encourage small entrepreneurs. I heard certain Members from the other side talk about small entrepreneurs. How do they improve and help small entrepreneurs when you are creating a bureaucratic nightmare? This is not a stimulus budget. I want us to not repeat what the Hon. Member Mr. Irfaan Ali said. I thought he did an excellent job. As a young Guyanese, a product of our country, being a macroeconomist, in this Parliament, we should be proud, as all Guyanese.

We know about the Commissions of Inquiry – all these Commissions of Inquiry. The worst one is what was being done to Walter Rodney but we said that the last time... It made no difference to you. You have a fetish with Commission of Inquiry. You have one on the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) and then you dash away the report. You do your own thing. It is time for us to bring the GuySuCo report – let us talk about it and withdraw the closure of Wales Sugar Estate – stop it.

There is a Commission of Inquiry on the public servants. My dear Mr. Jordan, Minister, said that the wages increases have to wait for the collective bargaining agreement but on a television interview, on a programme called “Public Interest”, a very knowledgeable person said that you have to wait until the Commission of Inquiry is finished. Public servants and the disciplined

forces cannot get the increase either until the Commission of Inquiry on Public Service comes in because there has to be the equivalences between the police, the army and the prison with the public servants. Why did you not say that in the speech in the first place? Why do you always have one person saying something and one saying another thing? Can you not get your act together? There was one Minister who was saying something and another Minister who was saying another thing. You are confusing the public.

The Commission of Inquiry on education, my dear friend Dr. Rupert Roopnarine, what is happening? It is still not established.

There are lack of transparency, accountability and oversight. I just want to give an example of the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) website. It was an innovation that was created by Guyana and Guyana was congratulated by the Inter American Convention Against Corruption in the 2011 Report to the Organization of American States (OAS) Mechanism for Follow-Up on the Implementation of the Inter-American Convention against Corruption (MESICIC) because we publicly had put the minutes of the tendering of the opening, the minutes of the tender board, the advertisement for the tenders and the awards of the tenders. We are the only English speaking country that did that. Go to it now and see what has happened. The posting up awards only go up to October, 2015, last post. It was the minutes of the opening of the tenders 6th October, 2015. There was no minutes of the NPTAB posted on the website, the actual postings of the awards. It is so difficult and it is un-user-friendly. It is an exercise and frustration. As I said, the last posting was October, 2015, so I do not know where the awards are.

I would ask Dr. Norton to pay attention to this website because what I was able to glean with it from July 2015 to October, 2015, only \$18 million was spent by the Ministry of Public Health or awarded for drugs and medical supplies. No wonder there is a shortage.

The construction at the Square of the Revolution, what is it that is being doing - a stadium, recreational park? What is it? There was no public information, no designs, no cost, no tendering. Why do you have to hide this? If it is for the jubilee celebration, let us all know about it. Why do you have to hide it? It is a lack of accountability.

I can go on about Fedders Lloyd Corporation Limited. Despite the call of the public, of NGOs, Transparency Institute of Guyana (TIG), Mr. Ram, Private Sector Commission - forget about the PPP; we do not count in your eyes - to withdraw that, go to public tender, you have resolutely, dogmatically and blatantly refused to do it. Again, “bulldozing in a China shop”, and as you said “*is ah we time*”.

The distribution of the budgets for seven of the ten regions won by the PPP/C has been a lesson of undemocratic approaches by the Regional Executive Officers (REOs) appointed. They are political appointees. They are the chief Accounting Officers. They have played as if they are governors in those seven regions. They disregarded the Regional Chairman. Let me give you one example if you do not believe me. In Region 9 - I know Lethem well; I know Region 9 well - there has always been, since I was a Minister of Health, the problem of never having enough hostels, accommodations for the nurses who are sent to Region 9 or the women who come out of the villages who are trained as nurses. A building was identified by the Regional Democratic Council (RDC) to be converted into another nurses' hostel because it did not have space. Who wants to listen to any RDC, any Regional Chairman? Who are they? What they have done is that they have taken the building and beautifully rehabilitated it. What is it for? It is for when they all visit the region, the highest ranking people of this country. There is an appeal to the Minister of Communities to help the regions where the budgets have been deficient, but he has ignored these calls.

My dear friend, Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge, I cannot understand why you are treating me this way. Two of your three programmes have been reduced. Have you noticed? I am sure being a good solidarity Cabinet Member, you will defend it to the greatest extent, that the cut should not take place. Sir, you, have also cut back on the number of contract workers in your Ministry, when your Ministry, as you know, check your book... Mr. Greenidge has my sympathy because the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the window of this country, not just for missions and Ambassadors appointments, it markets your country. When Minister Catherine Hughes wants to market some of her tourism stuff one of the conduits she will use is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

There are only four Ambassadors out of 13 missions. The rest are all Charge d' Affairs, in charge, or what is called High Commissioners (acting). There are only two consulates for the rest

of the Consul Generals. Why some of their masters have not received their accreditation yet, from the host countries? Is this a problem of trust and confidence or is just bureaucratic delay?

In conclusion, we call on the Government to restore the following:

- the We Care Programme of \$10,000 per child;
- restore the subsidies to the pensioners for water and electricity;
- restore the subsidy for contributors to the NIS with the 1% - which you withdrew;
- restore the School Feeding Programmes in Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9 based on the village economy model, village governance and nutritional studies;
- implement the nine-point programme with regard to saving the rice industry;
- stop the closure of Wales Sugar Estate;
- start the dialogue in the National Assembly on the findings of the Commission of Inquiry on sugar; and
- all the taxation issues.

We have proposed reductions. We have proposed amendments to these and we have proposed changes.

I hope that you will listen to them. We have called on you to do not put that increase on the shot gun licences yet we have a Bill here today that puts it at the figure of \$5,000. These are farmers and Amerindians who mainly use shot guns...

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I wish the Government well and the lesson for it to learn is that it should listen. It is to listen and stop acting as a “bulldozer in a China shop”.

Mr. Speaker: Before we continue with our debate, I would like to acknowledge the presence of a number of students from President’s College who are visiting us. The students and their

teachers, to you I say welcome. I hope you will find much food for thought being among us this afternoon.

Minister of Public Telecommunications with responsibility for Tourism [Mrs. Hughes]: I stand here with a terrible disadvantage because I have so much I want to share with this honourable House and I now have to take some time to respond to the utterings of the last most honourable speaker. She mentioned the airstrips that were cut...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am sure that you mean the statement.

Mrs. Hughes: It is the statement, Mr. Speaker. My apologies. She mentioned the cutting of funds in the last Parliament for the airstrips in several interior locations. She does not recall that I happened to be in the former Speaker's Chamber, consulting with the former Minister of Finance, when we, in the Opposition, at that time, pleaded that the airstrips in several important interior locations would not be included with the cuts that we needed to be made. It was the most honourable last speaker who said that they all had to go. In addition, "retribution and revenge" have been the words that have been bantered around this most honourable House. I want us to remember that there is an important word called "scam" that defined what Guyanese were faced in the last 23 years. I will only mention gold.

When we talk about contracts, which are not being renewed, I think this Government has absolutely every right to take that position. We have a contract for the building of the Kato Secondary School that has gone over \$1 billion and we still cannot put students in that school today. Therefore I say there is a big injustice that has been met to this honourable House.

1.54 p.m.

Let us talk about additional contracts which were previously only sent to one particular agency that provided all the medial supplies for this country at a more expensive price, and worse yet, we were required to pay up front for pharmaceuticals that have still not been delivered.

When we talk about the One Laptop Per Family (OLPF) Programme, we still have in our inventory 4,000 laptops that are without batteries. How will we give those to the Indigenous communities, and, of course, the 'greening' of Guyana, that all citizens are benefitting from.

We in this House passed \$1 billion in the last Parliament and there was nothing to see. Therefore, I urge the most honourable last speaker to bring a list to this Parliament of all the persons that she thinks had been dismissed from any position. We have the right, that if contracts are up, not to renew them. I regret that the services of the former speaker were terminated in a manner that she is clearly very upset with. I would like to say that we are all about healing and conciliation on this side of the fence, and at any time we are willing to work with her. With that said, I really do want to change my tone and get to the sense of my very interesting presentation.

So, Mr. Speaker, I rise to lend support and to congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance on presenting Guyana's largest budget, this well-crafted \$230 billion development-oriented budget, under the theme: *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*.

The *Official Gazette* of 18th January, 2016, highlighted the creation of a new Ministry of Public Telecommunications, which now encompasses the original responsibilities of tourism and a series of other agencies, including: telecommunications; tourism; the postal and telegraph services; and agencies such as E-Government, the National Data Management Authority, the National Frequency Management Unit, the Guyana Post Office Corporation and the Public Utilities Commission.

As a country, we must recognise the importance of the developing our Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector, and placing it at the centre of our development plans. Fundamental to this, is providing internet access and connectivity across all regions of our country, and designing a national broadband policy and implementing the supporting strategies. The socio-economic impact of broadband in Latin American and Caribbean countries, as stated in the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) Report of 2012, highlights the 20% increase in broadband penetration in any country, as associated with a 1.34% increase in gross domestic product (GDP). In 2007, it went to 2.9%, and in 2009 to 3.19%. These findings show that the greater the number of broadband subscriptions in a country overtime, the greater impact it will have on a country's GDP. This is why the United Nations (UN) advocates, as an important sustainable goal – and that is goal No. 9(c), that we, as a countries:

“...significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to internet in least developed countries by 2020.”

There can be no doubt that the development of an ICT sector in Guyana can transform this country. We continuously read about it and see in other countries, how this sector has become the engine of growth for global and social economic growth. In the Caribbean region in the past two decades, it has been the period in which we have seen the introduction, spread and the use of mobile phones; personal computers; tablets; the internet. We have also seen a dramatic expansion in the number and range of telecommunications and broadcast media providers, and the growth of application of ICT in business, schools and households.

Information and Communications Technologies have emerged over the past decades as one of the most viable representations of modern development, profoundly influencing production processes and social life. Regrettably, however, over the years in Guyana, the development of ICT as a contributing productive sector has been slow.

The high cost of supporting infrastructure, the absence of enabling legislation and limited skill sets have been significant contributors to this state of affairs. In general, the growth of ICT in Guyana has been a very mixed bag. It is meandered, it has had its fits and starts and it has had some individual achievements, but by and large, 2016, still finds us behind our Caribbean colleagues in terms of scope, function and overall contribution to national development.

We understand that the appropriate utilisation of ICT can improve the lives of all Guyanese and therefore must be the fundamental cross-cutting component in the overall national vision to build an information society by extension, and also attain country status in the coming years.

Our discussions on the challenges in the rice and sugar industries and the decline of gold prices are all grim reminders that despite our commitment and the sentiments, this primary sector can no longer continue to be the only economic driver in our economy, in its current scope and framework.

It is the technology-driven knowledge management industries that will have to be the cornerstone of our country's future. This would involve the growth of ICT as a stand-alone

economic sector and its application in all other sectors to achieve rapid and sustained development. We will need to grow and nurture this industry with policy and legislative frameworks, traditional ways of incorporating technology, such as the importing of machinery and equipment or direct foreign investment. All of those incidentally, are not enough to confront the challenges of an inclusive economic development.

The mandate of this new Ministry is clear. It is the effective implementation and utilisation of ICT to modernise Guyana to the benefit of all its citizens. We have several fundamental goals and objectives. We must, as a national imperative, utilise ICT to improve the delivery of Government services to our citizens. We must be able to process our various applications online and quickly and to get immediate responses to our queries through electronic and life help desks. Visits to Government offices to collect a form and having to return to drop it off, must become a thing of the past.

What does the implementation of ICT really mean in a practical sense? It means that our children in Annai or students attending the Bina Hill Institute or in Aranaputa, for example, must be able to benefit from the knowledge and tuition that the Biology Teacher at Bishop's High School or Queen's College offers.

Today's technology makes it easy with Skype and other platforms for distance education and learning not to be hindered. Therefore, we have to use technology to be able to offer education to our remote hinterland areas.

In the area of Health, if a Medex in Nappi needs the support with a medical issue in his community, he must be able to communicate online with a doctor in Georgetown or in any other location nearby, for consultation and related assistance.

To my Colleague, Hon. Valarie Patterson, I want to assure you that when we are finished, you will be able to check the status of those housing applications online, without the current challenges of limited bandwidth and slow speed. This makes sense and we can generate economic growth and stimulate development in a series of different sectors, but we need to design appropriate policies, establish a proper regulatory framework, and ensure institutional strengthening, training and infrastructure, which really have never been done before to date on a national basis.

I mentioned infrastructure. Should we talk about infrastructure in ICT? Where is the fibre optic cable that we spent US\$200 million on? One billion dollars of Guyanese tax payers' money and we have nothing to show for it. The past Government had to throw it aside. So I say to the Hon. Member, Mr. Hamilton, who is the vampire that sucked us dry? Despite the rantings on the other side, we will not and shall not forget what existed, prior to nine months ago.

The Government of Guyana will ensure that affordable universal broadband access is available for all our citizens, the private sector, and government and civil society, thereby eliminating the digital divide.

Universal access will extend beyond voice to include internet, computing devices, information literacy and access to telecommunication services. All of these we know once put in place, will significantly enhance our gross domestic product.

Guyana, because of its competitive position in terms of salaries and cost of operations, has a tremendous opportunity to become a leading provider of ICT in the Caribbean region. The local operations of two of the largest call centre providers in the industry, and also the call centre that I opened a few months ago, are testimonies to this real potential.

The development of our ICT sector offers a tremendous opportunity for young people, who naturally and instinctively, are experts in the use of these new technologies, to be gainfully employed. Contrary to the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramson's, assertion that we on this side of the House are promoting youth unemployment. I wish to provide him with some information and education on what we plan to do.

We will use ICT to enable and foster the process of innovation, and we intend to ensure that our young people in Guyana are the beneficiaries of this programme. As a Government, we intend to use the technology and to revolutionise the way we act at different Ministries and agencies. We are ensuring that we will computerise and bring the technology to the way Government does business, as I mentioned.

One of the basic things that we intend to do, is to create information hubs and as one can imagine, in each of these Ministries, we will need to establish programmes by which data

collection of our old records are actually completed. We are confident that we will be able to bring a large number of young people on in that area.

Liberalisation of the Telecommunication sector has been on the agenda for several years. A revised Telecommunications Bill was tabled in this National Assembly and has been subjected to scrutiny of a Select Committee of the House - both Government and Opposition seem united in the search. We are committed to bringing this legislation, which will end the monopoly in this sector, to this Parliament before the end of this year. There are several consequential matters that remain to be settled for which further consultations with a major player, Guyana Telephone and Telegraph Company (GT&T), are on-going. It is hoped that the process of liberalisation, as I mentioned, would be completed this year and the national spectrum be opened up to all strategic partners and we promise that it will be on a fair playing field. Comprehensive Intellectual Property is fundamental to this and also we want to make sure that training in the national ICT sector to all levels of our population takes place.

The 2016 Budget reflects Government enduring commitment and responsibility to increasing investments in this area.

2.09 p.m.

Overall, this year Government plans to invest \$1,854,000,000 in supporting ICT, and we are going to do this through the E-Government Unit.

I am happy to say that, an additionally, \$108 million will be allocated for the creation of an off-site datacentres and secure in data management storage systems for ministries and Government agencies. Strengthening the E-Government unit is an important part.

Three hundred and twenty six million is also earmarked to design and implementation of interconnections between agencies, state buildings and educational facilities. We intend to provide internet access, free of charge, to those educational institutions. We will set up ICT Hubs in various communities, and also ensure that the level of poverty and remoteness in various locations are transcended with technology.

There are many other aspects of what we plan to do that time will not permit me to mention. There is a \$25 million toward the establishment of a centre of excellence for technology. Also,

the Government will spend a further \$100 million to repair and upgrade the Georgetown to Linden fibre optic cable, which will ensure that we do have connectivity in our country.

I want to move on to some of the additional sectors that are very important to this department. As Hon. Members know we have our National Frequency Management System and that Unit is in fact responsible for the allocation of radio frequencies. This year, the frequency management system will continue to ensure that we look at a fair and equitable allocation of frequencies. They will be continuing their programme called *Girls in ICT Day Activities*, by which more female participation in the ICT sector will be guaranteed. So I say to the Hon. Member, Mr. Hamilton, that ICT is also for our women, not only bake and salt fish.

I want to mention that the National Data Management Authority, which, under this new Ministry, is going to be revamped and will become an integral part of the E-Governance Unit. In addition to those industries, I want to mention the Public Utility Commission (PUC) and that is the statutory organisation which regulates a series of our utilities. I am happy to say that the Public Utilities Commission, last year, was able, through claims that were put into it, to award \$17,596,000, to claimants - general members of the public - for claims that were granted to various utilities, including our electricity corporation and the Guyana Water Inc.

Mr. Speaker, I have so much I want to tell you and I must move on immediately to tourism. Contrary to some of the feelings, tourism is an important aspect of the new Ministry of Public Telecommunications, which has responsibility for tourism. I turn to tourism, which is the thrust of this Ministry. At this point it is important to note that the Budget's direct contribution to the tourism sector has, in fact, increase \$214.6 million in 2015 to \$312.7 million in 2016. This represents a \$98.1 million or a 45.7% increase in direct allocations to the tourism sector, through the Ministry of Tourism and the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA). This is hardly the action of action of a Government that is, as my learned Colleague Member of Parliament (MP) Ms. Selman described, is giving and I quote:

“...giving less priority to Tourism.”

The Hon. Member of Parliament, Ms. Persaud, in her presentation stated that, Tourism was, and I quote:

“...being taken a tour to nowhere”

Oh dear, what a statement to make. I would like to inform the Hon. Member that, in 2015, 206,819 visitors, that are non-residents, paid their hard earned money to come and enjoy this tour to nowhere. Most recent tourism statistics also show, and I got these just a couple days ago, that the largest in number of visitor arrivals ever in the month of January, occurred last month with an increase of over 3.2% arrivals, taking it to 14,445 arrivals.

We must be fooling a lot of people because all of them are coming to enjoy this tour to nowhere. And guess what? We fooled Cable News Network (CNN) too because their *Big Earth* documentary, listed Guyana as one of the 101 amazing adventures of the world. Then, we fooled *National Geographic* as they have listed Guyana as some of their best trips in 2014. Guess what? In December, we fooled *Business Insider* of the United Kingdom (UK) which placed Guyana 9th of the 12 emerging travel destinations to visit in 2016.

The hard work of our tourism stakeholders and organisations like the Tourism and Hospitality Association of Guyana that started decades ago, but which is now receiving real Government support and focus, is finally beginning to pay off. We have gone out to the international tourism market, and they are saying to us that they love it, and they want to come. And, when they come there is a piece of the pie for every Guyanese to enjoy.

It is us in this room that can pose the greatest detractors to the development of this industry. All of us who choose not to tell the complete story, those of us who cannot find any good in our attempts to move Guyana forward. Yes, I continue to say, “Move Guyana forward” because I recognise the contributions on all sides of this political House, as they have all moved this nation forward. I applaud all of them all. In this vein, I reach out to the media to ask it not to censor its stories of crime, but to be balanced in its coverage of the reports to bring the perpetrators to the courts, as we are doing, and to ensure that it are a part of the process of fixing the challenges we face in negative publicity. As a Barbadian colleague stated to me, “Cathy, your biggest problem is that it is plastered on your front pages”. Everywhere has crime, but we handle it differently. Tourism is about creating opportunities and about creating hope. I am convinced of the economic impact that we will recognise.

At this point I want to state that the National Competitive Report of May, 2013, stated that the values of Guyana's tourism product, that is the hospitality and associated services, could be as much as \$214 million roughly or 3% GDP.

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

Minister of Social Cohesion [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.

Mrs. Hughes: I want to look at some of the achievements that we are happy to share from over the last couple months.

The National Tourism Policy: Finally, we have been able to complete our National Tourism Policy. The overarching framework within which these developments are to take place in Guyana, are embodied in our National Tourism Policy. In fact, this policy was sent to our stakeholders and I do apologise the MP Ms. Africo Selman, to whom I did not share a copy of that Policy. I will be sending that to her later today.

Our Ecotourism Policy recognises our *niche* markets, which of course we have said are our fishing, sports fishing, our community based tourism, and our yachting, the advent of smaller yachts and smaller tour companies to Guyana. I want to also our adventure and leisure part of the industry, and most importantly, community tourism. We have started an integrated process which includes the Ministry of Tourism, the GTA and several other Government agencies, in ensuring that we implement a proper tourism satellite accounting system, which really would measure the real opportunities and contributions of this sector.

Hinterland Tourism is an important aspect of what we have been doing. I am happy to say that substantial funds in the Budget have been presented in that area. In the area of Hinterland Tourism, we have actually gone to a series of our hinterland locations and we have created a model called *Ready* which was a model designed in Region 8. What we did in Region 8, as we plan to do in all the regions, is to establish an inventory of tourism products that can be developed. We have actually got a compressive list of all the funding agencies. We have been going out to communities across Guyana asking to them to send in their proposals and we are

assisting them to get funding. Contrary to gloom that is presented on the other side of the House, there is excitement in tourism because we have many individuals coming in and many proposals to deal with.

On the Global Marketing front, I think that I have mentioned in several areas, our commitment. Funds have been allocated to increase the level of promotion that we are doing internationally. We have, for example, signed on to an arrangement with 'Trip Advisor' to ensure that we are recognised in our specific *niche* markets, where the tourists are coming from, and we will be targeting those segments specifically. We are also working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the material that we have produce and plan to produce for this year for example, we have up the level of display units, brochures, and a range of other things that are now visible at our Embassies and High Commissions overseas.

I am happy to report on our initiative with Barbados, under that Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) the private sector in Barbados and Guyana are networking to ensure that we can package the beauty of Barbados' beaches and the excitement of Guyana's ecotourism.

The Guyana Shield is a whole new area that we have been looking at. The Guyana Shield is the countries of French Guiana and Suriname. Believe it or not, those locations are at the onset to the challenges we face in airlift. We can reach a range of tourist coming from European destinations, by having them come through, either French Guiana or Guyana. I am happy to say that we have tour companies and a Familiarisation Trip (FAM Trip) just recently from Suriname and already, 43 tours have been finalised. So, I say that there are a lot that is happening.

The key way to sell our destination, we recognised, in a cost effective way, is our participation at international trade fairs. We have gone to specific trade fairs in the bird watching markets and also, in our adventure leisure markets.

The other initiative that is part of our plans for 2016 is the promotion of FAM Trips. It is through the promotion of FAM Trips, just in the last four months, that we have gotten coverage in several international newspapers and online editions, including *Huffington Post* and the *New York Times*.

So there is a lot that is going on. The partnerships that we are focusing on; our commitment to training; our commitment to training and in terms of the development of our tourism and

hospitality school, are other commitments to where we want to be. We are currently looking at the plans for the developments of the school, which are on the table and we anxiously await the conclusion of those. I am happy to say that the hospitality institution will become part of the University of Guyana's education system.

2.24 p.m.

I know that advertising and social media are important aspects, and I want to say that we have already developed relations with a team of young tech-savvy Guyanese entrepreneurs that are already preparing a series of acts. These are acts that would be screened and made available for our 50thn Anniversary celebrations.

There are several things that I want to say in closing. I really want to thank my fellow MP, Ms. Selman, for the series of recommendations that she made in her presentation. I think that her presentation was the spirit of what we hope to see in this honourable House. And I do have a few answers to her questions.

The first question she asked was about the tourism policy. I want her to know that has been disseminated, so that is done. She also said... [Mr. Ali: It is Hon. Member] Sorry, yes. Please, I profusely apologise. The Hon. Member mentioned tourism information sites and I am happy to say that, through the 'Visit Guyana Cluster', we have open one in Lethem and the current home of the Guyana Tourism Authority is going to be another location for an information booth. The Hon. Member also mentioned tourism representatives at some of our police stations. We have actually gone a step further and have drafted the design of a small Tourism Police Force that I do have to raise with our Minister of Public Security. So I want to say that there are several of the issues and concerns that were raised, that we are happy to say, we have closed.

At the end of the day, I want to say to this most honourable House that tourism is a strong source of investment for Guyana. Guyanese and those overseas have the opportunity to come and invest in our product. I think I have sold this House on the possibilities that this sector has for moving our country forward.

I, therefore, want to work with everyone and anyone; the students, including former Ministers of Tourism and MPs on the other side of the House, I think, together, we can make a difference and

we can change the tone of the debate in this honourable House. At the end of the day, this is about making sure we create a better Guyana that we leave for our children. I therefore commend this Budget to this honourable House for its passage and congratulate the Minister of Finance once again, thank you. [*Applause*]

Dr. Persaud: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Hon. Minister of Finance and his staff for the presentation of Budget 2016, but I am sorely tempted to slip him a note to say what women want in the Budget. Because, as in 2015 and 2016, my gender has been conspicuously ignored and marginalised.

There has been a movement towards gender equality, and yes, Guyana too, should and must move in that direction, but on the presumptions that tangible women's empowerment would not be neglected. The \$230 billion Budget 2016 has failed to deliver transformative initiatives which would impact on women's financial enablement and skills development, and has not offered a plan for structural support for women in the throes of domestic violence or to those struggling to survive and provide as single mothers.

Cosmetic mergers of the Women's Affairs Bureau, which exist and the Men's Affairs Bureau, which exist, and a new gender policy, would not address, in a concrete way, the fact that women are still at the bottom of the ladder of earning and they are still in a patriarchal society. To ensure the efficacy of the promised - Gender Affairs Bureau: "There must be effective mechanisms for the review and monitoring of sectoral policies and healthy inclusive discussions on the strengths and weaknesses, and steps to improve its output".

We cannot talk about women's equality in Guyana and not address the worrying problem of domestic violence. It seems that under A Party for National Unity and Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Administration domestic violence has been relegated to the back burner. A Hon. Member on the Government side sought to lecture us, during this debate, on the abuse of women. The irony and shame of it is that, not one woman on that side of the House, none of my Colleagues on that side of the House in Parliament, chastised sitting Members in this Assembly and in Government, when sexist and offensive remarks were directed against me. When the Hon. Minister gets up, and will get up, and talk about plans for women and gender equality, I will like to say to the Hon. Minister that it starts with you.

On another note, we have heard of many persons being pardoned and set free. Were there any female prisoners who were pardoned? And yes, there are female prisoners. Absolutely not! Has any attention been paid to their appalling conditions in the prison? No not in this Budget. This is the insincerity that looms large in the face of grand announcements of gender equality.

Does the 2016 Budget address women's wages, their unpaid work burden and labour in the informal sector. Is there any interest in this data collection, which would guide policies towards decreasing the inequity which exists in the working world with regard to wage? What about employment opportunities for women. It is a fact that women predominate as low paid workers, domestic workers and in many jobs which are non-unionised, non-regulated or unregulated and not subject to minimum wage. I suppose that I should not expect better from the current Government. There is an overdose of geriatrics or a geriatrics overdose, whichever way one wants to take it. Gender's imbalance is a hallmark; four Vice-Presidents and not one woman. Few women head their Ministries, though stocking some junior positions. Even fewer women are in advisory capacities, more geriatrics and lots of military men too. But then, maybe one has to be past the age of retirement to be considered, so much for the youth, Hon. Colleague.

The Guyana Women's Leadership Institution (GWLI), established under the People Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C), caters for the elevation of women – grass root women - to prepare them for leadership in this country. In the last six months, this institute has been starved of new initiatives; starved of evolving programmes to cater for the current needs of women. Yes, the PPP/C had many imaginative programmes, but time is moving on. One cannot be stuck in a time warp. When time marches on, there are advances and the needs of women constantly evolve. This is the Institute which annually turns out hundreds of graduates of women every year. What happened in the last six months? In fact, our very own MP, Ms. Gillian Persaud, is a graduate from the first batch of that Institute. I am urging the Hon. Minister, not to be stuck in a time warp, but to consult. While we are very happy that many of the PPP/C programmes are being taken on board, and I will tell Hon. Members about that in a bit, we need to be imaginative, innovative and visionary in planning for the future.

What about the entrepreneurial programme? Like the popular Christmas comedian, I have to ask, I wonder what happened to the Women of Worth (WoW) Programme? Word has it that it will be *genderised*. The whole point of that programme was that it provided opportunities for women,

single women, who did not have the same opportunities as those of their male counterparts. Single mothers struggling to provide for their families, better resources for women who were unable to source loans. We recognised, as the PPP/C Government, that it was not a level playing field, it still is not a level playing field, so be careful.

Over \$35 million was unspent from last year's Budget and that tells the story that not enough was done through this Ministry when so much screams for attention. What are the provisions in the Budget for women, whose husbands are going to lose their jobs in the sugar industry? At least 50 employees lost their jobs at the Uitvlugt Estate this week. In fact, women were told at that estate that, if they wanted to stay in the Estates' employ they had to cut and stack canes. A callous and a high-handed approach; I dare not say duplicitous. But if the workers were assured that they would not be knocked off and then they were what other word should I say?

The stench of unemployment threatens to lend to more social problems for women who are primary dependents. Is the Budget for difficult circumstances expansive enough to withstand the needs which will arise from these situations? Will these women be able to benefit when their tables are empty and their children cannot go to school?

I have not heard that the Bs Project, the Books, Buses, Bicycles and Breakfast, have been allocated to the Uitvlugt and the Wales Estates area. I have always championed the rights of women and men, long before I entered the political arena. I am happy that children are not going hungry; I am happy that children are getting books; and I am even happier that children are getting transportation. But my question is, when the donors' money run out, who will sustain this? Who decides where these buses are placed? What studies were done to determine which are the poorest communities and which communities have the most need? I would like to highlight the sheer inadequacy of the buses that are being, you know, gifted from the Government side and question the manner in which benefits have been accrued. How many children actually benefit from this bus system?

At the end of the day, when we had the 'Because We care Project' the \$10,000 benefited every child, not some or in some areas. It was not done at the whims and fancy of anyone. It was done for all Guyanese children.

I am going to tread carefully on the next one. There has been much issue about colours. Since I was a child and any child who knows the colour of the flag, there are five colours. The colours of the flag, if a child was asked in school, they could not only say green and yellow, the hapless black and white and red must also be mentioned. But I cannot help if Colleagues are colour blind but I can say that I am willing to offer consultation in the face of the uncontrollable and pervasive instances of suicides, violence and alcohol abuse.

2.39 p.m.

People are additionally consumed by the sheer fear for their lives, in heightened crime environments, Mr. Karma; uncertainty about their future in jobs as they are fired, replaced, demoted, subsumed in Ministries and others placed over their heads where they were heads of departments. People in the public sector are being frustrated. A budget that imposes draconian measures that hurt the pockets, the food table and the quality of life is no budget for the ordinary person, the poor person or the working person.

We suffer from the consequences of alcohol abuse in most aspects of life – accidents, suicide, violence, death and decrease in productivity. Why would taxes on alcohol be reduced? Are we nurturing a drinking overdrive or a drinking culture which has hurt us and continue to hurt us? Maybe Mr. Karma will tell us. Why not instead, spend on alcohol, drugs and substances abuse rehabilitation programmes, creating support groups for alcoholics and their families? What kind of Government imposes 100% and more increases on vital licence and then, on the other hand or at the same time, drags out negotiations which will give increases to workers' salaries.

In fact, let me make it easy and remind this Government of the promised 10% salary increase which we are yet to see. I hope the negotiations yield more as that was the APNU/AFC's proposal on the campaign trail and recently. How can the proposed measures of this Budget, which were well ventilated, be acceptable to anyone without evidence-based studies to show their merits or their contributions to improvement in finances and quality life across the board? The APNU/AFC Government has reneged on most of its Manifesto's promises. Let me list them for you, Mr. Speaker: \$20,000 for old age pension; the decrease in VAT; the 10% salary increase. I am pretty sure that nothing more than 5% or 7% is coming the workers' way and it may not even be retroactive from January, 2016. I hope my words will influence it otherwise. I

say to the Unions to press on and ask for 10% and more for the workers and I say to the workers to hold this Government accountable.

Every year, persons expectantly await a people-oriented budget to provide relief to their pockets through more disposable income which ultimately contributes to the local and national economy by having moneys circulated at all levels. With disposable income, money moves from the seamstress, the bookseller and the shopkeeper to the higher levels in the business sector, but *Budget 2016* is a damp squib which has once again failed the people of Guyana.

Poverty alleviation is a Millennium Development Goal. With the incurred increases in the cost of living, that Goal has all but faded into oblivion. If poverty among women is to be alleviated, there ought to be enhanced awareness of women's rights and provisions under these rights, for example pregnant women and their antenatal and maternity benefits. While the Prevention of Discrimination Act may be invoked, are these embedded in our policies? Do all women benefit across the board?

Amendment of legislation caters for women who do not work outside their homes. Legislation on sexual harassment and stalking and knowledge of gender issues through the society are what I want to see happening in the Ministry of Social Protection. Women work long hours, both as primary and secondary income earners, at the expense of their health and at the expense of where their children and families may be neglected. I would have been heartened to hear of initiatives to remove some of the burdens of our women, including minimal cost day care facilities for parents, special programmes for teenage mothers, parenting programmes, support programmes for widows, survivors of trauma, violence and abuse. I know some of this exist but I want to see more done in all of this.

At the end of the day, women represent 50% of our country's population, and investing in women's capabilities and empowering them to exercise their choices contributes to economic growth, overall development and the future financial status of their children. It is well known that children mirror their mother's financial status, rather than that of their father.

This is what confounded me most in this Budget debate of 2016: when the two Ministers of Finance conflicted markedly on the financial state of the country and the Consolidated Fund during the Budget debate of 2016. It is cause not only for concern, but serious worry. On one

hand, our Hon. Minister of Finance presented a \$230 billion budget and had the wherewithal, shortly after the current Government assumed office, to dispense large salary increases to Government's Ministers' of the largest Cabinet in the Caribbean to increase significantly the numbers of contract workers; to pay super salaries to a slew of advisors and to give to projects being embarked on with little details, notably the project on Durban Park. I do not have a problem with projects but I want to know what is happening. I want some accountability. Look at that picture.

On the other hand, the Minister within the Ministry of Finance claimed that the Consolidated Fund was in overdraft, which means that there were no moneys in 2015. That is a lot of confusion in one place.

Budget 2016 has no new initiative, nothing to cushion the hardships faced by the ordinary man. Rather, it has added to the vicissitudes that persons deal with on a daily basis. In fact, with its wide reaching ambit, the Ministry of Social Protection, which focuses on our most vulnerable and family welfare, deserves more than the \$3 billion increase from 2014. In fact, the Office of the Prime Minister received double and we are all confused as to what really is falling under the purview of the Prime Minister's Office. Not only we, but everyone is. Could not the Ministry of Social Protection receive more than the \$13 billion allocated to deliver some of the projects that are so badly needed to combat the social ills in this country, to increase the human resource pool in all of the regions of our country, to ensure our homeless are not treated in such an inhumane manner that water douses them in the middle of their sleep? I could not believe this. The homeless people need to be treated with dignity. *Na because dem na gat dem na matta*. They are Guyanese people.

I would like to quote the Hon. Minister Lawrence who spoke, at the beginning of the year, to *Kaieteur News*:

“The Minister of Social Protection wants to run with its programmes, but we are hamstrung by staff shortage in the Labour Department, staff shortage in the Accounts Department and staff shortage in the Child Care and Protection Agency...the perennial shortage of funding to monetise the initiatives, leaving us in some doubt as to how we are going to achieve our goals.”

I know that the Hon. Minister understands the need to have a larger cut of the pie and she wants that to offer services effectively to those who require it - victims of domestic violence, pensioners and single parents. We do not *wield the proverbial scissors*. Instead, I ask for more for the Ministry of Social Protection. I ask for more for the poor, for the powerless, for the voiceless, for the vulnerable, more for the Ministry of Social protection so that more can be done for all Guyanese.

Over 3,000 reports of child abuse have been recorded at the Child Care and Protection Agency during the course of 2015. According to the head of that Agency, neglect ranked highest while sexual abuse reports exceeded the 600 mark. Throughout 2015, the Child Care and Protection Agency had to find alternative care for over 500 children. That entity has suffered from a dearth of trained professionals, and I see no provision made for the employment of child psychologists, social workers and counsellors. In fact, I have seen people being fired from an entity that has a shortage. Policies and programmes will not be executed without requisite human resources capacity to efficiently and competently execute a mandate. In Region 6, for example, there is one social worker assigned to many shelters. Lives of children residing there have been scarred by abuse. Of course, it is a logistical and administrative nightmare. I would like to see the Social Service Ministry or the Ministry of Social Protection... I cannot keep track of all the name changes. On the subject of name changes, I am really sorry for the Grade VI pupils; between remembering the names of Ministers and all of the new names, God help them.

I would like to see the Ministry of Social Protection develop parenting programmes to prevent or curb the issue of child abuse. While an awareness programme is on the cards, prevention must be parallel. Rehabilitation of the abusive family or family members is also key for reintegration to be successful. The policies and programmes mentioned on pages 60 to 61 of the Budget speech, with regard to the Ministry of Social Protection, as spanking new initiatives, leave me puzzled, as the programmes mentioned there, notably the National Early Childhood Development Sensitisation Programme, form part of the programmes that were done under the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) in 2012 in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) towards the advancement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Let us talk about the Family Court. There is an existing counter trafficking in persons unit...those are not new. Where are the new initiatives in your budget, Mdm. Minister? I am happy that

pensioners can look forward to a book to cover their calendar year and the electronic system in the future as the \$18,200 given in this Budget, a paltry \$1,200 increase in the face of the loss of electricity and water subventions, has thrown many pensioners in disarray, as, in their twilight years, they are struggling to eke out of that sum payments towards light, water, food, rent and even medications. Let me read:

“Over \$600 million returned to the Treasury as hospitals face drug shortage.”

Further, let us talk about the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) handling critical drug shortage - and we talk about alienating drug providers. The problem is that there is a shortage. Pensioners have to pay over \$20,000 outside of the public sector to get medication and are suffering from many chronic illnesses – diabetes, hypertension, dyslipidaemia - and not to mention that they have to do tests like lipid profile, which cost somewhere in the vicinity of \$10,000 to \$12,000. How are they going to live on this \$18,200?

I forgot that pensioners are to get an additional benefit out of that money, but, before they could get that benefit, they must buy a fancy ticket to go out of the country to get the free airport tax. Then they have to buy new tyres and new cars to benefit from the free driver’s licence. Tell me again how many pensioners will benefit from those two measures? I want to know; the pensioners want to know. I hope the Hon. Minister will answer all of these questions and the many I have for her under the Estimates. Like many of my Colleagues, I am still waiting on some of the answers from last year’s Budget Estimates. There are many questions posed every year and many of us are waiting on those answers. In this House, where accountability and transparency are important, we need answers.

Did I mention that gas prices only went down by \$20? Transportation cost will have to be added to the pensioners’ list? Transportation cost has gone up and then, with people having to pay for minibuses on every trip and all of that, imagine what will happen to the pensioners. In summary, the direct dollar value of the pension will be eroded by the increase in cost of living.

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

2.54 p.m.

Dr. Persaud: The differently-abled once again...

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, if you would allow me, could I please ask for the Hon. Member to have five minutes extension, as agreed?

Question put, and agreed to.

Dr. Persaud: The differently-abled will once again not benefit in any tangible way. Yes, they will get a book for one year but imagine, if their increase is only \$800, that could be used up in the transportation money just to go to collect the money allotted to them. I am not here to score cheap political points by highlighting glaring inadequacies of the Budget, but to look at this Budget against the real scenario that exists in Guyana today, namely an unparalleled number of suicides, repossession of homes and lands because people cannot afford to meet the payments or access loans and now, with this Budget, there is a decrease in disposable income. It is not a laughing matter, Colleagues. There is a reduction of security of the family due to job loss and tenuousness in jobs of the breadwinners in the home, reduction of security – ha, security, I will get to that - crippling of the major economic generating industries - rice and sugar - with no transition plans to prepare the farmers for the future nor to withstand economic crisis nor natural disasters like drought. The farmers have been talking to me; water is not getting to their land. These areas are Upper Corentyne, Central Corentyne and West Coast Demerara. There is spiralling violence, abuse and other crimes against women and children, poor investment and low employment opportunities. [An Hon. Member: Those existed before.] I am not saying that some of these did not exist; I am talking about now. You are in the seat; it is yours to deal with. There is a stagnant economy with businesses in crisis, drug and alcohol abuse, fuelling crime, accidents and loss of productivity. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker hit gavel

Thank you for your protection, Mr. Speaker. There is rampant loss of lives and property. There are murders of men, women and youth in callous and brutal attacks by bandits. There was recently a woman. Then there was a young boy, a member of the Hare Krishna movement who was just going home from worship.

Like Nero, the Minister of Public Service, a self-appointed religious Pontiff, pontificates on Hinduism and now karma and engages in debates on dates. Where are the Hon. Minister's priorities? People are dying. Blood is being shed. Yet, this self-appointed Pope and Pontiff

meddles with dates. Against this, I say Budget 2016 has failed us all - you, me and the people who depend on us for it to make a positive impact on their lives. How could people feel protected and cared for if they are marginalised and displaced? A country's well-being is centred on boosting the morale of all its citizens, enabling them to unleash their capacity for an optimum level of productivity for the benefit of their country. This hinges on citizens being able to enjoy the fruits of their labour through personal financial stability, security of family, job and environment, equality of opportunity in all spheres and for all ages, genders, ethnicities and, yes, even political persuasions.

A climate of fear, uncertainty and hopelessness stalks Guyana, a country which clawed its way from bankruptcy under the stewardship of the PPP/C to where persons were able to own homes, cars and enjoy profits from an expanding economy where ground-breaking policies and programmes brought vulnerable groups and their circumstances to the forefront, where young people studied and stayed. They are not staying now. People saw their small dreams turn into big realities; children of cane cutters became professionals; love for the soil engendered booming agricultural returns; people were empowered to study, work and have ambitions which were realised; there was recognition of the Indigenous peoples, their rights and contributions; and our religious culture and freedoms were not tampered with.

As I conclude, I want to say this: as we approach our 50th Independence anniversary, I am proud of our collective struggles and our histories as we fought to achieve independence but I am deeply saddened by the ugly monsters which continue to rear their heads in our midst - party primacy, party paramountcy and political partisanship. While the Government has been vociferous in voicing its commitment to social cohesion, it has demonstrated through its actions of giving primarily to its political support base while starving the bases which support the PPP/C.

I would like to respond to some of the comments made by my Colleague, the Hon. Mrs. Catherine Hughes. What were you talking about when you mentioned the words "scammed for 23 years"? I have elaborated in detail that people were able to own; people were able to live and people were able to attain. When we talk about not renewing contracts, is it a blanket approach? Is this to drive more fear in the minds of people who are sitting in jobs, to tell them that soon they will be on the breadline?

We are talking about Information and Communications Technology (ICT) as if it is the most recent discovery in our life. In our Manifesto and in our Budgets, ICT hubs, ICT parts, ICT connectivity, ICT for the Indigenous community, ICT, ICT, ICT were coming out of the PPP/C's benches. In fact, from since 2009, this was talked about by the PPP/C. When we talked about interconnectivity, it was from these benches that E-governance was spoken about. It was from these benches that we talked about virtual classrooms, virtual consultations. When we want to talk new and ground breaking, let us be factual.

On the issue of tourism, I would like Guyana to be a destination for all. I was born here, raised here and educated here. I work here and I now represent my people here. This is home.

Mr. Speaker: You have three minutes remaining.

Dr. Persaud: I am distraught when I hear people speaking ill about their country and now, when you are in the seat of power, suddenly it is a reversal. The headlines screamed at what you said to deter people from coming to this country. Again, I do not want to be unparliamentary.

The other thing about tourism is that hospitality needs to improve; I agree. The hospitality school is not new; it was in the Budget before. Finally, if we are going to attract tourists, we need to keep them safe. They are going to go to the markets and people are being robbed every day in the markets. They are not only being robbed; they are being stabbed. [Members

(Government): Karma.] It is not karma. I know the meaning of karma, but I leave it to his Holiness to decide what it means to him.

This political partisanship and paramountcy is a subject that very few want to talk about or to confront, yet it lies here festering. Look at where lights are placed, who jobs are given to and taken from. When will we see ourselves as Guyanese first and only that? A Government must be for all Guyana, every Guyanese, each one, regardless of their political persuasion or any other distinction or difference. Everyone deserves equal opportunities and benefits.

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

Dr. Persaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We need to eradicate this ugly constant from every facet of our lives if we are to foster national pride, trust and fraternity and truly understand and appreciate and celebrate 50 years in Guyana without it becoming a meaningless \$300 million

exercise. I cannot support this Budget presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance unless he rectifies it to cater for all Guyanese and all of Guyana.

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

Minister of Social Protection [Mrs. Lawrence]: On 14th January, 2016, His Excellency President David A Granger, graced this honourable House with his presence and did address us on independence and resilience, our people's path to economic progress and went on to declare this year, 2016, the year of renaissance, given our celebration of 50 years as an independent State. Sir, his effervescent leadership and guidance have provided the vision for this 2016 Budget titled: *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: the Good Life Beckons*. This Budget will go into the annals of history as the most significant Budget in the last two decades. I say this because the Hon. Minister of Finance, Winston Jordan, has captured the vision and spirit of this coalition Government of consensus, united to create a new economic and social order for the benefit of all Guyanese. Allow me, therefore, to extend congratulations to the Hon. Minister of Finance and his committed and dedicated staff.

During the past eight months, the transformation of the social, economic and political landscape has been phenomenal. How can I not mention this, our new environment? Just take a look outside the windows at our surroundings and we will be able to understand what the APNU/AFC Government is about. We are about restoring Georgetown. During those months, we, as a coalition, confronted the crisis situation with utmost dexterity and I am sure would be able to face up to the Herculean task with courage and confidence.

On 21st August, 2015, I indicated to this House and the nation that our Government will continue to put in place measures to improve the efficacy of our social welfare programmes. I am, therefore, happy to report on the \$9.9 billion, in 2015, allocated to the Ministry of Social Protection for the execution of its four programmes, namely Administration, Social Services, Labour and Child Care Protection. I am also happy to report that the Ministry fulfilled the objectives of its six-point action plan: training of staff; specialised training for our Indigenous peoples; improved benefits for pensioners and programmes specific to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups; provision of safe and clean environment for those persons in need of shelter; labour - ensuring the rights of workers and employers; and early childhood development

programme. Prior to this Budget, I did extend an invitation to the Hon. Member, Dr. Persaud, who spoke before me. Had Dr. Persaud taken up that invitation, I would have been able to explain to her and to inform her of the policies and the various programmes that we are embarking on. Unfortunately, I trust that my presentation will be able to so inform the Hon. Member.

3.09 p.m.

In 2015, the Ministry of Social Protection resuscitated the Women of Worth (WoW) Programme with the Guyana Bank for Trade and Industry (GBTI), which provided loans for more than 90 female single parents. Regrettably, we inherited a bankrupt programme. From the \$29.4 million in loans, approximately \$22 million were non-performing at the end of December, 2014, which represents 77% of WoW's portfolio. It cannot be business as usual. We cannot continue on the same broken, ruined track.

For last year, we also upgraded the skills and competencies of staff from probation, welfare, counter trafficking, child protection and industrial relation departments. We collaborated with the Canadian High Commission for persons from the hinterland communities where they were trained in the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence in rural and hinterland communities as well as child abuse, domestic violence, youths in conflict with the law, substance abuse, trafficking in persons and suicide. We engaged an architect to address issues, re: a new building to house our Ministry, given that we are presently located in five buildings across Georgetown.

We increased senior citizens pension from \$13,125 to \$17,000, and, further, with corporate and the community, we looked at the facilities where the pensions were distributed and we began an exercise to upgrade them with more comfortable sitting and accommodation for our senior citizens.

We hosted a national gender-based conference and crafted a policy document, which has been circulated to key stakeholders for pertinent feedback.

We translated key laws into the Indigenous language and braille for the visually impaired. We are grateful for the support the Government received on this project from the UNICEF.

Finally, we continued working to achieve universal early childhood care and established childhood centres to provide quality teachings for our zero to four year old children.

May I inform those on the other side, Sir, who may not have taken time to read the *Hansard*, that last year, when I mentioned this programme, I did mention that this was a continuation and that I met it there? We have nothing to hide but I must also remind the Members on the other side that in 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998, had it not been for the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP), I do not know what programmes the then Government would have had to roll out.

Trafficking in Persons

I am happy to report that, for the first time ever in Guyana, we had a conviction in a Trafficking in Persons (TIP) case where restitution was ordered for the victim. What is distressing in Guyana is the preponderance of women who are TIP perpetrators. The majority of the 31 suspects for last year were women. This is contrary to global statistics which I will share with this honourable House. Children comprised more than 30% of the 59 victims for last year. In addition, sex is the major driver of human trafficking here. More than 80% of TIP victims are forced into carnal economics - the flesh industry. The labour sector absorbs just about 16% of TIP victims, coming a distant second.

We have four ongoing TIP matters in the Court and I am hopeful that we will secure four convictions for these matters, for we must rid our nation of this despicable man-made cancer. I would like to inform the Hon. Member, who spoke before me, that there was a room named Trafficking in Persons in the Ministry of Social Protection. As part of the overall plan, the unit will be resuscitated in 2016 and transformed into a department with these additional features: there will be an increase in staff with private investigators coming on board; there will be legal officers, senior case managers and junior case managers and an administrative officer.

We are serious about TIP in Guyana and will spare no effort to put the critical infrastructure in place to ensure the eventual eradication of the man-made threat and, in the meantime, the severest punishments for all convicted perpetrators, be they female or male.

In the quest, we will seek funding to build a home for male TIP victims who are 18 years old and above. To date, we have been able to establish a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with a non-governmental organisation (NGO). We have been able to provide a safe place for our women and so we want to move on to take care of our men too. This is part of a menu of measures we will pursue this year, 2016.

In the Minister of Finance's introduction to this Budget, he stated, on page 15, paragraph 4(1):

“...the policies, programmes, reforms and measures envisaged in this budget are designed to stimulate the economy to achieve higher growth rates. It is an economy which is growing at ever higher rates, with the benefits being more equitably distributed, which will enable us to bring the “good life” closer to reality.”

Permit me, Mr. Speaker, to return to the theme of this Budget which has lured us into this honourable House. It demands reiterating: *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*. And may I say to the Hon. Member in the back bench there, on the other side, that Minister Simona Charles-Broomes remains a Minister and she is a junior Minister within the Ministry of Natural Resources.

The good life is ahead of us, beckoning us. It knows we all have been yearning for it for the last 50 years. Today, we can sense it. We feel it is within our grasp but the challenge is whether, as a nation, we are willing to marshal the fortitude, muster the patience and mobilise the opportunities to stay the course until we all get to the destination as a proud and independent nation.

As is inherent in our Budget theme, this coalition Government believes there are two ingredients; if judiciously and consistently applied, we will get there. These are growth and confidence. There is already a measure of both in our country but growth needs stimulation and confidence needs restoration. The 2016 Budget provides both the stimulant and the confidence this country needs to ensure the good life all Guyanese deserve, beginning this significant year.

The objectives of the Ministry of Social Protection for 2016 are framed within the parameters of equitable distribution of benefits for all Guyanese as extracted from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of ending poverty; goal one: achieving gender equality; goal five: reducing inequality within and among countries. The Ministry's thrust in 2016 will take

Guyanese closer to the vision adumbrated by these laudable SDGs. To help fulfil the vision, there has been a 42% hike in the Ministry's budget for 2016, taking us to \$13 billion. This will not only help us to improve the services we offer, but also to expand our reach to vulnerable far-flung communities. Hence, it will include the purchasing of two all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) for the Labour Department to better monitor worksites in the hinterland, to help stamp out child labour, to prevent employers from underpaying or withholding workers' pay and, of course, to be a fillip against likely TIP activities.

The Family

The family is the fulcrum around which the Ministry of Social Protection and, by extension, the Government of Guyana, have envisioned this and future Budgets. We acknowledge that the Guyanese family is in dire straits and so, this year, we will intensify our efforts to target the restoration of the family as a foundation institution, Hon. Member Persaud. Broken families will produce broken youths, who often cannot find employment and sometimes engage in delinquent behaviour. Through the Probation Department, the Ministry is working with several partners on the option of alternative sentencing for first-time offenders so that we can rehabilitate instead of condemn youths to penal institutions, and that is new. With the positive economic outlook and increased investment in education, I am sure we will provide gainful employment for our youths. We will provide training schemes, Hon. Member Persaud, to help fathers, mothers and caregivers improve their parenting skills.

Much of our focus in 2016 will be on the welfare and protection of children. Our commitment to children is also shown in the increase in budgetary allocation from \$253 million in 2015 to \$471 million this year. This is money intended to help us target child abuse, especially sexual abuse; introduce a teen prevention pregnancy programme - that is new; and launch a campaign about child protection and implement the Early Childhood Development Programme that will include licensing of day care facilities. It also includes infrastructure works at the various buildings which house operations of the key agency.

Emphasis will be placed on institutionalising many of the 700 plus children in formal care, for every child in Guyana belongs to a family, whether biological, foster or adoptive, and so we will

work to find families for these children. We will also introduce greater financial support for families, including microcredit for both male and female single parents.

3.24 p.m.

While cash transfers are helpful to persons in dire circumstances, we need to move holistically to help families seeking public assistance by offering skills training available through other Government agencies. While the WOW programme is up and running, the Ministry is proposing another programme called POWER. The acronym “POWER” means People of worth Entrepreneurial Resources. While in the past WOW focused only on single parents, POWER will provide loans to both males and females, married or not married.

It will be remiss of me to avoid raising in this honourable House the spectre of child abuse which is now stalking our society. One of the major programmes targeting this scourge in 2016 is the launching of the campaign using all media outlets to raise the level of awareness of the Guyanese population to our plight of children who suffered abuse. This is in an effort to propel them into action, to root out the scourge of child abuse in the society. We want to cut a covenant with all communities in Guyana and perhaps we can start here today, to be more proactive for our children and protect them. Through this covenant the public will be educated on the destruction to the health and well-being of a child who is a victim of abuse and neglect.

I will like to now focus on the elderly. While I personally will like to tear down the eyesore that our senior citizens are housed in at the Palms, we cannot afford to replace it just yet. This year we will be spending some \$20 million to purchase equipment to improve the functionality and efficacy of that historic institution. While it is not ideal, given the variety of constraints, we have nevertheless addressed critical areas such as staffing at the institution, and have done work to improve the aesthetics of the environment. Our broader vision, however, is to establish a national minimum standards for elderly care facilities.

In addition, we have moved to correct the dietary deficiencies of the residents of the Palms. Specialists from the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation have been working with us to help provide meals with specific dietary requirements for residents with identified illnesses. We have ongoing programmes to build the capacity of the staff of the geriatric and other institutions linked to the Ministry of Social Protection.

The elderly in this country have been for too long forgotten. Their previously measly pensions epitomised that neglect. In a few short months we, APNU/AFC Government, managed to hike their pensions by \$5,000. I may say that \$5,000 added to what we met would give the pensioner \$60,000 more each year. With \$60,000, which is above the minimum wage, the pensioners, wherever they are, whether on the borders of Brazil or Venezuela, can cover any former allowance given to the pensioners. If we take into consideration what they got before we would realise that our pensioners would have an excess each year of \$22,000. Even if they pay for electricity, even if they pay for water, they will have that amount at their disposal. As we go forward, we anticipate a fully automated system at the beginning of 2017 so that pensioners would no longer require booklets to redeem their pensions, but could simply do so by producing their identification (ID) cards.

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

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

Question put, and agreed to.

Mrs. Lawrence: These things may seem inconsequential but cumulatively they are necessary to help lift the nation out of the retrogressive and punitive environment in which our people still access basic services.

We are a coalition of change, and together we will change this. We will improve the life of every Guyanese, including the homeless. This issue is being addressed largely by the Georgetown Resuscitation Committee and very shortly many of the homeless persons will be taken off the streets. Once these persons are screened, many will be sent to the Hugo Chavez Centre for Reintegration and Rehabilitation. There, we will ensure that they are rehabilitated, receive life-skills training to foster reunion with their families and communities and use their newly-acquired skills to gain employment wherever necessary. This year we will create a sustainable poultry and fish and vegetable farm at the centre.

Since our historic victory at the May 2015 polls, not only have we reviewed the management system, but we have introduced new programmes, such as the fish and chicken farms and

provision of greenhouses for agriculture, so residents can learn life skills to guarantee full reintegration into society. A partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and our Ministry of Agriculture have begun the process of self-sufficiency, and presently there are 7,000 tilapias being reared. Very soon, through this cooperation, the fully-constructed chicken pens will be teeming with birds for eventual consumption and, if possible, sale on the local market.

To cater for their physical being of the residents of the Hugo Chavez Centre Reintegration and Rehabilitation, medical personnel from the Ministry of Public Health are now making regular visits to check on them. It never happened before.

Unfortunately, there are still many of our vulnerable citizens who are not captured by the many available state institutions established to help secure them against the vagaries of modern life. I refer to those vagrants who are now being indiscriminately doused by private citizens in a bid to remove them from the streets. I repeat, Sir, they are doing this in order to remove them from the streets. This is not our method of handling growing national challenges.

We have improved conditions. The Hon. Member on the other side who spoke about bake and salt fish last night and is talking about water, let me so informed him that we have improved at the Night Shelter with running water, which it did not have for five years. Now, the institution is cleaned on a daily basis, clothing is available for residents, and we have installed washing machines, with the help of corporate sponsorship, to help those persons with laundering. The Night Shelter held its first Christmas lunch last December which was also sponsored by corporate citizens. Going forward, for the 50th Anniversary, it will be holding a karaoke afternoon. I extend an invitation to the Hon. Members of this House.

The Ministry also plans to have revisions to the Domestic Violence and Sexual Offence Acts. In this budget we have allocated \$40 million to construct a domestic violence centre for victims. We also have financial allocations to improve our response to human trafficking, finalise the National Gender Policy, delink the Probation and Social Services aspect from Social Security, create a suicide prevention manual and partner with several NGOs and the University of Guyana to train persons in vocational skills and business management and conduct job placement for single mothers.

The Ministry and the University of Guyana will partner to offer Social Workers the opportunity to pursue a Master's Degree in this field to lift the standards of the profession. The programme will be designed to reflect the Guyanese context and needs, since the Ministry, a major employer of Social Workers, is concerned about the absence of licensure and mechanisms to safeguard ethical standards and monitor and evaluate professional competencies. Hence, beginning this July, we will start an annual conference on Professional Practice for Ethical Standards. That will set the tone for what is required in local social work practice. The Ministry eagerly anticipates the establishment of a regulatory board that will hold all social work practitioners accountable.

As I conclude, this is not an exhaustive list and while we are responding to the many social ills, we are hopeful that these new initiatives will arrest further deterioration of the social fabric of the Guyanese society. This Ministry will continue being proactive rather than reactive. While some of our efforts are hamstrung, because we would like to have more money and more staff, nevertheless, we will keep our commitment to Guyanese people and intensify our focus on the "good life". We have promised that, and that we will deliver.

Numerous initiatives to be undertaken and these will lend to a development agenda that addresses current and emerging challenges, restore the dignity of vulnerable groups, offer protection to every Guyanese, including persons with disabilities, the elderly and children; bridge gender disparities, and significantly reduce major social ills, such as youths in conflict with the law, violence and sexual offences, violations of the labour laws, trafficking in persons and youth unemployment. I do look forward to the implementation of the plans in this momentous budget.

It is with joy and pride I commend this budget to this House for its adoption.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

3.39 p.m.

Mr. Seeraj: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, I would like to join with my colleagues in showing appreciation for the efforts that would have gone into the compilation of another budget within such short span of time. I offer my congratulations to the Hon. Minister of Finance and his staff who would have given long hours of work to prepare this document.

In 2015 it was a *Fresh Approach to the Good life in a Green Economy*. Today it is *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*. Sir, at the starting of the debate on Monday I think we have proven beyond doubt that the good life, the green economy, the stimulation of growth, the restoration of confidence all these things are illusive, if should quote our number speaker Comrade Irfaan Ali. It is illusive to most Guyanese, except for the very few sitting across the floor.

One Member of the Government side even said that this budget is not a “poor people budget”. I totally agree with the speaker because they are very few measures in this budget that address the concerns of the poor and vulnerable. As a matter of fact, there some measures in this budget that is even going to put more burdens on the poor and the vulnerable. Unlike the APNU/AFC manifesto and, of course, the numerous promises made in the election campaign this budget does not even make an attempt to address those promises made on the election campaign and even in the manifestos.

They were a lot of slogans: “It is time to respect our workers”; “It is time to respect our farmers”; “It is time to respect our youth”; “It is time to respect our Indigenous Peoples”; “It is time respect our women”. It was a very well-run campaign addressing the concerns of every single grouping. An expertly run campaign. Promises made of the moon and the stars with the sole of objective of ensuring that the Guyanese people are brainwashed and bamboozled into giving support to the APNU/AFC, without any thought as to how realistic are these promises. That was not a concern, Sir. The major concern was power, to get into office and to hell with the promises. They would have dealt with that and the consequences afterwards. It was to let them do whatever they could have done to get into power, never mind how unrealistic the promises are. I know that they are intelligent people in Government. They were intelligent people on the campaign and, I am certain, they knew some of these promises are really beyond the reach of any Government coming in after the 11th May, 2015 Elections. They knew that but it was not a concern for them. What really mattered was to get into office.

Twenty per cent increase in salary for the workers, what did they get? Across the sugar belt, sugar workers were told that they were being robbed by the PPP/Civic administration. GuySuCo can do much better and they could have got a minimum of 20%. Do you remember

that Hon. Member Mr. Charrandass? You were very active in the sugar belt, the Hon. Prime Minister and the Hon. Vice-President Mr. Ramjattan.

There were not promises to increase the Cabinet. There were not promises to bring three to four Vice-Presidents. Nothing was mentioned about that. There were no promises about increasing the salaries of Ministers. As a matter of fact, the small salaries that the PPP Ministers used to get were labelled as “fat cats” salaries. They were deemed to be too much for the Ministers, but we will deal with that.

The 20% minimum increase was promised to them. What did the workers get? [Mr. Williams: What did the rice farmers get?] Hon. Member Mr. Rajkumar said the rice farmers got \$700 to \$1,000 a bag. He answered your questions and that is what they got under the APNU/AFC coalition Government. Three thousand dollars was promised by the PPP/Civic on its campaign trail. It knew that it would be hard-pressed to deliver that but they did not go over board and said \$6,000 and \$9,000 per pay. It promised which was realistic. It did not mind risking losing power but we have to deal with the reality and that is hallmark of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic administration. We deal with what is the reality, but that was not to be on the other side.

The 20% that was promised to the workers, they got a very little, a pittance in 2015. It was packaged in such a way to appear much bigger than it actually was. For the first time in recent year, workers were getting salaries retroactive to half of the year. Again, the packaging was intended to deceive the workers into thinking that they were getting more than they were actually getting. It did not get there. The elderly, the pensioners, were promised doubled of what they get. What they were given in the left hand twice was taken with the right hand. The left hand gives and the right hand takes and that is what happens with the pensioners. They know it.

The elderly should not be underestimated and when you seek to increase their pension by a little and then you take away much more than they were getting...They know the numbers; they live by them and they do not have all these huge allowances on top of one and half times increase in salary. Their reality is different and we know that reality. That is why we remove the means test. That is why, year after year, progressively we have been giving to the elderly increases in their pensions.

For the first time, which I could remember, sugar workers did not receive the Annual Production Incentive (API). Over three decades they did not receive their Annual Production Incentive in a year in which they surpassed the target. The workers were punished for doing better. How can we really accept this? Workers achieved target, no increase for them, no Annual Production Incentive and then they are getting fired now. Estates are closing around their areas; they are being sent home and there are no answers as to their well-being and as to their future. The existence whole communities are being threatened by this move which, of course, is 180 degrees away from what was promised. That is the crime. It is not that these things are happening but it is against a background of what promise was and what the reality is. That is the hallmark of this administration through every single sector.

The workers are questioning the lack of increase, the lack of Annual Production Incentive and they questioned it against the background of the increases that the Ministers are getting, and the increase that they gave to themselves, and the four Vice-Presidents. They are saying, “Well, where are we going?” Is the “good life” only for the few who could give to themselves and even if their justifications is made that the Ministers are working hard and they should get more? What about surpassing the targets in the sugar belt? Is that not a physical demonstration of hard work of actually putting more tons of sugar into factory and in the bags for export? That is tangible, Sir. We cannot measure the increase of the Ministers and certainly we cannot measure it by output. If we are to measure it by output, I will state, with a clear conscience, that they are doing less. If I had the power, I would cut their salary by 90% and pay them for performance. That is what I will do.

The farming communities and rice is very dear to my heart, this country and all of us. It is the main staple and it contributes to food security. It is recognised as the staple of emerging millions in our increasing global population, for a lot of reasons - its availability, its price, its shelf life, its access in terms of transportation and all of that. What did we do to our rice farmers? Let me tell you. It was the promises of \$6,000 and \$9,000 a bag. Yesterday we even heard the APNU/AFC inheriting a broken rice industry, a rice industry that is on “shaky grounds.” I think my good friend Hon. Member Jennifer Wade mentioned those words – “a broken rice industry was inherited” and “shaky rice industry.” They were words to those effects. What did the Minister of Finance have to say about the rice industry in the year 2015:

“Mr. Speaker, unlike sugar, rice has been an amazing success story. The industry has recorded consistently higher levels of output breaking the 400,000 tonnes bar in 2011 and the 500,000 tonnes bar in 2013 and for 2014 rice output attained an impressive 635,238 tonnes”.

[An Hon Member (Government): Do you want to take over Mr. Jordon’s work?] It is unless we want to wave a magic wand and take out the \$23 billion. Your \$23 billion is also in this book, but I cannot find it in the Estimates. I looked even with my glasses on and I still cannot find it. Mr. Speaker, does that give you any indication that the industry is on “shaky ground”? Sir, this is in black and white. It certainly does not give me any indication whatsoever that it is on shaky ground. That is what the APNU/ AFC coalition inherited.

3.54 p.m.

We were further told that the Mahaica/Mahaicony Abary–Agricultural Development Authority (MMA-ADA) is doing an excellent job. That would have been correct if we said that the MMA-ADA in the past did an excellent job. Again, one Hon. Member mentioned about gunshot and gunplay among farmers. The regulatory body in Region 5, for essential services to the sector, is the MMA-ADA and if it was doing such a fine job there would not have been gunplay among the farmers. Everyone would have known exactly what is happening, when it is happening and how it is going to happen. Everyone would have had that confidence and that assurance that their crop will be saved. This is not the first time we going through a dry period. We have had floods and all of that. Last year I mentioned that I was honoured to be with Minister Holder when he threw those switches on at the Hope Relief Sluice to remove the threat of floods, not only to those communities on the East Coast, but also in Georgetown. That is the confidence that the farmers had in the system.

Today, they are left to run amok in an absence of any measures, any measure, to instil any sort of confidence in this administration’s ability to provide for them in the hard times. That is why they are firing shots. The people do not know what to do, so they are fighting now, even among themselves. What are we doing, Sir? Genuine representatives of the farmers are not being recognised. They do not even have access to information now, unless they go into the ground.

How can we talk about unity and partnership, and all this glossy language printed in electronic format, and on the ground the reality is different?

Some of our Comrades said “fear stopped the land.” People in the Public Service do not even want to talk to people in the Opposition. Men and women, I grow up with and worked with for over two decades are saying “*Bai I cannot tell you that, you gotta go higher*” – fear. Public servants are being told what to wear now on Fridays. A person has to wear green, at least in two Government agencies that I know of. Where are we going, Sir? What kind of partnership is that? Do you know generally, Fridays in the Public Service is, what we call, a dress-down day, a day for casual clothing, a day to relax, and all of that. It is known that people go to work with their jeans and polo shirts – any colour. I used to wear green, I still wear green and there is nothing wrong with wearing green. What is wrong is me being told that I must wear green or red or yellow. That is what is wrong. I should be allowed the freedom to wear whatever I want to wear. There was a time when I would have gone out on extension work with the officials from the rice board, and other officials, they used to tell the driver to look for the gentleman with the green shirt on the roadside. I had a green polo shirt, a very nice fitting shirt. I always used to wear it when going out in the back dam – green. Nothing is wrong with that, but I used to do that voluntarily. Nobody used to tell me “Seeraj, you have to wear green today.” That is something I wanted to do. I would involuntarily react against it, even if I liked doing it in the past. It sometimes might be just my reaction to it. We cannot go down this road. It is a sign of a creeping dictatorship. We have gone beyond that; we cannot really address those matters.

Do you know, Mr. Speaker, that last year, exports of rice, January to June, was 276,000 tons. I rounded it off. There are a couple of hundreds on the side. The value of it was US\$125 million. That gives an average price of about \$454 per ton between the low and high of paddy and rice, and so on. July to December last year, exports 260,000 tons, the value was US\$95 million. That average came down to \$366. Within a few short weeks, this Government was able to reduce the average export price for rice by nearly US\$100 per ton. They had all the answers, Sir, to the difficulties and the problems of the farmers. What they did, Sir, was contributed to the crisis that we are faced with in the industry, currently.

We heard a lot about markets and market opportunities. As a matter of fact, that is the only thing the Minister said of rice. I mean, last year, he was decent enough to at least make an attempt to

give us \$23 billion to pay to 7,000 farmers. The farmers are calling on us, me, in particular. They said “Mr. Seeraj, if it was in the budget and it was not given to us, what are you going to do about that? Can you not take the Hon. Member before any Committee? We should consider that Sir, because the Hon. Minister of Finance Mr. Jordan stood there and said that there is \$23 billion in the budget to pay some 7,000 rice farmers. I remember that very clearly, Sir and the farmers are saying, well where is it? If it is not there, then probably the Hon. Minister of Finance should be brought before the Committee of Privileges to answer for misleading the House on such a critical issue to the livelihood of over 110,000 farmers, people who contribute to rural development, who contribute towards ensuring the social fabric of rural lives are upgraded. We cannot treat them in that way, Sir. I humbly suggest it to you.

Farmers were told about new markets. They were told about the Mexican market. This apparently is the brainchild of the Hon. Prime Minister. We are not hearing anything about it anymore... but the much touted Mexican market. We have lost trading with Venezuela which is next door to us, our neighbour and we are talking about going to Mexican market which is next door to the United States of America. Our largest competitor for rice in this part of the world is the Government of the United States of America. It supplies over 94% of the imports into Mexico. How are we going to compete with the United States of America in Mexico? Mexico and the United States of America are all members of the North America Free Trade Area (NAFTA). How are we going to go in there? We are a part of the CARICOM and we cannot even compete in CARICOM Member States with production from the United States of America. Sir, we tried all those things. You see, Sir, when you create this kind of expectation in the minds of people and allow them to go down the road in a certain way and then you dash their hopes, the people are killing themselves. Did you see what had happened in Region 2, Sir? Black Bush Polder, in the years gone by, used to have the highest rates of suicide, today, Sir, it is in Region 2, Essequibo. The first casualty was a rice farmer who owed a lot of money. The man was not seeing a silver lining at the end of the cloud, and he took his life. It is because expectations were created in the minds of the farmers that paradise beckons with this Government. Paradise beckons with the APNU/AFC coalition.

Although, we exported more, we exported 36,000 tons of rice more in 2015 than in 2014 but what we got was US\$28 million, nearly \$6 billion less for exporting more. That is not an

increase in production. It is what we do with what we have. How do we market it? How do we sell it? How do we exercise economic diplomacy, trade and trade negotiations? How do we have a full appreciation of all the factors before we make pronouncements? Did anyone of us on this side of the House, Sir, go out there and promised the workers 20%? Did anyone of us on this side of the House, go out there and promise the farmers, \$9,000 per bag?

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, it is if I could move at this point to ask for the Hon. Member's additional five minutes, so that he can have the full time.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Seeraj: Mr. Speaker, I just want to bring this to your attention, Sir. It is that sometimes when you address some Members they are on their feet still. It is no sign of disrespect, Sir, because our colleagues from the legal profession will tell you that when the magistrate or judge speaks to a person, that person has to jump to his or her feet as a show of respect. Here, Sir, you have to sit down to show respect.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you are using up your time.

Mr. Seeraj: Sir, if I am on my feet, it is a mark of respect. You will have to give me two minutes more for that.

In Region 2 rice is critical. It does not have an alternative like other regions, such as sugar, and all of that. It has limited options and opportunities. Today, Sir, acreage sold is almost half of what it was before. The region is devastated. We knew we were going into a dry spell. Sir, do you know when they kicked in the Dawa Pump Station to provide some irrigation water? It was late last month. We were told months ago that we would have been getting into a drought. I think that the Hon. Prime Minister said, after he consulted a veteran politician, that he decided to turn the key. Sir, if the politician was not consulted, the pump would have never started, despite the plight of all those farmers. Although we planted just over half, almost 10,000 acres in Region 2 are under threat. You have to be proactive; you have to talk to the people who know; you have to go on the ground. You do not talk about unity and co-operation and cohesion - by the way, I

understand that it does not even have a budget - and all of that, and do not do it. You need to execute it on the ground so that people can see in a physical way that this is what we are doing.

Our heart must bleed for the farmers of Region 2. We made some suggestions, knowing very well the plight that the industry is going to face. We talked about removal, even if on a temporary basis, of the draconian taxes on diesel fuel. We never asked for it. The rice industry, when it does well, we pay our dues. We do not ask for favours. When the going is rough, we need support; we need partnership and we need a physical demonstration of your willingness to help the people. What happened? Farmers have to pump two and three times. They have to pay that draconian tax two or three times. Did you notice, Sir, that the Minister spoke about reduction in the fuel prices? Diesel is \$11, I think; gasoline is \$20. Nobody uses gasoline to pump water into their fields. That is for when you are watering your kitchen garden or something such as that. What is critical to the industry is diesel fuel. What did diesel fuel get? It got \$11 reduction per litre and gasoline, which the farmers do not use, got \$20. Where is your priority? Where is your sympathy to the farming community?

4.09 p.m.

Especially against the background of these big promises that you have made to them. Where is your sympathy to workers too, Sir? Here it is, on page 72, gasoline - \$190 reduced to \$170, this majestic sum of \$20; diesel - \$161 reduced to \$150, not so majestic. It should have been the reversed.

If this Government was serious about the industry and had a full appreciation of the plight of the farmers, they would have removed all taxes completely on diesel fuel for the industry, made a short-term investment to get long-term benefits and secure one of the pillars of our economy. What they are doing is sending a strong signal to what they think and how they think about farmers and the industry because what they are doing is not having any positive impact.

In 2014, a number of farmers were owed a lot of money by a co-op in Region 3, a co-op that went into partnership with an Expert Agriculture and Rice Advisor to the coalition. They suffered. There was over \$400 million and they were not getting paid. Of course, the Guyana Rice Producers' Association's (GRPA's) business is to represent the farmers - to protect, to promote and to advance their interests.

I spent endless hours, many days and weeks going into the nights, making representation to the Government, to the then Minister of Agriculture, Dr. Leslie Ramsammy and the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB), to see how we could have helped these farmers. It was a co-op, and we were trying to support the co-op. The co-op's effort must be applauded because they sought to get involved in value-added and to address the concerns of their farmers. Unfortunately, they were hoodwinked and deceived by a sophisticated conman in this whole arrangement and they were left wanting over \$400 million. My duty was to represent their interests. In the short-term, the Minister agreed that, as a temporary relief measure, seeing that the Guyana Rice Producers Association had all the information, to pass to the farmers through the GRPA, in a coordinated manner, \$100 million to ease their plight months after they would have delivered their paddy. This is how a proactive government operates. That money was passed through the GRPA and paid to 163 farmers who received that money. Today, I am being asked "Seeraj where is the \$100 million? The \$100 million was paid to 163 farmers to address their issue of empty cupboards and empty fuel tanks, so that they could get food to eat and fuel to go about their business. That is what it was used for.

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

Mr. Seeraj: I am concerned about what is happening at the Guyana Rice Development Board. Recently, a contract for somewhere in the vicinity of US\$420 million was signed by the Guyana Rice Development Board with some company to bring almost 5,000 tons of fertiliser into the country. There was no advertisement, so there was no bidding process. It was just arbitrarily handed to a supporter and campaign financier of the APNU/AFC to use about \$420 million of the rice farmers' money to bring in fertiliser, which I was told would be sold to farmers for \$5,000 a bag.

Tomorrow morning, the Guyana Rice Producers Association can deliver to the Government, Urea Fertiliser for \$700 less than what they are thinking of selling it for to the farmers. Where is the transparency, the accountability, the ethics and all this talk about bids, *et cetera*? When the Board protested, they said it was a Cabinet's decision, so they could stay in the corner. That is what I was told happened. I really bleed for what is happening to the agriculture sector.

Fisheries - we spoke a lot about pirates. They recently caught the man in Region 6 with a boat engine. The engine was traced to an incident where a fisherman was murdered. Piracy, we are not putting new laws here to bring draconian measures to serve as a deterrent to acts of piracy. What happened? A man was caught with an engine and the investigation showed that the engine was taken from a fishing boat when a fisherman was murdered. He was slapped on the wrist with a charge of being in possession of stolen items. What signal are we sending to the fishing industry? More importantly, what signal are we sending to pirates and would be pirates? That they can go out there and take away the fishermen engines, shoot and murder them and then they would be slapped on the wrist if caught in possession? The Minister of Public Security needs to look at these issues and to trace these things.

Overall, we need to take an assessment of where we are going. It is sad to say, but I get the distinct impression that Members on the other side really do not care.

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

Mr. Seeraj: The 'good life' is only beckoning to the few. Thank you, Sir. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now take the suspension. The Sitting is suspended for one hour. We will return at 5.15 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 4.16 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 5.16 p.m.

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Holder]: Mr. Speaker, as I rise to make my contribution to the debates on Budget 2016, under the theme: *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*, we on this side of the House, have already begun to inspire growth and reinstate confidence for the people of this dear land. For this, I join with the rest of my Colleagues in congratulating the Hon. Minister of Finance for a budget well received.

The 2016 Budget Estimates provide another solid platform to further Guyana's economic and social development and sets the stage of growth for the country's economy despite Guyana only recording a growth of 3% in 2015, of which agriculture and fishing growth were 4.2%.

For the 2016 Budget, agriculture will continue to contribute to the economy at 18%. I must add that agriculture has received \$20.3 billion in 2016, one of the largest budgets for the sector. This is Government's commitment to agriculture and persons involved therein.

In 2016, we will continue to improve rice cultivation, improve drainage and irrigation systems, strengthen the regulatory framework governing the fisheries sector and promote large-scale agriculture in the Intermediate Savannahs.

In his Address to the National Assembly, in January of this year, His Excellency observed that and I quote:

“Climate change is an indisputable reality Guyana, as a small developing country, low-lying coastal state, ignores the consequences of climate change at its perils. The rise in sea levels and the extremes of the weather, all associated with climate change, will represent formidable challenges to our nation. We will pursue climate resilience as another portal of development”.

The challenges of climate change impact heavily on the nation's plans for the development of our agricultural sector. Guyana's agriculture is primarily concentrated on the coast, the potential for agricultural development in the hinterland regions is known. The Government of Guyana's 2015 Manifesto has indicated hinterland development as a priority, with the implementation of policies for development of the Intermediate Savannahs, as well as the Rupununi Savannahs. The Intermediate Savannahs have long been considered as the next frontier for the nation's agricultural development.

In keeping with the *Year of Renaissance*, the Ministry of Agriculture has been working assiduously for the revitalisation of agriculture in the hinterland. The Ministry of Agriculture has aligned its Work Programme to realise the Intermediate Savannahs as the next agricultural centre, and has prioritised the implementation of policies for the development of the Rupununi Savannahs.

In our quest to achieve the second pillar, outlined in the Budget Speech, National Infrastructure, we will commence the establishment, and in some instances the re-establishment, of agricultural stations in each of the main Eco-zones of Guyana. This is being done to nurture integration between the coast and

hinterland and to increase access to the bountiful resources of our hinterland. Stations will be established in the North West District in Region 1; in the Pakaraimas in Region 8— Kato; in the Rupununi Savannahs, Region 9, there will be a new station Manari; and in the Intermediate Savannahs, in Region 10, the Ebini Station will be expanded.

These agricultural stations will demonstrate the agricultural potential of these areas, including demonstration orchards, nurseries and seed production units for the production of planting materials relevant to each Eco-zone; breeding herds of cattle and small ruminants to provide breeding stock for farmers and seed stock for entrepreneurs. These stations will have multiple functions, such as research areas, housing, and office space, mechanical and other workshops, recreational facilities and teaching facilities.

During 2015, work had begun on updating the various studies on the agriculture development of the Intermediate savannahs. Large-scale agriculture in the savannahs will commence in 2016 with the production of soybeans by the Brazilian Company New Frontier Agriculture Incorporated in the Kimbia/Ebini Savannahs.

While a feasibility study for the Agricultural Development of the Rupununi Savannahs does exist, this will be updated and expanded during 2016 with a view to the logical expansion in that area along the lines of the *Santa Fe* Model which is in the process of development in the North Rupununi Savannahs.

These initiatives will create new employment opportunities both directly, and, more so, indirectly as the country's economic base is moved inland and will complement other activities such as mining, forestry and support service activities thereto appertaining.

Let us look at the Sugar industry for a moment. All stakeholders must appreciate that it cannot be business as usual for our sugar industry. To resist change is wanting to see the demise of this industry. To put obstacles in the way of management's efforts to implement change is to say that one is not interested in securing employment for the majority of sugar workers and that one is not interested in the industry becoming viable.

5.33 p.m.

There is an abundance of interest in the \$9 Billion allocation for Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo). The \$9 Billion will be geared towards assisting the industry in its recovery and modernisation programme and for budgetary support to this Corporation.

The coalition Government has made major changes in the management of the sugar industry. After years of failing to reach its target, GuySuCo met its target in 2015. This must be attributed to the implementation of good management measures. These are the positive signs of recovery the APNU/AFC promised the people of Guyana.

For the past two decades, GuySuCo's former Board and the past Regime were warned that the sugar industry needed to address its cost structure if it is to survive and be viable. Sadly, these warnings were ignored by the Board and Government. The culture of cutting the industry's capital expenditure and different kinds of bailouts were instead preferred. Such bailouts included, the Government obtaining lands from GuySuCo and only paying for some of it; subventions from the Ministry of Finance; and latterly, in 2015, the very unusual act of disposing of the Skeldon Cogeneration Plant to the Guyana Power and Light Company/Skeldon Energy Inc. (GPL/SEI). In the absence of any programmes to rationalise the Corporation's debt structure, these knee jerk actions served as mere palliatives as the sugar industry's financial deficit escalated at an alarming rate. The situation was further compounded by a union, which is a product of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) and whose agendas were highly ambiguous with a strong political underpin.

The present Government has inherited an industry which, from a financial standpoint, is in its death throes and, from an economic perspective, would require increasing levels of bailouts to support its economic role. This economic role can only be sustained if the industry is reorganised, costs re-engineered and its operating deficits are reduced. It cannot be business as usual, which is what the Opposition and Guyana Agriculture Work Union (GAWU) are asking for.

Government is committed to securing the future of the 17,000 people employed in the sugar industry and their dependents. This cannot be done by sustaining the industry and its employees in its present shape. To maintain the *status quo* would spell disaster for the industry and its employees sooner than most people think. The future lies in an industry that is more than sugar.

The financial woes of sugar are so grave and the needs of the economy are so great, that the transformation of sugar cannot be done gradually. Time is of the essence. The process has to start immediately, and while there will be some initial redundancies, opportunities for re-employment will be created in a relatively short period of time. Some current workers may find themselves becoming entrepreneurs in the near future.

Wales Estate is the beginning of this process. The attitude of the Opposition and GAWU is difficult to understand. They had 23 years to reverse the fortunes of the estates, but did nothing, except take them further into depression. Their present reaction and utterances are from the same old mould. Maintain the *status quo*. To date, neither has offered an alternative sensible constructive solution. The Government is clear that doing nothing is not an option.

GuySuCo would not have been in the abysmal position it currently finds itself in, had it not been for the following: The local component of the new Skeldon development should have been funded through the sale of land, but this turned out not to be the case since lands were taken from GuySuCo without compensation, such as prime real estate at Liliendaal and Turkeyen; lands were given to the Central Housing & Planning Authority (CH&PA) without compensation; the Ogle airstrip was given to Government as a gift; European Union funds, under the accompanying measures, were not given to GuySuCo, except for US\$12 million for the packaging plant; GuySuCo had imposed a peppercorn tariff for the power it exported to the national grid, a rate so low, that it was impossible to maintain the Cogeneration Plant to acceptable standards; to add salt to the wound, the Cogeneration Plant was sold to National Industrial & Commercial Limited/Skeldon Energy Inc. (NICIL/SEI), but GuySuCo's personnel still does most of the work - the goose was being systematically killed.

Regarding the future - sugar production for 2016 is projected to be 242,287 tonnes, which is a 5% increase over its 2015's production. The present attack from the Opposition on the proposed closure of the Wales Estate's factory – note it is the Wales Estate's factory, not the Wales Estate its political rhetoric. The Ministry of Agriculture is committed to the 1700 workers and 774 private farmers from Wales. Let me provide a glimpse of the plans for the merger of the West Demerara Estates and the conversion of Wales Estate lands into a profitable non-sugar enterprise:

- An Aquaculture Feasibility Study will shortly commence. Preliminary indications are that, professionally undertaken, aquaculture would be a major profit generator providing reasonable employment.
- Feasibility studies will shortly commence on other crops. Work already done, indicates that a number of well-known crops can be successfully grown on the Wales Estate soils. Again, profitability and employment are key criteria.
- The establishment of a dairy/livestock business utilising in due course the existing factory building.
- An all-weather road will be developed connecting the Wales farmers to the Uitvlugt Factory. Those farmers who currently rely on punt transport would have their lands replaced with cane lands more conducive to road transport. Ancestral lands will be retained by the farmers' community.
- GuySuCo has commenced discussions with its workers at Wales Estate, offering them alternative employment at the Wales and Uitvlugt Estates, thereby minimising the anticipated redundancies at this time.
- It is expected that the number of redundancies at the end of the year would be lower than anticipated as the non-sugar activities would require skilled and unskilled labour; and vacancies arising at Uitvlugt Estate, in the course of the year, will only be filled by workers from the Wales Estate.
- Workers would be encouraged to become farmers with extension services provided by GuySuCo.

Regarding other plans for the industry, this year will see a marked decline in the cost of production at the East Demerara Estates, as the proper integration of La Bonne Intention (LBI) and Enmore Factories are completed. A concerted effort is being made to reinforce the technical skilled levels with the assistance of very experienced former technical staff of GuySuCo. The sale of lands which are considered a surplus to the industry's requirements will recommence with the proceeds applied to reducing the Corporation's indebtedness to the banking system. The Skeldon Cogeneration Plant will be returned to GuySuCo and an increase in the tariff per kilo-

watt hour negotiated. The cost of services to third parties, including drainage and irrigation, will be recovered. Value-added production will be increased at the Blairmount and Enmore Factories. Each of the sugar estate will continue to keep its expenditure, yields, recoveries and other related indicators, under the microscope, to ensure production and unit costs are significantly improved.

Additionally, in the 2016 Budget, we have included the Sugar Industry Mechanisation Project to the sum of \$400 million. This is a two-year project to *inter alia* purchase machinery and equipment for semi-mechanical planting, mechanical harvesting, and land preparation.

From all the data we have seen, it is unlikely that the sugar business would become profitable in the foreseeable future. It is our hope that GuySuCo would not be about sugar only, but a business in which sugar is but one activity, and while sugar may be making losses, albeit at a much reduced rate, the other activities cogeneration, other non-sugar crops, and other forms of diversification would be so profitable that when their results are consolidated with that of sugar, the business would show a profit and become cash positive. The Board and management feel that this is possible. Let us all work with them and make it happen.

With regards to the rice sector, it is clear that we have some major challenges to address in the rice industry. In 2016, the Guyana Rice Development Board will continue to push its mandate to enable better services offered to farmers in the areas of research and extension, quality control, and marketing.

I do believe that the GRDB is indispensable in providing some answers. Some answers lie elsewhere. I do believe the Guyana Rice Producers Association has an extremely important role to play and not play politics since one would expect that they all share common interests, such as the viability and sustainability of the rice industry. The millers also have their role.

Rice has been heavily affected by the present *El Nino* conditions. The lack of water is the main reason we will be experiencing an 8.4% decline in the industry in 2016. For instance, in Spring Crop 2015, hectares sown were 97,000, however, as at 1st February, we have only sown 73,000. This represents a decline of 33%. For the areas that are heavily affected, we have the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA) and the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary – Agricultural Development Authority (MMA-ADA) working assiduously to overcome these extraordinary obstacles.

The cost of production of paddy and rice is a major hindrance to Guyana's competitiveness in world markets. While we have the ability to produce high volumes of rice, the cost of production impedes our ability to compete. To overcome this hurdle, the GRDB focuses heavily on research and extension. Research focuses on plant breeding, agronomy, pathology, entomology and seed production. While the extension arm promotes conditions for access and transfer of improved rice varieties and crop management practices for farmers.

The Board, in 2016, will be enhancing its research capabilities. Research in plant breeding will be done with the aim of having increased yields for local varieties. New aromatic varieties will also be developed supporting the expansion of the production of the GRDB 13, the current aromatic variety.

Regarding the marketing of our produce, trade will be a key element in the sustainable development of the rice industry. At the Rice Conference held in July 2015, I implored all millers and exporters to let us collate our efforts and to partner with the Government to ensure that we focus on finding and sustaining markets. I must say that some good work is already underway.

The Government will continue to make investments that are necessary to fully support the agricultural sector. Guyana has been exporting rice consistently for over 100 years. Continuing the export growth that the rice industry has experienced over the past five years, and existing markets will be maintained, whilst new markets will be pursued. A new market for paddy is being pursued in Mexico, whilst additional markets for paddy and rice are being pursued in Europe and other countries.

The shadow Minister of Agriculture, the Hon. Colleague on the other side, apparently does not quite understand the situation with the Mexican market. Mexico is a big rice producer in its own right. Mexico, however, imports 1.8 million tons of rice from the United States (US), under the Public Law (PL) 480 Programme arrangement. I think that it is all well known that the cost of rice production in the US is even higher than in Mexico, but of course, that rice is being dumped bearing in mind the special arrangement under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) Treaty. Mexico is unhappy with this current situation and is looking for markets outside of the United States of America (USA) and they also have a lot large mills to do their

own production and processing. It is in this context that Guyana is being looked at as one of the possible sources of rice.

The Hon. Member also referred to the Venezuelan situation. In 2010, the previous Government negotiated an arrangement with Venezuela for a very high price, the highest price of rice in the world at the time, as in the sum of \$790 per ton, but this was an exchange for oil at a \$120 per barrel.

5.48 p.m.

Venezuela is up to the stage where the cost per barrel, as one sees it, is at \$27 and they will not continue to pay for rice at \$790 a ton. The previous Government was informed of this since 2014. So we inherited the loss of the Venezuelan market.

Notwithstanding that, while a time of negotiation our rice market was 70% Venezuela, currently it is just around 30% because new markets have been found, as indeed Portugal and Italy take as much rice as Venezuela took from us. So marketing is under control.

With our marketing situation, some good news emerged with GRDB 13, Guyana's first specialty rice, our aromatic rice. After an introduction on the domestic market, we are now preparing to trade this high priced product on the international market. Aromatic rice is currently being traded at US\$700-\$1200 per ton, as compared with the current market price to regulars, between US\$350-\$450 per ton. This could very well carve the future directions for rice production and trade for Guyana as it has a significantly higher market price.

GRDB would continue to monitor the supply and prices of fertilizers and chemicals and will pursue avenues of having these inputs available to farmers at competitive prices. To foster the continuous growth of the rice industry, investing in key infrastructure is also mandatory. GRDB will commence preliminary work on a new headquarters, inclusive of a new quality control laboratory.

Consistency has led to reliability in the industry and the Government will continue to pay emphasis and make the relevant interventions. We will not stop here. We will ensure that more markets are tapped into with a view to Guyana's rice being available worldwide, expanding from the present 38 countries to which we currently export.

I could perhaps understand the concern of the Hon. Member on the other side of the House. He alluded to \$100 million that was given to him, which he claimed was to give to farmers to offset production cost. However, that sum has never been accounted for up to this day. Indeed, in fact, under the previous arrangement, the Guyana Rice Producers' Association received \$2.5 million dollars every month from ...

Mr. Seeraj: Mr. Speaker, on a Point of Order.

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

Mr. Seeraj: That is right, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I think it is being suggested to you the Standing Order under which you rise. Would you share it with the Speaker?

Mr. Seeraj: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Please let the Speaker know.

Mr. Seeraj: Standing Order 41(6). The Hon. Minister of Agriculture just alluded that \$100 million was given to Mr. Seeraj and was not accounted for. Sir, he should check with the records of the Guyana Rice Allotment Board. I stated that very clearly that no \$100 million was ever given to Mr. Seeraj, and there is no record of that. What was, and I said it clearly that \$100 million was made available through the Guyana Rice Producers' Association for payment to farmers and those records were submitted to the Guyana Rice Allotment Board. I stated that Sir. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. Please continue Minister.

Mr. Holder: There is also the \$2.5 million per month which was made available to the GRPA over a number of years, if not, decades and to date the Guyana Rice Development Board has no account, no ultra-statements or anything for those amounts. That is why the new Government has stopped that transaction.

To move on, cognisance must be placed on the nation's rising food import bill. In 2015, approximately US\$145 million or \$30 billion worth of food was imported. This represents a 34%...

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

Ms. Ally: I rise to move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes' extension so that he can conclude his presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Holder: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I will have to rush this because there are 10 units to report on and I have just finished presenting two - rice and sugar.

Guyana's Vision for Agriculture 2020, seeks to change the view that agriculture is for subsistence livelihood, while also seeking to promote agriculture as a wealth generator and entrepreneurial enterprise, producing food and non-food commodities to meet local and export demands.

Further, our strategy promotes Guyana's agriculture in the field of fashion and medicine, furniture and other recreational products. The F5 Strategic Approach abandons the more familiar commodity approach that targets all facets of agriculture - food, fibre, fuel, fashion and furniture. It targets value-added, *et cetera*.

While rice and sugar have overshadowed the conversations on agriculture, non-sugar and non-rice agriculture are just as important, with tremendous potential in our efforts to expand our agricultural base geographically throughout these 83,000 square miles and away from our relatively congested and climatically threatened coastland. In 2016, we would be furthering the development of the other crops sector.

The National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI) has been allocated \$872 million. In the Intermediate Savannahs, infrastructural works would be done to enhance egress and ingress into the area. The acreage under orchard cultivation will be increased considerably. A nursery will also be established at Ebini. Large scale commercial production of soybean will commence.

We will also finalise agricultural development for Regions 1, 7 and 8. In Region 1, emphasis would be placed on increasing spice production to initially satisfy local demands estimated at US\$1million annually. The commissioning of a spice factory will further enhance spice production in this region. The focus for Regions 7 and 8 will be on commodities that will enhance food security and livelihoods and support the school feeding programmes in these regions. Emphasis would be placed on high value commodities such as black pepper, fejou and carrots for export to the coast. Similarly, we will re-introduce white potato cultivation to satisfy local community demands.

The Livestock Development Authority has been allotted \$508 million in the 2016 Budget. The outlook for 2016 is a modest growth for this sector of 0.5%. While poultry, meat and egg productions are expected to increase, beef and mutton productions are expected to decline mainly as a result of the effects of the *El Nino* phenomenon. The expected shortage of rice bran and other agriculture by-product feeds will also be expected to affect the supply of feed for pigs and dairy cattle.

The Minister of Finance alluded to the Government's intention to re-energise the cattle industry through the development of a milk pasteurisation plant. But what he did not mention, is that if we were to look at the top 10 food imports into Guyana, it would be seen that milk and cream are number one. In 2015, Guyana imported US\$27 million in milk and milk imports. This represents 19% of total food imports. These figures must be reversed.

Efforts would be given towards the improvement of the dairy sector by working towards the development of plans for the acquisition of a new milk processing plant along with the re-establishing of milk collection. An approach has been made to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) for assistance in the development of this initiative.

The swine programme has been enhanced by the grant that was awarded to the Swine Farmers Association from the Ministry of Communities, which will result in an importation of improved breeds of pigs. It is envisaged that grant funding will also be made available for the construction of an abattoir and processing facility.

With respect to poultry, eggs and meat production, the Authority will be given enhanced support towards the production and availability of meat and eggs in the rural and hinterland communities

with the introduction of the Black Giant Dual purpose poultry, a grazing animal. These birds produce up to 200 eggs per year and the cockerels can grow up to 4.5 kilograms. This initiative will also be extended to the residential hinterland schools to reduce dependency on the importation of these commodities.

In 2016, the Guyana Livestock Development Authority (GLDA) would be working on the development of the local apiculture industry towards a higher geographical coverage, higher production and international quality standards. This programme will involve the unemployed youth, the hinterland regions and schools. Additionally, the GLDA continues to support financially, the removal of beehives which pose a threat to the society.

The veterinary diagnostic laboratory will become fully operational and attempts to intensify for accreditation internationally.

In the 2016 Budget, the Fisheries Department was allocated \$160 million. Having recorded a decline of 7.2%, fisheries will grow by 1.5% in 2016, due to the increase in fishing activities and moving into new areas such as deep sea fishing.

In 2015, the marine sub-sector raised revenue in the sum of \$25 million and recorded exports of 21, 568 metric tons or \$71 million. The current *El Nino* weather situation would affect the fishing industry as well. It could reduce the reduction of the catches and lack of adequate conditions for spawning. There will also be improvements in data collection and also working with the Coast Guard to minimise piracy. Details on that I will have to give at another time.

In the 2016 Budget, the Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC) has been allocated \$140 million. In 2016, the GMC would pursue increases in exports to both regional and extra-regional markets. In relation to the Suriname market, for instance, in 2014 our crops were exported to Suriname - 236,000 kilograms and in 2015, exports grew by more than 107%. Emerging markets would be aggressively pursued in 2016, and the GMC will continue to do their marketing locally and overseas.

Regarding Drainage and Irrigation, the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority - water management is a critical area of focus for the Ministry of Agriculture since most of our aquatic practices are in the low lying regions of Regions 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. We need to be able to adapt to

climatic changes where our water resources and management are concerned. Even in the height of the *El Nino* period, we are still faced with some occurrences of heavy rainfall that could cause flash floods.

I want to expunge on youths in agriculture, which might have been interesting. The MMA has been allocated \$237 million. The Hydrometeorological Service will put up more hydrometeorological stations. The Guyana School of Agriculture (GSA) would be allocated \$253 million. I am sorry I cannot elaborate on this because time does not permit. But the Ministry of Agriculture has 11 sizable units. It is one of the bigger ministries.

For the management of pesticides and toxic chemicals, the Pesticides and Toxic Chemicals Control Board will receive \$92 million in next year's budget and there will be major project in the agriculture sector for the role of agricultural infrastructural development. Access dams, road improvement, flood risk management projects.

To conclude, to achieve the aforementioned, a planning unit in the Ministry of Agriculture that will be high-performing, efficient and adaptable, will be established. This will allow for the improved delivery of the numerous programmes and services which we provide to the public. The focus will be on modernising management and technical support. The establishment of a planning unit would institute one overarching coordinating mechanism for agricultural policy.

6.03 p.m.

Technical staff will work closely with the semi-autonomous agencies to jointly accomplish the National Agriculture Strategy 2020. With the dynamic nature of agriculture, factors of production, the supply chain and trade issues, a review of the current make-up of the Ministry of Agriculture indicates that we need to ensure that roles and responsibilities are clear and relevant. In this unit, we will leverage the best to ensure that the public interact with the Ministry of Agriculture in an efficient environment. This will also ensure more effective management of resources by eliminating duplication or unnecessary expenses.

With the implementation of these initiatives that we would be pursuing in 2016 and over the next five years, I have no doubt that the agricultural sector would continue to propel the Guyana economy to ensure that all stakeholders enjoy a good life.

In closing, I commend this Budget to this House for its approval. [*Applause*]

Mr. Chand: Cde. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to the 2016 national Budget. Between the previous Budget presentation and this one, there has been a short time span. Nevertheless, during this time, several matters, worthy of note, took place domestically and internationally.

With regards to international developments, economic experts tell us that 2016 will be another year of weak economic performance globally, with only a few countries doing well. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has predicted that tens of millions will swell the unemployed numbers. A study by Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (Oxfam) has revealed that inequality has grown over the last year, thus bringing into sharp focus the divide between the haves and the have-nots. Expectedly, the rank of the poor will increase and, at the same time, we are seeing that the ruling elite of many developed countries are placing austere burdens on the backs of workers, students, pensioners and farmers. Alongside such economic deterioration, there are unjust wars, violent conflicts, and a new emphasis on militarism. Various animosities among people are being promoted and nuclear conflagration is today threatening humanity. But there is also a silver lining that has appeared.

From the developed countries to the developing ones, a new activism has emerged. In their millions, workers, students, women, farmers and the oppressed are fighting back. And, hopefully, such militancy will result in a world order that will be based on such values as peace, progress and prosperity.

At the domestic level, these recent months have been marked by a high level of despondency by a major section of our workforce. I refer to the workers - field, factory, clerical and other segments of the working population within the sugar industry.

In this second national Budget of the APNU/AFC coalition, Government expectations that workers generally will be better off have been dashed. The silence about the plight of workers in the sugar industry tells its own story. It is a sad story. On page 7 of the Budget presentation, the Minister of Finance stated:

“...the sugar industry returned a creditable performance, in 2015, with production growing by 6.9 percent to 231,145 metric tonnes. Though this level of production is still below the average achieved in the previous decade, the industry is showing encouraging signs of recovery. This, no doubt, can be attributed to new management and the measures taken to increase efficiency and productivity.”

Without belabouring the point, I need to emphasise what is already known: in productive enterprises, the workers are the key and decisive force to ensure economic levels of performance and production. Yet, for this increased production referred to by the Minister in his address, the workers of the sugar industry, the only section of the State’s employees, some 34%, received nothing or zero in terms of wage adjustment in 2015. It is a downright discriminatory act against them. The year 2015 was the first year for over 30 consecutive years when workers in the sugar industry have received no increases in pay. In harder times, the workers’ worth were safeguarded, their importance acknowledged and they received an increase which played a part in maintaining their family, paying their bills and keeping up with the ever rising cost of living.

This year, the Hon. Minister indicated that \$9 billion would be provided to the sugar industry. While it is commendable, I need to point out that it is also \$3 billion less than the sum of \$12 billion that the Prime Minister announced while in New York during a recent meeting he held there. This shortfall to the industry, at this time, will surely hamper the present efforts to turnaround the industry’s misfortunes. Instead, the allocation of only three-quarters of the requested sum needed by the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) will detract from the progress made so far and delay the implementation of plans to return the industry to a viable state.

In considering the Government’s \$9 billion subsidy and the prospects of the sugar industry which, in spite of its trials, still makes a sterling contribution to our economy and social life, one cannot ignore the vexing issue of the closure of the Wales Estate, which has been mentioned, in recent weeks, by the Corporation as well as by Government officials.

The decision of closure affects some 2,500 workers and farmers directly and thousands more indirectly. It is a decision taken without any credible study done. It is a decision that

even the sugar Commission of Inquiry (COI) did not recommend. The haste with which the unpopular decision has been taken makes one wonder if there is *more in the mortar than the pestle*. The Minister of Agriculture and the GuySuCo, in justifying the decision on Wales, called attention primarily to the poor drainage and irrigation, bridges infrastructure, the condition of the fields and the aged factory which would require - we are told - major investment.

The reasons given for the closure of Wales Estate are clearly overstated and are made to misguide. Moreover, those reasons certainly do not reflect the improvements done in recent times, both in the field and the factory, and which involved substantial expenditure. That the factory is old and underperforms betrays a lack of knowledge of what has been done to the Wales factory. Since this seems to be the main of the four reasons advanced for closing the Estate, allow me, Sir, to point to a few relevant factors.

In terms of years, Wales factory would be as old as maybe all the other sugar factories with the exception of Skeldon. However, whatever its age, let it be noted that the factory was designed to crush 102 tonnes of cane per hour. At this time, it is currently processing between 96 and 98 tonnes.

Additionally, over recent years, many vital components have been replaced as is necessary. To this end, I wish to point out that the cane knives at Wales factory are similar to those utilised at four other factories. Its mills are similar to those used at Blairmount and Uitvlugt factories. The boiler is like the ones used at Rose Hall and Uitvlugt. The evaporators as well as the pans are of the same model used in five “old” factories. And the baskets used are even better than those used in other factories.

I refer to these updates about the Wales factory to show that the so-called “aged” argument cannot be a serious or strong reason for the arbitrary shutting down of Wales Estate.

I wish to remind this Assembly that the quite expensive Commission of Inquiry, in reflecting on closure of Wales Estate stated, on page 37 of Volume 1 of its Report:

“...the COI does not recommend the closure of the any estate at this time.”

The Commission of Inquiry, in reflecting on closure of estates on page 30 of the same

Report stated:

“They took into account the current state of the economy which lacks vibrancy...”

I want to emphasise that the Commission of Inquiry of eminent comrades, according to the Government, talked about the economy lacking vibrancy, with awareness of the problem in the sugar industry, the low market price of gold and the level of unemployment. It is against this backdrop that the Wales Estate is being closed. There will be another 1,900 added to the 1,900 Amerindians who were dismissed last year.

At page 31, the Commission of Inquiry stated:

“The effect of closing any estate without planning and adequate notice to cane farmers has serious consequences, not only for the employees and private farmers but for the communities as well.”

This, I think, was a reasonable advice. It was discarded, obviously. I am prompted to ask: is this the fate that awaits the Report of this costly Commission? What are we going to discuss in the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services, Mr. Minister? You have shattered the recommendation of the Commissioners.

It is instructive that we be reminded that all political parties, during the elections campaign, spoke in support of the sugar industry. They left no doubt that the industry would be maintained; closure was not mentioned at any time. This ought to have been mentioned since sugar plays such a prominent role. There was no mandate to close any estate and to privatise the industry. Yet, in a mere matter of months, after the National Elections, we are faced with the painful prospect of closure, which will put hundreds on the breadline and bring greater hardships, if not ruin, to hundreds of cane farmers and self-employed persons.

There is no denying that the consequences of the closure for those who will be affected will be grave indeed. The confusion as to who took the decision or where the decision was made would be hilarious if the matter was not so serious. Whatever the source of that decision, be it the GuySuCo, the Cabinet or whoever else, one thing is certain: it will impact negatively on many lives linked to the operations of Wales Estate. However one looks at it, it is a callous and ill-thought-out decision.

To those who have made the decision, allow me, Cde. Speaker, to point out and emphasise that the decision will have major implications for the workers and their families, pensioners, business owners, service providers, and others. There will be a real risk of an escalation in the levels of poverty, unemployment and crime, especially in the West Bank Demerara area.

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, as agreed, I am asking for the additional five minutes extension for the Hon. Member.

Question and put and agreed to.

6.18 p.m.

Mr. Chand: Mr. Speaker, for clarification, I saw that I have 30 plus possibly five minutes. It is on the schedule. I am guided by this. I prepared my speech based on this, so please allow me, Comrade Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, it is unfortunate that a revised time - and let me assure you that we have stopped the timer so that...

Mr. Chand: Comrade Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: You must listen to me now, please.

Mr. Chand: Comrade Speaker, just for clarification, I was guided...

Mr. Speaker: I was given an amended list with an amended time for you. That amended time was 15 plus five minutes. If it is different, then I will be guided. Hon. Member, I will advise that you will proceed with the additional five minutes that you have so that you will speak for 20 minutes.

Mr. Chand: Comrade Speaker, I shall have to have my address published fully. I have to skip a great part of my address.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I would suggest that you use the time that you have usefully, but I must tell you that many other Hon. Members, who spoke today, had their statements truncated

when the time for their cessation arose. Yours is no different. Now, I am going to suggest that the count be started for your remaining two minutes plus five minutes.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member, Ms. Anna Ally, is not here, but she admitted that there was a mistake where I, as the sectoral spokesperson, was given 20 plus five minutes and Mr. Komal Chand was given 30 plus five minutes. The correction was made. Unfortunately, Mr. Komal Chand was not told and I take responsibility for that part. I apologise. However, I would like to ask, as this is such an important issue, if he could be granted an additional five minutes, please.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, what I have indicated is that Mr. Komal Chand will begin with two minutes plus five minutes.

Mr. Chand: I had difficulty listening to Minister Holder and this is the kind of confusion and information that we are fed with. First, I want to refer to the Chairman of GuySuCo's article in last Sunday's *Stabroek News*. He stated that lands would be given to displaced workers to cultivate cane and other crops. Here we were told just now by the Minister about aquaculture. Here the emphasis was on aquaculture and livestock. Again, I want to point out that this is how this nation and people are treated. The suggestion by Dr. Thomas and the Minister no doubt requires study and thought. The Minister is now saying that a feasibility study will be done. What is taking place in our country when so much is at stake and this kind of simplistic approach to important issues that affect the lives of our people, thousands of people, are treated this way? We said that, in view of Mr. Thomas' position on this matter as Chairman of the Board, we need to have full disclosure. I would presume that this matter would have been discussed surely and fully and the responses would have been available on the valid and reasonable issues I raised.

I urge the Minister of Agriculture as well as the GuySuCo's Board Chairman to share, without delay, with the workers, their Unions, this Assembly and the Guyanese public the plans, given their importance.

At this time, too, one can see that there are widespread objections to the closure and the condemnation of the decision by the growing numbers of knowledgeable and concerned Guyanese. I and the Union I represent urge the concerned authorities from the Corporation and the Government not to persist on this path. This path is to condemn many thousands of our compatriots

to hardships that could very well be avoided. I also say that seeking to sideline the trade unions and not respect their legitimate role should be discontinued.

What is worrying, too, is that Wales Estate could be the first of many painful stories. Other crops could be talked about. GuySuCo, in a letter on 29th January, 2016, stated, among other things:

“...the Corporation took a decision to diversify the sugar industry into non-sugar ventures and they have identified the Wales Estate cultivation for the first of such projects.”

This was clear. We need to have a proper position. There should be complete closure of sugar is what this letter of GuySuCo said to the workers.

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

Mr. Chand: Thank you, Comrade Speaker. I believe that Wales Estate can overcome its current hurdles and difficulties. I recall that the Estate’s average sugar production reached about 30,000 tonnes during the 2002 - 2004 period. It is sure that a potential production of 35,000 tonnes is possible in the not-too-distant future, once continued necessary inputs are available and there is a motivated workforce and an able management. There is also the view that a commitment to secure Wales will also incentivise farmers to replant abandoned lands which have been retired.

While support has been given to the ailing industry, the support did not translate to wage increases in 2015. In fact, sugar workers were doubly hit by no wage increases and by a high-handed approach in fixing their Annual Production Incentive (API) award. These are unfortunate developments in the industry. The workers are obviously being penalised, but for what? In the final analysis, while the workers and their families are made to suffer, the Minister of Finance, I am sure, will underline the importance of that industry to our economy. The people we depend on to keep it going need to be encouraged and not discriminated against.

Mr. Speaker: You have two minutes remaining, sir.

Mr. Chand: I must now go forward faster. We need to go forward with the many feasible measures identified to revive the sugar industry. We need to avoid doing those things that will roll back the consistent efforts needed. Immediately, one of those things is to rescind the decision to

close Wales Estate. This was underlined at a panel discussion held on 5th February, 2016 at the Moray House Trust where participants from all walks of life were strong in their rejection to closure. I think the Hon. Minister of Business was present at that meeting. There is a widespread mood in the nation that disagrees with the closure. I call on the Government not to ignore the sentiment of the people.

As we get ready to mark the 50th anniversary since our Independence, we should rejoice in the freedom that was won out of our people's struggles and not feel or harbour a sense that an oppressive state is in the making, which is undermining the freedom and the colonial tactics of divisiveness may be creeping up on us yet again. Let us ensure that this is not so. We still need to forge national unity and build our nation. [Applause]

Minister of Communities [Mr. Bulkan]: Mr. Speaker, I rise to join my Colleagues, who have spoken before me, to add my commendation and my congratulations to the Hon. Member, the Minister of Finance, for the Budget presented to this honourable House on the 29th January, 2016, in keeping with an earlier promise that he had made to present the Budget in the first month of the fiscal year. Others have spoken on the utility and the value of presenting a budget earlier in the year, so there is no need for me to go into that.

This Budget, at \$230 billion, the biggest ever presented, is not, by and of itself, reason to celebrate or to boast, but the reasons to boast for this Budget are that it is a bold Budget, it is a brave budget and it is a balanced budget. My reference to "balanced" is not as the accountants would use the term as in balancing a budget, but means a budget that has equity and fairness. This is why I say "balanced".

A budget, as we all know, is a financial plan and *Budget 2016* is a plan for development. *Budget 2016* addresses, confronts and invests in the challenges facing our country. With its projected fiscal deficit at 4.7% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), this Budget, when approved and when the allocations have been spent, will inject a massive stimulus into the economy. This is a Budget that invests in people.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Mustapha, when he spoke two days ago, had urged and implored for the Government to come with a programme: here is a plan; here is a programme. But to be able to recognise it, we need to be objective and dispassionate, qualities, I venture to say, are in very

short supply in this honourable House. After all, we are here at the National Assembly, not at a political rally.

On this question of the fiscal deficit, the first speaker on the Government side had urged exactly that, with reference to the 2015 Budget, the fiscal deficit could have been greater. In this regard, I note that when the Hon. Member, Mr. Irfaan Ali, spoke that he was very measured in his critique of the economy which he referred to as slipping and sliding. Unfortunately, the subsequent speakers painted a doomsday scenario. Among those speakers are the Hon. Members Dharamlall, Damon, Mahadeo, Neendkumar, Gill, Anamayah, Chandarpal and Ganga Persaud. They all painted a very dim portrait of this Budget and could find no good in this Budget.

6.33 p.m.

Listening to the Hon. Members, it would be unforgivable for one to not recall that, when this Administration took office, the National Assembly had not met for 11 months, as a result of it being in recess, prorogation and dissolution which caused to throw the financial management of our country into a tailspin. Yet, the Minister of Finance and his team of dedicated and committed public servants were able to produce and present two Budgets within seven months.

Budget 2016 is a renewal of the social contract with our people by investing in their development. This process is an endless one; it never stops. One Budget goes into another and, in this regard, I recall the words of the late United States (US) President, John F Kennedy, who pointed out that all governments have to contend with the revolution of rising expectations.

The new Government that came into being, following the Elections of May, 2015, created a new Ministry, the Ministry of Communities, and, while many pretended to not know what a community is, I must point out that we live in communities; everywhere there are Community Centres and we belong to something called the Caribbean Community.

The Ministry of Communities incorporates two former Ministries, namely Housing and Water and Local Government and Regional Development. The reason for the creation of the Ministry of Communities was to seek to ensure that there is a more efficient delivery of Government services; that with one Ministry, there would be better coordination. The intention was clear that people's welfare is to be the centre and the focus of development.

My Colleague, Minister Valerie Patterson, addressed the vision and the plans for housing in her presentation on Monday and Minister Dawn Hastings-Williams will elaborate on those for the water sector during her presentation. But, permit me, Mr. Speaker, to briefly touch on these sectors.

Providing Quality and Affordable Housing Solutions

The previous Government did not allow the board of the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CHPA) to fully execute its functions. In reality, that board was treated as an ornament and was not allowed to exercise its regulatory oversight of the entity. The hand of control and domination of the Minister were heavy and the excesses were many. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker hit gavel.

My Colleague, Minister Patterson, highlighted the level of inefficiency, excesses and poor service that this executive dominance resulted in and residents suffered as zoning...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, do allow me. Hon. Members, I would like us to have this debate not punctuated by what is fast and very fast amounting to shouts by Hon. Members who are in their places. I do believe that we cannot continue the business of this House in this manner. I know that some Hon. Members are particular offenders and these are Hon. Members who have served in this House for quite a long while, who are familiar with the Standing Orders and who, I suspect, are giving examples to the newer Members. I wonder. I thank you. Please proceed, Minister.

Mr. Ali: I rise on a Point of Order, Standing Order No. 41(6). The Hon. Minister said that the Minister responsible for housing played a heavy hand in the board, controlled the board. Mr. Speaker, I happen to be the immediate former Minister.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have stated the Standing Order and that is one out of two conditions. The other one is to state the problem which has caused you to interrupt the House and then sit down. You cannot make a speech. I would not allow you to make a speech.

Mr. Ali: The Hon. Minister is imputing improper motive by the former Minister of Housing and I am asking him to withdraw that.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. Please proceed.

Mr. Bulkan: My Colleague, Minister Valerie Patterson, highlighted the level of inefficiency, excesses and poor service this executive dominance resulted in and residents suffered, as zoning and building regulations and construction standards were disregarded. This APNU/AFC Administration will pursue a vastly different approach.

Under this Government, the Board of the CHPA has been given the mandate to function with the authority it has under the Housing Act. It has begun to exercise greater oversight of the operations of the CHPA. Three subcommittees of the Board have been constituted to facilitate the executive Board oversight of operations of the CHPA. These subcommittees are for planning and projects and finance and allocations, and they have earnestly begun their work.

This will ensure that the more than \$5.8 billion from the housing fund that has been programmed in this 2016 Budget gets implemented more efficiently and transparently.

My Colleague, Minister Patterson, also, in her presentation, spoke of the odious inheritance that this Administration has inherited and committed that this Administration will fix the housing problems with lasting solutions; that this Administration will give value for money; that we will make the application process more user friendly. The applicants will be able to obtain information on the internet and, earlier this afternoon, the assurance was given by the Hon. Minister, Catherine Hughes, that, with the telecoms liberalisation, the bandwidth will be in place to allow for faster internet connectivity. It was a very passionate address.

Very significant, Minister Patterson also made the point that the work in relation to housing allocations will allow for greater involvement of local authorities and this is consistent with the Administration's policy of decentralisation.

Promoting Integrated Water Resources

Promoting Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) has three critical pillars. These are participation, integration and decentralisation: participation of the community in the decision-making process, integration with the various sector agencies involved in the exploitation of this resource and decentralisation. The latter of these is perhaps the most important one, in that it

allows for people's involvement in the decision-making process at the local watershed level, and this is another example of returning power to the people.

The current El Niño conditions that are severely impacting on the wellbeing across communities demonstrate the need for the IWRM approach. It is no coincidence, therefore, that, for the first time in Guyana's history, presented before this honourable House is a budget dedicated to IWRM. The Government has also budgeted \$28.5 million for the reconstitution of the National Water Council.

Local Government and Regional Development

There are three words that encapsulate this Government's approach and attitude towards local government and regional development and these are: decentralisation, empowerment and communitarianism.

The Ministry of Communities has the responsibility for the conditions in communities countrywide. We will, however, exercise that responsibility not directly from the Ministry, as used to obtain in the previous dispensation, but rather via 81 Local Democratic Organs, these being our 10 Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs) soon to be nine Municipalities and 62 Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs).

The Hon. Member, Mr. Hamilton, who is not in the House at this moment, when he spoke two days ago, among other things, said that he could find that there was no funding for local government in this Budget and he said that there were no transfers via the Fiscal Transfers Act. The clear implication is that this Government is not supportive of local government or of local democracy. But, if we can, for a moment, put aside the fact that that comment or accusation is coming from a party that denied citizens of this country their constitutional right to practise local democracy and so damaged and degraded our local government organs, literally rendering them dysfunctional, I can proudly point to our track record in the eight months that we have been in office. **[Mr. Nandlall: When are you going to do the Fiscal Transfers Act of 2016?]** I will get to that.

In the eight months that we have been in office, we have passed legislation to facilitate the holding of local government elections and we have gone further and named the date for the

holding of local government elections, which will be in another six weeks from today. [Interruption] And, what is the price tag...

Mr. Speaker hit gavel.

Thank you for the protection that you are seeking to afford me, Mr. Speaker, and I trust that Hon. Members on the other side will heed your caution. What is the price tag for these elections? The Hon. Member, Mr. Hamilton, wants to know if this Government is putting its money where its mouth is. And these elections, when held, would cost the Administration more than \$1.3 billion but that is an investment in good governance. It deepens the democratic process and those are concepts that we are committed to.

To turn to the Fiscal Transfers Act, Hon. Member Nandlall is curious. Hon. Member Hamilton obviously did not take the time to familiarise himself with the details of that Act, but I venture to say that, had he consulted his Colleague on his left, the Hon. Member, Mr. Croal, or the former Minister, the Hon. Member, Mr. Ganga Persaud, they would have informed him that the Fiscal Transfers Act does not mandate the central Government to provide funding to local government organs, but rather it outlines a formula for organs to access budgetary allocations once they have been made, such allocations being entirely discretionary.

With local government elections and with elections of 71 new councils all across the country, it will be accompanied by this new philosophy that sees central Government providing support as opposed to seeking to dictate to and dominate the affairs of local government organs.

6.48 p.m.

The hand of control has been replaced with the hand of collaboration and cooperation. The crisis conditions, which currently characterise our towns and villages, will be replaced by community renewal when people are allowed to practise their constitutional right to manage and develop their areas. That is what I meant when I referred a moment ago to communitarianism. What there is it is a community solidarity. We have to return to the time when we were each other's brothers' keepers and sisters' keepers. The fresh approach to community management will see partnership, not partisanship. It will see respect not a desire to dominate.

The present rot local government system will be rehabilitated. The degeneration of our communities will give way to rebirth and renewal when local leaders are elected and allowed to make decisions on those areas that directly affect their well-being. One only has to look at the physical transformation that is taking place in our capital city right before our very eyes, as a result of the changed mind-set to the role of local government, to appreciate the wisdom and necessity of empowering people to manage their own affairs. Even though the Hon. Member Chandarpal, when she spoke, sought to disparage and denigrate the actions of the city council, and sought to suggest that they were not desirous of improving the condition of the city, I venture to say that you were closing your eyes to reality Hon. Member. The physical transformation, which we are seeing in our city, is as a result of the 2015 budgetary allocation of a meagre \$300 million. That is in comparison to the question that was asked earlier about what is there to show for the \$1 billion that this honourable House passed in Budget 2014.

Also accompanying the new councils, which will come into being following the elections, will be the Local Government Commission (LGC), a legislation that was approved in this House way back in 2013 but that was not operationalised up until the elections of May of last year. Funding has been provided in this budget for the Local Government Commission. One of the things this commission will allow is for politics to be taken out of the management of our communities. It is the case that too often the rancour, which accompanies political cut and thrust, affects and prevents community minded persons from coming forward to play a role in managing and developing their communities. The operationalising of the Local Government Commission will be further proof of our commitment to introducing meaningful local democracy.

Rebuilding capacity within local government organs will not be simple or an overnight task, but this administration is committed to this end. The incoming councils will require significant support to execute their mandate. In this regard the Ministry of Communities will follow a policy of collaboration with local and international agencies and groups to achieve the goal of equipping and empowering those organs. One such partnership is with the Canadian funded Caribbean Local Economic Development (CARILED) initiative. Under this partnership six municipal development plans are being updated and the new councils, when installed, will be invited to further refine these plans into Plans of Action for Municipal Development (PAMD). Under the same programme, the Ministry is exploring with the E-Government Unit the options

of developing a common information technology (IT) platform for financial and administrative management across local government organs.

The local government election aside, the single most significant challenge for the local democratic councils (LDCs) is the matter of how these councils will finance their activities to be able to effectively discharge their responsibilities. It is no secret that the financial status of all our councils is a devastated one. Many are unable to meet their operational cost. This is largely as a result of the fact that property valuation and revaluations have not been done since 1995. Collection rates are low and the revenue base of councils are restrictive. This administration is committed to ensuring that newly elected councils have adequate financial resources to discharge their responsibilities.

Other initiatives, which are in place to support our local government organs, include the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) initiative. This is a programme that is targeted to stimulating local areas economic growth by promoting micro and small scale enterprises among the disadvantaged in our communities. This Budget 2016 provides for local area economic profiles which will provide the targeted local councils with data to promote local economic development and the sum of \$40 million is provided for in this budget.

The Ministry will continue to assist and equip our municipalities and Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) to execute their responsibilities. To this end, the sum of \$400 million is budgeted under the project development and assistance subvention for this year. It will cater for additional support to our three new townships, these being Bartica, Lethem and Mabaruma.

As we continue to build capacity within our local government organs to deliver on the "good life", the Community Infrastructure Improvement Programme (CIIP) will continue to provide local councils with assistance to enhance the aesthetic community facilities and to preserve and construct community infrastructure.

In pursuing the "fresh approach", day to day management of the Community Enhancement Worker component was transferred to the local government organs in Linden, Mabaruma and Lethem last year in 2015. In 2016, the Ministry will extend this approach to all Neighbourhood Democratic Councils and municipalities. This is what we mean by decentralisation and empowerment.

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

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

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Bulkan: I turn to regional administration and development. The Hon. Member Mustapha, when he spoke, accused the administration of “taking control of our regions.” He said that the administration was appointing officials who were usurping the role and functions of elected officials and that there was excessive interference. Other and similar accusations were made by other Hon. Members, including Hon. Members Dharamlall, Damon, Mahadeo, Mr. Harry Gill and even Hon. Member Ganga Persaud. One of the laments was the fact that approximately 20% of the capital allocation for 2015 for our regions was returned. I will admit that that is regrettable. What is the reality? It is that a mere four months was available to execute the capital programme as a result of the prorogation. [*Interruption*]...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Speaker has the power to name Members. Were I a Member of this Assembly, not in the position of Speaker, I would be embarrassed if I was named. I am trying to avoid visiting that on any Member. Please proceed.

Mr. Bulkan: Mr. Speaker, you would have recognised that it has become a common occurrence anytime I attempt to speak in this honourable House.

When one considers the process of inviting public tendering, the evaluation and award of contracts, the bottlenecks at the tender board and the need for the reconstitution of our regional tender boards, these were some of the factors that were responsible for that unfortunate state of affairs. If there is any blame to be cast that blame belongs to at the feet of the Hon. Members on the other side of this House. However, for the 2015 current allocations, I am pleased to note that 98.5% of those allocations were spent and, if taken as a whole, the current and capital allocations for the Budget 2015, the sum of 97% was spent. However, the tabling of the Budget 2016 this early will allow for its early execution and its full implementation of the capital programme as well.

In relation to regional administration, our Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs) will be beneficiaries of that very strategic vision of empowerment. The creation of our ten regions was not merely for the purpose of administration but more importantly development. Each region must be prepared to accept the challenge offered to it by the Government to begin to take more ownership of the areas. Our regions must ensure that the bountiful natural and other resources, which they are endowed with, are used to attract investments, create jobs and contribute to improving living standards, to raising people's quality of life and bringing about development. Our regions must no longer see themselves as administrative regions, as vehicles to soak up resource from the central Government, but must rather seek to leverage their abundant resources to be able to drive development in their regions. This is what our Constitution provides for. Article 77 provides for each region to craft its own development programme.

I recall in my first budget presentation, in 2012, I made that very point. I had urged the Government to adopt article 77. It would be there in the *Hansard*. When the regional chairpersons and vice chairpersons were sworn in shortly after the elections of last year they were given that very charge by President Granger, to craft a plan of action for the development of their respective regions. Subsequent to that the Ministry of Communities in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and other agencies, both local and international, provided support to our regional administration, offered such support to the task of developing their respective Plan of Action for Regional Development PARs. His Excellency has stated emphatically that strong regions will lead to a strong nation, and meaningful support will continue to be provided to the RDCs in equipping them to exploit their potential for the benefit of the residents. That is the nature of the engagement that this administration is seeking to have with our RDCs. It is misleading for Hon. Members of this House to be pedalling a false narrative, accusing us of seeking to usurp the authority.

7.03 p.m.

Again, in relation to the creation of the (PARs) respected development plans, at a leadership forum that was convened by the Ministry of Communities in July of last year and held at the Arthur Chung Convention Centre, under the theme "Unveiling a Plan for Regional Empowerment", all 203 Regional Democratic Council councillors attended that leadership forum. Subsequent to that, the Ministry took the lead and selected, with the agreement of Region

10, that region to be chosen as a pilot region for the crafting of a PARD and funding was provided for international and local consultants to guide that process. Round table discussions were held in October of last year to apprise all of our RDCs as to the progress made in that process and for those RDCs to learn from the experiences of Region 10. It is regrettable for me to inform Members of this honourable House that the activity was boycotted by the Opposition control coastland RDCs. Whilst we are seeking a strategic and meaningful engagement with the RDCs and not a superficial one, whilst we are asking our RDCs to identify their development needs and priorities, what we are doing is discharging our obligation. The question is: Will the Opposition control councils step up or will they stay out of the process and criticised?

I am pleased to announce that at the second round table conference, that was held one week ago, there was full participation from all of the Opposition control regions at the level of the Regional Chairman. I believe that they are now seeing the wisdom of collaborating with this process and of seeking to take advantage of the offer of support to the crafting of the 2016 proposals of the PARD.

The 2016 allocations propose a further \$6 billion dollars for our 10 regions. It increases the 2015 figure from \$26 million to \$32 billion, an increase of 23 %. These increases varied in the regions from 13 % in Region 10, the lowest, to 37 % in Region 8, an average of 23 %. That is ample proof that this administration, that Budget 2016, is investing in the development of our regions. That is the proof of the pudding. The Hon. Members on the opposite side sees no good in this budget, but figures do not lie because we are all entitled to our opinions but not facts.

In closing, this budget invests in hinterland development, community development, people's development and Guyana's development. It is for these reasons that I commend this budget to this honourable House and urge its unanimous approval.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Bishop Edghill: I rise this evening to make my contribution to this debate on Budget 2016 and I want to situate my remarks in a particular context. That context is a principle on which the system of natural justice around the world is founded and it is taken from a biblical text, Proverbs 18 and 17, "The first to bring its case seems just until another comes and examines it."

This is exactly what I will do tonight. The Hon. Minister brought his case and he seems just and correct, but I will examine it.

I want to begin, Sir, by bringing to the attention of this House, and to the entire nation, that while we are hearing about all of the fanciful speeches about two budgets in such a short time and the biggest budget ever, last year \$30 billion was returned to the Consolidated Fund because it was not spent. Those are not manufactured figures because I know whenever I use figures in this House people get worried. That is stated from Table III, page 3 of Volume 1, \$9 billion of that \$30 billion was for capital works. I will come a later, time permitting, to show that we have a serious problem with implementation.

While I am on the issue of implementation, when we left Government we left a contract to the value of US\$113 million which was signed with Venezuela under the PetroCaribe arrangement. The APNU/AFC Government was unable to execute the contract completely. As matter of fact, only \$42. 3 million of that contract was executed. We have to tell the people of Guyana the truth. Failure to implement the contract caused the price of rice to drop and rice farmers are in trouble. That is the reality.

On the 29th January, 2016 when the Hon. Minister of Finance read his budget and I was leaving a reporter asked me for my comment. I used one word to describe what I heard “bland”. Having read and listened to the discourse, I have since added “miserably inadequate, insipid and uninteresting.” This budget is anti-poor, anti-development. It panders to special interest and punishes the poor and working class. This budget rewards political investors and ruins the lives of ordinary citizens. This budget kills dreams. The young professional, the middle class persons who were seeking to own their own car and their own home, this budget kills their dreams and drives fear and uncertainty into the lives of the working class population. This document advances and cements the views and the beliefs of hundreds of thousands of Guyanese that the APNU and AFC are strong on rhetoric but is a miserable failure on keeping their word and they cannot be trusted.

We were told that Budget 2016 is situated on some very important pillars.

- i. national unity

- ii. national infrastructure
- iii. national institutions
- iv. national security
- v. public service

Time might not allow me to examine all of these pillars, but as time allows me I will. Let us start with national unity. We have heard a whole lot of talk about social cohesion. As a matter of fact, there is a Minister of Social Cohesion. It was the Minister of Finance and other Members of this House who introduce this subject that I am about to discuss. Boats, bicycles and buses and we are told that they are going to have two others 'bs', boots and breakfast or books and breakfast. In all my life in Guyana I do not know of a more discriminatory practice in the allocation of goods and services to the people of Guyana than this particular matter. You are calling it social cohesion.

There are a number of questions to be asked. Is this initiative funded from the public purse? Are they now part of the national assets? Are any of these donors/contractors engaged with the state or are any of them political investors? More than that we need to ask the questions: Who decides who get bicycles? Who decides who get buses? Who decides who get boats? Which communities? When the PPP/C gives out goods and services to the people of Guyana, we give every child in the public school \$ 10,000 and a parent was able to decide. When some political investor donates 50 bicycles and somebody goes to a community to distribute those 50 bicycles there are 700 or 800 children in that school who are left without a bicycle. When the PPP/C went to that school to distribute goods and services, every child in the school got it. There is nothing more discriminatory in this counter at this particular time as the boats, buses and bicycles administer by the Ministry of Social Cohesion.

If we are going to talk about national unity, we must not just have talk and sentimental thinking, we must put it on paper. If the APNU/AFC Government is serious about national unity present to this Parliament a White Paper on what it stands for and let us discuss it. Do not let it just be talk and hot air. Let us bring something tangible to the table. It cannot talk about national unity when there is a Presidential Adviser, who is also heading the State Assets Recovering Unit (SARU),

every day, in the newspaper, is giving interviews about audits that are not yet tabled in this National Assembly and making them public. You cannot continue to have leaked audit reports and people being tried in the media. That is not national unity but that is being vindictive. It is a vulgar display of vindictiveness.

We must stop dividing our communities. We must stop the threats and *bullyism* that are taking place by newly appointed directors on state boards, that are reeling out threats and bullying their ways in state entities and driving fear in the lives of people.

7.18 p.m.

We must stop the vacuous statements that are being made that carry with it no substance and meaning. If we are going to talk about national unity, it got to be more than talk. It must be something with some level of permanence. It was must substantial; it must be structured; it must be ideological and it must address the class issue; it must address the ethnic issue and it must give way to economic formations. We have to have that.

I turn my attention to national infrastructure. Mr. Speaker, I have Budget 2015 and Budget 2016.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I do not intend it, but the Speaker is on this side of the Assembly. When you address, address the Speaker.

Bishop Edghill: I hope I get back my time.

I hold in my hands the Budget 2015 and the Budget 2016. They both look alike, you can get easily mixed up; it is the same thing. It is not only the cover that is the same, but when the language is read, “Infrastructure Deficit of 2015” and “Infrastructure Deficit of 2016”, it is the same thing that you are talking about – nothing new. Where is the vision? Where are the projects that will capture the imagination of the people of Guyana and will transform the society? Where is the national infrastructure that will link our communities? Where are the new ones? What we have is that last year we were told about what is taking place at the Cheddi Jagan International Airport. I stood in this House and I made a statement. I said that we are getting less and we are paying more on the Cheddi Jagan International Airport. I challenged the Minister of Public Infrastructure to lay in this House the reworked contract of the Cheddi Jagan International Airport and up until now no document has been laid in this House. We are asking this House to

finance, again, a reworked contract where we are getting less and paying more. We use to hear, when they were in Opposition, that we inflated the Bill; that we inflated the price of the contract. When they got in they reworked the contract...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am trying to keep this with your help, the form of address is Hon. Member or Comrade.

Bishop Edghill: Thank you Sir.

The Hon. Member, up until now, nowhere, was able to present to this House the reworked contract to dispute what I have said, that we are getting less and we are paying more. While we were accused of inflating the price of the contract, now the evidence is there. Where is the accountability and transparency? Why is there not an audit of that project?

What is in the budget? Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, last year was criminal, this year it seems to have fallen to a lower category, that there is now an investigation and a review to see how we could be able to work this way around. It meant that either they were misinformed or, secondly, the exuberance was so great that they did not take time to study the real project. The speciality hospital, which was killed and criticised all over this country, is now resurrected without no procurement process, contrary to every law in a vulgar manner, in as much as, institutions and stakeholders in this country have asked that this matter be subjected to public tendering – no budging. It would appear that Fedders Lloyd Corporation Limited, maybe a political investor, has to have its reward no matter what.

Now what we are hearing is the wind farm. Well, the Mr. Samuel Hinds, former Prime Minister and Minister responsible for energy and electricity, has successfully laid this matter to rest in a letter to the editor, to today's *Stabroek News* newspaper, that explains a lot of things, that I think Hon. Members may want to become silent about, right now. The figures that the Minister placed in the budget as the cost of electricity, the former Prime Minister said that with the current prices of electricity, right now, it is below 10 cents. We are seeking to have a power purchase agreement to buy electricity from another political investor for 14 cents. What is important is that we have to deal with the issue that even with the wind farm - I am waiting for the Minister of Public Infrastructure to address this matter, in the House tonight - because of the nature of it, the GPL will still have to expend a lot of resources for standby power when you are not able to

have the capacity because the wind is not generating that kind of electricity. And you want us to pay 14 cents, US, higher than what we are presently generating.

I want to move a bit on and talk about this \$230 billion budget and where the money is really going. Mr. Speaker, I want to direct your attention to Programme 051, Ministry of the Presidency. In 2015, that programme received \$142,082,000 for contract workers. In 2016, it is getting \$788,000,159, an increase of \$646,077,000. There is an addition of 126 persons employed in this programme, which will give an annual emolument package, per person on average, of about \$5,128,000, which will mean on average these new people, who are employed as contracted employees on Programme 051, will be earning \$427,000 per person.

I go to Programme 053, Public Service, \$22,987,000 was allocated in 2015. In 2016, it is \$62,481,000, an increase of \$39,494,000. There were 30 persons employed in 2015. There are now 38 in 2016, an increase of eight persons. This will work out to an average of \$412,000 per person, per month, in this programme.

I go to the Office of the Prime Minister. In 2015, the Office of the Prime Minister had an allocation of \$21,681,000. In 2016, it is \$82,766,000, an increase of \$61 million. I am only dealing here with these figures on contracted employees, not the entire programme. This is an increase, of 11 persons, \$5.5 million annually per person. The 11 new persons employed, by the Prime Minister, will be earning an average of \$463,000 per month. What was the process? Was there advertising in the newspaper that people could have applied for this job? These are all political appointees, political hacks, who are earning super salaries. It is as parasites sucking the wealth of the Guyanese people.

Programme 251: In 2015, it was \$12,143,000. In 2016, \$42,590,000, a \$30 million increase. There were 24 persons employed in that programme. It will now be 29, an increase of five persons. It means, that the persons in this programme will be earning an average of \$508,000 per month.

Let us go to the Ministry of Public Telecommunications, since the Hon. Minister is speaker. This is a new Ministry. All 112 persons in this Ministry are contracted workers. There was no public service advertising.

Let us go to the Ministry of Education. It is very interesting information here. At the Ministry of Education, Programme 401, in 2015, contracted employees received \$177,479,000. In 2016, it has jumped to \$468,196,000, an increase of \$290,717,000. In this Ministry contracted employees are 211 persons. In 2016, it has jumped to 243 which means 32 persons were employed. That means, on an average, one person in this new set of contracted workers will be earning an average of \$9,068,000 per year or \$750,000 per month. We wait for the examination of the Estimates for them to tell us, who these people are, and the job they are doing, and how they were employed. It is the employment of cronies, party hacks, political activist to support them.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, let us try to avoid the pejorative. I think it is generally accepted that the word “hack” is not a word to be used here. Please try. I am sure you are capable of other words. Let us try to use those.

Bishop Edghill: Yes Mr. Speaker, I apologise. I will delete the “hacks”.

Mr. Speaker: I do not know whether other Hon. Members are like me, but I believe that we can have the decibels slightly reduced.

Bishop Edghill: I just heard the Minister of Communities. I want to go to the Ministry of Communities, Programme 421. I have done a careful analysis here, because I know I will be rebutted. The Ministry of Communities, last year, had an allocation for Ministry of Communities; it had an allocation for Ministry of Housing and Water and it also had an allocation for the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. When all of the allocations are added together, it will be \$105 million – contracted employees. In this year, 2016 it has moved from \$105 million to \$148,085,000, an increase of \$43 million but it has employed an additional only seven persons. This means that these persons will be earning \$511,905 on average in that Ministry.

7.33 p.m.

I know that this is causing some amount of trouble in the House. I said that the Budget is anti-poor and anti-development. I said all of that because we heard the Minister indicating, and he told public servants, at the end of his speech, that he understands that they cannot get a salary increase until the unions are finished negotiating. We have now learnt that they have to wait on

the Commission of Inquiry into the Public Service. [An Hon. Member: What page?] At page 72 of his Budget Speech, Sir.

I want to make a case. I said that I will both examine, criticise and I will make some recommendations. I want to recommend to the Minister that the joint services are not subject to wage negotiations with a union. Pay them now! In case the Minister wants to know where he will get the money from to pay the joint services, I respectfully submit to the Minister, at page 8 of his Budget Speech, where he told this honourable House that:

“Every week 15,000 ounces of gold is being smuggled out of Guyana”.

Bear with me, Mr. Speaker, even if that was a People’s Progressive Party (PPP) problem, let him fix it now! He is in charge. Listen to the rationale, at 52 weeks in a year, that is, 780,000 ounces of gold for the year, at an average gold price of \$1,000...

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask for the additional five minutes atop of the four minutes for Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bishop Edghill: Thank you, Sir. That means that if the Minister is able to stop the smuggling of these 15,000 ounces of gold per week, and he gets the royalty of 5%, he will garner US\$39 million from royalties and he will have \$8 billion plus to pay the policemen, firemen, soldiers and the prison officers.

While we are paying political appointees the salaries that I just pointed out, the public servants who are there, seeing them walking in and out, must know that their salaries are on a totally different scale. When we were paying contracted employees, we were questioned in this House and we answered the questions. Drivers were getting \$52,000 just like everyone else; and persons were getting \$100,000 like everyone else. I had given the figures. But there is a more important and fundamental fact here: In the *Stabroek News* of 15th April, 2015, Mr. Goolsarran, former Auditor General, told us that:

“Between \$28-35 billion is being lost annually to procurement fraud”

Professor Clive Thomas, on the day before elections, 10th May, 2015, repeated the same argument that:

“Between \$28-35 billion is being lost annually to procurement fraud”

I am about to tell the Minister of Finance that he could double the salaries of all public servants by simply converting this money that used to be taken through procurement fraud under the PPP and use it for the public servants.

If it is true that \$28-\$35 billion was being lost annually to procurement fraud, then this Budget ought to have made fiscal space for another \$28-\$35 billion to pay public servants. So I am asking the Minister to pay the teachers, nurses, and customs officers now, and pay all public servants a decent wage now.

I want to make some other suggestions that will help get our support for this Budget. The electricity subsidy that is given to Linden has grown. The price of fuel has gone down, but the subsidy for electricity, which is really fuel for Linden, has grown by \$140 million.

If the price of fuel has dropped and the Government has just given to Linden what it had given last year, take the \$140 million and build a school in an area that it is badly needed. Do not keep encouraging waste in electricity in Region 10. Kwakwani has received an additional \$34 million for fuel. This is the cost for a nursery school or a health centre for one of the riverine communities.

The allocation for Presidential Guards has grown by \$40 million. There were no salary increases. It means that the Government has additional guards. This is also the cost for a school or a health centre.

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

Bishop Edghill: Thank you, Sir. I would not be able to close this debate if I do not talk about the allocations to the Government Information Agency (GINA) and the National Communications Network (NCN). Some Hon. Members would have to bow their heads in shame now because when they were on this side of the House, they cut the budget of GINA to \$1 and NCN to \$1. They were actually saying that GINA and NCN were propaganda rags for the then Government.

How is it that GINA is now getting a \$20 million increase and NCN is getting \$54 million increase? All of a sudden, the paragons of virtue have now changed their chorus and they are saying give us more money for NCN and GINA. As of yesterday, we had a Director of Public Information saying:

“It is not GINA’s business to cover Opposition Members in the Debates”.

What a shame. While I heard the Hon. Minister of Finance telling us that there is an allocation of \$300 million for the Jubilee Celebrations, my research in the Budget for “National and Other Events” for the year, the total is \$1,004,964,000. That is the figure for “National and Other Events” for the year.

I heard the Hon. Minister, Mr. Bulkan, talk about the performance of the regions. I will bring some figures very quickly. I am a member of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and we just sat in this very same Chamber at a PAC meeting where the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Public Health told the PAC that he had to send back \$600 million to the Treasury at the end of the year because the regions were unable to spend this money.

Mr. Speaker: You have three minutes remaining.

Bishop Edghill: Thank you, Sir. When we look at the performance, I just want to give an example of the Capital Budget. In 2015, Region 10 was allocated \$240,257,000. They only spent \$89,937,000 or 37.4%.

When we look at Region 4, in 2015, it had an allocation of \$237,287,000. They only spent \$109,913,000. This is non-performance. Mr. Speaker, I told you about \$600 million and the total health budget being sent back. Listen, for education, in 2015, the allocation was \$71,085,000,000 for Region 1. They did not spend \$16 million.

Look at Region 4, it had an allocation of \$130 million and they only spent \$47 million. Region 10 had an allocation of \$69.6 million and they only spent \$38,213,000. So, what are we talking about Sir, when Hon...

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

Bishop Edghill: When we talk about Budget 2016, it reminds me and I close as I started. There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but at the end of it, it leads to death and destruction. At the beginning of the matter it looks just, until the other person comes and examines it and then discovers it is not what it says.”

I cannot support Budget 2016 for the reasons advanced. Thank you Sir. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is past the 7.30 p.m. time. We will take a short suspension and return at 8.10 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 7.44 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 8.25 p.m.

Minister of Public Infrastructure [Mr. Patterson]: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, colleague Ministers, Hon. Members of this side of the House, Hon. Minority Leader and other Members of the Opposition, I now rise to congratulate my Colleague, Hon. Winston Jordan and his hard-working team for the excellent effort put into crafting this well-done 2016 Budget. Let me also take this opportunity to wish my Colleagues a Happy Ash Wednesday.

Mr. Speaker, my Government — yes, our Government — took the reins at a critical juncture when the pillars of our economy, sugar, rice, bauxite, gold, *et cetera* were experiencing severe downturns. However, with vision and foresight, we were able to rise to the task and achieve some level of stability. We still have a long journey to go, but we have commenced this voyage.

The struggle will be intensified and in this year's presentation, some bold and imaginative steps have been highlighted. These will move the economy to higher levels of production and productivity.

From the standpoint of my remit, there will be a concerted effort to ensure that the roads, bridges, energy, power generation and other infrastructural works in the various regions, be expanded and developed. Further, there will no longer be separation, but rather linkages which will be forged and the rich resources from which Guyana is blessed, will be made available for all for the benefit of this great nation.

I am glad to be part of a team which is working assiduously to transform this land of ours to a heaven here on earth. Hence, the relevance of the theme of the 2016 Budget: *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons* cannot be understated.

8.28 p.m.

What is this theme saying to me? It is saying, in regards to stimulating growth that, my Government and my Ministry, after I took office, embarked on a policy to put in place systems to ensure transparency and accountability as soon as it was assembled. Previously, chaos reigned. Some of the measures taken were, all projects were publicly advertised with more effective supervision and monitoring devices being implemented; the upgrade and tightening of evaluation procedures; and the establishment of the National Task Force Project. These are just a few of the steps taken to stimulate growth.

In regard to restoring confidence, after taking up the necessary measures of stimulating growth, my Ministry has and will be taking steps to restore confidence by proposing the establishment of the Inspectorate Division, which will be implemented this year.

Furthermore, the Guyana/Brazilian hydropower initiatives will be vigorously pursued as well as other similar hydropower units. Greater initiatives will be taken this year with regard to hinterland roads, airstrips, and bridges upgrades as well as other infrastructural works, especially in the three new townships of Bartica, Lethem, and Mabaruma. Efforts will also be taken to carry out studies to build the Southern corridor, through a phased approach. The continuation of the works of the National Task Force, coupled with the work of the Georgetown Restoration Project, will also be a priority. These are but a few of the many projects to restore confidence.

To ‘stimulate growth and restore confidence’, my Ministry wholeheartedly joins with other ministries to usher in this truly dynamic process. This process is one that will engender in all a spirit of togetherness and oneness as Guyana moves forward. We must create new blessings for all of our people in a rapidly flourishing economy where ‘the good life beckons’.

I will now review the performance of my Ministry in 2015, and give a projection for the year 2016 and onwards.

But, before I do this, permit me a few minutes to respond to a few misleading statements recently made by Members of the Opposition. Since taking office, it has been my mandate to foster transparency, accountability, and partnership for the development of Guyana. On assuming office, I dispatched a letter to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition requesting that he identifies the Shadow Minister of Public Infrastructure. No response was received until late November, 2015. Despite this late response, an invitation was extended to the Hon. Member Bishop Edghill to join me in a review of the Ministry's 2015 Programme, as well as to share a press conference with me on the contents. To date, the Ministry has not received any response. Listening to the Hon. Member's speech, I realise that he did not have much of a clue on what public infrastructure is about; what we did and what we are doing. I would say this because he mentioned the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) Expansion. Since 25th June 2016, a complete review of that project was in the public domain. One can quickly Google it on *Kaieteur News* on 25th June.

Then, there are claims that we are getting less for more. If the Hon. Member had actually come to the review, he probably would have understood that even before we took this Office they had already sky rocket the project. The Cabinet had already agreed to US\$2.5 million extra on top of the contract for terminal renovation. We had to make additional allowances to relocate the Guyana Defence Force (GDF). A particularly interesting one was that they relocated the GDF but so that it does not reflect in the project sum. They paid GDF the money so that the GDF could pay someone else, but not all entered to the project. They started a new car park at US\$2 million that was never... Relocation of existing services would have been another half of a million dollars. These were all US (United States) dollars. When the assessment of the project was done it came up to over \$200 million. What this Administration has done, and I keep repeating it, was to ensure that we have a project for US\$150 million and we have one of the best reengineer projects. If the Hon. Member does not believe me he could come with me and take a walk and let us visit the 4000 residents in Timehri North who will remain; who were being forced to be dislocated. They will remain under this renewed agreement.

In addition, offers were made by the Ministry of Public Infrastructure to the Members of the Opposition for membership on various boards that fall under the purview of the Ministry. None were taken up. This is rather unfortunate and regrettable. Why would the Opposition refuse to send representatives on important boards like Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL)? They are

going to be mumbling about Bath Settlement, but they have somebody there who will sit and represent what you will like to represent. If the Hon. Member is so concerned about the project of the airport, he can send a representative. That offer is still open. Do you know what I mean? And my offer to meet the Hon. Member and to explain to him what my Ministry had done in 2015 and what we will do in 2016, still remains open. But, from his presentation, I realise that they did him a disservice by throwing the purview of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure in his hand.

In relation to the statements made by Hon. Members Mr. Hamilton, Mr. Dharamlall, Ms. Persaud, Mrs. Chandarpal and several other Members, that the Ministry of Public Infrastructure has not conceptualised any new projects of its own, I wish to highlight a number of projects that have been identified for implementation by my Ministry. These projects are being funded by the Government of Guyana and the UK-Caribbean Infrastructure Fund (DFID) and focus on stellings and wharf development, waterfront development, port development, airstrips and aerodromes development. Just this morning, I received positive confirmation on these grants. These developments are estimated to cost \$15.2 billion. I will ask the Hon. Members if these are PPP projects. This Government will no longer build wharfs. We are upgrading the Parika Stelling to a water front development, in Region 3, to the tune of \$472 million.

In Region 1, similar renovation upgrades to Port Kaituma - \$1.1 billion. Is that PPP? Kumaka - \$157 million. The tune of \$1.1 billion would be used to upgrade the Transport and Harbours' Department stelling in Georgetown. Immediately, next to it the Stabroek Market wharf, we will be building concessionary stands and constructing a floating ramp to accommodate speed boats. To top it all off, we will be doing a walkway linking the Stabroek Market to the Transport and Harbours' wharf, all for \$1.1 billion. Is that a PPP project?

To a value of \$3.6 billion, we will be doing sea defence and land reclamation from Kingston to Ogle. We will be constructing a boardwalk from Kingston to Ogle. That Sir, as you know, is in the public domain and we have invited tenders, but that is in Region 4.

In Region 6, we will be constructing a similar boardwalk, concession stands powered by solar lighting, and a recreation area in Skeldon, Region 6.

For Hon. Member, Mr. Damon, the construction of a boardwalk, concession stands and recreational space for the speed boat operators and the travelling public in Supenaam, Region 2... [*Interruption*]

I am not finished. The Hon. Members asked and it is my duty and responsibility. Port developments - acquisition of a new dredge. Of course, we would like to have a new port, but in the interim, the acquisition of a new dredge is mentioned in the Budget Speech for \$2.5 billion.

The Ministers of Public Telecommunications and of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs are interested in these - airdromes and airstrips \$1.2 billion; the upgrade of Annai, Ekereku bottom as a hub, Lethem and Bartica in Region 7.

The Ministry of Public Infrastructure has already published advertisements inviting technical proposals, including conceptual designs and financial proposals, from suitably qualified individuals and consulting firms. These advertisements have attracted interests as far as Europe. Bids are expected to be in here by the end of February, 2016. This project as I just mentioned, will see land reclamation and a boardwalk powered by renewable energy, all to be completed by late this year or early next year for \$2.5 billion.

These developments will create employment and major economic inputs in these regions. It is our Government's commitment that the residents and current users, and you can tell them in Supenaam, will be given the first option for jobs and concessions in these new areas.

Let me just say in other projects also being undertaken under the Fund, is the reconstruction of the Wismar Bridge, which is the gateway. The Mahaicony Branch Road and of course, the construction of the Parika Goshen Road, which would be executed for \$2.398 billion. This sum has been set aside to commence construction.

In response to Hon. Member, Mr. G. Persaud's claim that the budget for Region 8 has been significantly reduced, permit me to firmly refute this.

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

Mr. G. Persaud: Yes. I rise on Standing Order 40 (a). The Hon. Member is attributing a statement to me that I did not make. I said that Region 8 continues to be the lowest, in terms of allocation. I did not say reduced. The *Hansard* can verify that.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw my previous comments. Coupling exactly what the previous speaker said, I would like to say that, in 2015, the sum of \$257 million was expended on internal roads and the airstrip in Mahdia, Region 8. The Brian Sucre Junction to Mahdia was also rehabilitated.

Furthermore, in 2016, the sum of \$433 million was identified to continue works in these same areas. That means that for 2015 and 2016, nearly \$700 million will be expended by the Ministry for Region 8. Hon. Member Mr. G. Persaud, unless I am mistaken, \$700 million is an impressive figure.

Derelict vehicles - the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, in keeping with the Nation's goal of a 'green economy', has budget \$133 million for the acquisition and preparation of a site for the storage of derelict vehicles.

8.43 p.m.

This land, of approximately 50 hectares, is located along the Soesdyke Highway and will facilitate the compaction and the storage of derelict vehicles picked up across the country. This is under the Project Guyana Restore.

Quickly going, Sir, I would tell you that, and I am speaking of transparency, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, if one visits our website right now, every single project executed under the 2015 capital and maintenance works is there. The name of the contractors, the percentage paid and everything. So when Members are talking about the non-implementation of the public procurement information, which is in the hands of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), chaired by the Opposition, I just wanted them to know that, if they need any information on the Ministry of Public Infrastructure. We have internet access in the House they can Google it right now.

Potholed streets in Georgetown, impassable bridges in Port Kumaka, bumpy airstrips across the hinterland, these and countless other undeveloped infrastructures have impeded Guyana's development.

In his Budget Presentation on 29th January, 2016, the Minister of Finance, Hon. Winston Jordan, noted the Government's recognition of these impediments and said that the 2016 Budget placed a high priority on infrastructural development. This is true and is evident in the allocation of \$30.64 billion for the Ministry of Public Infrastructure. This figure is broken down into a current provision of \$7.3 billion and a capital provision of \$23.33 billion.

While achievements were made in 2015, under the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, it was recognised that much more needed to be done. Rather, under the theme of *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure has been allocated 13.2% of the total Budget to move the 'good life' concept from words to reality.

The Work Services Group (WSG) in the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, which is the largest agency in the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, has responsibility for the execution of all foreign and nationally funded projects falling under the Ministry. One such project, which has the potential for major development in Guyana, is the East Bank Demerara Four Lane Expansion Project, funded by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). This project was awarded in three lots. All three contracts were signed on 3rd October, 2011, with a commencement date of 1st November, 2011, and completion date of 30th April, 2013.

Thus far, Lots 2 and 3 - Vreed-en-Rust to Great Diamond have been completed and the defects liability period ends in the 2nd quarter of 2015. Meanwhile, Lot 1, Providence to Covent Garden, with a length of 2.65 kilometres, was awarded to Dipcon Engineering Services at a price of US\$8 million. The contractor had only completed 59% of the contract when he effectively ceased all works in May 2015, two years after the project was scheduled for a completion. Following discussions with the contractor, an agreeable settlement was reached on 16th August, 2015 and the contract was terminated.

The outstanding portion of work of Lot 1 is being pursued with the relevant authorities for completion by the two contractors who successfully completed Lots 2 and 3. The IDB and National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) have provided their 'no

objection' to this approach in this section and these works will be completed in the second quarter of this year. And, I want to say, just in case the Hon. Members want to know, what was negotiated with the two contracts. They kept their existing rates, which they had signed in the contracts in 2011, which were with the rates implemented in this extension project.

Another important project is the Sheriff Street - Mandela Avenue Project, also funded by the IDB and signed on 15th March, 2013. This project has encountered considerable delays since the signing of the loan. On two occasions, following public advertisement and evaluation of the bids, the process had to be annulled since none of the companies fulfilled the evaluation criteria specified in the bidding documents.

Having regard to the scope of works in relation to this project, the Government of Guyana has decided to review the various components under the project in order to determine whether there should be any adjustments, taking into consideration the present configuration of Sheriff Street - Mandela Avenue. In this regard, the Design Section of the Work Services Group has already commenced this exercise. In the 2016 Budget, a sum of \$580 million has been provided for this project.

For the East Coast Expansion Project, there will be major road works from Better Hope to Belfield. The scope of works includes a four-lane expansion from Better Hope to Annandale and a two-lane upgrade from Annandale to Belfield.

In regards to the fourth road project, which is Vreed-en-Hoop to Hydrone, this contract was awarded in January, 2015, for duration of three years. For road works under this project, the cost is US\$44.3 million, and has another component for US\$2.5 million which caters for a School and Road Safety Education Programme. As of December 2015, road works under this project was approximately 20% completed, while expenditure as at 31st December, 2015, was US\$15.3 million.

Under Budget 2016, \$2.369 billion was provided for the continuation of this project. Road works are expected to be completed by 31st December, 2017. Also in 2015, a number of foreign funded studies were commissioned. These were:

- The East Bank Berbice Road, Region 6;

- The Feasibility Studies have been completed for Phase 2 Stanleytown to Everton. The Ministry is presently awaiting the IDB's 'no objection' in order to proceed with the tendering for the civil works to complete this section and that is a promise by this Administration to the people of Berbice and it will be done;
- For the East Bank Demerara, Grove – Timehri, a feasibility study has been completed and we are assessing that at the moment;
- Urban Transport Studies - this study is intended to develop specific diagnostics of the urban transport situation, problems and trends and to provide recommendations. The terms of reference have been approved, consultants have already been shortlisted and proposals are expected to be submitted shortly;
- Other feasibility studies that are being undertaken right now are the upgrade and rehabilitation of the Linden/Soesdyke Highway, the Kwakwani/Ituni Road, the Wismar Bridge, as I mention before, and the East Coast Railway Embankment. All these studies fall under the IDB portfolio.

The Ministry of Public Infrastructure, through the Work Services Group, has been constructing, rehabilitating and maintaining roads and bridges in Regions 1 to 6 and in Region 10. In the 2015, \$509 million and \$570 million were awarded under the Miscellaneous and Urban Roads Programmes, respectively. A total of 32 urban roads and 51 miscellaneous roads were awarded to various contractors. All works are expected to be completed in the second half of 2016.

The preliminary design, Hon. Members, for the Parika - Goshen Road was completed and is currently being reviewed. And, as I mentioned earlier, we will be proceeding in 2016. Budget 2016 has a provision for Miscellaneous Roads in the sum of \$1.425 billion and Urban Roads in the sum of \$1.164 billion for all regions.

In regards to bridges, in 2015, 24 bridges were rehabilitated and repaired at the cost of \$83 million. These include bridges in Moleson Creek, Mahaica, Linden, Lethem, North Sophia, Essequibo and other areas.

For 2016, the Budget 2016 has a total of \$293 million, which has been provided for the rehabilitation of bridges, under Current and Capital provisions.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you Mr. Speaker. So I will jump ahead to Hinterland Roads. In keeping with our policy of linking the hinterland to the coast, the Government has embarked on a programme to rehabilitate the major road networks in the hinterland regions. These roads are intended to facilitate the access to those areas where our natural resources are located, so as to assist our extractive industry production, which currently contributes significantly to the growth of the economy.

These roads also facilitate greater connectivity between coastland and hinterland. For instance, areas such as Mahdia, Lethem and Bartica have seen, over the years, an increase in commercial activities and in some instances, a hub for persons travelling *via* land from Brazil to the mining areas. In 2015, the following works were carried out in Regions 1, 7 and 9 a total of 801 kilometres of road works were done for a total cost of \$733 million.

The closure of the Wales Estate was unfortunate, but unavoidable. But since this Government considers Region 3, in particular the West Bank Demerara, to be our next frontier for development, therefore, feasibility studies will be conducted this year, right now, for the expansion of the road network for Free and Easy to Sand Hill Junction. This expanded area is an earmarked for an industrial and business estate, housing - the Minister of Housing said that - and agricultural development, coupled with the new Demerara crossing, which we are embarking on, soon the residents in that area will be our pioneers in this frontier.

In 2016, a sum of \$200 million has been provided for the renovation of buildings, which include nine buildings, the completion of the Umana Yana and the completion of the Hon. Prime Minister's Residence, *[Interruption]* **[Hon. Member of the Opposition:** Again...*[Inaudible]*
It is the completion Hon. Member; it is a retention; it is \$171,000

The Cheddi Jagan International Airport Corporation had another successful year and discharged its functions in keeping with its mandate. Last year, we saw a 6% increase in both passengers in-

bound and out-bound, as well as in cargo over the previous years. The income generated by the CJIA Corporation was \$1 billion in 2015. The income in 2015 has almost doubled in the last six years. Of the income collected, \$415 million was transferred to the Consolidated Fund in 2015 compared to \$393 million in 2014.

The CJIA has also procured ambulance, which is on standby 24 hours, in case of any emergencies. The Airport Expansion Project, as I said, was redefined by the Government and is now scheduled to be completed in 2017. [Mr. Ramjattan: Reengineered] Yes, reengineered. The reengineering that was done, the existing terminal building, will be renovated and extended. The runway will be extended the same length on both sides, and we will have the construction of one Code E remote parking position. In the 2016 Budget, \$4.4 billion would be provided.

8.58 p.m.

The Guyana Energy Agency (GEA), a body with primary responsibility for energy, made a number of accomplishments in 2015 and, in *Budget 2016*, the GEA has been allocated the sum of \$7.9 billion for renewable energy projects in schools and hinterland hydropower systems.

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

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Sir. As I mentioned earlier, this Administration had a meeting with the Brazilian Ambassadors and the Brazilian contractors who had signed the MoU for the Mazaruni Hydropower Project with the previous Administration, and they came recommitting their interest in developing this Project. We will, with their assistance, proceed apace.

I will quickly mention the Guyana Power and Light (GPL) Company Inc. A new board has been installed, albeit without the representative of the Opposition.

With the increase in the rebates of GPL Inc. from \$10,000 to \$15,000, residential, commercial, and industrial consumers will benefit from 1st April, 2016. The Opposition has made light of this but let me tell this nation that, for residential consumers, totalling 166,000, the benefit is expected to be \$7,000 monthly.

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

Mr. Patterson: For commercial consumers, who number 10,000, they will save \$36,000 monthly. For the large industrial consumers, they will save \$1.5 million every month. These savings are anticipated to boost their productivity.

In conclusion, with the presentation of the early 2016 Budget, we have a golden opportunity to execute our work programmes and thus fulfil the promises we made to the electorates in our 2015 APNU/AFC Manifesto.

I would like to support the call of the Hon. Members, on this side of this House, to join in making a plead to the Members on that side of the House to join with us to build this beautiful country of ours together since in unity there is strength.

With those few words, I commend this Budget to the House. [*Applause*]

Mr. Croal: I rise to make my contribution to *Budget 2016*, which was presented on Friday, 29th January, 2016 by the Hon. Minister of Finance under the theme *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*. But having listened to the debates over the past three days, the comments through the social media as well as the members of the public, we will have no doubt in concluding that the confidence that some members of the population placed in this Government has eroded. Hon. Minister Bulkan, you may need to add me to the long list that you mentioned of the persons who highlighted this Budget as being dim.

As this Government is about to complete its nine months in office, which is synonymous to the average time period of the birth of a child, I can say, with confidence, that the Guyanese population is disappointed and becoming impatient in what it has seen as a result of the birth of the coalition. I hear your cry of only being in Government for a few months but may I remind the Hon. Members that, before becoming a tree, the seed grows through germination. If a bad seed is germinated, then what it results in is what we are facing currently. Therefore, allow me to add to some of the discussions on this Budget.

Regions

Last year, I mentioned the need for the Regional Chairpersons and Vice-Chairpersons to be sworn in as Justices of Peace (JP). This has been the norm and it is in accordance with the Local Democratic Organs Act No. 12 of 1980. May you allow me to quote, Mr. Speaker? Section 26:

“The chairman and the vice-chairman, shall, by virtue of their offices, be justices of the peace for their region, but shall, before acting as such, take the oaths required by law to be taken by such justices unless they are, on the day on which they become entitled to act as chairman or vice-chairman, such justices and have taken the oaths required by law to be taken to act as such justices.”

[Ms. Ally: A fresh approach.] Well, let me tell you the fresh approach. There have been a number of articles written on this same matter. To date, the Hon. Minister has not answered the population or made any comment as to why our regional chairpersons and vice-chairpersons have not been sworn in as JPs, hence preventing them from performing their roles as part of their civic duties within their regions. Yet, we speak of empowerment.

Respect for the regions, especially those that are controlled by the PPP/C must first start at the Cabinet level. We have observed a trend whereby Ministers are going into the respective Regions, on governmental business, and not formally informing the Regional Democratic Councils, while, in some cases, the Regional Chairpersons and Vice-Chairpersons are notified through the local coalition political activists. This is *eye pass*. We can never get tired of reminding the Government that it needs to stop behaving as if it is in campaign mode and start acting as a responsible Government for all of the people. Hon. Minister of Communities, maybe you can inform the House of the protocol that is involved.

We have even seen a trend of workshops to promote equality, which sounds well in theory. However, when the invitations which are being done for these workshops are examined, they are anything other than equality. I leave it there.

In 2015, early into the Government’s term, the new Regional Executive Officers (REOs) were given a hefty increase. The Hon. Minister of Communities, while on this side of the House, whenever he heard the salaries of the Regional Chairpersons and Vice-Chairpersons, he cried shame. The ball is now in his court. In fact, when line item 6211, under sustainable community management, is looked at, the budgetary allocation has decreased to \$99.9 million from an actual \$106.6 million in 2015. The Government has had two Budgets to date. We call for the granting of similar percentage increase for our Regional Chairpersons and Regional Vice-Chairpersons.

Regional Executive Officers

By the end of next Friday, we, in this House, will be asked to approve the capital and current estimates for both the Ministry and the Regions. Therefore, it would be remiss of me to not make reference to the newly appointed Regional Executive Officers. The REOs and accounting officers, in their own right, will be placed with the responsibility for implementing projects and programmes totalling \$32.5 billion for the 10 Administrative Regions. As mentioned prior, speakers have been using the term “fix it”. Hon. Minister of Communities, I, therefore, charge you to address the number of areas and fix the problems with the REOs.

Before I give you what some of those issues are, let me quote from your budget speech of 2015 because you made mention, giving an explanation as to why \$30 billion went back to the Consolidated Fund from the 10 Administrative Regions and Ministry.

“In each of our 10 Regions, capital projects had to be shelved as a result of this. In fact, the capital allocations in this Budget are some 26% less than it was in 2014, or a sum of \$749 million.”

What the Hon. Minister was saying, in 2015, was that they had reduced the allocation for the capital budget for the Regions, bearing in mind the late start in 2015. Therefore, the excuse of having a late budget in 2015 *does not hold water* because there was an already reduced allocation.

I also heard the Hon. Minister mention, as one of the excuses, that part of the delay was in the setting up of the newly constructed regional tender boards. Yes, we recognised that there had to be new regional tender boards because there was a new administration in place, but where is the blame to be placed? The responsibility for the approval of the regional tender board is at the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB). So, I do not understand why it would take long to be approved.

I was disappointed in the Hon. Minister because I was looking for an explanation as to what the Ministry has in place to deal with the Regional Executive Officers and to address the issues of not spending money and implementing their projects and programmes in a timely manner.

I did not even hear any mention about the major issue of the shortage of drugs and medical supplies. In fact, we heard one explanation that over \$600 million was returned to the

Consolidated Fund as unspent, but, when the estimates of the regions under the line item that caters for drugs and medical supply was examined – and this was provided by a permanent secretary (PS) - one would see that there is an expenditure mentioned. I would like to ask the Hon. Minister which is really accurate. My explanation, and I am subject to correction, is that there was a late cutting and holding of cheques just to reduce the balance on the Integrated Financial Management and Accounting System (IFMAS). By the time the Permanent Secretary appeared before the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), he did not get the memo that the cheques were cut. Those differences need to be addressed.

9.13 p.m.

Many of the Regional Executive Officers still seem to not understand their roles and functions within the Regions. There are Regional Executive Officers who are carrying out the role of the Regional Chairpersons. They are driving around and making decisions on behalf of the Regions. You do not have to go far; there is Region 6. There are also Regional Executive Officers who are stymieing the Regions by taking a long time to make simple decisions. When one looks at the Regional Tender Board's functionalities and we speak about transparency... I would like to help the process, Hon. Minister.

The Regional Tender Boards have been meeting in an *ad hoc* manner. May I proffer a reason for that? One of the reasons that had been given was that, when the Regional Tender Boards reach in an *ad hoc* manner, there is going to be absenteeism at that Tender Board meeting. Very short notice is given that the Board is meeting and so the relevant persons who may have their eyes out will not be able to attend. You need to fix that because there are statutory dates that are set for a meeting of Tender Boards.

There is a lack of Minutes. The Minutes of meetings are not being provided to the Regional Democratic Council. Contracts are not being provided and there is a need to beg for information. As simple as their allotment report for the IFMAS one cannot get. The Regional Democratic Council has to go through a long process before some of the Regional Executive Officers provide it.

There was a policy in place that whenever there are contracts that are being awarded within the various communities - and I know the explanation will be given that it is now online and I

commend the Government for ensuring that is done... But how many persons, at this point in time, within the communities, are able to access online. When you have that signing of contracts, it is important to ensure that the unpriced bill of quantities is posted at the location of work, wherever the work is taking place. [An Hon. Member: Since when do you know that?] It is a policy.

We have had allegations of contract splitting and so I want to ask the Hon. Minister to address the allegations. It is worrisome in light of the limits of the regional administration being raised. I want to ask the responsible Minister of Finance, in his discussion with NPTAB, to ensure that the mechanisms are put in place to have the tight evaluators and constant changing of evaluators to ensure that we have a secure system. There are cases of REOs not attending Regional Democratic Council meetings. There is one REO who has not, to date, attended any RDC meetings. In many cases, decisions of the RDCs are not being implemented by the REOs. So while the Hon. Minister quite glowingly mentioned decentralisation as one of his pillars, part of decentralisation is to ensure that the decisions that are made at a decentralised level are carried out.

Progress Reports

The Regional Chairpersons and Vice-Chairpersons of the RDCs are crying out: simple reports of RDCs are not being supplied in a timely manner. Now, the priority projects for Regions are being determined by the Regional Executive Officers, bypassing the ruling of the Regional Democratic Council.

As a general trend - and it is having a domino effect - we have seen a total lack of respect and insubordination to Regional Chairpersons and Vice-Chairpersons by many of the Regional Executive Officers.

I want to predict here that, in another three years, if you think the situation is bad now, it will get worse because already there is limitation in the allocation of fuel, preventing the mobility of the political arm of the Region.

Land and Water Transport - Regional Administration and Finance

Last year, I made the observation that, under Regional Administration and Finance, the 2015

Capital Budget only allocated budgetary resources for Regions 4 - motor vehicles; Region 7 – vehicle; Region 10 - motor vehicles – and they all total \$32.5 million. Do we recognise the three Regions?

In 2016, the only region that is budgeted under Regional Administration and Finance is Region 4 again. Vehicles were purchased to the tune of \$12 million. It is under Regional Administration and Finance that vehicles are purchased or procured; it is where the political arm of the region gets access to vehicles. So I made the charge that, for two consecutive years, Regions 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8 and 9 continue to suffer. I give you one example; only one I need to give. The Regional Chairman of Region 1 quite frequently has to use taxis at his resources. There was even a shared vehicle that was used but that vehicle has been down since October of last year.

Ministry of Communities

I want to provide a clarification, since the former Hon. Minister Edghill would have quite clearly provided information on the contracted employees. Let me just provide a little clarity before the Hon. Minister rebuts what the former Hon. Minister Edghill would have provided. When one summates the actual expenses under the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development for the three programmes in 2015, it is a total of \$48.6 million. When one adds the communities' expenditure from September to December, that is \$37.8 million. When one adds the allocation of the committed expenses in 2015 under the Ministry of Housing and Water, that is another \$33.1 million. Hence, there is a total of \$119.6 million of the actual expenses for 2015 representing 55 employees.

In 2016, the total contracted employees' allocation for an additional seven employees is \$148 million, hence an additional \$28.47 million. Hon. Minister, next week, you will need to provide the information: who are those seven persons incurring a total of \$28.47 million more?

Other Operating Expenses

There is a strange phenomenon in this line item. The Hon. Members on the Government side, while in Opposition, queried and asked detailed questions for any allocation that was made under the line item "Other". Let me put this into perspective: the actual expenses for 2015 totalled \$407,000. The budgetary allocation for 2016 under the heading of "Other Operating Expenses"

is a whopping \$427 million, a small matter of 99.9% increase. Suddenly, “Other” is nothing but “Other”.

Project Development and Assistance

The Hon. Minister was correct when he provided an explanation on the fiscal transfers, which takes into consideration the area, the size of the locality, the population and the actual rate of collection. So what happens is that, whenever there is the lump sum, the formula is applied and that is how the allocation for each of the local authorities is gotten.

Last year, unfortunately, the Hon. Minister admitted to this House that he did not implement the Fiscal Transfers Act which was signed into law in 2013 and should have started in 2014.

While in Government, we were accused of depriving NDCs and Municipalities of resources. In light of local government elections and the 71 local authorities who will have new authorities, I say an increase of \$42 million using the same theme, using the same message that was given by the Hon. Minister of Communities when he was over here, is woefully inadequate.

Solid Waste

We were informed of the introduction of the National Solid Waste Strategy. The Hon. Minister does not have to reinvent any wheel. May I remind him that he has, at his disposal, a complete Solid Waste Management Bill which is ripe for piloting, which also includes the setting up of the Solid Waste Management Authority that deals with enforcement, penalties, *et cetera*. There are complementing Acts such as the Environmental Protection Agency Act, the Municipal and District Councils Act, the Public Health Ordinance, *et cetera*. The Hon. Prime Minister was instrumental in the first draft of that Act.

Hon. Minister, you also have, at your disposal, a regional solid waste programme. While the Budget caters for the construction of a landfill site at Bartica, and reference was made to the inventorising of new landfill sites across the various regions, the Environmental Protection Agency has a list of potential sites. In 2014, access roads were constructed to sites in Regions 1, 2, 5, 6, 7 and 9. One would have expected by now, therefore, that resources would have been made available to those sites that we already know are available, in addition to Bartica, to develop further so that, simultaneously, if you want, you can do an updating to see what

additional sites are available. But we do not have to wait a whole year because there are a number of sites that have already been identified in addition to Bartica.

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, with your permission, I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be able to have his full 30 minutes and the additional five minutes, as required.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Croal:

Region 1

I see my Friend at the back. I received disappointing messages of his representation of Region 1. His was a limited presentation which focussed on pensions in general, youths and training and the one mention of the road construction from Port Kaituma to Baramita. Very well, but the Hon. Member has to remember that there are three sub-regions in Region 1.

9.28 p.m.

Hon. Minister Cummings - the coloured girl in the ring - spoke so glowingly of the completion of the construction of the new Port Kaituma Hospital. Not even for one second could you acknowledge the foresight of the PPP/C Government. In fact, the construction of this hospital should have been completed last year. There was even a disagreement - the hospital that you spoke so glowingly of - as to the location in Oronoque.

The Hon. Ganga Persaud, last night, provided the percentage performance of the region's capital but allow me, Mr. Speaker, to provide a little further explanation on Region 1's overall capital performance.

Out of an allocation of \$186 million, the actual expenditure was \$119,190,000. Sixty-six million, nine hundred and seven thousand dollars or 36% of the allocation to that region was returned to the Consolidated Fund. Let us dissect it further. Public Works: Out of an allocation of \$30.8 million, only \$7.4 million was expended; 76% was unspent. In that is the \$20 million that is reappearing on the 2016 Budget for the upgrading of the electricity supply for Wauna, Hosororo

and Sugar Hill. That allocation was made in 2015 and it is returning. This House is owed an explanation as to why there was not even an award of the allocation for the electricity distribution to the tune of \$20 million.

Even if one looks at Health Services, out of an allocation of \$80 million, \$53.2 million was expended with 33.5% unspent. Buildings – Health: only \$9.5 million was expended out of \$18.1 million. What prevented the construction of buildings? That is an easy award that can be done within the Regional Tender Board limit. Much needed space and rehabilitation across the Region...

Land and Water Transport

Out of an allocation of \$24.5 million, \$10.4 million was expended under Land and Water Transport for Health in Region 1. This is just a simple procurement. There needs to be an explanation as to why the people of Region 1 would have suffered.

Electricity Generation

I commend the Hon. Minister for providing the information that he just did. I, therefore, ask you, Hon. Minister, to pay attention to the installation of the boards for the Port Kaituma, Mabaruma and Moruka power and light company. [An Hon. Member: Mahdia too.] Well, I am reminded about Mahdia. You have, at your desk, recommendations of names of persons who can sit on the board that have been provided. You can change it as you like but you already have a start. I further ask, where are the resources for the increased generation for the Mabaruma community? You campaigned on the slogan, 24/7 electricity for Mabaruma.

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

Mr. Croal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You have had a chance in two Budgets and there has been no increase to the usual six hours of generating. I can inform the Hon. Minister why the region performed poorly, and I will tell him. There is a newly installed REO who, despite having an assigned Regional Executive Officer house, took over the regional guest house annex which is opposite to the regional guest house. The same happened in Region 2 and there is a coup in Region 9, in that the REO removed three self-contained rooms which involved the destruction of bathrooms and complete bedrooms to accommodate himself when there is a house already - all

the years - for a Regional Executive Officer. In case they want to provide an excuse that it needed renovation, there was the allocation for renovation for that house in 2015. How can we get performance when the administrative head of the Region is neither here nor there? The REO has been out of the Region more than he has been in. He is always attending meetings and I do not know what else. To compound it, the Deputy Regional Executive Officer was sent on six months continuous leave in December, when it was crunch time, when you needed to ensure that your resources are allocated and expended. There are cases that, when the REO is out, nothing happens.

Respect for Village Councils' Decisions

I bring to this honourable House another disturbing observation, a case of a certain Minister of the Government using authority...

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

Mr. Croal: Thank you. ...and overriding a village council's decision. If, in a simple case as to the determination of the location of a Benab - and I speak here of Kwebanna, located in the Moruka Sub-Region - I can only imagine the magnifying effect, as the Hon. Seeraj mentioned, the dominating effect of a creeping dictatorship stepping in. And, may I also inform the Hon. Minister of Public Infrastructure that, while I know you are waiting on a boat that the PPP/C Government negotiated for the North West region, I know you have a boat that runs there now? Hon. Minister, you need to address; only a selected few are accessing that boat and the selected few happen to be pro-Government business persons. I could provide that information for you. So, I ask that you pay some attention there.

Hinterland Sustainable House Programme

I thank the new Hon. Minister of Communities and it is amazing...

Mr. Speaker: You have one minute more to wrap up.

Mr. Croal: Thank you. We have a new Minister of Communities who seems to be "fix it" because one day into the new term he has all the solutions for housing. Hon. Minister Scott, I do not know what happened the day before. I commend the hinterland projects for Regions 1 and 9.

I commend you to ensure that the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) funded project which was negotiated under the PPP/C Government is completed and implemented.

I could go on and on but I want to close by saying that this Budget, when the programmes and the policies that are in place are examined, is not only about having expenditures that are done at a governmental level, it is also what the benefits for the masses out there are and that is why I conclude, like the others, by saying that it is a budget for a selected few.

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

Minister within the Ministry of Communities [Mrs. Hastings-Williams]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I would like to congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, and his competent and hardworking staff for preparing such a shrewd and sagacious Budget, a budget that eloquently outlines the path to prosperity, a place where we, as Guyanese, can enjoy the “Good Life in a Green Economy”. To achieve this, measures will be implemented to stimulate growth whilst restoring confidence in the minds of our people. All of this will be executed in a historical and momentous year, a year in which we, as Guyanese, will join hands together in the celebration of our 50th Independence anniversary.

Before I continue, Mr. Speaker, let me rebut some of my Friends from the opposite side of this House. Being a teacher by profession, I have learnt that there must be the right conditions for a seed to germinate. In 2011, when we took governance, we inherited a condition that could not allow a seed to germinate and so we will have to fix it. We have to fix the conditions and it will take time. When the tree starts to bear fruits of transparency and accountability, we will enjoy the “good life” that this Government has to offer.

I was amazed yesterday when Budget debate began to take on colours - the yellow and green colours. Look how beautiful my Colleague looks in her green and yellow and look how handsome my brother over there looks in his red shirt. The colours of the National Flag - red, green, white, black - are beautiful colours and you have a fundamental right, your democratic right; if you want to wear green, wear it; if you want to wear red, wear it; if you want to wear yellow, wear it. You can come to this House red and dread and we, on this side, will come to this House green and clean.

This Administration stands firm on its words to materialise the promises made on our campaign trail. We are of the firm belief that every single Guyanese, regardless of geographical location, ethnicity or religion, should be able to enjoy the good life. That is what this Administration is committed to realise. In this regard, our people can expect the following changes: change from an economy that is fragile and unstable to one that is vibrant and robust; change from an unsanitary, unhealthy and unsafe environment to one that is healthy and eco-friendly. These are some of the changes this Administration will be propelling amidst a pottering global economy.

As I would have anticipated, there were a lot of frivolous statements made prior to the commencement of this debate and during the debate sessions. One that was conspicuous was that *Budget 2016* was a repackage. We heard statements and descriptive words like “vampire” budget.

9.43 p.m.

I will accept vampire budget if I should define it as vampire budget that sucks the blood of corruption that was flowing in the veins of the previous administration. If you want to say it is a bulldozer we are going to bulldoze the soil of corruption that we inherited so that we can have a budget which is a people’s budget.

I would like to ask the Opposition Members if the construction of mini hydropower stations at Kaimara, Kumu and Tiger Hill are a repackage? Is the development of a milk pasteurisation plant and construction of an agriculture station a repackage? Is the complete rehabilitation of the Soesdyke Linden Highway a repackage? I can go on and on. These are all strategic projects designed to resuscitate and catapult our economy. These projects were strategically crafted to guide our economy and country towards a bright path to prosperity. When the Opposition Member speaks of a repackaged budget, I am sure they are referring to a budget that is transparent, a budget that has a clear vision and one that is free from pork barrel politics.

This administration stands firm on our commitment, I repeat, to get rid of corruption and improve transparency. Yet, when we initiated the process of recovering our national assets and investigating corruption, we were accused of witch-hunting. I would like to ask the Hon. Members, on the opposite side, if they are saying that we should concede to corruption. The answer, of course, from this side of the House, is a resounding no. I am enjoying the attention I

am getting from the opposite side. However, what I am getting at is that persons, who are convicted of wrongdoing in our public sector, should face the full brunt of the law. That is justice, not witch-hunting.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to address another issue at hand. The PPP/C-led administration often advocated for pluralism, yet when the position for Deputy Speaker was offered by this administration, a paragon of democracy, the Opposition vehemently refused to occupy the post. Is the Opposition Member against their own mantra of pluralism or is it that they cannot come to grip to deal with the fact that when the Guyanese people meant that they wanted change they meant it? I cannot understand why the Members on the opposite side said the words “incompetent Government”. If the Guyanese knew that we were incompetent they would not have voted for us on 11th May, 2015. This Government is not representing 51% of the Guyanese population. We are representing every single Guyanese across the length and breadth of this blessed land, including Members of the Opposition.

Let me come to the measures that this budget, Budget 2016, has to offer.

One, the increase in fuel price: By doing this we will be on par with other developing countries which are taking the initiative to cut greenhouse gas emission, a policy that is consistent with the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) and backed by the Opposition Members. By using vehicles, which are relatively new, the demand for spare parts will significantly be reduced along with the consumption of fuel. In addition, it is to look at some of the headlines at our local media, *Guyana Times*, 3rd February, 2016, “Minibus burst into flames on Eccles Public Road”, cause of accident, mechanical failure and faulty wiring.

Guyana Times, again, 29th December, 2015, “Victim on the road to recovery”, cause of accident, brakes failure.

Stabroek News, 9th February, 2016, “Senior Cop critical after crash, cause of accident, tyre failure.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at today’s *Kaieteur News*, “Used Tyres are like a time bomb”, a time bomb waiting to explode. Are the lives and safety of the people not important to the Members of

the Opposition side? [Ms. Teixeira: Tell us about your Ministry.] I am getting to my Ministry but you do not have to tell me when, where and how.

My question is: How can the Opposition Members be so short-sighted in not noticing any measure or policy in the budget that stimulates production and restores confidence while creating wealth? Is it that they are buried in oblivion? There is no single strategy or policy used to create wealth. Wealth is created through a combination of specially crafted policies and measures as the one the Hon. Minister Jordan alluded to in his budget speech. Simply, wealth is the increase in disposable income generated from an increase in aggregate demand. This can be achieved either through an increase in Government's spending, consumption, investment or net export while holding inflation in single digits. My question: Is the reduction in excise tax and fuel not creating wealth through the increase in disposable income? Is the investment of \$40.3 billion on education not creating wealth in the future by producing more productive citizens? These are some of the questions I would like to ask. If these measures do not create wealth, then the Members on the Opposition are saying that money or knowledge is not wealth. Something I find very obscure.

Allow me to expound on another matter that I found very interesting. One of the Hon. Members on the opposite side of this House in his budget speech on Monday said "the banking system is saddled with toxic loans." I would like to thank the Hon. Member for bringing this issue to light. If I can recall clearly, the Hon. Member made reference to the Bank of Guyana's Third Quarter Statistical Bulletin for 2015 to support his claim. What the Hon. Member deliberately failed to mention was that the banking system was saddled with toxic loans before this administration occupied office in May, 2015. It is clearly outlined in the Bank of Guyana end of year report, 2014, that the level of non-performance loans had increased by 60 % and 69.7% respectively. It is evident that the previous administration the one which is responsible for the creation of toxic loans. This administration, on the other hand, should be commended for salvaging the economy due to its prudent and sound macroeconomic political implementation.

Let us take a look at the water sector. This Government remains steadfast and committed in providing potable water to every single Guyanese. In doing so, protecting our watersheds, expanding coverage, water treatment and reducing non-revenue water...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I do not know whether the Hon. Member Ganga Persaud wants the floor for any particular reason. Would you rise, Sir? Do you wish to have the floor, Sir?

Mr. G. Persaud: No Sir. I am heckling. Sorry Sir.

Mr. Speaker: It is not provided for in the Standing Orders, Sir. I hope you will obey the Standing Orders. Thank you.

Mrs. Hastings-Williams: Thank you Mr. Speaker for giving my friend over there the attention, who, I think, is craving attention from me. Let me continue. In doing so protecting our watersheds, expanding coverage, water treatment and reducing non-revenue water remain top priority under this administration. Entrenched under this objective the National Water Council along with the National Water Agency, the operational arm of the council, will be resuscitated. Together, these two...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, we would receive a motion for continuation.

Suspension of Standing Order No. 10

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Nagamootoo]: Mr. Speaker, I move the motion that the sitting continues until the hearing of the contributions of all Members listed on today's schedule, beyond 10 p.m.

Standing Order suspended.

9.58 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: We will continue until the last speaker is not standing.

Mrs. Hastings-Williams: Entrenching its objective the National Water Council along with the National Water Agency, the operational arm of the council, will be resuscitated. Together these two initiatives will seek to provide policy level advice to the Minister on all matters relating to the management of water and resource.

Key activities plan for 2016 include a review of the legal mandate for integrated water resource management as well as establishing baseline, hydro-graphic based on information for Regions 9 and 10.

The Décor Creek Watershed Management Plan will serve as the first real pilot of the implementation of an integrated water resources management plan for Guyana. This creek is the main source of water for the newly built treatment plants at Wisroc, Linden. Due to the increase of mining, logging and farming activities the sustainability of the creek remains susceptible to pollution. In tandem with these initiatives, another area of critical concern is the reduction of non-revenue water which is critical for the company to achieve break-even.

Anchored on these pillars, we will be expending \$4 billion in 2016 to improve and expand access to water across Guyana. Under the coastal programme, \$585 million was allocated to complete the construction of wells, water treatment plants and distribution mains at Jacoba, Port Mourant, Eccles and Timehri, among others. Other civil works include the installation of water supply system and distribution network at Yarrowkabra, Waimakabra and the rehabilitation and upgrading of water treatment plants at Cotton Tree and Bartica, amongst others. Upon completion in excess of 128,000 persons will benefit directly from this investment.

With respect to the hinterland water supply, approximately \$195 million will be expended. This administration stands firm on its words to bridge the gap between the coast and the hinterland regions. We believe that portable water is essential. Having access to it, it is a fundamental right of every Guyanese. This year we will be targeting the completion and upgrading of water supply systems at Mahdia, Port Kaituma, Mabaruma and Paramakatoi. Upon completion this programme will benefit in excess of 14,000 residents. In Linden, we will be spending \$229 million to complete the interconnection at the bridge at McKenzie crossing and mains on east and west banks of Linden, completion of construction of treatment plants at Wisroc and Amelia's Ward, reduction of non-revenue water among others directly benefiting in excess of 27,200 residents.

In Georgetown, we will be expending \$226 million to complete the distribution and transmission, mains, wells and storage reservoir in Albouystown, West LaPentience, Meadow Bank, among others, benefiting more than 135, 000 residents. Finally, approximately \$2 billion will be expended for the commencement of construction of new water treatment plants at Uitvlugt, Diamond and Sheet Anchor, benefiting more than 31,500 residents.

This gives us an overall investment *per capita* of more 11.9 %. Given the investment the following outputs are targeted:

- Construction six new potable water wells.
- Construction of three new water treatment plants.
- Installation of 5,000 new water connections.
- Installation of 25 kilometre of transmission and distribution mains.

The outcomes of these will be increase in water coverage on the coastal, increase in water coverage in the hinterland and reduction in non-revenue water.

With respect to the regions, we will be expending in 2016 approximately \$32. 5 billion, as we heard before, an increase of 27 % in comparison to Budget 2015. Under the regional education programme, approximately \$1.3 billion will be expended to improve and extend the educational sector, while providing social protection to the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

Some of the flagship projects, which we will be executing, are construction, extension, rehabilitation and maintenance of schools in areas such Aurora, Akawani and Golden Grove among others. Other key initiatives include the procurement of school buses and boats to facilitate transportation. Let me pause and explain a bit from the little knowledge I know. Equal access does not necessarily means that if a child who lives in Chinowieng gets \$10,000 and a child who is living in Georgetown gets \$10,000, it means that a child in Georgetown will be able to get or to buy more things with \$10, 000 compared to the child who is living in Chinowieng where a pair of school boots costs nearly \$8,000 - \$10,000.

Equal access by providing buses: If I am going to give 30 buses to the children in the Upper Mazaruni they will not be able to use it because they do not have roads and so they have to get boats. If am providing buses for the children on the coastland they will be able to use it. The equity comes with each have an equal access to education whether it is by boat, bus or by a bicycle.

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

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

Question put, and agreed to.

Mrs. Hastings-Williams: I can remember, and all of us who are here with me, that ever since I came into the Parliament I have been asking the previous administration to establish science laboratories and, home economics department to the lone secondary school which is in the Upper Mazaruni, Region 7, from which I hail. I have been representing to establish these very important things that schoolchildren should be accessible to. Today I am proud and happy to tell you that we have begun and we have distributed 11-plus more computers to that secondary school.

Under the regional agriculture programme, approximately \$427 million will be expended in 2016 consistent with the country's vision to promote this sector by 2020 as a well generator and entrepreneurial enterprise, producing foods and non-food commodities to meet the needs of the country and our regional and international partners. Anchored on this notion, for the first time, an agriculture component has been included under the regional budget for Region 8, and the other regions will follow. Other new initiatives include the development of 4,000 acres of state lands for the purpose of constructing an agriculture station at Region 9, construction of greenhouses, rehabilitation of slaughter houses among others.

This Government is cognisance that investment in health is a key input in achieving human resource productivity. In Budget 2016, approximately \$722 million will be expended under the regional health programme on activities such as procurement of ambulances, rehabilitation and construction of new doctor quarters. For the first time Imbaimadai and Waramadong will be having resident doctors placed at the health centres. To address the problem of drugs shortage, approximately \$2 billion is budgeted for the procurement of drugs and other medical supplies, in keeping with our mandate to foster integration between the coast and the hinterland while narrowing the gap of living standards. This administration will be renewing, extending and expanding our physical infrastructure. In this regard, approximately \$1.1 billion will be expended towards the construction and rehabilitation of roads, bridges, coping areas such as Moruka, Mabaruma, Wakenaam, Patientia Housing Scheme, amongst others.

I conclude by saying that this budget indeed expulses its objective of stimulate growth and restore confidence in the minds of our consumers and investors. I am sure that our people of this nation, including friends over there, the Hon. Members, are at peace of mind knowing that a bright future is ahead of us all.

I thank you Mr Speaker. [*Applause*]

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, I rise to make my contribution to this debate. My Comrade Komal Chand, who spoke earlier, was expecting to get a lot more time so that he could explain the crisis in the sugar industry but since he did not get the amount of time he needed I thought that I too would join with him to talk a bit about sugar.

In 2014, sugar contributed about to 3.4% of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Additionally, it generates approximately US\$100 million in foreign currency, making it the third largest earner of foreign currency or foreign exchange for our country. It employs about 16, 500 sugar workers and if we assume that these workers have a family size of four, it means that about 66,000 people depend directly on sugar. Indirectly there is perhaps another 120, 000 persons who benefit from this industry.

When a quarter of a country's population depends on an industry, it is not only about dollars and cents. It is not only about dollars and cents; it is also about bread and butter for thousands of people across this country.

10.13 p.m.

If badly handled, you can imagine the harm, the social dislocation and the damage that would be done to sugar workers and their families and the communities in which they live. The announcement that Wales Sugar Estate will be closed will cause 1,500 sugar workers and some 774 private cane farmers to lose their jobs. About \$2 billion in wages would be lost. When these workers lose their spending power, some economists have estimated that another \$1 billion to \$ 4 billion would be lost by the villages by indirect spending. Can you imagine the consequences of this, on the living standards of the people in the West Demerara? Can you imagine what this would do to people's welfare in Region 3? I saw a video recently of a woman who was selling food to sugar workers and she said this: that with the closure of Wales Sugar Estate her food

stand would collapse and she would have to crawl away and die. That is in the video. I want to ask: Where is the conscience in this coalition? Where is the compassion in this coalition? There are some in the coalition who had good working class credentials. I say “had good working class credentials.” They claim that they were the voices of the workers, but where are they now? They have suddenly gone blind, deaf and dumb. There is not a word of solidarity with the poor, struggling sugar workers in West Demerara. Are you not allowed anymore to speak? You have a coalition now, but you are not all uniformed together. Are you not allowed to speak anymore? Are you not allowed to express your own opinion? It is sad to see how power has caused them to change. Perhaps our national poet, Martin Carter, has the right words for this situation when he said, “A mouth is always muzzled by the food that it eats to live.” I am still hopeful that some of them would have the courage to speak truth to power and that they will join with us, on this side of the House, to oppose the closure of Wales Sugar Estate.

Last year the Hon. Minister of Finance titled his budget “A Fresh Start to a Good Life.” Having had nine months of this coalition, many are asking what is “good” in this life. The broken promises, the despair and the hopelessness are drowning people in this country. Ask the rice farmer, paddy prices are the lowest in recent memory. Ask the public servants about the low wages and the high cost of living. I want to echo what my brother said earlier, and that is, if they have the money let them pay the public servants now.

We can ask the *donkey cart man*, the *horse cart man*, the *ox cart man* about the new licence fee that they have to pay. This, I submit, Sir, is symbolic of this Government’s callousness. I ask them, that they repeal this increase in these licences forthwith.

Ask the young people in this country, they want to know where the real jobs are, not a promise of a potential job. They want jobs and they want them now.

Ask the people across this country about their fears, about the shocking crimes, about the brutal murders. It seems that we are living in a nightmare without an end. It is to ask the people of our country. Are we better off now? They will tell you a resounding no. It seems that they have designed this budget to wage war against the poor of our country.

It is apparent that the “Fresh Start to a Good Life” was a false start. Now, that so many are disillusioned and disappointed in this coalition. There is now a desperate attempt to manage

expectations by saying that the “good life now beckons”. For the ordinary people, this false hope, in this budget, is clear that they have put special interests ahead of the public’s interest. A good example is the speciality hospital. For years, they have painted it as a despicable and corrupted project.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you will try to say “Hon. Members.”

Dr. Anthony: Sure Mr. Speaker.

In the last budget, the Hon. Minister of Finance, decided to abort the project. On the 17th June, 2015, the *Stabroek News* newspaper headline “Government ditching speciality hospital”, quoting the Minister of State, the Hon. Joseph Harmon. The Hon. Minister of Public Health, Dr. George Norton, reemphasised this point in his last budget speech. He said:

“The speciality hospital happens to be one of the so-called transformational projects of the past regime that had to be abandoned.”

By the 26th November, 2015, the Government did a total somersault and it started to sing a different tune. *Stabroek News* headline states “Government signs speciality hospital deal with previous bidder – no public tendering”. There was no public tendering. Is this the accountability? Is this the transparency that we are hearing about so glowingly from the other side? We understand that the company will now have to assess, design and build this new hospital. If this is true, then this decision is flawed. Selecting a disqualified company is totally wrong. This project must be retendered. Calls for retendering have largely been ignored. They have shamelessly violated principles for expediency by hand-picking a crony, and giving the company a blank cheque to go build this hospital. If this is not a definition of a sweetheart deal then I do not know what is. It is a classic case of special interests over the public’s interests. Maybe, when the Hon. Minister of Public Health gets up to speak he will explain the intrigues that led us to this flip-flopping.

In 2015, the inefficiencies of the Ministry of Public Health were troubling. Looking at the numbers presented between the budgeted and the revised, more than \$645 million were returned on current expenditure and another \$132 million on the capital budget. What were these moneys

budgeted for and why were they not used? It was because it did not use it. Who would suffer? It is the poor of our country that is suffering.

The time when I spoke, I encouraged the Hon. Minister to use some of this money to help the people who are diabetic and who are hypertensive. Instead of sending back all of this money, perhaps the Ministry could have used it to buy some glucometers for the diabetics and, some blood pressure apparatuses for the people who are hypertensive. If that was not enough, maybe they could have given some of this money to the community NGOs, so that it can assist in preventing suicide in our country. This was not a part of their talks, instead the Ministry sent back all the money without helping many of the people in our country. Is this the hallmark of a caring Government? Is this the kind of coalition that people voted for? I submit this was not the kind of change that people wanted.

The regions were no better. Many of the daily newspapers lamented on the unspent millions that went back to the treasury. Badly needed services were denied because of a lack of funds. I am happy that the Hon. Minister Dawn Hastings spoke before me and she had a glorious programme of what would be happening in the water sector, but simple things we need to get fixed. Imagine this, at nights the West Demerara Regional Hospital cannot function because there is a shortage of water. Most night emergencies are shunted to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation because the hospital at West Demerara cannot get water at nights. Can we not fix that? How much money would it take to fix the West Demerara Regional Hospital's water problem? That is not enough.

10.28 p.m.

Mr. Speaker hit gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, some Members in the two front benches seem to provide a very serious competition to the Speaker. Perhaps, they might want to consider that he is too near to them to be subjected to such distraction. Please proceed.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, imagine nurses at the West Demerara Regional Hospital, Nursing Hostels, have to line up in the mornings with buckets to get water to

bathe. Perhaps, the Minister of Public Health, when he recently went to the West Demerara Regional Hospital to re-open the Neonatal Unit, did not notice this.

While I commend the Hon. Minister for re-opening the Neonatal Unit, guess what? There is a long list of supplies that the new Unit needs. I have a long list here of things that they need for the Unit to function properly. Some examples of these are that they do not have Neonatal Endotracheal Tubes and some of the basic equipment for that Unit to function. Yet, the Hon. Minister went to re-open the Unit, but we are grateful that the Unit was re-opened.

In Region 2, there are no sutures. If someone has a laceration and they go into the Suddie Hospital, there is nothing to stitch them with and this is the regional hospital for Region 2. If per chance they find sutures, they do not have gloves to use so that they can do a sanitary procedure. These are the kinds of shortages that we have in Region 2.

It is very nice that in Region 2 the Suddie Hospital has an x-ray machine, but they have no x-ray films, so they cannot do any x-rays at the Suddie Hospital. Thanks to the newly opened competitive procurement system that has been put in place, maybe this is the result. So, perhaps, instead of asking the Hon. Ministers of Public Health, for maybe these very difficult things to get, I would ask him for something much simpler. In his last budget speech, the Hon. Minister of Public Health, Dr. Norton, had this to say:

“Mr. Speaker, just to let you know of the patients who need basic but important medications like anti-pyretic for fever...

In this country, only 30.8 % had access, of those patients who need Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS) that is so necessary in the cases of vomiting, diarrhoea and fever...”

I disagree a little with him here because ORS is not used for fever, but he said:

“...only 28.9% had access to ORS”.

He went on to say that:

“This is totally unacceptable”.

I agree with him. It moved from 30.8% to 0% of people not having medicine, like for example, Panadol at Suddie Hospital. We should all be ashamed of such a situation. These tales of woes are repeated in every region across this country.

On 4th February, 2016, again, the Hon. Member went to Region, No. 5 and opened a Health Centre at Experiment. Again, a noble gesture, but where are the equipment; where is the staff; and where are the medications to offer the service. The people of Experiment are in no better position because they still do not have medical services. Yet, millions of dollars went back to the Treasury from Region 5.

If we go to Region 6, we have some unqualified persons who are occupying very senior positions in the medical system. Because of that, perhaps they are not able to do the right things in the health system in Region 6. Maybe that is why, on 17th November last year, a man walked into the New Amsterdam Hospital as a patient, and perhaps he fainted or something, he was pronounced dead and sent to the mortuary for four hours. Later, he woke up in the mortuary. He was on television talking about how he was treated at the New Amsterdam Hospital.

Mr. Speaker hit gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this is probably the hour when the energy is highest. Please allow the speaker to make his statement. Thank you.

Dr. Anthony: Perhaps they are working miracles there – pronouncing people dead; sending them to the mortuary; and then people are waking up in the mortuary horrified. This is the kind of health system we now have. Maybe, the Ministers of Public Health would tell us more.

Something is fundamentally wrong with the rhetoric that we are hearing. When we talk to the people, the pain and the suffering that they have to endure is because of mismanagement and incompetence.

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for an extension to the rest of time Dr. Anthony has available.

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance also told us in his Budget Speech on page 58 that:

“...no woman should die giving birth. To give meaning to this belief, the Government will devote additional resources towards the expansion, rehabilitation, maintenance and equipping of maternal and child health facilities countrywide”.

I agree with him wholeheartedly. The people of Mahaicony also agree with him wholeheartedly. They are still waiting for the Maternity Ward and the Operating Theatre at the Mahaicony Hospital to be fixed. How much longer must the pregnant women in Mahaicony wait?

Last year, we were told that the Government’s flagship programme for maternal health was the completion of the Maternity Ward at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. This flagship seemed to have dropped anchor because the ward is still incomplete and women have to double up on the beds at the hospital. I do hope that the \$89 million that has been assigned in this year’s Budget would help us to complete the ward and to ensure, like last year, that we do not have more than 11 deaths at the hospital.

I noticed that, in the capital budget for the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, an allocation was made to house a Computerised Tomography (CT) scanner facility. I think having a CT scanner at the hospital is very laudable thing, and I have looked very carefully in the capital budget to find where the actual CT scan was. I must submit that it is like a case for *The Hardy Boys* and *Nancy Drew* – “The Case of the missing CT scanner”. There is none there.

The Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation is known as our referral hospital. It has been doing some good things, for example, renal transplants. There is a commitment to those patients to give them their medication. Sadly, over the last week, I met the parents of one such child who had an operation at the hospital; an ordinary man who is not working for more than \$50,000 per month. Do you know what Sir? He went to the hospital, and because he could not get the drugs for his daughter, he had to take his hard-earned money and pay \$15,000 for one of the medications for the month. Is this the kind of caring Government that we have? Is this the kind of care that we are giving to our people? This ordinary man is just one of the many thousands of people who have gone to the hospital and could get its service.

When the hospital came before the Public Accounts Committee, they were able to get a list of 184 items, but 168 items were not available in the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. It includes basic things like Ibuprofen, aspirin and Panadol. What are we running? [*Interruption*]

Last year we said to the Hon. Members that, if the moneys were put in the Budget for the regions, they would end up with problems because the regions did not have the capacity. They were not able to come up with regional formulary for the drugs that they needed in the regions. They have no committees to decide what is needed. We told them that they would not have the capacity to buy the medicines in a timely manner.

We also advised him that when they buy in bulk they would get better prices, but our advice went unheeded. And what happened? We ended up with shortages in the region. We were told that, in case of a shortage, they would be able to send drugs centrally to those regions that had shortages. But I submit that, nowhere in the Budget, is there a provision to buy a surplus centrally so that there can be compensation when a region is short?

10.43 p.m.

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

Dr. Anthony: I just heard about equity and we heard that, maybe because of the difficulties in the interior, we need to allocate more to those regions. Let me tell this House what is happening with those regions. For Region 8, \$30.6 million has been allocated for drugs, which is the lowest for all regions. I submit that \$30.6 million is not enough for that Region. In Region 7, \$61.9 million was allocated for drugs; Region 9, \$73.8 million and in Region 1, \$80.8 million. These certainly are not enough to make sure that the people of those regions benefit from medications and reagents. Where is the equity that we are talking about? How are we going to address the gap between hinterland and coastland? Do Members remember that famous statement that we all heard, that we must address the gap between hinterland and coastland? But this Budget that the Hon. Minister, Mr. Bulkan, describes as a bold and brave Budget, would just maintain the *status quo*. It would not change anything, and the people in the hinterland would continue to suffer.

The amounts allocated to Regions 10, 5, 2, 3 and 6 are also inadequate. Sir, I can tell you that I would anticipate that they will run short of drugs again this year. So this 'fresh approach' is not working and we are seeing the difficulties that people are having.

I want to also turn to neonatal mortality. Just at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation last year had 231 neonatal deaths and that is too high.

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

Dr. Anthony: And that was just the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. I do hope that, with all the neonatal units that we are putting in, we will get them to work; we equip them properly; and that we train people so that we can bring down the neonatal deaths.

One of the things that we on this side were very proud of was our immunisation record. We won gold medals; we were held up on a pedestal by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and many other organisations. Sir, do you know what has happened? Immunisation over the last year, when one looks at Appendix I, Diphtheria, Pertussis and Tetanus (DPT), Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR), Yellow Fever, Polio, Bacillus Calmette–Guerrin (BCG) have all fell in 2015. Why is this happening? It is happening because, in some cases, we have a shortage of vaccines. If the Minister would like to dispute that, he should check the list that was handed to the Public Accounts Committee because they did not have vaccine.

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

Dr. Anthony: The Hon. Minister made an announcement to us about the Zika virus in Guyana. Then, he went on later to say that we only have one confirmed case. He is technically correct, but clinically, many of the doctors are seeing signs and symptoms in patients that confirms to the Zika virus, in Guyana. The reason why we cannot confirm them in our laboratories is because that test is not available. The few tests that were sent to Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) were not enough to tell us about the epidemic in Guyana. I would like to ask the Hon. Minister this...

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

Minister of Public Health [Dr. Norton]: If it pleases you Mr. Speaker. I congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance for this expertly crafted document, the Budget of 2016, *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence; The Good Life Beckons*. The Hon. Minister informed us that advertising the investment in health is a key input towards achieving human resource productivity. In order to ensure that all Guyanese enjoy ‘the good life that beckons’, strategic investments will be made by this Government in the health sector, on the implementation of a comprehensive review of the National Health Strategy.

Contrary to what was implied by the Hon. Dr. Ramsaran, this National Health Strategy is not a PPP document. The Hon. Member spoke as if it was formulated in Freedom House. The National Health Strategy came into being by the direct inputs of the very directors that are, at present, working at the Ministry of Public Health, and with the contributions and the guidance from international agencies like the Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO) and WHO. This coalition Government reviewed that strategy at a retreat we had in August of last year, and among others, we decided to place emphasis on the following: That health care workers should bear upper most in their minds that the health of a nation is the wealth of a nation.

The Ministry of Public Health’s paradigm shift is to focus on primary health care. This was in the manifesto of the coalition - the emphasis on primary health care. One can understand that, if it is there in our budget, the emphasis on primary health care, the stand we took with regards to if we had a choice what we would take when we took the Speciality Hospital into consideration, and what would have been our policy position with regards to that. It was found that we will promote greater integration of services, including health surveillance, especially in the remote locations of Guyana, with a focus on preventative, rather than curative medicine, thus, the name change of this Ministry. We will also be addressing chronic diseases, the health of children, and lactating and pregnant mothers, which we would use to emphasise that health statistics information should be used in employing an evidence-based approach in the delivery of health services. We placed emphasis on the fact that the Ministry of Public Health is adopting a multi-sectorial approach to health care delivery. I think that this was suggested by another Hon. Member from the opposite side.

We have already embarked on engaging other ministries in our fight against diseases like the Zika virus and the causes of suicide. The Ministry of Public Health has invited other ministries

and has engaged other Ministries like those of Education, Agriculture, Citizenship, Public Telecommunications, with responsibility for Tourism, Communities, Natural Resources, Social Protection and even the Ministry of Public Security because they need to come on board so that we could have a collective approach on something as national as what is taking place now, with respect to the Zika virus. This is to ensure that the people of Guyana would be among the healthiest people of the Caribbean and across the Americas, and to ensure that they enjoy a ‘good life’.

The Hon. Dr. Mahadeo, my good Friend and Colleague, sounded sharp in his presentation. He was congratulated by the Hon. Ms. Teixeira, his Chip Whip. I think he might have been at his best, but I do not know if it was because he was quoting me so... [*Inaudible*] [*Interruption*] I must repeat some of the quotations that he used. In one of my speeches, I said that the fish rots from its head downwards, which is nothing but the truth. It is a fact that, at times when the fish start rotting from the head, we try to correct that situation by taking off the fish head. That is why, at one time, in the PPP/C Government the Ministry of Health was without a head, because the Minister of Health then, was made unavailable. I do not know for what reason; perhaps some of us know. This did not help the rot because it had already gotten to the body.

Then, the Guyanese people took over because they threw out the entire fish, and then they began cleaning up and building recreational parks and we ended up with a growing and greening economy in Guyana.

The Hon. Dr. Mahadeo did not stop there, that is why I said he went on quoting me. He spoke about something rotting in the state of Denmark, with respect to Surendra Engineering Company Limited (SECL) and the Specialty Hospital, the one from India, not Denmark. Something was rotten. This is a company with a track record in Guyana that had some difficulties supplying the Government with some drainage pumps. I do not know if they have complied with that contract. Also, with the Enmore Sugar Packaging Plant, we ran into difficulties there. The PPP/C, true to form, awarded the contract to Surendra Engineering Company Limited to build the Speciality Hospital when they had never built any hospitals in their lives. Fortunately, for having said that, I imagine, that shortly after, what happened was, the PPP/C Government fired the Surendra Engineering Company Limited for fraud. So, something was definitely rotten in the state of Denmark.

This Ministry of Public Health has seven programmes and over \$22.1 billion or 9.5% of the Budget was expended in this sector in 2015. This year, we will spend about \$28 billion, nearly \$6 billion more than last year or almost 11% of the Budget. Of the seven programmes, we have the first programme of Governance and General Administration. This programme is critical to the smooth implementation of the Ministry's mandate, especially with respect to human resources and communication, and particularly in the procurement and supply chain management.

10.58 p.m.

We as a nation must become more responsible for managing our own health outcomes. It for this reason, that this Government invested this large sum of money in drugs, medical supplies, equipment and facilities, to meet the growing demands for services in this sector.

This coalition Government has encountered many challenges and constraints in this sector, the reason for a total of nearly \$1.2 billion been allotted to this programme. The over \$57.2 million that is being earmarked as capital expenditure, will correct the limited spaces that are inhibiting the Ministry from functioning effectively. This Ministry has lost two its main buildings to fire and since July 2009, the PPP/C Government had subjective the personnel of this Ministry to work in spaces of limited capacity. All efforts will be made by this Government to correct this situation.

Twenty million dollars is earmarked for buildings, which includes remodelling and equipping the Head Office Building for the Minister within the Ministry, so that the Hon. Minister, Dr. Cummings, could show us her motion without limitation. This Minister would not be doing a *tra la la la*, she would do something more appropriate like *don't hold meh back* because she will be ready to go and her motion will be something like 6.30.

Also, \$15 million has been allotted to upgrade the electrical system for the Food and Drugs Department, where more than \$10 million would be used to acquire a mercury analyser and an optima absorption spectrophotometer. Ten million dollars is earmarked for equipment in this programme that includes a walk-in freezer and pallet trucks for the Materials Management Unit at Diamond. Apparently, \$1.1 billion was allotted as current expenditure for this programme because of a dire shortage of human resources, which this present Government inherited. These

human resources are very much needed for the successful implementation of this health care vision.

Strategies are devised, not only to attract, but to retain staff within the Ministry, including the improvements of terms and condition of employment. Relevant training is being done to build the capacity of personnel required to implement this strategy, especially within the Food and Nutrition Department. Eleven training programmes for the Food and Nutrition Department were done from May to December of last year, and for this year, 21 more are planned with the inputs from the United Nation's Children Fund (UNICEF) and PAHO/WHO.

All critical vacancies within this Ministry are being addressed and every effort would be made to fill the positions of the Deputy Chief Medical Officer, a position that has been vacant since 1994, as well as the Director of National Public Health Reference Lab, which has been vacant since 2014. We have already filled the position of the Director of Regional Health Services with a qualified and experience officer.

This Government, when we took up Office, encountered this very important Ministry of Public Health with inconsistent access to information technology resources, which hinders greatly the collection of information data management and the sharing of information. Every effort is being made to correct this situation by filling the vacancies that exists in this particular department, with a staff of 17 persons, which was founded by this Government, when it took office, with only two such persons.

The Regional and Clinical Services of Programme Four will ensure that consistent and adequate quality health care is provided to all citizens across the 10 administrative regions, based on the sound values of equity, solidarity and quality health services as a human right. A total of approximately \$13.3 billion was allotted to this programme of which \$11.9 billion is going to current expenditure. We will empower the region, through training and increase human resources, so this Ministry could be successful in its plan to decentralise the regional system.

A standard complement of staff for each region is being put in place to avoid the multitasking of the few existing staff who, in the past under the PPP regime, have been called upon to function in disciplines outside of their mandate. This must become something of the past.

This coalition Government continued to deploy medical doctors and other health personnel to hinterland regions and note carefully that we referred to it as the ‘hinterland regions’. A past Minister used to call it “the bush”. For the hinterland regions, we have a national plan for a medical physician to be placed in every health centre across the country. In this programme, \$1.5 billion was also appropriated as capital expenditure. We plan to complete all unfinished structures, such as the Experiment Health Centre that the Hon. Member across the floor just referred to.

It is a fact that I went to receive the keys for that building because \$32 million was spent for the construction of that building since 2013, and it is still unfurnished and unfinished. I went to take it over so that this Government could make certain that it is properly furnished and completed.

A similar situation exists at the Yawong Health Centre. If the Hon. Shadow Minister of Health, I presumed, does not know where Yawong is, we can take him up to Region 8. We used to call it Mountain Foot. But the problem with the Yawong Health Centre is that \$29 million was spent on that health centre and it is still not finished nor furnished.

It is not only health centres. We have a brand new x-ray machine at the Parika Health Centre for three years and it has not been used, with a laboratory next door to it that was built and not furnished. We will make certain that we get it working. If the Hon. Members, think that the three years non-functioning of that x-ray is bad enough, Wakenaam has got one for 10 years that has not used and is still unlocked.

The Hon. Member spoke about the opening of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at the West Demerara Regional Hospital. When one visits this hospital, there is a conspicuous, bold, bronze plaque and on it is written “This unit was declared opened by the Hon. Minister of Health, Dr. Bheri Ramsaran.” Never used! Complete with incubators, and was never used. We worked on it and got it functioning, and today, on Facebook, one can see the photograph of the first baby, a premature baby. It is not true to come to this House and say that we need a list of medications and we know that it is functioning. I have been there.

It is not only the Neonatology Unit that we have there, but we also have that Unit surrounded by an unused space that we have put into function. We have created or refurbished the ward that existed there, and we now have an air condition, it is well painted and a postnatal ward, which

could accommodate as many as 15 beds. It is not only those 15 beds; it will now be converted into postnatal wards.

When we go further down, to the Leonora Diagnostics Centre, there one can find another maternal unit that is unused. The beds are wholesome and birthing rooms and everything is there and it is not being used. We have \$40 million to put into the functioning of that unit again. When we talked to the midwives they said, “We used to deliver babies here.” There is a gynaecologist specialist there, but it is totally non-functional. Then what happens? This is so because the doubling up on beds in the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation had become the norm in the PPP/C Government.

Thirty million dollars is also earmarked for the renovations or the refurbishing of the Diamond Diagnostics Centre; \$15 million is earmarked for the construction of a solid waste furnace for the Linden Hospital Complex; \$20 million is earmarked for the refurbishing and upgrading of a section of the old Linden Hospital Complex building, to establish a consultation room, a 10-bed surgical ward and a patient waiting room. That is what we are doing.

It is not only in Linden. In Kwakwani as well, we have \$15 million for the extension and the remodelling of that hospital to house an operational suite, a rehabilitation unit and a larger nurses’ rest room.

We are going to add new health centres to other regions, like in Yakashiba in Region 2. Mr. Speaker, do you know where that is? Or, Simoni in Region 9. We are going to put health centres in those areas and adequate housing facilities will be provided for the staff to be deployed in regions such as Region 3, in Forth Island, or even in Region 9, in Sand Creek, to build Medex houses there.

For the first time and the first of many to come, \$30 million has been allocated for the acquisition of a fully equipped state of the art river ambulance. If we put that ambulance at Parika, patients can go right up to Kurupung or Mabaruma or wherever. No longer would patient have to die because the weather is bad and planes cannot air-dash them to Georgetown.

Contrary to the reports that are being peddled by the regional politicians in the media, and also in this House, about shortages of pharmaceuticals and medical supplies in the regions, our on the

ground reports from our Regional Health Officers, not the Regional Chairmen, and from information gathered from our various health facilities that we have personally visited, there are pharmaceuticals and medical supplies in the region, albeit a few shortages here and there.

11.13 p.m.

In Region 3, the Regional Chairman, who carried an article in the *Guyana Times*, was confronted by the Regional Executive Officer and the Regional Health Officer and was asked, “Why did you say that to the newspapers? The drugs are there.” The Regional Chairman could not have answered. In Region 6, the same thing happened. When the regional officers were called, they said that they received all of the drugs they asked for. Yet, the Regional Chairman was saying that there was a shortage.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to explain the process for the procurement of drugs and medical supplies, which the Members of the Opposition seem to have a difficulty in understanding, especially the Hon. Member who questioned the Budget allocation for pharmaceuticals and medical supplies. This process remains substantially centralised, with the exception of minor purchases that include small emergency supplies like medical gases and snake bite kits. The allocations have been distributed across the regions as a first step in improving the programme budgeting of health cost at the regional level, even as work is advancing on a costing exercise to determine the total cost of drugs expended in each region to address the disease profile of a particular region.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. Norton: The Hon. Mr. Hamilton, in his presentation, implied that there is a shortage of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) test kits across the country, which is misleading, for I can assure you that there are enough kits in this country, at this moment, to last Guyana for the rest of the year.

The Hon. Member went on to state that this Budget caters very little, if at all, for the disabled. That statement is furthest from the truth. The programme of disability and rehabilitation attracted an appropriation of \$347 million. Is this not a substantial amount for any one programme? Yet, the Hon. Member said that, practically, there is nothing for disability in the Budget. Out of the capital expenditure of \$26.6 million, \$9 million will be used for the purchase of a 30-seater minibus, \$11.5 million for medical equipment, including ultrasound and shortwave diathermy and another \$5.7 million earmarked for equipment which includes \$4 million for a generator set for the Cheshire Home.

We are in the process of moving apace with the establishment of a training school for children, adolescents and young adults with special education needs associated with disabilities. This is with the cooperation and technical assistance from an agreement from among the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Government of Cuba and the Government of Guyana. This agreement will pave the way for the establishment of a training centre at the cost of \$30 million.

The Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) will do all that is necessary, under this Government, to provide the best possible medical, nursing and other appropriate care to all persons in an efficient and effective manner. Seven million, eight hundred thousand dollars was allotted to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation as the total expenditure. From \$7.3 billion, which is allocated for current expenditure, \$3 billion is for materials, equipment, pharmaceuticals, medical supplies, and other consumables.

Moneys are allotted for the expansion of the Renal Centre. At present, the Government spends approximately \$11 million annually for dialysis. This will serve to reduce that amount. We will continue with the expansion of the Industry Health Centre and the rehabilitation of the Medical Science Library.

From a sum of \$60 million, \$30 million is appropriated for the construction of a facility to house the Computerised Tomography (CT) scan, as the Hon. Member over there did say. Let me say this: \$298 million is earmarked for the purchasing of medical equipment, including \$160 million for a 64-slice CT scan. This is reflected in the Budget. This CT scan will save Guyana approximately \$60 million per year that the GPHC spends on a subsidised cost for CT scans, \$20 million for an operating table, \$15 million for an anaesthetic machine, \$21 million for invasive

and non-invasive ventilators and approximately \$36 million for neurosurgical equipment. All of these are in the Budget Estimates.

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

Dr. Norton: Before I close, I would like the Hon. Members of the Opposition to please be advised that the Government of Guyana has sought and received the technical assistance and support of the Inter-American Development Bank in the amount of US\$350,000 to the Ministry of Public Health to aid in addressing key challenges in reducing maternal, infant and child mortality rates. Additionally, the Ministry of Finance has requested the preparation of the following loan resources and technical assistance from the IDB: one, loan resources in the amount of US\$5 million to improve maternal, neonatal, child and reproductive health services at the primary as well as the regional hospital level; and, two, technical support in the amount of US\$1 million for the implementation of project which will support the response to the suicide epidemic in Guyana.

The Ministry of Finance is currently seeking for Guyana to be a member country of the Islamic Development Bank. If Guyana's application is favourably considered, Guyana will have access to approximately US\$50 million in development resources, of which \$10 million is earmarked for the health sector.

The "good life" beckons and it will come nearer if we collaborate and cooperate with each other, rather than oppose for opposing sake.

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

Dr. Norton: I want to urge the Hon. Members of the Opposition not to panic because of what the Hon. Dr. Frank Anthony said about the Zika virus being an epidemic in Guyana. One case has been laboratory diagnosed and that is what we go by. We have been sending and receiving samples. What the Hon. Member should let this House know is that, since they were in Government in the epidemic of chikungunya, offers were made to the then Government to send a technician to be trained and that opportunity was not grasped. This Government has already done that; shortly, that person will be coming back to Guyana and we would not have to send tests any longer. It is not that the testing cannot be done in Guyana; it is that we do not have the personnel.

The equipment is here to do the testing. It is not an epidemic in Guyana and to say such is irresponsible and is considered as mischief.

With this, I beg that this Budget be supported by all in the House so that we can really start stimulating growth and restoring confidence.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Dr. Anthony: When I was stopped, I was going to make a point because I think it is a very important point.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I do not think that we should try to change the rules now. Of course, if there is an explanation that the Hon. Member wants to give, the Speaker will let him have the floor but it cannot be to make a new speech.

If you are rising on a point of explanation, then I will let you have the floor.

Dr. Anthony: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Please proceed.

Dr. Anthony: At the point when I stopped my speech, I was going on to say to the Minister of Public Health that the doctors, in this country, are seeing clinical signs and symptoms of the Zika virus, and, because we do not have the laboratory wherewithal to make the relevant diagnosis, we also have to look and do surveillance for these clinical symptoms. I was going to ask him what surveillance systems he has in place to make sure that we are able to pick up what is happening with the Zika virus in Guyana. At that point, I was not able to complete my statement because my time ran out. So it is not mischievous.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you are now explaining that it is not mischievous. I thank you. You have now completed your statement.

Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today. I thank you all very much for your cooperation. I was a little surprised that our energies seem to be doubled around 11 o'clock. I thought it was a bad hour.

Mr. Nagamootoo: I had craved your indulgence. I sat here, in the National Assembly, and listened to the Hon. Member, Dr. Anthony, saying to this House that there is an epidemic of the Zika virus in Guyana, which I consider to be irresponsible and mischievous. I, as a Member of this House, do not accept the statement that he has made about clinical studies and the long explanation that he gave here. I thought that it would be courageous of him to withdraw the statement that he has made.

In saying so, I would like to move the adjournment of this House to tomorrow, Thursday, 11th February, 2016, at 1.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I see the mood is changing. This House stands adjourned until Thursday, 11th February, 2016.

Adjourned accordingly at 11.29 p.m.