

Official Report

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

27TH Sitting

Thursday, 11th February, 2016

Assembly convened at 1.12 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Resignation of Dr. Clive Jagan

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I was informed, by way of letter dated Wednesday, 10th February, 2016 from Dr. Clive Ramesh Jagan, that he has resigned his seat as a Member of Parliament with effect from that date. With Dr. Jagan's resignation, a seat in the National Assembly has become vacant. The vacancy is in accordance with Section 99A of the Representation of the People Act, Chapter 1:03 to be filled by a person whose name is to be extracted from the list of candidates from which Dr. Jagan's name was extracted. As Dr. Jagan's name was extracted from the People's Progressive Party/Civic's (PPP/C) list of candidates, I have, in accordance with Section 99A of the said Act, called upon the representative of the said list to further extract from that list the name of a person who is willing to become a Member of the National Assembly to fill the vacancy in the Assembly.

Visit by Representatives of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Canadian Branch

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have two sets of guests today. We have, visiting from Canada, representatives of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Canadian Branch. This is part of the collaboration and cooperation which occurs among branches of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I have had the pleasure of having discussions with our visitors, the beginning of what we hope will be very interesting engagements. I would like to say, on behalf of the Assembly, welcome. I hope that your presence in our deliberations will leave you with memories and I hope that, as I told you when we spoke, this will only be the first visit. Welcome again. You will, Hon. Members, want to – and I ask our visitors to allow me to - specially mention reference to the High Commissioner of Canada, Mr. Pierre Giroux, who is here, and I believe that he has come to the National Assembly before today. So, an additional welcome to him.

Visit by Students of President's College

Mr. Speaker: The second set of visitors, I am told, is a group of 50 strong. Those visitors are students of President's College. You will recall that, yesterday, we had a smaller contingent from President's College. This is a larger one and I am told that none of the ones who came yesterday are among those who are here today. Welcome. As I said to your fellow students yesterday, I hope being with us will leave you with much food for thought. So welcome.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS, INCLUDING POLICY STATEMENTS

Venezuelan Statement on Essequibo

Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs [Mr. Greenidge]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If it pleases you, I would like to deliver a statement in connection with a matter pertaining to a Venezuelan statement on Essequibo.

On Wednesday, 10th June, 2015, I made a statement, in this House, on our relations with Venezuela in which I asserted our sovereignty and the threats posed by Venezuela to it and our territorial integrity. I would like to bring Hon. Members up to date on the most recent and crucially important developments in this regard.

On Thursday, 4th February, 2016, the Venezuelan Foreign Minister made a statement at the United Nations (UN) Headquarters in New York, which contained several falsehoods and innuendos as these relate to the territory of Guyana.

The Government of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana repudiates, in its entirety, the statement issued by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Venezuela. Mr. Speaker and Colleagues, the statement which I refer to is entitled: “Venezuela ratifies its rights over the Essequibo at the UN” and it will be circulated to the Hon. Members of this House. That statement is yet another example of Venezuela’s time-worn belief that falsehoods repeated often enough may eventually lose their basic falsity. They do not. Venezuela has no rights over the Essequibo.

Guyana’s rights over the Essequibo, on the other hand, were settled by the Award of 1899 of the International Tribunal of Arbitration established under the Treaty of Washington of 1897, whose decision the Government of Venezuela undertook to accept, “...as a full, perfect and final settlement of all the questions referred to the arbitrators.” Venezuela did accept the decision jointly with the United Kingdom, demarcating the boundary on the ground and drawing up a definitive map depicting the boundary between British Guiana and Venezuela, identifying Essequibo as being within British Guiana in accordance with the 1899 Arbitral Award. But there was always, in Venezuela, elements who wanted more and for whom the birth of an independent Guyana seemed to end their imperialist crusade, so they tried to prevent it, contending with Britain that the Arbitral Award of 1899 was null and void. Britain resisted them, their final rejection being the Geneva Agreement of 1966 which acknowledged that Guyana would be free and ensured that Venezuela could not pursue its nullity contention against the new State, save in specified ways, starting with a mixed commission and empowering the United Nations Secretary General to bring the contention to finality by judicial settlement consonant with the Charter of the United Nations.

From the outset, Venezuela delayed the pursuing of the annulity contention, pursuing, instead, a policy of harassment of the new State, impeding its development by threatening investors. It kept Guyana out of the Organization of American States (OAS) for 25 years. Contemptuous of international law, it has issued decrees asserting maritime claims progressively more and more outrageous. It remains one of the few countries of the world to have excluded itself from the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Now, in the statement to which I have referred, Venezuela seeks to move away from its nullity contention and to imply that the Geneva Agreement is about “a historical position” and a “territorial controversy” and seeks to embrace the agreement even as it attempts to rewrite it. Guyana totally rejects these backhanded attempts to despoil Guyana of her rights. Guyana accepts the Geneva agreement for what it is. It is not surprising that Venezuela accepts it as it would wish it to be.

When, on Monday, 4th April, 1966 the United Nations Secretary General, then His Excellency U Thant, acknowledged receipt of the Geneva Agreement, he responded: “I have made note of the obligations that eventually can fall on the Secretary General of the United Nations by virtue of paragraph 2 of Article IV of the Agreement and it pleases me to inform that the functions are of such a nature that they can be appropriately carried out by the Secretary General of the United Nations.”

Last year, Guyana’s President, His Excellency David Granger, called on the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, to have Venezuela’s contention that the Arbitral Award of 1899 is null and void and settled with finality by the judicial process. By the Geneva Agreement, both Guyana and Venezuela have empowered him to do so. Venezuela’s behaviour towards Guyana is a festering wound to peace and development in our region and an affront to the rule of law in the world. It must be healed by a process of law.

As Hon. Members are aware, the UN Secretary General has had discussions with both Guyana and Venezuela and has made proposals for “the way forward”. Guyana has been cooperating with him and will continue to do so. Venezuela, however, seems prepared to derail the process. In this 50th anniversary of the Geneva Agreement, which was signed on Thursday, 17th February, 1966, Venezuela should be seeking to fulfil the objectives of that Agreement and not frustrate them under a cloak of righteousness. Guyana will not allow the deceptions being peddled by Venezuela to persist.

1.27 p.m.

The people of Venezuela are our sisters and brothers and Guyana has always held out the hand of friendship to them and continues to do so, but there are forces in Venezuela, who made it their

life's mission, abusing the hallowed memory of Bolívar, to hold Guyana hostage to their crusade of greed.

Guyana is a child of decolonisation. Its ancestry lies in the Charter of the United Nations, its purposes and principles. Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity are its international heritage. We will remain faithful to the demands of both and we look to the international community to stand with us in Venezuela's assaults upon them.

It is my hope that the National Assembly will lend its full support to my statement, as we continue in our collective endeavour to defend Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The statement will be brought to the attention of the Secretary General of the United Nations, the Members of the Security Council and the wider membership of the United Nations.

I thank you. *[Applause]*

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The following Bills were introduced and read for the first time:

MOTOR VEHICLES AND ROAD TRAFFIC (AMENDMENT) BILL 2016 – Bill No. 3/2016

A BILL intituled:

“An Act to amend the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act.” *[Minister of Finance]*

FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION AND AUDIT (AMENDMENT) BILL 2016 – Bill No. 4/2016

A BILL intituled:

“An Act to amend the Financial Administration and Audit Act.” *[Minister of Finance]*

CUSTOMS (AMENDMENT) BILL 2016 – Bill No. 5/2016

A BILL intituled:

“An Act to amend the Customs Act.” *[Minister of Finance]*

INCOME TAX (AMENDMENT) BILL 2016 – Bill No. 6/2016

A BILL intituled:

“An Act to amend the Income Tax Act.” *[Minister of Finance]*

MISCELLANEOUS LICENCES (AMENDMENT) BILL 2016 – Bill No. 7/2016

A BILL intituled:

“An Act to amend the Miscellaneous Licences Act.” *[Minister of Finance]*

AUCTIONEERS (AMENDMENT) BILL 2016 – Bill No. 8/2016

A BILL intituled:

“An Act to amend the Auctioneers Act.” *[Minister of Finance]*

HUCKSTERS LICENSING AND CONTROL (AMENDMENT) BILL 2016 – Bill No. 9/2016

A BILL intituled:

“An Act to amend the Hucksters Licensing and Control Act.” *[Minister of Finance]*

TAX (AMENDMENT) BILL 2016 – Bill No. 10/2016

A BILL intituled:

“An Act to amend the Tax Act.” *[Minister of Finance]*

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT’S BUSINESS

MOTION

BUDGET 2016

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.

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The privilege is mine to make my humble contribution to the debate in relation to the 2016 Budget. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome our distinguished guests from Canada and, of course, His Excellency the High Commissioner. Like you, Sir, I hope that their stay here would be memorable.

I also would like to extend a warm welcome to a full gallery of students, from President’s College, who are with us today.

Sir, I would also like to take this opportunity to convey our deepest sympathy to three Amerindian brothers who, I understand, have just been killed in a horrific accident in the Rupununi. They have our deepest sympathy.

I wish to begin by offering my congratulations to the Minister of Finance and, of course, his competent staff for presenting and preparing the 2016 Budget. I have listened to the debates from both sides of the House. I have listened to the almost utopian outpourings which have emanated from the Government's side in relation to the absolute perfection with which this Budget is blessed and I have listened to the realistic and pragmatic arguments coming from this side of the House, and I say that I stand proudly with the pragmatists in our today's debate.

I want to begin by beginning with the very title of the Budget. The Budget is titled: "*Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*". I thought it curious and indeed courageous that the Minister would choose growth in his title as part of his speech because, when I looked at his figures chronicled in his Budget, it is the first year that this coalition Government has assumed governmental office; it is the first year that it has taken control and management of the economy of this country and it is the first year that we are recording our lowest economic growth in 10 successive years - 3.0%. That is the Minister's figure. [An Hon. Member: A sign of things to come.] It is a sign, hopefully, not of things to come. I am a patriot; I want the best for my country. I hope that, in future, the Minister will have a better performance to report in his next budget. But many persons out there have a difficulty in accepting even the 3% growth rate for the year 2015 that is reported in the Budget.

While we may use macroeconomic mechanisms, the Bureau of Statistics and the Central Bank to generate figures which establish growth rate, the real barometer, for me, is the views of the people out there who live in the economy. Their views are what, to me, are important. I spoke with a wide cross section of Guyanese: I spoke with the market vendor; I spoke with the professional; I spoke with the public servant; I spoke with the horse cart man; I spoke with the taxi driver; I spoke with the lawyer; I spoke with the businessman on Regent Street; and they all said that, in 2015, they experienced a horrible year. They said that money was not circulating. They said that their businesses performed badly. They said that they experienced the worst Christmas in decades. That is their view, so we can, in this air conditioned, very comfortable

setting, speak about high growth rates, but the people out there have a different reality in which they are living.

When one looks at the figures and the productive sector, then one sees that the views that the persons out there have expressed are really borne out because, in the productive sectors, as reported by the Hon. Minister, there was an increase in rice but we all know the reality that there is no market for rice. The rice was reaped but it is still in the factories; it is still at the wharf; it is still in the storage bond and it is rotting there. So, the rice farmers are in financial chaos.

The sugar workers increased production but they were not paid their Annual Performance Incentive (API) because the world market price was low.

The construction sector is suffering from inertia because the Government has basically torpedoed the previous Government's housing drive. So, one of three ready-mix concrete companies now is up for sale; construction is on the decline. Gold prices remain stagnant in the world market and there is no increase in production here. The Government's efforts to grant concessions to the miners have been stymied because of a requirement that the Government put into the concession that the miners must get tax compliance. Of course, the miners find that a nightmare so none of the concessions which they were granted are being enjoyed by them. So, in all the major productive sectors in the economy, they are not performing. That is why the man in the street is questioning the Minister's growth figure.

To *rub salt in the injury*, the Hon. Minister, in a contracting economy, in a depressing economy, reports to this House and to the people out there that there are no reported job losses - an astonishing statement. Persons stop me in the streets and ask me if we cannot do something about statements being made in the National Assembly that are completely out of sync with reality. Persons who have been dismissed are hearing that there are no reported job losses. They want to know if they have become phantoms. They are not recorded anymore in this country; 1,972 Amerindians, hundreds of employees in the public sector and the private sector have been dismissed. I have filed, in the High Court, several actions for dismissal, whether the dismissals are wrongful or not is a matter for the Court, but the dismissals have taken place and the Minister is saying that there are no reported job losses. So, people out there are questioning the Minister's figures and that is not a healthy thing.

What the people out there find very unnerving is another statistical data disclosed by the Minister and that is the exchange rate. The Minister reported, in his Budget, that the United States (US) dollar is changing at \$206.50 to the US dollar.

1.42 p.m.

That the people find as a total outrage, because when the man from the Rupununi goes to the cambio he has to pay \$210 and \$212; when the comrade from D'Urban Street goes to the cambio on King Street he pays \$210 and \$212; when the comrade from Black Bush Polder goes to the cambio in Rose Hall he pays \$210 and \$212. The distinguished and Hon. Minister is telling the House that the United States dollar is changing at \$206. The people out there want to know where these figures are coming from because they are living a different reality.

I wanted to know where the boost in revenue came from because the Minister reported that there has been an increase in revenue. When I carefully checked the budget I saw the transfers coming from the extra budgetary funds, from the statutory agencies, a total of \$9 billion taken from these agencies which were claimed to be illegal. That is where the surplus came from. It did not come from economic activities, officially. It came from moneys that were put there under this Government. What is more fundamental is, the press would recall, the people out there would recall, and Your Honour would recall, that there was a long and dedicated campaign by the Hon. Members of that side when they were on this side to remove these moneys and place them in the Consolidated Fund. All manner of arguments were advanced. They said that it was unlawful; they said that it was unconstitutional; they said that it was being kept in those funds for corrupt purposes. They brought a motion to this House; they brought a motion in the High Court challenging the legality of these moneys. Now they are in Government and nine months after they are refusing to transfer these moneys. We call upon them to transfer every single cent of the extra budgetary funds into the Consolidated Fund. The Lotto Fund has over \$28 billion but they have only transferred \$1 million. Are they keeping \$27 billion for corrupt purposes? Let them transfer it now. That is what they said. Let them deliver.

We were told that growth comes from consumers' spending, comes from investment, from Government's spending and from net export. I looked at the factors in the budget to see what would stimulate this growth the Minister spoke about. Of course, there is going to be

Government's spending, because we are told that there is the highest Government injection in to the economy in any given financial year, thus far. Yes, we know there is going to be Government's spending but we also know - the Minister will know much more than I do - that Government's spending alone cannot propel the economy forward, cannot bring the desired growth that he aspires to achieve. I am looking for the measures in the budget that will inspire the growth the Minister is speaking of. What I find is that the opposite is contained in the budget.

There is an over reliance on taxation in the budget. Everyone here would have witnessed the Minister is bringing a slew of legislation to the House just now. All of those legislations are designed to impose additional taxes on the people of this country. From 2008 to 2014, our last budget - as the Hon. Member Gail Teixeira reminded us yesterday - there were no additional taxes by our Government. In fact, every year we designed different measures to reduce the tax burden. Here there is a slew of measures which are designed to increase the taxation burden and then widen it. The net is so wide, it captures from man to mule. No one is exempted. That is not the type of model that would achieve the stimulated growth that the Minister aspires to achieve. When there is increased taxation and salaries are not raised to a proportionate level, then it is taking away from the consumer the disposable earnings. How are we going to get the growth, Mr. Minister?

I ask that the Minister reviews the taxation burden he is imposing on the backs of the people of this country. This budget has no new salary announced, but a dozen and a half, or more, of taxation impositions. There is not a single budgetary salary increase. We are told that we have to wait on collective bargaining but the tax measures are coming immediately.

Another important omission of this budget, if it wants to advance growth, is the lack of a regime of tax concessions that will attract investments and encourage consumers' spending. What the Minister has done, and he does it very grudgingly, is to assess the volume of concessions granted and has placed a value on it, and essentially he advances the theoretical argument that our economy cannot afford these concessions. Well, to the distinguished Minister, I say with the greatest of respect that that is a very myopic view to take of concessions. You have to look at the concession, but not in isolation, Sir. You have to look at the concessions then measure it against the investment it will ease; you have to be measure it against the jobs it will create; you have to measure it against the spending it will generate and then you will get the true picture of

what the investment is, what the concessions are. The ideology expressed in this budget is that concession is a bad thing, so it must be reduced. That will not foster, it will not induce and it will not engender the economic growth the Minister spoke about.

The Minister said – it is a good intentioned – that he will incorporate a new set of procedures which are intended to make business easier to remove red tapes to overcome bureaucratic hurdles and to reduce corruption and advance efficiency, very high idealistic principles. I wish him all the best. The problem is that in the very same budget he announced a peculiar budgetary measure. He said that before one can get a public licence in this country the applicant must satisfy the agency to which he is applying that all his tax returns are in order, that he has paid all his taxes, or that he has an arrangement to pay off all his taxes. That will lead to a bureaucratic nightmare and that will be a breeding ground for corruption.

First of all, the Minister when he imposes that new measure - it is being imposed - he does not speak about the institutional building of the capacity of Guyana Revenue Authority to deal with the traffic of applications it will receive when the new measure is imposed. The Guyana Revenue Authority is the same organisation with nothing to improve it, human resources otherwise. [An Hon. Member: The first duty is to pay your taxes.] Yes, the first duty is to pay your taxes, but at the same time you also have to increase the state's ability to collect the taxes. That is what I am saying. When the first wave of applicants go, when the mule cart driver goes there for his licence, the minibus driver goes for his licence, the grocer goes for his licence, the shopkeeper goes for his licence, they are all told that they have to get their tax return in order. They have to pay off their back taxes. Can you imagine the confusion that would take place?

Significantly, there are some legal implications as well with these licences. There is something fundamentally and conceptually wrong with using one set of legislation as an enforcement mechanism, to enforce obligations on another set of legislation. [Mr. Ramjattan: There is absolutely nothing wrong with that.] I will deal with that just now. There is something fundamental wrong with it. If there are violations of the Tax Act, if there are violations of the Income Tax Act, if there are violations of the Corporate Tax Act, then these pieces of legislation have their enforcement mechanisms. Use them and go after the defaulters. Do not burden another set of legislation with the responsibility and duty of enforcing this set of legislation. It is not that

we are without precedent on this matter. In 2003, we amended our Constitution and made, as fundamental right, the right to work. Article 149A of our Constitution now reads:

“No person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of his or her right to work, that is to say, the right to free choice of employment.”

No person shall be hindered in his right to work. There is no condition attached to it. When the minibus driver goes to renew his licence, and that is his work, and then he is told that he has to satisfy another set of conditions, Sir, you may be in a collision course with the Constitution of the country. As I said, we are not without precedent. I implore my honourable friend Mr. Ramjattan to listen to me.

A few years ago we implemented a similar measure here in relation to professionals. We amended the Tax Act to say that professionals, before they get their Tax Practice Certificate, must file updated tax returns. Not that they must pay their taxes; not that they must enter into an arrangement to pay, but they must at least file their tax record. Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan went into the witness box in the court. Legal proceedings were filed by the doctor, the accountant, the lawyer, and the engineer through their respective associations. After 14 years that matter is still ongoing. Mr. Ramjattan went into the witness box. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, let us not allow ourselves to be carried away.

Mr. Nandlall: It is because he is speaking. The Hon. Member, himself, went into the witness box to depose how unlawful it was. Integrity in public office is important, Sir. I move on.

1.57 p.m.

Vice-President and Minister of Public Security [Mr. Ramjattan]: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order, Standing Order 41 (2). Could I please correct what...because it would appear? It is misleading this House as to two matters. The matter is *sub judice* and he is raising it here to begin with. Secondly, he is misleading the House. The taxes were increased from \$10,000 as we know to \$250,000 and the constitutional motion, which I brought, was that it was oppressive, the Tax Practice Certificate. Please let him get it right.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Nandlall, you are aware that we ought not, in this House, to raise as issue matters which are before the court. I would suggest....

Mr. Nandlall: Sir, if I may? It is not...

Mr. Speaker: You may not, but you will listen to me now. You are aware that the Standing Orders do not allow us to make mention of matters which are before the court. You are also aware that this matter is still before the court. I would suggest that you do what you know that you should do in this matter.

Mr. Nandlall: Sir, the Standing Orders do not state that you cannot mention a matter that is in court. The Standing Order states that you cannot mention the matter in such a way as to prejudice the proceedings. That is what the Standing Order states.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I shall read the Standing Orders to you.

Mr. Nandlall: Do I sit or do I stand, Sir?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you may sit. It would be helpful to all other Hon. Members. Standing Order 41 (2):

“Reference shall not be made to any matter which is *sub judice*, in such a way as might,...”

I would emphasise the words following.

“...in the opinion of the Chair, prejudice the interest of parties thereto”.

I would think that a reference, which includes gratuitous expression such as “integrity in office”, in the same breath as you were making the point, should not form part of your presentation here today. I will invite you to withdraw it and start again. You are fully capable of doing all the things you want to do and saying all that you want to say without gratuitously importing matter which you know you ought not to do.

Mr. Nandlall: Is it that integrity is important to public office. That is a statement of fact.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, are you withdrawing the reference?

Mr. Nandlall: Which reference, Sir?

Mr. Speaker: It is the reference to the case before the court at this time; the reference to the discussion as to who went into the box; the reference as to who argued the motion in relation to the income tax...

Mr. Nandlall: I maintain, Sir, that there is a challenge in the court against...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the Speaker has asked you a question. I recommend that you withdraw it and start again.

Mr. Nandlall: I want to reference to a case that is pending in the court and I wish to assure Your Honour that I will not say anything to prejudice the outcome of those proceedings.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I give you that but give the Chairman what is provided, and that is, to determine whether in his opinion it is likely to do that.

Mr. Nandlall: Could I make the statement then, Sir, and then you will judge?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I await your response to my request.

Mr. Nandlall: I would like to say, Sir, that there are proceedings pending which challenges the legality of a provision in the Tax Act which requires persons who are to obtain a Tax Practice Certificate to first file their returns. There is such a proceedings pending in the court.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, am I to take it that you withdraw the references to a particular Hon. Member in here?

Mr. Nandlall: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Then you should tell us.

Mr. Nandlall: I wanted to know what you want me to withdraw, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am waiting for the withdrawal then you may proceed.

Mr. Nandlall: I withdraw the statement in which I mentioned the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan name.

Mr. Speaker: I accept that, Hon. Member. You may proceed.

Mr. Nandlall: Yes. Sir, I am humbly and respectfully cautioning the Hon. Minister of Finance to expect a slew of litigation in relation to some of these measures which impose burdens on the taxpayer in relation to one set of legislation to enforce another set of legislation. That is an eventuality that the Hon. Member would have to confront with soon.

The other issue is with growth, because that is the title of the budget “Stimulating Growth...” Now we cannot put the words “stimulating growth” on the title of a budget and that by itself will cause growth. We have to ensure that there are policies and programmes that can achieve the growth that we speak about in glossy print. That is what I want to speak to quickly, some of the measures.

Firstly, I implore this Government to demonstrate to the people of our country that they respect and that they will protect private property because there were a series of incidents in which persons, who have been issued with transports and certificates of title and are living in their homes, were being ejected from their homes with notices being erected by the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA) stating that it is in the property of Central Housing and Planning Authority and persons’ titles and transports are being revoked.

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Williams]: If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker, on a Point of Order, Standing Order 40 (a). Again, the Hon. Member is referring to a matter that is before the courts of Guyana. The matter before the court was actually initiated by him and we are asking him, Sir, to desist.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member for his intervention.

Mr. Nandlall: I am representing the interest of dozens of people with whose property is being taken away by the state. That is the contention that they are advancing, whether it is in court or not, it will never be a gag against me speaking on it. An injustice remains an injustice whether it is litigated or not. Litigation is to bring justice, not to perpetuate injustice.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, your words will still remain the same. Do not expend so much energy. Please proceed.

Mr. Nandlall: Injustice has that effect on me, Sir. When we speak about growth, growth comes from investment, it comes from spending. People will not invest in an economy; they will not spend in an economy and they will not be growth in an economy where private property is not protected. That is the fundamental point here.

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, the Points of Order are usually not included in the calculation of time for speakers because there is a pause. Otherwise, this could be a measure, Sir, that every time we speak on this side, Points of Order are raised and it takes away time from us.

Secondly, Sir, in relation to the Hon. Member time, excluding the Points of Order, he, therefore, has a total of 35 minutes and I am seeking the five minutes extension within that 35 minutes.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I thank you for your intervention. Hon. Member, you will speak for a total of 35 minutes. There is one point to be clarified. The Speaker has observed the practice, which he observed yesterday, and that he has observed in every debate here, when matters are prolonged the timer goes on hold. It begins again when the Hon. Member, again, returns to his statement. There ought not to be any further comments on this, Hon. Members, unless you feel that your timing should be preferred to mine.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Nandlall: Sir, I spoke about the importance of respecting private property.

Another important issue that needs to be reviewed by the Hon. Minister of Finance, another policy, is the use of Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU). The reports, which have received, are that SOCU is violating the rights of people. It is inimical the way that it is conducting its business; it is inimical to the economic interest of this country. People's moneys are being seized in whimsical manner. Their jewellerys are being taken from them at the airport. That cannot be stimulating to growth. We are asking for a review of SOCU. It was set up also for a completely different purpose which is to examine and investigate genuine cases of money laundering and terrorism, not to be unleashed on the people of this country.

I want to call on the Government, that if it wants to restore confidence in the economy then it must observe the procurement laws of this country. It cannot hand-pick contractors and give them millions and millions of dollars of contract without any transparent process, and in disregard of the procurement process.

We demand also the consumers must enjoy the reduction that is taking place with fuel prices, that is, the real reduction. We want the electricity tariffs to drop.

2.12 p.m.

We also want gas at the pump to reduce because that is important to simulate growth. We also want the ban to be reviewed on vehicles. A lot has been spoken about in relation to cars and the auto dealers have spoken. Do not bother with us. The auto dealers have issued a statement. They have said that the cars will go up by nearly \$2 million beyond the reach... [An Hon. Member: Who dealer?] It is the Auto Dealers Association, the umbrella body. It will go beyond the reach of the ordinary consumer, but that is not who I am worried about. The budget speaks about growth. I am worried about the productive sector - the agricultural equipment, the construction equipment. I have here a list of prices of trucks and motor lorries and capital equipment that are now being imported that are 15 years old. I want to give the likely price that it will be if the new ban is imposed and the importers are forced to bring in vehicles that are eight years and under.

A Bedford single axle truck, now, is \$6 million; it will become \$18 million. A double axel truck is \$9 million; it will be \$27 million. A hauler, that is, the truck that pulls the container, double axel, is now \$7 million; it will be \$20 million. A Caterpillar excavator 312 is now \$12 million; it will be \$24 million. A 320 excavator is \$15 million; it will be \$36 million. A grader is now \$28 million; it will be \$68 million. I have a whole list. Construction will stagnate in this country. Only special interests are going to benefit, not the ordinary contractors out there. The special ones, such as the “bs”, are going to benefit.

I want to move quickly to the legal sector. My learned friend, the Hon. Attorney General, who is scheduled to speak after me, will have to report on a number of things. He will speak about the opening of the Land Registry and Commercial Registry on Avenue of the Republic. I hope that he will say that that is a People’s Progressive Party (PPP)’s Government project. He will speak

about the construction going on in the compound at Georgetown High Court where a building is being erected to house two judges of the Land Court and Registry. I hope he will say that that is PPP project. Construction will soon begin at Sparendam to erect an edifice that will house two magistrate's courts and chambers for the magistrates. I hope he that he will say that that is a PPP project. He will open, this year, the Family Court. I hope that he will recognise that that is a PPP project. He will also open the Lethem Magistrate's Court later this month. I hope that he will say that that is a PPP project. He will announce the establishment of a new office of the Director of Public Prosecutions in Berbice. I hope that he will say that that is a PPP project. Other than that, he has nothing else to say. I have read the budget and there is nothing there from the legal sector.

As I wrap up, Sir, I looked at the entire Estimates and I was wondering where the growth will come from and then I stumbled on the list of the expenditures on the item dietary. I found in 2014 the Government spent \$3.6 billion in dietary. In 2016, we are budgeting \$4.8 billion in dietary, an increase of \$1.2 billion on dietary. We will have growth, but it will not be economic growth.

I thank you very much Sir. *[Applause]*

Minister of Social Cohesion [Ms. Ally]: It is with a great sense of pride that I rise before this august body to, firstly, commend my colleague, Hon. Minister of Finance, for creating history in our country, by presenting two national budgets within eight months. Sir, you have demonstrated the brilliance required of a Minister of Finance, and I have to say that we on this side of the House are proud of you. This is the calibre of leadership Guyana needs to philip our country to the next level.

Secondly, I unreservedly offer my support to Budget 2016, under the theme *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*. The theme speaks volumes and underscores the Government's pro-poor philosophy. Our quest is to engender social and economic growth, rekindle confidence, locally as well as in the diaspora and ultimately offers every Guyanese the "good life."

This budget is geared to include all Guyanese. It sets out to create scope for Guyanese to be included in the development of our beloved country. Beyond inclusion, there are opportunities for participation in the growth and development of our country. The budget goes beyond

consideration for the richness of our economy. Rather it focuses on the richness of human lives. This is about development with a human face. This is the development Guyana needs. Let us look, for instance, at where the greatest emphasis is, it is on education, but I would leave my honourable colleague, the Minister of Education, to address that.

There is a striking nexus between this budget and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. I will get there, do not worry, Ms. Teixeira.

Goal 1 speaks to the ending of poverty in all its forms. This budget is tailored to reduce poverty. Mr. Speaker, irrespective of what is being touted to the contrary, this budget, Sir, is friendly to the poor as it includes:

- Increase in rebates granted by Guyana Power and Light Inc.
- Reduction in the price of fuel.
- Increase in Income Tax threshold from \$600,000 to \$660,000, which would benefit a minimum of 65,000 workers. In our country, people would have more disposable income.
- The removal of excise tax on vehicles under four years old and below 1500 cc.
- Removal of Income Tax from income earned by artistes during festivities, once it is certified by the Minister responsible for tourism.

This budget is truly friendly to the poor and is designed to offer every Guyanese the “good life”, as envisioned by the President.

As I reflect on Goal 16 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which is:

“Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provision of access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”

We are speaking directly here to the role of the Ministry of Social Cohesion, in fostering a peaceful and inclusive society. On that note, only a visionary would consider the need for a Ministry of Social Cohesion, but one, whose thinking is warped, would rename it the Ministry of Social Bribery. It is my task, as Minister, to lead a national process that is geared to address the

issues of exclusion and marginalisation in our society. I am required to ensure that there is an environment where people feel a sense of belonging. I have to ensure that through our programmes and projects, scope is created for citizens to be included in these processes, that they participate in initiatives at the local and national levels. Our interventions would be geared so that as a nation we are reprogrammed to respect and value the contribution of each other, regardless of our diversities, whether these are based on culture, race, religion, ethnicity, gender, age or geographic location, as none of these things should be used as justifications for marginalising us. [Mr. Dharamlall: What about the gays?] We are going to take care of you, Sir.

On that score, let me caution my dear friend, Hon. Member Mr. Cornel Damon, that if we are to progress as a nation, let us see ourselves as Guyanese, even though we may belong to different race groups. We have to move together as one. It will be nice if we, as Members of this National Assembly, lead by example, by being the agents of this change. Members of this honourable House, it was Christian Larsen, who spoke of social cohesion “as a belief held by citizens of a given nation-state, that they share a moral community which enables them to trust each other”.

Ladies and gentlemen, our diversities as well as experiences of our colonial past have caused some fractures in relations and mistrust among us.

2.27 p.m.

We cannot dispute this, however, we cannot continue in disunity, disharmony and division. We will work towards cohesion. My Ministry would complement the work of other ministries, civil society, Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), the differently-abled, the business community workers and employers and bodies working toward the achievement of social cohesion.

The work of this Ministry will be hard and long, despite the opinion expressed by the Hon. Member Mrs. Chandarpal that social cohesion would not come out of the Ministry, but through Commissions. Let me say to you Hon. Member that, we need everyone to be involved, to make social cohesion work. Let me also say that this Minister, this Ministry and this Government will not go down the road of vengeance. We believe in law and order. Let me say, at this point in time, if we commit a crime, then we will have to do the time.

With the allocations for the Ministry of Social Cohesion, I will now turn to the programme of the Ministry of Social Cohesion. This Budget would support the initiatives of the Ministry of Social Cohesion to develop policies, programmatic and operational frameworks, as well as to initiate strategic actions. These actions include, capacity building and development of strategic partnerships for pursuing a social cohesion agenda in 2016.

Our budgetary allocations would allow us to work with communities across the regions of Guyana, giving opportunities for citizens to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper. That willingness to cooperate means that they freely choose from partnerships and have a reasonable chance of achieving goals. This willingness to cooperate and share the fruits of their endeavours equitably is the paradigm shift that the Ministry would work to create.

Therefore, the passage of the Budget would allow the Ministry to continue laying the foundation for building and sustaining the momentum that would foster longer-term social programming. As such, it would allow us to:

- Undertake further meetings and consultations with communities in all 10 administrative regions; convening national sensitisation and networking meetings with strategic stakeholder groups;
- Information sharing and coordinating meetings with key State and governance stakeholders, such as, ministries, the regional administrations, municipalities and other related entities.

Let me take a moment Sir, to congratulate the Private Sector Commission (PSC) for the optimistic approach taken by that body on this Budget, as well as express gratitude for its implicit confidence in this Government

My Ministry would undertake training and capacity building for social cohesion programming and management — training of trainers’ initiatives; training of core of Government officials in key ministries; training of staff in regional administrations, municipalities and selected Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs); and mediation, conflict resolution and peace building initiatives would be undertaken in our communities

Allocation from this Budget to my Ministry would assist to achieve the objective of formulating and implementing a strategic framework for more effective advocacy, strategic communications

and outreach programmes on social cohesion. It would allow us to prepare and disseminate advocacy and strategic communication products, such as, brochures, posters, factsheets and information on social cohesion and related issues. It would allow my Ministry to establish working and inter-sectoral relations with counterparts in several other Ministries.

The outcome would be that the work and outputs of the Ministry of Social Cohesion would be more effectively communicated to national stakeholders. The general public would be better acquainted with social cohesion programmes and actions, and understand their roles in the process of fostering enough and enabling cohesion in Guyana. That would dispel the myths propagated by the sceptics about the focus of the Ministry and assist stakeholders to understand our mandate and their own roles in contributing to the furtherance of social cohesion in this our native land.

It would be remiss of me, if I do not chronicle the Ministry's journey and accomplishments over the past eight months.

The eight-month journey of the Ministry of Social Cohesion has been very promising. To date, there are outstanding achievements and we have only just begun. This Budget will assist us to consolidate the gains already made and expand our programmes and projects.

International bodies such as the United Nations (UN) and the British High Commission (BHC) have reached out to the Ministry in support of our thrust to foster social cohesion. They have provided financial and technical support to the Ministry, particularly as it related to the holding of the Social Cohesion Round Table, held last September. We have drawn from the Round Table, key inputs for the development of the Ministry's Strategic Plan. The development of that document has commenced.

Others have indicated their interest and have begun partnering with the Ministry, and this includes, the Institute of Applied Science and Technology (IAST). They are partnering with the Ministry in assisting to foster social cohesion and expanding micro-enterprise initiatives in the regions of Guyana and is emerging as one of our good practices. With support from IAST, the soap making project in North Rupununi, Region 9, has been gaining momentum.

We have also assisted the community to expand their multiple uses of peanuts in Aranaputa and Parishara, and this will continue to expand. At Parishara, we have been able to refurbish the mill and the entire building of that peanut factory

The Ministry has been in the forefront in providing support for every child to be able to attend school regularly and punctually. We believe in the development of Guyana's human resource capital. I submit that there is a correlation between one's level of education, their inclusion and participation in development processes, and their opportunities for upward mobility.

The argument therefore is that, if the Ministry of Social Cohesion can contribute to enabling a child to attend school regularly and punctually, it is potentially making a significant contribution and investment in his/her personal development, the development of his/her community, and national development. By extension we would be making a contribution to sustainable development.

Regardless of what has been said, the truth is that the Ministry of Social Cohesion has partnered with Guyana's business community and to date, over 300 bicycles have been distributed in Regions 1, 3,4,6,7 and 9, to children who live long distances away from school.

With respect to boats - six have been distributed in Region 2, in the Upper and Lower Pomeroon; Maraikobai in Region 5; Barakara in the Canje River; and in the Berbice and Demerara Rivers. The boats are outfitted in green and yellow.

Regarding buses - the Ministry and the business community partnership has led to the acquisition of six buses to date and these have been earmarked to service Regions 4, 5, 6 and 7.

2.42 p.m.

Let me say to the Hon. Member, Dr. Vindhya Persaud, on the question of distribution of the boats, buses, and bicycles, that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) will not be daunted by your accusations of our distribution centres. If you really knew where those items were distributed then you will be put to shame. Sorry if your supporters are gravitating to us. On the question of vengeance, all I will say, like I said a little earlier, Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, if you do the crime you will have to pay the time.

Secondly, last night, the Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill, referred to our contributors as political investors. I want to assure the Hon. Member that these contributors are good corporate citizens who have confidence in this APNU/AFC Government. Sorry if you did not have it in your time, but I am sure it is only that they did not have confidence in you.

Mr. Speaker, you would observe that, from these interventions with the inputs from the business community, we have made inputs with the 3B's Programme in most of the regions. I assure you that, as time unfolds the Ministry of Social Cohesion and this APNU/AFC Government will give the Guyanese people the 'good life' they are looking for. We have done all of this...

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

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: Mr. Speaker, may I kindly request that the Hon. Member be given an addition five minutes, in accordance with the schedule.

Question put and agreed to.

Ms. Ally: We have done all of this in a mere eight months. Let me say that this is just a tip of the iceberg. We will continue these partnerships and give children opportunities to attend school.

In concluding, it was Mahatma Gandhi who said that:

“Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will.”

That will is what drives this side of the House. It is the will to unite; to live in harmony; to offer each Guyanese an upward mobility; and the 'good life'. I urge those on the other side of the House to lay the differences aside...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, let us use the correct references to the Hon. Members opposite. Please proceed.

Ms. Ally: My apologies, Mr. Speaker. I urge those Hon. Members on the other side of the House to lay their differences aside, let us put our hands to the plough, and according to Valarie Rodway's song:

“Pledge every effort, cherish this earth, and make here a paradise, land of our birth.”

Let me finally conclude by endorsing Budget 2016, and call on all Guyanese, including the Opposition, to work with the Ministry of Social Cohesion and let us give ourselves and all of Guyana what we deserve, a 'good life'.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Bishop Edghill: On a Point of Order. I rise under Standing Order 40 (b) and I wish to indicate that at no time did I refer to the donors as political investors. I am referring to the statement made by the Hon. Member. I asked a question: How many of the donors are contractors engaged with the State? And, are they also political investors?

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member for that explanation.

Mrs. Campbell-Sukhai: As I stand to contribute to the 2016 Budget debate, I want to acknowledge the effort by the Minister of Finance and his team from the Ministry of Finance for presenting to this House the 2016 Budget. The budget document on page 18, paragraph 10 states:

“Substantial financial provision has been made to promote the preservation of indigenous culture, identity, social integration, economic prosperity, physical infrastructure, green energy, sustainable development, and the protection of indigenous lands.”

These broad categories outlined in the 2016 Budget Speech, simply reword the People's Progressive Party/Civic's (PPP/C) legacy of success in the areas of lands rights for Amerindians, the economic transformation of the village economies, the challenging social issues faced by hinterland and Amerindian residents, the successes in the expanding of physical and productive infrastructure in the villages, and a successful cultural environment with expanding and increasing recognition of the rich diversity and culture of the Indigenous peoples.

I took some time to examine the Budget to see what financial resources were available to the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs and I discovered that, for the current budget, \$776,533,000 was allocated. Then, I looked at the capital budget - the capital budget is what offers direct intervention and directly affects people's lives. I noted that for the capital expenditure a mere \$1,407,000,000 was allocated. What does this amount to? This amounts to a mere 0.05% of a budget of \$230 billion. [**Members of the Opposition:** Shame.] It is a shame because the Budget Speech also recognised and, in the words that I want to put it, it

boasted of the hinterland being home to our Indigenous peoples spread across the three quarters of our national land mass and recognising the inequity that exist. Yet the Budget allocates the least to the most challenged segment of our population.

This is unfair. It is unfair to the extent that the capital budget merely offers support to three areas that will actually have some impact on the lives of Indigenous people. I want to deal with these three areas of impact.

I would like say that for the first one, just close to \$1 billion is going to be spent on a youth project. This project is a replacement project to what obtained before 10th May, 2015; a project which supported Indigenous youths; a project under the name of the Youth Entrepreneurial and Apprenticeship Project, which engaged 1,972 young Amerindians. The engagement of these youths was in activities that provided support to community development, while attaining experience in various fields like education, health, village administration, regional administration, and to a lesser extent, to engagement with the sectors of forestry, mining, and of course the maintenance of village assets.

It is appalling to know that, as soon as the coalition Government obtained or got into office, and of course under questionable circumstances, they dismantled this innovative project geared towards supporting Indigenous youths. I would like to quote from a statement made in this House by the Vice-President and Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, the Hon. Sydney Allicock:

“Towards this end, with effect from 1st September, 2015, YEAP will be replaced by the Hinterland Employment and Youth Services. All former CSO will be eligible to be enlisted for training to receive relevant skills, so as to enable them to earn an income in the pursuit of suitable livelihood and a means to enjoying the good life. Under the new initiative we hope to train thousands of young people while paying them a stipend.”

2.57 p.m.

This project, which was declared to be implemented on 1st September, 2015, has resulted, not in Amerindian youths enjoying a ‘good life’; it has resulted in Amerindian youths being less, in terms of what they obtain. They lost interest in community development and they are no longer

meaningfully engaged at the community level. If one was to calculate the loss of income, and I am only calculating from May 2015 to January of this year, they have lost \$473,280,000. [Ms. Ally: Mrs. Campbell-Sukhai, you had stopped paying the people since April, 2015. What are you coming with now?] I am speaking of May to January. For the information of this House, a Supplemental was brought to this House to pay the CSOs, which we supported.

I wish to say, the loss of meaningful engagements of the youths from Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9 did not only directly affected 1,972 individuals, it affected approximately 12,000 family members. It also contributed to the collapse of the very growing entrepreneurial spirit in those villages. It caused the collapse of businesses in those villages because, annually, that project contributed to almost \$1 billion circulating in Indigenous communities across the hinterland.

As I listen to the Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, on Tuesday, when the Hon. Member was presenting her presentation on the Budget, the Hon. Minister noted that these 1,972 young people were not genuine youths. She said that they were PPP politicians. This is grave insult to young Amerindian youths. Why is it a grave insults to Amerindians youths? Because her comment infringed on the rights of Indigenous youths to make a free political choice, just in the event that, indeed, they were PPP politicians.

Secondly, disbanding the YEAP Project and the sloth with which they have moved, not to replace it is also infringing on the economic rights and opportunities of young Indigenous people. This is a classic example of paid back time for the Amerindian electorate. Because in the 11th May, 2015 Elections, the Amerindians voted overwhelmingly for the People Progressive Party/Civic Government, and to pay them back with the denial of engagement in their community and taking away their income, does not allow them to enjoy the 'good life'. In fact, it is a discrimination not to support young Amerindians, when they are engaged meaningfully in activities that could enhance their skills and capacities. It is discrimination against the Indigenous youths to deny them income for service to their community. It is discrimination and discriminatory to punish young Amerindians and their families on the assumption that they are politically aligned. This goes against all international norms and laws as it relates to Indigenous people.

I want to say that it is criminal and an infringement of Indigenous peoples' economic right. I wish to underscore that and I would wish that the Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs would tell this House, today when he speaks, why is it that from 1st September, 2015 to 31st January, 2016, he has not been able to roll out the Hinterland Employment Youth Service (HEYS) Project to benefit Amerindians. What is keeping him back? He is in his seat; he has great power and authority to stand up and represent his people; the authority is in his hands.

It is in his hands to ensure that, as a Ministry with the portfolio responsible for assisting young people, and in fact, I am reminded that he is Vice-President of this nation, he must track; he must be able to monitor; and he must be to ensure that his portfolio and the responsibility matches the salary that he takes home.

Taking \$1 billion away from the Indigenous community matches the increase that the coalition Government provided with the increase salaries for themselves. [*Interruption*]

The Budget also spoke about support for Indigenous education, and they afforded the words and it is recorded in the Budget Speech that, in this year, they would provide moneys to design a facility to support Indigenous youths to access higher learning. [**Mr. Patterson:** What is wrong with that?] Nothing is wrong with that, but I want to ensure that the Indigenous people and the nation understand that this project is also one which is coming late. It is late because, in 2015, just before the prorogation of this Parliament, the Cabinet approved for the design and the construction of this facility to assist Indigenous youth with cheap, adequate and affordable accommodation.

The Government brought Budget 2015 and it boasts of two budgets in less than a year, but in the first Budget they fail to include that very critical project to support the Indigenous youth development. In the 2016 Budget, I wish for the Minister to explain to this House, why is it that he sat back and allowed only an allocation for the design of the building. One year to design a facility, is that how you measure your performance?

When we built the Liliendaal Student Dorm, we dealt with design and construction in a single year. Delaying the construction of this critical facility will only delay the opportunities of young Indigenous people to access higher learning opportunities. Parents of current students who are going to the University of Guyana and other technical institutions in Georgetown are always

concerned. I was told that on some trips into the interior these matters were raised. I want to ask the Minister, what propelled him to finally bring this project in 2016, and what did he not see right in also asking the Ministry of Finance to provide funding for construction? Answer that. The delay that the Hon. Minister continues to have in his Ministry is not impacting positively on the well-being for a 'good life' for Indigenous people.

The Budget also makes mention of how this coalition Government is going to support 450 scholarship students. I want to remind this House and the nation that this project was established in the late and early 1960s by the People Progressive Party/Civic. I am happy that this programme still continues up to today, providing support to Indigenous students. But, what I am not happy about is the fact that parents have been asking last year for an increase for the students' stipends. They made representation and I am representing them here in this Parliament. They need an increase. Since the Government, when they got into office, disbanded the "We Care Project" and denied the \$10,000 per child per year, it also affected the Indigenous students who are on regional and national scholarships. I am asking the Minister to seek an audience with the Minister of Finance and ask the Minister of Finance whether it is not too late to increase the \$4,000 to \$10,000 per month.

Why should Indigenous people always have to be fighting and challenging the Comrades, Ministers and the Hon. Leaders on the opposite side? This had been the trend of what occurred when the People's Nation Congress (PNC) was there.

3.12 p.m.

It is now creeping in again when they have to beg, when they have to come and ask and when the fishing... The other side promised them that they are very visionary and will make their lives easy. They said that there is a good life ahead so vote for them. You need to get up and act on behalf of your people.

School uniform for children is another support which the PPP/C Government, when it was in office, afforded the Hinterland students. Later on, it became a national support. School uniforms have arrived a couple of weeks ago in Region 9, not in September; it should have been bought in July or before September and distributed by December. The Budget came late; I agree. But now,

in February, Regions 1, 7 and 8 are still awaiting uniforms. Two academic terms have passed and children have not yet received benefits from your Government.

A comment was made yesterday, during a presentation, that we have the same Community Support Officers (CSOs). Then this Government should make them work the way they worked before. I understand that they do not listen to technical people anymore; they do not listen to those who work in the fields, and the barrage of highly acclaimed unqualified experts that they have around them are misleading them. There are legal advisors. There are advisors on sports and culture. There are advisors on everything and yet they cannot do the job.

I now turn to land titling.

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I ask for an extension of the Hon. Member's time to include the five minutes to bring her time to a total of 35 minutes. Thank you, Sir.

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. Campbell-Sukhai: Since the coalition Government and its politicians were in Opposition, they continued to mumble and continued to champion, as they said, land rights for Amerindians. Even in the Budget, it states that moneys are in the Budget and that land protection for Indigenous peoples will be dealt with.

I want to let this House know that the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government, between the years of 2012 and 2013, secured adequate funding to deal with this matter. The Hon. Vice-President, Sydney Allicock, sat on the Multi-Stakeholder Steering Committee (MSSC) and he had every single detail and information relating to this matter. What obtained since he got in, since they are so efficient more than the PPP/C Government? I will tell you what happened.

To date, they have not yet titled any village since they have been there. They have not dealt with the extension applications that were applied for by Indigenous peoples. They have not produced any new demarcation for Amerindian lands. It is nine months into their term. Yesterday, I saw a copy of the Manifesto of the coalition Government, and, in that Manifesto, there are seven

paragraphs expounding international bonds and rights about land and protecting Amerindians. Today, they have not yet done anything as it relates to land.

I call on the Minister to prioritise projects that will bring greater benefits to Amerindians and desist from sitting for long hours and months to deal with systems. Approve the title for Kangaruma; approve the title for Tasserine; approve the title for Sawaraowai; approve the title for Eclipse Falls and approve the title for Parabarawau. I ask the Minister to do these things in the one year that he has. It seems as though the Hon. Minister and his company have abandoned the Amerindian Land Titling (ALT) Project and the partnership we have with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on these matters. They have totally abandoned ship.

I also wish to ask the Minister, if it is not too complicated for him, to cooperate with the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) to deal with the Kangaruma and Tasserine mining claims that were approved after 2013. The Minister should sit and negotiate because the Indigenous peoples noted, in the report, that these matters were critical and key to their ownership. The title of Kangaruma and Tasserine should be provided to them this year. The investigation is over; the review was done and there is nothing keeping them back with the exception of claims that were approved after 2013. In fact, let me tell this House that, in 2012, titles were prepared for those communities and the wickedness that occurred in the mining sector disallowed Tasserine and Kangaruma from owning land now. I call upon you; you are sitting there; do not allow the title issue to go unanswered.

I also call on the Government to provide titles to Rockstone. The matter of Rockstone has had extensive discussions, so much so that so many compromises were made. Finally, the Amerindians, who are not greedy people, have agreed that, within a one square mile on the main road, anyone with legal and formal leases to their lands will be excised out. The Amerindian Act allows for that and yet the Rockstone title is being delayed. Give the lands to the Amerindians.

Work was done on extension application. I want to expend my time talking about extension. Please give Mainstay, Mashabo, Bethany, Capoey, Wakapau, Akawini, Saint Monica, Sand Creek, Potarinau and Mokokoko their extensions. Investigation reports are on your desk and you are entrusted in ensuring that they get their lands.

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

Mrs. Campbell-Sukhai: I will go off land because these matters are public and it is important for the nation to know. But, I want to say that the Amerindian Development Fund (ADF)...the PPP/C Government secured more than US\$6.4 million to generate economic activities to stimulate village economy and to transform the way of production in those villages. Up to now, not a cent was spent from this money since they assumed office. I can read, in last year, the first quarter, how many villages accessed funds from the ADF for their micro projects.

Today, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs was able to accomplish only two things: a meeting with the North Rupununi Development Board to control the funding for 16 Amerindian communities in that location...that comes from ADF. They do not want the communities to manage singly by themselves...

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

Mrs. Campbell-Sukhai: They want the North Rupununi Development Board to be the implementer of these projects for the 16 communities. Every time anyone from the coalition talks about the Interior, one hears about Annai, Surama, North Rupununi Board and Bina Hill. The Indigenous community is expansive; it goes beyond that area. It goes into Region 7, Region 9 and Region 1. The bigger things for everyone must be focussed on and not for one selected area because the Hon. Vice-President, Sydney Allicock, comes from there. The Government needs to stop focussing on the small things like the Bs. There has been no new initiative to compliment these big ticket projects left by the PPP/C Government - shame. There is no big ticket project to complement the foundation that the Vice-President inherited. Do you know what this Government's big ticket project is? It is 300 bicycles, some expandable slippers and boots.

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

Mr. Williams: If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this 2016 Budget and to congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Da Costa Jordan, and his team for the preparation and presentation of a well drafted Budget, a budget so transformative that it will engender a new ethos, indeed a renaissance. I congratulate him.

It is unprecedented, in the annals of our Parliament, that a budget was presented within five months of the previous Budget and also in the month of January.

3.27 p.m.

This is a clear indication of this Government's commitment to stimulating growth and strengthening the confidence of the Guyanese people as a good life beckons.

Before I delve into my remit, I must observe that no Member on the other side, surely not the lawyers who have all spoken, have seen it fit to raise any substantial or meaningful issue that concerns me. I do not know if I should be disappointed that they have not engaged me or if I should be pleased that they have recognised how successfully I have done what I was required to do in the Ministry of Legal Affairs and the Office of the Attorney General. All the lawyers have spoken, as I have said. The Hon. Mr. Bulkan would determine who else would want to speak on the law on that side.

I have listened to the protestations, on the other side, by my Hon. Friends and they have been bizarre - most of them - but I just want to disabuse the mind of the Hon. Member, Pauline Campbell-Sukhai. The Amerindian Youth Programme had, in fact, come to an end before we took office in May, after the glorious victory on Monday, 11th May, 2015. It meant that we inherited over 2,000 unemployed youths in Amerindian communities. Even when they were employed under the last Government, they deployed them to do political work for them in the Hinterland community. Fortunately for the Indigenous youths, this Government, the APNU/AFC Government, has taken them in under the Youth Entrepreneurial Skills Training Programme and we have them in training so that they could develop skills that they could deploy in making themselves useful citizens of this country.

The Hon. Member also spoke about title and she asked why we did not, in eight months, give the Amerindian communities titles to their lands. So the question must be asked: why did the last Government, in 23 years, not give it to them? The Amerindian peoples must ask them that.

My Hon. Friends, on the other side, have even blamed us for recording the lowest economic growth in 2015, in a decade. I do not know if their memories fail them. We were in office for a couple of months in 2015 because they kept out of this honourable House for well over 11 months in 2015 and it is to our credit that we have a country that is still viable and up and running. They believe people's memories are short, but people's memories are not short. That is why they are seated on that side of the House.

The Hon. Member from the Guyana Rice Producers Association (GRPA), Mr. Seeraj, accused us of making promises to brainwash and bamboozle the Guyanese people to get power and that we were unconcerned about how unrealistic the promises are. I wish to address that, Mr. Speaker. The development of bringing two Budgets within a short space of time has this challenge. **[Mr. Nandlall:** Is that a development? That is a coincidence of [*inaudible*]] [*Laughter*] I know this would have happened and so, in ruminating on what should be my approach, I decided that I would enquire of you, Sir, in terms of dealing with the noise levels on the other side, whether I should seek your protection or whether I should employ self-help. I will be guided by you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, this development brings this challenge: the promises made in the first Budget by this Government, in 2015, had only a five-month window to be delivered upon and not the normal 12 months that one would expect.

Nonetheless, this Government, our Government, strove manfully to execute its mandates and, in the case of the Attorney General's Chambers and the Ministry of Legal Affairs (AGMLA), we were able to deliver on the promises that we made in the last Budget presentation in this House: Housing the Commercial and Land Registries in new premises; and appointments of Registrar and Deputy Registrar to head the Commercial Registry. We are, nonetheless, labouring under this weight that those premises were acquired for over \$550 million. We are labouring under that and we are going to take action on that. Continuing, we are working on: reducing the backlog in the Land Registry; widening the class of persons who can be coroners by passage of the Coroners (Amendment) Bill 2015 into law to facilitate inquests and inquiries into hundreds of unsolved and unnatural deaths under the watch of the last Government. Another promise that we delivered on is that we passed the law to create a permanent Law Reform Commission.

Also, we honoured the financial independent status of the constitutional bodies by passing, in this House, budgets initiated by those newly freed entities. Further, we created a draft Bill on cybercrime, which has been sent to stakeholders for consideration and feedback before passage through this honourable House. Importantly, we began payments on the judgment sum to Rudisa, which was left unpaid by the last Government. That is only one because the last Government, if they gifted us anything, were some hefty judgments under their watch. We also have another \$5 billion debt to deal with that was accumulated under the watch of the last Government and the last Attorney General of this country. That is what we have to do. Those are the promises that

they have burdened us with. On the passage of this Budget, the final payment to Rudisa will be made. The sums are so hefty that, as a poor nation – they left us with a poor country - we are unable to pay these fantastic judgments in one walk. We have to try and see if we could spread it over time. That case was done by the Hon. Member, Mr. Anil Nandlall.

I do not know what type of Chambers the last Government had as an Attorney General's Chambers, but they always seemed to be losing cases that attracted some hefty judgements. Only last week, the Minister of Finance lamented to me that he also was served with a judgment for \$400 million from Dipcon Engineering Services Ltd., so it is just to show that we have to examine the conduct of the Hon. Members on the other side that could have led to these outrageous sums being awarded against the Guyanese people in this country.

According to the English Philosopher, Thomas Hobbs:

“Law is the formal glue that holds fundamentally disorganised societies together.”

Legal Scholar and Author Glanville Williams described the law as:

“...the cement of society and also an essential medium of change.”

Jurist Joseph P. Bradley opined:

“Society cannot exist without law. Law is the bond of society: that which makes it, that which preserves it and keeps it together. It is, in fact, the essence of civil society.”

This APNU/AFC Government will reassert the rule of law in this country of Guyana. [Ms. Teixeira: *inaudible*] a few minutes ago.] I am not in a position to deal with any grazing at this time. I will ask Mr. Bulkan to assist me.

In keeping with the aforementioned precept, the Drafting Division of the Attorney General's Chambers is a great division. We need to pay the members of the Attorney General's Chambers better wages and salaries. They have prepared a number of legislation, including the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (Amendment) (No.2) Bill 2015 - Bill No. 15 of 2015 and the Anti-Terrorism and Terrorist Related Activities Bill 2015 - Bill. No.16 of 2015 which criminalises terrorism in its various forms and provides for the detection, prevention, prosecution and punishment of persons involved in terrorist activities in and outside of Guyana.

The Division has prepared legislation to give effect to the legislative agenda of the Government for 2016 to provide for greater benefits for the welfare and upliftment of our people; in other words, it is for the good life.

The AGMLA will continue to be proactive and include the relevant stakeholders in the creation of legislation before passage through this House. In the exceptional case of complex legislation, we will seek recourse to the device of the Special Select Committee.

The Attorney General's Chambers has also implemented a system of publishing draft Bills on its website, inviting stakeholders to send in their comments and views to the Chambers. These Bills include the Cybercrime Bill, the Protective Disclosure (Whistle Blower) Bill, the Witness Protection Bill and the Insurance Bill.

The Office of the Attorney General is the arm of the Government responsible for providing legal services to the Government and its various agencies. The Attorney General acts as guardian of the public interest to ensure that the rights of all Guyanese are protected and to represent the State in civil proceedings in the name of the Attorney General. To this end, the Government of Guyana is collaborating with the Canadian Government - and it is apposite that we have visitors from the Canadian Parliament with us, the High Commissioner also, who is well known to us.

3.42 p.m.

We are collaborating with the Canadian Government to strengthen the criminal justice system in Guyana. The Canadian Government has allocated the sum of \$110 million, of which the sum of \$75 million will be utilised in 2016. The Justice Education Society (JES) of British Columbia is the executing agency of the grant and has conducted the following training programmes with the various state agencies.

Two-day roundtable with the Guyana Police Force's (GPF) senior management in October, 2015: The Commissioner of Police and all the senior ranking officers participated in presentations and discussions on how major case management could improve the investigations of serious criminal cases.

Twenty-two investigators from the GPF completed a seven-day course in Major Case Management and Investigation. The course involved lectures, demonstrations and practical exercises in a variety of investigation techniques used in serious criminal matters in Canada.

Six analysts completed a ten-day intensive training course in Forensic Video Analysis. This is very important for Guyana. The training and equipment provide solutions for collection, processing and managing of all forms of multimedia evidence, including video, still images and audio from private and Government's Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras.

Five-day crime scene management training for crime scene technicians and for investigators: This training focused on best practices in crime scene management, how to prepare for court and practical exercises for processing major crimes and preparing forensic experts for court.

A two-day training for police officers who have been selected to become trainers in the JES activities was also conducted in January, 2016.

During the period 4th to 15th January, 2016, the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and prosecutors from the Guyana Police Force were trained in trial advocacy skills. JES trained in major case management and provided on-the-job coaching. JES also trained them in crime scene investigation and provided on-the-job coaching. JES trained the analysts from the GPF and will provide on-the-job coaching on cases and JES will also organise a diagnostic on the backlog in criminal cases in the Magistrate's Court. This collaboration will continue in June, 2016, with the training involving magistrates and judges.

Supreme Court of Judicature

Mr. Speaker, in relation to the Supreme Court of Judicature, as you might know, the Family Court infrastructure was something that had bedevilled the last Government and it had practically been promising, over two Parliaments, to establish the Family Court. The Family Court Rules have been comprehensively revised and have been submitted to the National Assembly. The infrastructure is complete. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has provided assistance with the furnishing and the training of judges, lawyers and support staff for the Family Court. So, under the APNU/AFC Government, the Family Court will be realised in Guyana.

The final revision of the Rules of the High Court has been undertaken by a consultant retained by the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) under the Canadian funded Jurist Project. This revision should be finalised by March, 2016 and implementation will, thereafter, follow.

Work has commenced on the extension of the High Court, which will provide accommodation for the Land Court, additional courtrooms and a case management centre and additional library space.

I take personal pride in getting these projects off the ground because, when we came into office, all these projects were supposed to have been effected by protest bids for well over two years and, upon inquiry, investigation and the application of some turpentine, one sees mud is very high in the compound of the Supreme Court and the Magistrate's Court in Sparendam has already started... In Sparendam, two courtrooms will be constructed and a brand new court building. The Lethem Magistrate's Court was declared open in 2015 and is now functional.

Land Registry

The Land Registry is now located centrally and has made tremendous strides in removing years of debilitating slothfulness under the last Government. The new Registrar and her team are to be commended because, in August 2015, when she assumed governance of that Land Registry, there was a national outcry, not only by lawyers, but by the citizenry, as to the state of that Land Registry. When this Government's team got into that place, this is what they met: a backlog in private transfers, both in Berbice and Georgetown, of well over 3,500 cases; Ministry of Housing transfers - well over 5,000; mutilated and lost titles - over 335; mortgages - well over 650.

What is the present situation? The present situation is that the backlog in private transfers has been reduced by 2,500; the Ministry of Housing's transfers by 1,600; mutilated lost titles by 275 and mortgages by 640. I think that that Registrar and her team deserve a very great round of applause.

In 2016, the Land Registry will embark on capacity building aimed at ensuring that all staff are equipped to discharge their duties efficiently; the Land Registry's service in Essequibo will resume and the records of land holding in land registration areas will be restored and preserved.

Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT)

This Government continues to show political commitment to removing this country from the clutches of the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism censoring regime process that the last Government placed it in. This fact is confirmed by the latest “Progress Report” of the Americas Regional Review Group (ARRG) which is to be presented to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Plenary in Paris, France, 16th to 19th February, 2016. At page 81 of its Report, the ARRG has detailed all the work that this new Government has done since taking office:

“The main development in Guyana is the enactment of the AML/CFT (Amendment) Act 2015 which became enforceable on 10th July, 2015. The Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) has also issued guidance on targeted financial sanctions and a money laundering typology report on the gold jewellery trade in August, 2015. The AML/CFT regulations 2015 were laid in the National Assembly on 17th August, 2015 subject to negative resolution and are enforceable. The AML/CFT (Amendment) (No.2) Act 2015 was enacted on 17th December, 2015 and became enforceable on 6th January, 2016. The AML/CFT (Amendment) Regulation No.7 of 2015 was laid in the National Assembly on 17th December, 2015 subject to negative resolution and is enforceable. The FIU issued guidelines on targeted financial sanctions on 21st December, 2015.”

In its conclusion, the Americas Regional Review Group stated this:

“The enactment of the AML/CFT (Amendment) Act 2015 and the AML/CFT (Amendment) (No.2) Act 2015 has implemented a substantial number of action items. Guyana continues to demonstrate its commitment to comply with the action plan and is to be commended for having met most of the deadlines.”

Nothing was done from 2000 until 11th May, 2015. The employment of the contract of the former head of the Financial Intelligence Unit recently expired, thereby occasioning a temporary vacancy in that position. That vacancy is in the process of being filled, pursuant to the new provisions of the AML/CFT (Amendment) Act 2015, by the Committee on Appointments of the Parliament.

Commercial Registry

The Commercial Registry, having moved into its new premises, is confidently seeking to build its capacity to give speedy and efficient service to the Guyanese people. The Registry is 80% digitised. The digitisation of companies, businesses and trademarks was completed in 2009.

The Auditor General's Report shows that only 38% of trademark certificates are issued annually. This backlog has persisted in excess of 20 years...

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

Minister of Natural Resources [Mr. Trotman]: Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask that the Hon. Member be given five extra minutes to conclude his speech, as has been agreed.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This backlog has persisted in excess of 20 years. A trademark is issued four years after application. Presently, the Intellectual Property Automation System JAVA is being used to reduce this backlog by enabling searches, examination and the generation of certificates for trademarks. By June, 2016, trademark certificates will be issued three months after application once all statutory requirements are met by the agents. I must congratulate the Commercial Registry for this.

Patents filed since 2003 are now being advertised in the *Official Gazette* and, subsequently, certificates issued. Companies' certificates of incorporation and business registrations are now being issued within four days of application. Again, congratulations to the Commercial Registry.

The Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs Action Plan for 2016

Through the leadership of the Ministry of Legal Affairs, a Hague Conference will be held in Guyana in partnership with UNICEF Guyana and the Hague Conference on Private International Law. The theme of the Conference is: *International Family Law, Legal Cooperation and Commerce, Promoting Human Rights and Cross-Border Trade in Guyana through the Hague Convention.*

The sum of \$16 million has been allocated for the hosting of the Conference in July this year and UNICEF has already made a substantial contribution to this.

The new Justice Sector Programme, which is designed to consolidate improvements in the justice sector, is a collaboration between the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Government of Guyana. The following funds are allocated in relation to the respective components.

Setting up a law revision office and undertaking a revision of our laws to update them to 2015: The sum of US\$182,000,260 has been allocated for that.

Setting up a permanent law reform commission with a secretariat for the purpose of continuously examining our laws and making recommendations on areas of reform: US\$504,000,150 has been earmarked for this.

Training for judges, magistrates and prosecutors, including writing of decisions, sentencing, *et cetera*: US\$42,150.

Disposal of backlog cases by measures, including the appointment of part-time judges to deal with the civil backlog within a specified time frame: US\$49,020.

The introduction of voice recognition systems for recording evidence in the criminal sections in the High Courts of Demerara, Berbice and Essequibo and Magistrate's Courts hearing serious offences to enhance and speed up trials: US\$327,000.

The introduction of cybercrime legislation and a regime to train investigators, prosecutors, magistrates and judges to understand the nature of these emerging crimes: US\$58,200.

Provision of funding has also been made for the acquisition of Caribbean Law (CARILAW) and LexisNexis legal research database programmes. The country will hear more about LexisNexis and purchasing of books for the Attorney General's Chambers at a later date.

3.57 p.m.

In light of these premises, the majority of the Guyanese people will, like the Phoenix, rise again from the ashes of their own despair as A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government stimulates growth, strengthens their confidence, as "the good life beckons."

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I think this is a good time to take the suspension. I wish to remind Members of the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply that we should meet. I invite you to join me in my chambers to treat with matters. Members we will meet immediately after we rise.

Sitting suspended at 3.59 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 5.12 p.m.

Ms. Manickchand: We are here for Budget 2016. Before I begin I wish to congratulate warmly the Hon. Minister of Finance and his staff, and the staff of all the Ministries, who would have had to work a bit harder to get us two budgets in six months. I wish to offer them warm congratulations. I am aware that many of them will leave this room disappointed, because they did not get what they wanted, and astounded because of what they see in the budget. Nevertheless, we are grateful for their tireless efforts, over and over again.

This is about nine months since the new Government is in place. It is enough time, I believe, being on the jobs daily - certainly they believe so, given that they have paid themselves handsomely - to understand fully what is happening in the country. It is enough time to be able to garner where we are, where we were, where we want to go and how to get us there. This is the budget that could characterise this particular new Government.

I think it is my duty to note, for this honourable House, what many of us in here already know. This period has been characterised by disappointment and sadness, by heavy heartedness, by dissolution, and by lost opportunities - the lost opportunity to fulfil promises so passionately made just nine months ago; lost opportunity to treat teachers the way you told them that they should be treated, giving them massive increases; lost opportunity to fulfil promises such as massive increases in the old age pensions; lost opportunity to really show how a country could go forward using the best talent, irrespective of how people voted; lost opportunity to show youths that they matter in decision making. We only have to look across from us to understand how very distrusted the young people of this country are. We read in the budget that young

people are not prepared for leadership. This has caused great disappointment in this land and that is unfortunate.

Dr. Henry Jeffrey, commenting in the *Stabroek News*, a former Member of this House, now lecturer and commentator in the *Stabroek News*, said that he would bet the bottom dollars that a substantial number of those who wanted to see the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) out of government and supported the coalition are now extremely disappointed with the performance of the latter. As can be expected, the popular refrain would be, "*Is not we own; all yuh sen he home*", without listening. Another characteristic of the nine months is, "*Is we time; we seh suh, it will be suh; we don't have to listen to anyone.*"

I wish to read the words of a young prolific writer, Sara Bharrat. She titled her piece *It Is Time*. It is something that was associated with the green and yellow campaign of the APNU/AFC. Nine months ago she was a champion of change. I have to say, in fairness to her, I got the impression that she was the champion of change of the culture of our politics, where we were. I cannot read the whole piece but I invite everyone to read it. This is what she said:

"Our country is small and our people are inescapably connected. I believe that last May we began the fight to take Guyana back, to give her the sort of grooming she deserved these past 50 years."

Then she writes of her disappointment and disillusion. It is our time that is destroying our country. She concludes like this:

"They told us that it is time and they were right. It is time to see them for what they really are, to see that they were never sincere and they cannot forgive. It is time to see that hate and bitterness drive them in a power struggle that robs us, robs us of our lives and our time, things that can never be returned."

Your champion of change is reflecting the feelings of disappointment of so many in our land. You could have changed this.

Outside of that, I was looking at the budget to see what the policy framework is within which this Government is going to function. One would think that at least the manifesto promises, and

the promises made on the campaign trail, would inform what that policy would be. I have not seen anything written. I have not seen what framework is there.

When we were elected into office in 1992 we said very clearly what we wanted to do. We wanted to reduce poverty; we wanted to make democratic norms and practices the order of the day rather than something to long for; we wanted to make sure that all our people could benefit from the goods of our land. I could go through all our policies on education, making access to education expanded, housing the population, providing better health services. Everything that was built up over the years can be marked by the indicator of the World Bank.

In 1991 the World Bank did a study on poverty here and reported that in or around 61% of our people were living in poverty. That was out of every 100 persons. [Mr. Williams: Which year?] It was in 1991 under the People's National Congress (PNC) Government, the party that makes up most of the APNU/AFC Government. It did a study on us again in 2008 and reported that Guyana had reduced poverty to 35%, had cut poverty in half. We saw there was a policy focus, a framework, all our programmes were done within this framework and here is the indicator. It was almost ten years ago. I am absolutely sure this new Government took over a better reduction in the poverty levels.

In the absence of something clear, about what policy this Government is pursuing, we are left with the measures in this budget. What are some of them? It is a ban on the importation of cars older than eight years old which will cause at least 80% of the people who bought cars last year not to be able to afford cars this year; bans on the importation of tyres that would quadruple the cost of tyres. The category of persons who bought cars last year would not be able to buy cars this year. That means that the mothers and fathers within a particular economic bracket, 80% of who bought cars last year, had they postponed their purchase to this year, would be without transportation, and probably relying on the bikes and buses. Charging less on rum; assertions that homes would be repossessed; assertions that rice is not Government's business and is a private sector enterprise undeserving of Government assistance; \$1,200 for pensioners; \$800 for poor people who are receiving public assistance; million dollar salaries for their Ministers; new fees for licences; removal of the Women of a Worth (WOW) programme; removal of the Because We Care Cash Grant programme.

From what is said in the budget, and what is not said in the budget, I think we can garner what is the framework, what is the intent of this Government. It is for the Members to make themselves comfortable, to live life large, while they neglect the persons who depend on them for service. I think we can get a good summation of what the budget is. It came from no lesser a person than the Hon. Member of the Government Mr. Audwin Rutherford when he said that this is not a poor people budget. He said that. If we were confused then, we heard from the other side, from almost every speaker in the back bench, this inane repetition of nothing happen under the previous Government and that this budget was a “fresh approach”. I understand why Hon. Member Mr. Jaipaul Sharma was confused. How could it be a “fresh approach”? How could nothing have happened if there were so many programmes?

Let us take education sector. Everything here was a repetition of what we had two years ago. That is not fresh. We announced in this House, two years ago, that we negotiated the money for many of the programmes that you are now calling fresh. How could it be that there was nothing in the budget? Having taken almost, wholesale from the last budget, from the PPP/C’s programmes, all that is now in education, the budget for education is easy to support. Of course, we have complaints about the things that were left out. What we have a quarrel with is that the PPP/C programmes were not taken holistically. There will always be problems when a piece is plagiarised and a piece is left out.

5.23 p.m.

At school you are cautioned not to copy because you could copy wrong. There are the nice fancy schools that I will talk about just now. There are the nice fancy schools for our children and there is the training of teachers and there is the improvement of our literacy and numeracy standards. We are giving our children what the PPP/C wanted to give them as far as education is concerned, but by some of these measures we have removed from their parents the ability to look after those children.

You took out education programme and you are going to build a school, but you took away from the parents, of all those 1,700 children, from the Wales Sugar Estate, the ability to put breakfast on the table before they go to school. You are taking away from the single parents, who were relying on WOW,...What is WOW? WOW is a loan that was being given to single parents at a

low interest rate without the requirement for collateral. We were recognised by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) for this programme. You are taking away... I am hearing the moronic refrain...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you did not say that. You will withdraw it right away.

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, did you hear anything?

Mr. Speaker: I heard you say the word “moronic”. It is not a word to be used in this chamber. The first one was “inane”, I let it pass but please we cannot keep doing this. Would you withdraw that and then proceed?

Ms. Manickchand: Your Honour, it was a heckle. I do not think we were paying attention to heckles, but there is an attempt to...

Mr. Trotman: I rise on a Point of Order, Sir, to say that last evening the Hon. Member and Minister of Social Protection said that the WOW programme has been restored. For a Member to stand here and say that it has been taken away, having heard that last night, would not be correct. That is a Point of Order, that it is palpably wrong to make a statement like that, having heard Minister last night.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I thank you. I await the withdrawal of the term that you ought not to have use, Hon. Member.

Ms. Manickchand: I withdraw the term, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I will ask all other Hon. Members not to indulge, however much the temptation is great, to use epithets.

Ms. Manickchand: It is such as the word “hoodwinked”, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I beg your pardon, Madam.

Ms. Manickchand: I was wondering if you do not want us to use words such as “hoodwinked”. I could refrain from using the word “hoodwinked”, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Please proceed.

Ms. Manickchand: We heard something mumbled as heckling in this National Assembly about how many of the loans were bagged. You do not squash a programme because you cannot manage the programme. You fix it and you manage it. The programme was always at risk because of the nature of the programme, offering collateral free loans to anyone, carries with it a risk that there will be low repayment if there is no serious monitoring. We are talking about single parent women who are trying to look after their children. Let us not get distracted from what I was saying. I was saying that you put the fact that you are going to build a school, in here, but you have taken away from parents their ability to send their children to school.

Mr. Speaker, you are saying to our rice farmers and their children that you are not going to invest in rice, rice is not Government's business and that the rice is going to be treated as a private sector enterprise. The people in this National Assembly, who are Hon. Ministers of the Government, were able to pay themselves more than twice what the other Government's people were using based on the contributions of rice farmers over the years. That is how you got the money to pay yourself. That is how we were able to take our country to this point. When there is a sector in trouble, whether for rice price, for markets, or so, the responsible thing to do is to step in and help the people of the sector. They are not asking for a million dollars a month or \$1.7 million a month, but they are asking for some relief in diesel, some relief fertilisers, some guidance and they would like to see the Minister of Agriculture. A small thing such as that, they never saw him and people are wondering if the Hon. Member was ever in a rice field. These are some of the real issues that people want to talk about.

In the education sector's budget we heard that there is going to be the big ticket items for the SEIP programme, that is the Secondary Education Improvement Programme. I wish to bring to the attention of the National Assembly that in the budget debates of 2014, at paragraph 4.74, this is what Dr. Ashni Singh said:

“Moreover we will commence implementation of a \$10 million universal secondary education initiative which will facilitate the construction of new schools and provision of materials for improved teaching techniques and technology assisted learning in mathematics. Our teacher training college will continue to offer...”

In 2014 we announced this programme in the Budget 2014 and by 2016, had we been, in office we would have been coming with new things. In 2016, two years later, you come and bring as a fresh idea, and as the Minister of Finance said “a new initiative”, a programme that we began in 2014. It is a stagnation budget. The items for 2014 are being brought up in 2016. What was in that programme to take us to a closer place where we could have universal secondary education? There were programmes built-in. For example, there are to be four new secondary schools, most of them with a thousand-person capacity with state-of-the-art science labs and all the works. One was supposed to be at Good Hope on the East Coast. I hope that we have not changed this in the new philosophy of paying off political investors. There was supposed to be one at Good Hope, La Parfaite Harmonie and on the highway. Those schools would have been schools that allow us to get closer to universal secondary education.

This is the good programme that the Minister boasted about, in which teachers would be trained further to deal with Mathematics, English and the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematic (STEM) subjects. This is the programme where Grade Eight students will get, more than 800 students, the tablets that the Minister spoke about. This is the programme that would allow for us to have better improved grades in Mathematics and English. This is what the Hon. Minister spoke about. This is our programme from 2014 and we support it fully because it is a good programme, but what we are asking you to do is to be innovating and come up with ideas and good plans for Guyana. Do not be lazy and copy what we did, but come up with things that will complement what we have already done.

The next big ticket item in the budget that is being touted as new is the Early Childhood Education programme. The Early Childhood Education programme where we are looking to put...They call it a new approach shamelessly.

I turn the House’s attention to 2014, a publication by a national newspaper the *Guyana Times* and this is what was stated:

“Education Minister Priya Manickchand with Global Partnership for Education Board Chairman Julia Gillard....”

There was a photograph.

“The Education Ministry has announced that at the last meeting of the Board of Directors on which Education Minister Priya Manickchand sits as a Director, representing Latin America and the Caribbean, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), approved a US\$1.7 million education grant for Guyana”.

I am hearing the comments about who wrote the article, but here, it is what Julia Gillard said. It is the former Prime Minister of Australia who is now the Chairperson of the board for Global Partnership for Education.

“This is critical funding at a time when 58 million children of primary school age are still not in school...”

Guyana has earned this because it was to be an addition to all the good works we were doing. Guyana, presently, we left the APNU/AFC Government with an 85% enrolment in nursery education which is the highest in the Commonwealth Caribbean. Coming back and telling us that there is an Early Childhood Education programme and shamelessly calling it a “fresh approach” in the new Government is a stagnant move. What I would have liked to hear from the Minister of Finance is, given that the donor funding for education has been reduced by 10 % or more by now, from 2010, how are we going to make sure our education funding, which used to be 5% under the PNC, that has been move to between 16%, 14% and 17 % under the PPP, that is continued under this Government...? How are we going to sustain the growth that we have made and even go further? That is what I would like to hear. It is not to repackage what we had and come here and tell me it is a “fresh approach”. This is stagnant; it is doing what we did two years ago.

The other item, uniform for children, was done by the PPP Government. In fact, it was done far more effectively than is being done now. The last year budget, which was mentioned by the previous speaker on my side, has still not been implemented. Their children, all over the hinterland regions, who have seen the faces of Ministers who went there to shake hands and distribute colours, have not been given their uniforms. They have been given boots and slippers, the “bs” programme, but they cannot go to school without their school uniform. They have not been given that.

The School Feeding Programme which, again, is repeated in the budget as though it is a fresh intervention is something that was started by the PPP/C Government. The extension of the 7,000 new children, who are going on the programme, is in the strategic plan that was left at the Ministry of Education. It was bringing the children who were off the programme on to the programme and what is frightening is that this programme was copied without people understanding the philosophy of the programme. What we had was not only a programme that kept our children filled on nutritious meals, but there was a programme that provided employment for people in the village, either by the making of the peanut butter or the making of the cassava bread.

What we have now is a bringing over from Brazil, for many of the schools, an importation from Georgetown, that biscuit with cream in the middle. Absolutely, there is no nutrition. It would be interested to learn who they are buying some of that from. Are they repaying the political investment, who we heard about, because they have totally failed to grasp the import of the programme for the village economy? I may say, Sir, that this is a programme that was recognised globally as a model for how Governments and developing countries can do several things with the same funding - feed children, develop skills in a community and provide employment. When this copying is being done, we are available to come and explain to you why we came up with something and why it is important that it stays the same way.

5.38 p.m.

Again, it is same APNU/AFC Government which said, on the campaign trail, that the education system is in tatters, everything is...

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I move, at the same time, to ask that the Hon. Member has her five minutes, plus her five minutes extension, as agreed.

Question put, and agreed to.

Ms. Manickchand: We heard that everything was in tatters and these things were bad. If everything was in tatters, this adoption wholesale of our programme really makes a lie out of that claim because the Government is doing the exact same thing that we did. Outside of that Sir, we

heard that there was going to be a Commission of Inquiry. It is now nine months, none has been appointed, no work has been done, and as a result of that we have major things stalled up. For example, the policy, the strategic plan that we left in place, is waiting on this elusive Commission of Inquiry before they finalise it. That plan did not come about by magic, it was consulted on, all across this country, by stakeholders and it identifies what is wrong in the sector and what is needed in the short and medium term to fix it. That is what the commission, I understand, is going to do. If the commission is so important, then get cracking with it. Stop this delay. We have seen audits, where they think it is important. Is education not important? Is that why we have not had the commission, as yet? I call on the Government to lay the Education Bill. The Education Act in this country was not amended for over 100 years. Let us lay the Education Bill. It is to bring it up to a place where it can meet the needs of the Guyanese children. This constant refrains of why you did not do that... It was tabled in this House. I believe that it was sent to a Special Select Committee but it does not matter, even if we did not bring it. The day before we brought the Sex Offences Act, we did not have a Sex Offences Act. The day before we started the School Feeding Programme, we did not have a School Feeding Programme. In other words, governing is not about collecting for yourself; it is about progressing for the country.

The teachers' salaries: The teachers' five-year agreement is at an end as of 31st December. Teachers were promised a significant increase. They have got none. If the Government cannot give the teachers their increases, then, at least, give them the duty-free concessions that they earned under the previous Government. We left 30 agreed upon duty-free concessions for 30 teachers and those have been held up. I understand that after we left office, after the APNU/AFC came into office, that there were 46 more approved, and none have been given. Give the teachers their duty-free concessions.

There is urgent need for there to be some sort of collaboration between the public education system and the private education system, as an enterprise. Those children in the private schools are our Guyanese children. The professionals in the Ministry of Education will tell you, Mr. Minister, that if they were to come back into our public school system, it will flood us. The problems, which they are having, are that they do not have access to any of the texts. Letters have been written by a particular school, letters have been written to the Ministry, asking you, Sir, for access to the textbooks that are the property of the Ministry, and there has been no...

Mr. Speaker: The Speaker is reminding you that he is at this end of the hall and not across.

Ms. Manickchand: Thirty seconds more for me, Sir.

These are the issues that need to be addressed. I wish to raise very quickly, before I move on, to some issues in Region 5. Last night, in an attempt to paint the former Government as corrupt, the Hon. Member Mrs. Catherine Hughes raised the issue of the building of the Kato Secondary School. The Kato Secondary School is being built presently. It was to bring us closer to universal secondary education and take off the overcrowding at Paramakatoi Secondary School, to bring Region 8 up to a place where all of the children can access secondary school. That was publicly tendered and someone won. If, in fact, the contractor is not doing what he is supposed to do or the consultants, who are supposed to be supervising him, are not doing what they are supposed to do, then let the new Government take it up with them – take them to court and do what it has to do. As you know, why I am worried about that, Sir, it is because we had also, this country, built a school at Sand Creek and within a very short period after building that building the beams were cracking. We were attempting – the Hon. Attorney General would have those files - to take that contractor to court. To my surprise, upon the assumption of office, he was given a national award. I do not think he will be going to any court. When he comes here, and I am calling on the Minister of Education, the honourable gentleman, it is that he is to lay those matters in this House. I do not have the records, but there was nothing corrupt being done by the Ministry of Education with regard to that project. We are not there to finish it.

Your Honour, I want to raise some issues with you about Region 5. Region 5, you have heard about, Sir, from many speakers in this House, has had some serious human rights breaches over the last nine months. It has asked repeatedly for us to address these issues. The issue about the light, Sir, and I will give you a specific example. There is the issue with the light. One Milton Ramu did not ask the Government for the light. He bought a light and he put it there and he said it was there to keep his community safe. The officers from Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL) mounted that light for him, then they came and took it off and they went away. They stole the light. They deprived him permanently of a light that was his. We were told by the Hon. Minister of Public Infrastructure that the lights at Bath Settlement and the lights at Bush Lot had to come down because the Government could not afford it.

We heard from the Hon. Member Jennifer Wade that the lights had to come down because Seafield did not have on the road. Seafield does not have lights on the roads. Give Seafield the lights. Do not take the lights from Bath Settlement and Bush Lot because somebody else does not have. The surprise came, Sir, when this Government, which was saying that it could not afford lights, found lights to give Pouderoyen and found lights to give Linden. It had to buy the lights and it is paying for the light bills for these places. We are happy that these places are getting the light bills. On what grounds did you remove the people's lights? Is it because you have found that you cannot even to field the candidate for the local government election in the Bath Settlement community? Is that why you removed the people's lights? It is discrimination, Sir.

The bus, which used to bring the children from Mahaicony River to the high school - there is no high school in there, and they cannot catch anything else - has been broken down and it has not been fixed. We are calling on the Government to fix it, and fix it now. The gas for the generator that Hon. Member Michael Carrington spoke about, what happened there, Sir, we bought a generator for the people of Maraikobai and that is the kind of help that is needed. If the Member does not understand, it is that he is in the wrong place. We had to assist, every now and then, with fuel. We are asking, again, that the Government assist the people with fuel in Maraikobai.

I want to end with one story. We heard from the Minister of Finance, and several persons over here, that there were no job losses. I want to tell the story of someone named, perhaps, Farida. She was a secretary, and has been a secretary for many years, 20-something years. She has two children. They both went to two top schools in this country because she looked at the person she was working with and wanted her children to have that kind of comfortable life. Her husband was a driver. This was finished at the time of the elections. Farida was fired. It could not have been for any other reason, but it was because of her perceived affiliation, and or the way she looked. Farida's daughter, who was studying law, had to drop out and she is now a young teacher, untrained, just trying to hold on to something until she can try to get into school again. Is Farida's child not entitled to the same life of your children, of our children? That is Farida. Do you want me to give you some more names? There is Haniff from the Ministry of Education; there is Roy and there are such a large number of persons. I am not speaking of the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) who were knocked off. I am speaking of secretaries and drivers, the

people who have mortgages; people who have children, deserving of all that your children are deserving of. We call on you to stop the human rights abuses that are going quietly by every day.

I thank you Sir. [*Applause*]

Mr. Greenidge: I am inclined to take the advice of my distinguished colleague on the other side of the divide, concerning the desirability of sticking to foreign affairs matters. Let me take the opportunity..., notwithstanding the wisdom of that advice, because of what I have listened to is, for me, cynicism and reflective of selective amnesia. Mr. Speaker, just permit me, please, to make mention that when colleagues spoke of discrimination, the firings from public employment, and so forth, that I am speaking from the point of view of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. If I say that, I do not believe it should be necessary for me to elaborate because, as regards to discrimination, random firings, and the like, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the institution that bore the brunt of that despicable period, a practice of the PPP. Do not let us go there. We hear crocodile tears. I see the colleague, who would know, on the other side of these benches, smiling very broadly. I am not going to say anymore because he at least, knows what I am talking about. **[An Hon. Member: Is it Mr. Rohee?]** *I throw meh corn I ain't call no fowl.*

When we come to deal with the problem of selective amnesia, we hear, for example, former Government Members of Parliament speaking as though as when they came into office they never used or benefited from anything that went before. Another Government comes into office and everything that went before they have inherited. It reflects a certain immaturity, so let me leave those issues.

I am called upon to stand to support the budget delivered by the APNU/AFC Minister of Finance so eloquently and so widely commended for the measures it contains, and also recognised as delivering the growth target set. I suddenly discovered that we have all sorts of economists on the other side, one of whom can tell us that putting taxes or restrictions on the imports of cars will lead to second-hand cars costing more than brand new cars. That is the sort of economics we are coming up with on the other side. **[An Hon. Member (Opposition): Who said that?]**
Who else would say it? Who else would you say would say it? Look on your left hand side.

5.53 p.m.

Let us turn to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I am happy to report that, in the eight months since I have acceded to the Office of Minister of Foreign Affairs, and notwithstanding the obvious challenges that any new Administration would face and one has to admit that, that is what we seem to be failing to acknowledge on the other side, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has pursued its mandate with due diligence and alacrity, whilst seeking to shape more robust and relevant foreign policies in circumstances that have been changing and that are very difficult. I think that both sides acknowledge that.

In this regard, I have the pleasure, and indeed the ardent duty - I have been given that task - of providing guidance to His Excellency, the President, and the Cabinet, as regards the execution and implementation of Guyana's Foreign Policy.

Let me therefore start from the outset, with the most pressing problem, which I made reference to earlier. I am hastened to confess that, in 2015, our diplomatic energies had been focussed primarily in the direction of territorial integrity. It is no secret that the controversy arising out of Venezuela's unfounded claims to our territory has been our most ominous challenge. It has been continuously engaging the attention of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For this reason, I believe that it would be remiss of me not to update this House on developments in that area, other than those that I have mentioned earlier.

During 2015, in response to the heightened threats to our territorial integrity and sovereignty, the Ministry sought to secure Guyana's borders through advocacy and diplomatic preaches, at the regional, bilateral and international levels. Significant, amongst these was the engagement with the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General for an early settlement of the controversy which arose as a result of Venezuela's contention, that the 1899 Award was *null and void*. Part of the process with the Secretary-General entailed the hiring of an international legal team to guide Guyana in its attempts to pursue a juridical settlement, should the UN Secretary-General choose that option, an option that we have been pressing upon him. These actions on our part, ensued after the President of Venezuela issued two Decrees, which impacted negatively on the relations between Guyana and Venezuela.

The Decree 1787, now repealed, was enacted by President Nicolas Maduro and signed by him and the full complement of Venezuela's Council of Ministers. It was published in the Annual

Official Gazette, 40669, dated 27th May, 2015. That Decree created and activated the Maritime and Insular Operational Zone of Integral Defence and an Insular Strategic Region of Integral Defence. The jurisdiction of this purported Atlantic Zoning, which is also referred to as the Atlantic Facade Venezuela, had at its northern most points, the boundary with the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and at the southern most points, having started in the middle of the mouth of Essequibo. It also attempted to usurp most of the maritime territories that formed the total Coastal Projection of our Republic. It also encompasses parts of the frontages of Barbados and the Republic of Suriname, and includes airspace within all of those areas.

I make mention of this because it is often forgotten how extensive the implications of these Venezuelans Decree are. This, in our view, is the most aggressive act by Venezuela to date. The Decree is intrinsically late to its view that the 1899 Arbitral Award is *null and void* and the attendance spurious claim to Guyana's Essequibo.

A technical mission from the UN, headed by Ms. Martha Doggett, Chief of the Americas Division of the Department of Political Affairs, visited Guyana during the period 29th August to 2nd September to discuss the options under the Geneva Agreement for a resolution of Venezuela's contention.

It is the view of Guyana that the Secretary-General of the United Nations has the authority, and I stress this Mr. Speaker, because, whilst we thought we had persuaded the UN of this, at times they seem not to be sure. It is the view of Guyana that the Secretary-General of the United Nations has the authority and the mandate to bring this matter to a definitive end. The issue of the concurrence of either parties or the lack thereof should not arise, if the International Court of Justice (ICJ) was requested to provide an advisory opinion.

Guyana reiterated its preference for a juridical settlement via the International Court of Justice to address that contention by Venezuela. In relation to our eastern neighbour, Suriname, that country's new Government has recently stated that its claim over Guyana's New River Triangle is back on Suriname's agenda.

It is anticipated that this issue will be addressed under the auspices of the National Border Commissions of Guyana and Suriname. Naturally, there can and will be dialogue at the highest

political levels between the two countries, namely, at the level of the Presidency and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, to take this particular issue forward.

Due to intense regional international lobbying, Guyana received the support of several international organisations, including the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Commonwealth that expressed their full support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Guyana, including the right to peacefully exploit off-shore resources. The UN Secretary-General continues to actively engage the Governments of Guyana and Venezuela with a view to definitively resolving the controversy.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has commenced a sensitisation programme to keep the Guyanese public abreast on matters relating to these borders. A Booklet entitled: *What you need to know about the definitive nature of the Guyana/Venezuela Boundary* was published in an effort to further sensitise the population. We have raised the issue in a number of fora, and in those fora there have been similar Booklets.

In the meantime, Guyana's relations with Brazil remain excellent. The Ministry intends to continue to pursue a number of key initiatives that will further cement these relations. During a visit by His Excellency, the President, and his team to Brasilia in July, 2015, for the MERCUSOR, a bilateral meeting was held between the President of Guyana and the President of Brazil. The President of Brazil gave Guyana the assurance of Brazil's full backing in relation to efforts for a peaceful resolution of the controversy. The Government of Brazil is in the process of putting in place preliminary arrangements for major infrastructural projects with Guyana. My Ministry is now well poised to engage our Brazilian partners to start to bring these to fruition in 2016.

I am pleased to announce to the House that, as part of that effort, Guyana and Brazil are in the final stages of arranging for the visit on 1st March, 2016 by Chancellor Maura Vieira, my Brazilian counterpart.

In the area of economic diplomacy, we have also engaged in reshaping our foreign policy to give greater emphasis to economic diplomacy, which we believe is a major pillar on which the accelerator to the development of Guyana lies. In this regard, we have begun the strategic reorganising of the various departments in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The economic diplomacy thrust includes encouraging and facilitating Guyanese in our diaspora to contribute to Guyana's national development through doing business, investments, trade, philanthropy and the transfer of skills and knowledge. In this regard, the overseas missions are currently mandated to pursue every opportunity that arises. Concomitantly, our overseas missions have been working assiduously to ensure that there are no hindrances to the efforts of tens of thousands of Guyanese who are planning to come home this year to celebrate our country's 50th Anniversary as an independent nation.

Our greater emphasis on diplomacy also means that the missions are expected to more aggressively pursue trade opportunities and foreign-directed investments, in consonance with the development emphasise of the Government. For whilst we need investment, we seek investments that are feasible, sound and from the outset, bring opportunities for Guyanese people as a whole. In the pursuit of engaging our diaspora, we have also recognised that there was an absence of a structured mechanism for engagement in this regard. We have been working on crafting a Diaspora Engagement Strategy, which includes inputs from the relevant stakeholders and the diaspora. The Strategy, when completed, is expected to assist in establishing a structure that will help us to better respond to and channel the contributions of the diaspora to achieving maximum benefits aimed at achieving development. It should be noted that a number of other sister agencies have also begun to engage the diaspora and ours will remain the role of seeking to coordinate that exercise.

On the front of CARICOM, we continue to work on the expanded market access for our goods in the CARICOM markets. The Government has supported the deepening of the Regional Integration process in terms of Inter-Regional Trade, CARICOM'S External Trade Negotiations and multilateral developments in the World Trade Organisation (WTO), *et cetera*.

The question in CARICOM has been the renewed focus on the bilateral trade agreements which CARICOM has with Costa Rica, Colombia, Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

In October, 2015, Guyana met on the occasion of the 9th Meeting of CARICOM/CUBA Joint Commission and exchanged proposals to enhance the preferential access to each other's markets for an expanded list of products, under the CARICOM/CUBA Trade Agreement. The two sides

will continue negotiations, during the course of this year, with a view to reaching an early agreement on key proposals.

As regards the World Trade Organisation, for small developing countries like Guyana, the WTO carries out a Trade Policy Review every six years. In 2015, my Ministry also coordinated the completion of Guyana's Third Trade Policy Review, under the WTO.

The Final Reports on the Review are presented at a special session of the WTO's General Council at the Secretariat in Geneva in September. At that meeting, the Members applauded the Government of Guyana's recent actions to initiate various public sector reforms, including a comprehensive tax review aimed at improving transparency and efficiency, as well as providing a levelled playing field for all businesses.

Significantly, I am exceedingly delighted to report that the WTO members also commended Guyana for rectifying the application of the Environmental Tax and the zero-rated Value-Added Tax (VAT) to both locally produced and imported products, and the enactment of the modified Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Bill.

In relation to the Caribbean Forum (CARIFORUM), I would just like to add that Guyana's Chairmanship of the Regional Trade Bloc, which commenced in July, 2014, ended in June, 2015. Guyana also carried out the functions of CARICOM'S High Representative, under the Caribbean Forum/European Union/Economic Partnership Agreement (CARIFORUM/EU/EPA), until December of last year.

As CARICOM'S High Representative, Guyana hosted the Third Meeting of the Ministerial Joint Council, under the CARIFORUM/EU/EPA in Georgetown, 16th July. I had the distinct honour and privilege to lead the Delegation to that meeting.

The main focus of the Joint Council was the mandated review of the EPA and the results of that review will guide the work of EPA Trade and Development Committee in 2015.

In 2015, the Ministry also provided collaborative support and guidance to Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) and the Demerara Distillers Limited (DDL), concerning the development of geographical indicators for Demerara Sugar and Demerara Rum. Just in case the term geographical indicators do not mean much to Colleagues, this is the regime under which

France has exclusive rights to produce something called “champagne” with certain characteristics. In relation to other products, it has been agreed those other countries that can distinguish the characteristics of their products, either as a result of a process or as a result of some distinctive characteristics, can also have that distinction. It is in pursuit of that, that I made reference to GuySuCo and DDL.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through the Embassy in Brazil has sought and received technical assistance under the African/Caribbean/Pacific (ACP) Trade Capacity Programme to support the geographical indications initiatives of the two companies and that initiative will, we hope, come to fruition after completion of the study during the course of 2016.

6.08 p.m.

As regard the Caribbean bilateral, it is the view of the Government of Guyana that strong bilateral relations are at the heart of the Economic Integration Process, and have the proven ability to meet down to the benefit of the people of the countries of the region. And so, we have sought to strengthen relations between many of these partners.

We welcome as Members may recall the Hon. Freundel Stuart, Prime Minister of Barbados, who attended the Inauguration of the President Granger in the course of last year. I want to say that the opportunity was taken by the Barbadian Prime Minister to hold high level talks with senior Government functionaries in Guyana. Critical talks were also held between the two heads within the margins of the CARICOM Conference of Heads of Government.

In June 2015, I met with the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados, Senator Maxine McLean, in Georgetown to discuss the strengthening of bilateral ties. The occasion of the holding the Third Meeting of the Guyana-Barbados Joint Commission in Barbados, in October 2015, also provided the opportunity to hold such discussions. I want to say that, coming out of the Guyana-Barbados collaboration, a number specific initiatives was identified and Guyana, as well as Barbados, contributed to initiatives which would help strengthen the respective countries. I want to indicate that it is not simply a one-sided process. Assistance in the area of utilising skills in transport, civil aviation, culture, maritime and the like, were contributed.

The Ministry also arranged for the visit of the President and a team to Trinidad and Tobago. Arising from that visit, we did agree to set up a framework within which the cooperation between the two countries could be enhanced, and amongst the areas in which cooperation will be developed, especially with a view to capitalising on skills. For example, in Trinidad and Tobago, it was in the area of energy services, even as Guyana is carrying out on its shelf work that can utilise the skills that Trinidad and Tobago has already developed to quite a high degree. That is a very positive development on the regional integration side.

In the 2015, as regard Latin America, Guyana's interest, especially as they relates to the preservation to its sovereignty and territorial integrity, were pursued. There was an attempt to expand mutually beneficial partnerships and to promote peace and stability. High level exchanges were held with the Presidents of Chilli, Columbia, Ecuador, and Ministers of Foreign Affairs of a number of these countries, including Mexico and Panama. Guyana's relation with Chilli, if I might isolate that for the moment, moved very positively. There was a number of cooperation programmes pursued as well as South-South Programmes.

On the political side, with Chilli in particular, there seem to have a high coincidence of interest and they pertain both to bilateral and are on the global agendas. We will be pursuing those during the course of 2016.

For South America as a whole, Guyana relations with the subcontinent, other than Brazil, continue apace. We recently, for example, in the case of Ecuador, discussed the establishment of an Ecuadoran Embassy in Georgetown. Ecuador has indicated there interest there. We have also begun the process of reengaging the Columbians with a view to collaborating in the area of trade and technical cooperation under the aegis of the Joint Commission.

On Cuba, there is similarly an extensive range of activities taking place and relations with Mexico have advanced quiet extensively, not only at the bilateral level, but in the framework at the Mexico-Caribbean Cooperation Programme.

On the United States of America (USA) front, since assuming in May 2015, Colleagues would remember that Guyana has seen a marked improvement in its relation with the United States of America. I do not want to hark back to some of the more unfortunate incidents that took place towards the end of the last Administration, but I would like to say that, for the first time in our

history, the USA, through its mission in Georgetown, publicly stated its support for Guyana's position on the controversy with Venezuela. Talks have intensified in this area and Members are aware that this, in fact, it is a seminal event, given the USA's role in the origin of the Arbitral Tribunal and the way in which both the USA and Venezuela benefited from the award.

Cooperation between the two countries was also maintained at a high level, especially in relation to capacity building in the area of the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative. In May 2014, the Government of Guyana and the United States (US) signed modified agreements and three of the letters of agreement on the Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement, on 8th April, 2011, beginning 2011, between the Government of Guyana and the Government of the United States have fructified and have led to some of the agreements that I have mentioned.

The relationship with Canada, which of course is the home of a very large Guyanese diaspora, traditional and more recent, Canada also remains one of the largest investors in the minerals and gold mining industries, in particular. Whilst most of our technical cooperation programmes are pursued within the framework of Canada-CARICOM Regional Corporation Programme, there are opportunities for more active bilateral cooperation, and we are in the process of pursuing these in the course of 2016.

One area in which, we have in recent times, perhaps allowed our energy to lapse, is the area pertaining to Asia, Africa, Pacific and Europe. These are areas that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has started to work on recently, on a variety of fronts, including dealing with the questions of the threats to the border. We have worked within that grouping, which would include China and the Republic of India. I would like to make special mention to some of the new initiatives that were taken place in relation to the African Caribbean and Pacific Group (ACP) in particular, and in relation to India, which of course has a long standing relationship.

The very solid economic and social cooperation programmes with China over years have generated very high levels of investment. China, in its relation with the region, has also allocated something like US\$3 billion of concession in the financing of eight Caribbean nations. It has pledge US\$250 billion in investments for the countries of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). Guyana stands to benefit from that fund and our relations will also be guided by the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and common positions at the

multilateral level, with a view to pursuing the small states' agenda, which is a very important dimension.

As I mentioned, relations with India are quite dynamic and we will soon conclude a memorandum of understanding, which I believe was mentioned by the Minister in his Budget Speech. I refer here and underscore for emphasis...

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

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

Question put and agreed to. ,

Mr. Greenidge: I would just like to finish that section on the discussion of India on the high level exchanges between President Granger and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in 2015. We have a number of things to follow up, as it regards those particular set of exchanges.

On the issue of MERCOSUR, I am not going to go through in any detail, but to say, having reviewed what has been done in the period since we have been in office, there were some challenges. I would like to touch on those challenges before turning very briefly to 2016.

Notwithstanding, the efforts that I have described, we had a number of challenges, particularly on the human resources side, which I know Colleagues would have a special interest in. We have had to critically examine what was extant, as regards human resources, and we have begun to make the necessary adjustments. The exercise obviously involves the streamlining of personnel, including our representatives abroad. It also meant that we have had to identify and recruit suitably qualified and competent persons to head our key overseas missions with a view to maximising the potential of Government's foreign policy paradigm shift.

It would have been foolhardy for us to take steps to strengthen our representation abroad without buttressing the capacity at Takuba Lodge, our Headquarters. It is therefore in this context that a number of senior diplomats have also been recalled to Head Office, some more will be returning in 2016. As I had said publicly before, having the right mix of experience and young officers functioning at the Ministry, is important, not only for our efficient functioning, but also for

proper succession planning and seamless continuity of the effective pursuit of Guyana's foreign policy goals and objectives.

During the course of 2015, the implementation of the Ministry's Work Programme, in the execution of this policy, was carried out through the Political Trade, International Cooperation, Consul and Administrative Departments at Headquarters, and through the diplomatic and consular missions abroad. In 2016, that structure is to be modified.

As the Ministry seeks to conclude the accreditation of its diplomats in the various capitals in which we have sought *agremos*, we are at the same time engaging in a comprehensive organisational restructuring in order to make the Ministry's various departments and units more amendable to the foreign policy direction of our Government. Many of these new configurations will be headed by our senior diplomats who have been recalled to serve at Head Office. Concomitantly, at the level of Head Office the Foreign Service Institute...

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

Mr. Greenidge: The Foreign Service Institute has been put on a sound footing with the aim of providing relevant training to the staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and to the wider public service, where necessary. One of the main purposes of this exercise is to staff the Ministry with professionals pursuing specialised diplomatic careers, who would provide the institutional memory and capacity that are so vitally important to our future and the protection of our interest.

In 2016, the Ministry intends to focus more attention on helping to build capacity and opportunities in the services sector of Guyana's economy. We are cognisant of the importance of this sector to economic growth and development. The trading environment in which Guyana operates has already signal key changes in the post-2015 global environment. Guyana's only option, therefore, is to concentrate on improving its competitive posture and diversifying its economic base. This reality will require a robust approach to the services and investments sectors, for which we have some responsibility.

In Guyana, the production of services is in excess of 60% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but accounts for less than 12% of exports. The potential, therefore, for the development of the services sector and the expansion of services trade is immense. But for this to happen, the

capacity of the services sector and providers and their access to international markets would have to be further developed through foreign investment and trade support. Thus, in 2016, we will work closely with the private sector and, of course, the sister agencies to develop that strategy.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also intends to take a more robust approach in our public diplomacy efforts. Our plans involve going beyond merely keeping our foreign policy in the public domain.

As was mentioned before, it extends to reaching out in a sustain manner to reaching out to our nation youths to further educate them in key aspects of Guyana's foreign policy and capturing their own energies and initiatives to enhance our foreign policy formulation.

6.23 p.m.

As was mentioned before, we have many important bilateral partners in the Caribbean, Latin America, North America, Europe and so forth. Our efforts would be to accelerate, strengthen and deepen these respective relations. We intend to continue with our partners in Asia, Africa and the Pacific. As a founding member of the Caribbean Community, Guyana has also been in the fore front of regionalism and we intend to continue, and to further lift our efforts in that regard. We will continue to meet our treaty and other international obligations, as we seek to fortify our presence and expand our role into the discussions and the actions that permeate international organisations.

We believed that this space afforded by the various international fora should be maximised as a space where small developing states like Guyana, have a voice for matters affecting them, as well as a platform from which we could contribute to the decisions affecting the international systems. I thank you very much Mr. Speaker and Colleagues for the attention. [*Applause*]

Vice-President and Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs [Mr. Allicock]: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. Before I get into the business of the debate, I would like to take this opportunity to say to the people of Annai that we are with them at this time of their mourning. We know how sad it could be.

I stand to make my contribution to this 2016 National Budget Debate, a Budget that is a coalition Budget; a Budget that is based on togetherness and unity. I take this opportunity to apologise to

Hon. Members Mr. Gill, Mrs. Pearson-Fredricks and Ms. Campbell-Sukhai. I am truly sorry that, as a Government, we were unable, in our eight months in office, to fix all the damage created by the PPP/C over last 23 years.

I would like to allow the Indigenous peoples of this country to know that we are working to fix this. It is a situation that they know that communities are divided. Communities are highly politicised, and for us to move forward, we have to bring the people back together. That is what the coalition is about. It is about the entire Guyana; it is not about one party; it is about every single Guyanese, including the Indigenous peoples.

I note well, the presence of some born-again Indigenous members on the other side. These Hon. Members may have had their Damascus Moment at the end of their journey to the Opposition benches. I wondered where these Hon. Members were when Sir John in Aishalton was slapped; when the members of Upper Mazaruni were challenged and up to today they are in court for their land rights. I heard the Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall, on the conflict of interest regarding Amerindian lands. I thought he would have spoken about accountability, the intimidation tape to the CSOs, and Carifesta X instead. The Hon. Member, Mrs. Pearson-Fredricks, spoke of being offended by someone from the Government benches having mining blocks on Indigenous peoples' lands. The Hon. Member would know that she is being conservative with the truth. The Hon. Member, Mr. Charlie, specifically referred to Tasserine and asked how soon they would receive their titles. Hon. Member, Ms. Campbell-Sukhai, made a lot of comments and asked a lot of questions, but this Minister is a failed Minister.

The issue of mining blocks being awarded in lands traditionally occupied/utilised and applied for as village lands by Guyana Indigenous Peoples, as in the case of Tasserine, are still unresolved issues that were inherited. These are things that were there. I recall that the Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall, was the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs at that time. I recall also that the Hon. Member, Mrs. Pearson-Fredrick, served as advisor to the Hon. Minister, Ms. Campbell-Sukhai at that time. If not, all these blocks would have been awarded.

These awards were made after the residents of Kangaruma and Tasserine, for example, had applied for these lands to become their village lands. These Hon. Members of the Opposition were part of the team which participated in handing over worthless pieces of papers to the

residents of Kangaruma and Tasserine, suggesting to the leaders of these communities that they were being handed land titles. I have the evidence here. I did not want to describe the statements of these Hon. Members in this House as hypocritical since that might be unparliamentarily. I would therefore refrain from attempting to describe those statements. I am, however, thankful that these Hon. Members are now the new and enlightened representatives of the Indigenous peoples. It would now be very useful for them to present their thoughts regarding how we can, together, undo the damage which they did. We have a country to build and we have the Indigenous peoples to look after, it is time to come together to attack the issues rather than personalities.

Having addressed those issues, I now turn my attention to Budget 2016. Budget 2016 is a people's budget. Budget 2016 is about improving the quality of life of Guyanese across Guyana's 10 administrative regions. It is about fixing wharfs, hinterland airstrips and ocean going vessels which serves our hinterland population, improving education delivery and health care services, boosting agriculture and creating a healthy economy. Budget 2016 will create jobs, provide training for our young people and give our senior citizens additional disposal income.

[Interruption]

It is continuously said over the other side to fix it. It means that they are guilty of breaking it and having this country like this. Budget 2016 will enable us to enjoy a green city and a green economy. One can already see and smell the change in our capital city.

We have removed the tentacles of central Government from the affairs of Indigenous peoples' villages and communities. Villages are now free of political interference from the Government side. I now invite Members of the Opposition to join with us so that the villages can breathe free of political pressure again.

Guyana's first Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Resources Conference was a success. The Conference was exclusively managed and facilitated by the National Toshias Council (NTC). Indigenous peoples Non-Governmental Organisations participated fully and freely in the deliberations of the National Toshias Council Conference and the Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Resources Conference. That never happened before. Members are guilty on the other side of

keeping them out of previous conferences. How could you claim that you care for the Indigenous peoples?

For the hinterland youth, employment was launched. Budget 2016 will make possible, the massive explosion of the programme across Guyana's hinterland. My Colleague, the Hon. Mrs. Garrido-Lowe, has already addressed this. The Hon. Member, Ms. Campbell-Sukhai should talk more with the Hon. Minister, who is now in full control of ensuring that proper education is given to our young people.

Real training is taking place in our villages. This not being red and dread like my Colleague said. That was what it used to be, like red cashews and the red feyres in those communities, intimidated by the Hon. Permanent Secretary at that time. They had to do or leave. Our young people are no longer a part of a young political brigade. They are being prepared to face the challenges of the world and to make successful men and women of themselves, not to be beggars. Not to say at the end of two or three years of spending good money, "We do not know what to do." They must be able to say "Thank you for training me. I am now moving on, I have a job".

The Amerindian Land Titling Project is back on track. The shortcomings of the period, which proceeded 11th May, 2015, are being address.

6.38 p.m.

The Ministry is addressing the Indigenous peoples land issues. To this end, work has started on the establishment of the Hinterland and Indigenous Peoples' Lands Commission. The situation is that the communities are aware that there is a process known as free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) and this will take time. We have to consult and do so properly. That is what has happened. There are 212 communities with over 75,000 Indigenous peoples to take care off.

Protection for Hinterland Development

Budget 2016 provides for the following interventions which are geared to improve the lives of Guyana's Indigenous peoples in the education sector.

Commencement of work and design for a new dormitory to house the tertiary level students from the Hinterland: \$10 million is allocated for that.

Expansion of the Hinterland employment and youth services - \$997,410,000.

Support via subvention to the Bina Hill Institute of Learning - \$35 million: this institution is helping those young people who are leaving school to go to the next phase where they would be properly rounded as young adults to take care of their businesses within their communities.

The establishment of resource and document centre for Indigenous peoples - \$6 million: this is a need to have our records, our information and our history properly stored.

Acquisition of boats, outboard engines and minibuses to get children to and from school - \$25 million: I am not sure that the colour matters.

Schools in Port Kaituma, Santa Rosa, Baramita, Matthews Ridge, Powakaru and Barasirwau will benefit from improvement and the addition of living quarters while a new secondary school will be constructed at Waramuri; Akawini will get a new Nursery School; Karawab and Bethany Primary Schools will be improved; Yarashima will be extended and Warapoka Secondary School will also be extended. Mashabo and Bethany Primary Schools will be provided with living quarters for staff. These are all part of a package to the sum of \$196,352,000. Paramakatoi School and Micobie Nursery School will benefit from significant improvement as part of works valued at \$36,610,000; schools will be constructed at Tabatinga, Pai Pang and Baishaidran. Living quarters will be built at Sand Creek and major improvements are planned for Surama, Aishalton and Woweta Nursery Schools and Kwatata Primary School at a cost of \$94,605,000.

The electricity system at Saint Ignatius Secondary School will be upgraded - \$9,561,000; Kairuni Nursery School, St. Cuthbert's Primary School, Arau and Philippi Primary Schools will benefit from solar systems where \$4.4 million is allocated for this.

Infrastructural Development

We are rebuilding the Umana Yana. It is the pride of Guyana. Its place in the history of Guyana is precious. Guyana will have the Umana Yana in time for the 50th Independence anniversary celebrations. I wish to say to the Wai Wai brothers, who are presently reconstructing what was

destroyed, that I am proud of them and I am happy that they were able to make it. We are going to show that, given a chance, we could help to build Guyana.

The electricity system of Matthews Ridge, Port Kaituma, St. Cuthbert's Mission, Siparuta, Orealla, Maraikobai, Mocomoco, Wauna and Sugar Hill will be improved at a cost of in excess of \$120 million.

Roads will be rehabilitated at Port Kaituma and Matthews Ridge after two decades of abandonment. More roads will be rehabilitated at Baramita, Bartica, Puruni, Itaballi, Mabura, Kurupukari to Tabatinga, Ituni to Kwakwani and Mahdia. Bridges will be built and fixed at Cassandra Crossing and Sand Creek, Aishalton, Baishaidran, Paruima, Hosororo, Papaya and Arokoro. These works will be done at a cost of more than \$1.7 billion. More roads will be constructed at Mabaruma and Moruka to the tune of \$31 million. Bartica Stelling and the goods wharf at Kingston, which serves the Northwest District, will be rehabilitated. Mahdia airstrip will be completed. The following Hinterland airstrips will be rehabilitated – Eteringbang, Annai, Paramakatoi, Kurupung, Kato, Kopinang and Monkey Mountain. This project is worth \$241 million.

The development projects listed represent a sample of the interventions which are geared to take Guyana's Hinterland and the Indigenous residents closer to a good life. These interventions will create jobs. One just has to use his or her common sense and look around and use the opportunity that is given through these projects. It will restore hope and improve village economies. We, in the Ministry, are aware of the Government's situation. It is about togetherness. Instead of doubling up or duplicating, we work within Ministries to give that support and this is what is shown here. The benefits come from all of these Ministries to the Indigenous peoples and the people who live in the Interior.

From my interactions and working with my fellow citizens across Guyana's 10 Administrative Regions, I conclude that there are only 32 persons who feel that *Budget 2016* is not a good budget. Nevertheless, they have been included for the good life.

The Hon. Member, Mrs. Campbell-Sukhai, is on record in the *Guyana Times* dated Friday, 8th February, 2016 saying that the Budget did not adequately provide for Guyana's Indigenous peoples. But you heard, not too long ago, about the benefits that will be shared to these peoples.

The Hon. Member clearly did not examine the Budget. The Hon. Member also played the stuck record of 2,000 CSOs becoming jobless. Again, in the newspapers, it is stated that it is 1,972. I have a Cabinet document that goes to the amount of 1,952 CSOs. They say that the CSOs that are being talked about are young people. Anyone can go investigate this to see how many are not young people. Probably they are full grown youths. This was to the tune of \$234,240,000. The programme ended in April, 2015.

Further, there is a cancelled cheque that was supposed to be used to pay the very CSOs that the Opposition claims this Government knocked off. This cheque was cancelled on the 10th May, 2015. The world knows that CSOs were not employees and that the programme ended before General Elections in 2015.

We have moved forward. The Hinterland Employment and Youth Service (HEYS) is a training programme and the Hon. Member, Valerie Garrido-Lowe, explained, in details, that it replaces a young political brigade. It is geared to help with the development of the Indigenous youths. Simultaneously with HEYS, we are working towards the development of the more than 75,000 Indigenous citizens. I invite the Hon. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai to be Indigenous.

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

Ms. Ally: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes added to his original time. I thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Speaker, I crave your indulgence on a Point of Elucidation, Standing Order No. 40 (b). I believe the comment and the statement made by the Hon. Vice-President and Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs is a racist one and I... [**Interruption**]

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mrs. Campbell-Sukhai: ...demand an apology.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member...

Mrs. Campbell-Sukhai: For any Vice-President...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member...

Mrs. Campbell-Sukhai: ...to refer to me, as a Member of Parliament, to be Indigenous is racist.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, it is customary that, when the Speaker attracts your attention and begins to address you, you cease what you are doing and reclaim your seat.

Mrs. Campbell-Sukhai: My apologies, Mr. Speaker.

6.53 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: I am bound to say that Hon. Members must know that, if they speak loudly enough, they will disturb the speaker on the floor and this Speaker too. I have been very indulgent with Hon. Members and I do not want to muzzle them. It is a very familiar term, perhaps, but I must say that we have to exercise restraint. We cannot do it if we have bedlam. Hon. Member, when you rise on a Point of Order, you tell me, the Speaker, what that Point of Order is based on, then you make your statement and then you leave it to the Speaker. That is the procedure and I will ask Hon. Members to follow it. If a Member rises and proceeds to make a speech and then draws a conclusion, there is nothing for the Speaker to do but to thank the Member and move on. So, I am asking Members to remember that.

I did hear your point. I thank you.

Hon. Member, Mr. Allicock, I do believe that you can express yourself differently and not in the manner in which you referred to the Hon. Pauline Sukhai. [*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

Hon. Members must allow the Speaker to do what he must do. Mr. Dharamlall, you are fast becoming the most noticeable heckler in the Chamber. It is not to your credit, sir. Now, Hon. Member, Mr. Sydney Allicock, please...

Mr. Allicock: I thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Would you withdraw the term or the manner in which you addressed the Hon. Member just now?

Mr. Allicock: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I withdraw. I apologise.

Mr. Speaker: Please proceed, Hon. Member.

Mr. Allicock: The Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs is in consultation with the National Toshias Council (NTC) and the villages with regards to the Amerindian Act. The protection of the rights of the Indigenous peoples is at the core of these conversations. We agree that the Act needs to be amended in some respect to assure that appropriate safeguards are in place to deal with matters such as land rights, and environmental and wildlife issues. We will work with the villages, the communities, the NTC, Indigenous peoples, sister Ministries and international organisations as we address these issues. I am proud to say that the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs has a capable team. Staff could handle this and we are going to ensure that all these activities will be met on time.

Renewable clean energy, especially for schools and health facilities, is another major issue that we will address. As detailed by the Hon. Minister, Mrs. Hughes, information and communications technology (ICT) connectivity for schools and community buildings will be addressed. This is part of the approach to ensuring that information and education are taken to our citizens where they live. It is essential to connect Coastal Guyana to Hinterland Guyana, the realisation of one nation, as advocated by His Excellency the President.

We want the Hinterland and the coast to have a two-way flow of education because we, as Indigenous peoples, are the keepers of the environment that gives to each and every one of us a life. There is where true life is because we know and understand a lot about the laws of nature and how the ecosystem works. So, we have a role to play in the development of our country. Agriculture products, including fruit farms, are also on the Ministry's agenda.

Adequate potable water supply is also another important agenda item for the Ministry in 2016. The Hon. Minister of Finance presented a budget that is for all Guyanese. I say to him and his team that they did a wonderful job of including the opportunity for the Indigenous peoples to be given that chance to help in the development of the nation. He has given us the recipe; we also have the formula. The good life beckons; we must respond. We have been given this opportunity and we should not lose it. I now, therefore, commend this Budget for passage in the honourable House. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Lumumba: Mr. Speaker, before I comment on the more substantial items of my presentation, in passing, I just want to say that I know that the Hon. Vice President is capable but maybe he travels too much. I thought, by now, that the Hon. Vice-President would have, at least, gathered some rice markets. I also noticed that, in eight months, he has not been able to put together any bilateral agreement with any country or association that brings food or development to Guyana. I know that you have some more time, hopefully by next Budget. I will ably respond to that in the positive.

I must congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Jordan, for his first, full one-year Budget. This Minister, in particular, is a person I respect. I recall, during his days as Budget Director, I always stopped by and sought his advice on a variety of issues and he was always willing to provide it. However, I think that it is unfortunate that the things he said recently are in contradiction to what he was taught by the “Master Blaster”, the Hon. Opposition Leader, and his ex-boss, Mr. Bharat Jagdeo.

The objective of a budget is to highlight and indicate what the Government will do for the people for a period of one year and how funds will be allocated to carry out the requisite activities. Sometimes more is required; sometimes less is spent and some has to be returned to the Consolidated Fund.

This Budget is like the phantom; this Budget is full of illusions. The Hon. Minister of Finance reminds me of a three-card player at Bourda Market; one time one sees King of Spades and, another time, one does not see it. This Budget represents a blur. A serious Government that claims it is concerned about the have nots, a serious Government which, during its campaign for office, indicated that it was campaigning for the people should present a budget that reflects the cornerstone of its ideological position.

Let me highlight a few items: I start with Value Added Tax (VAT). There is a Member of this Government who, when in Opposition, hammered the then Government, the PPP/C, for the implementation of the Value Added Tax, and, on several occasions, in every pathway and byway, told this nation that they would reduce VAT substantially or eradicate VAT. There is a gentleman in Guyana, a well-known con man by the name of Byron France. He attempted to sell City Hall; he sold Parade Ground and he sold the bauxite ship, Saguenay. When it comes to the

Value Added Tax, the present Government pulled a Byron France on the people of Guyana. [An Hon. Member: A who?] Byron France was his name. [An Hon. Member: The President?] [Mr. Nandlall: The present Government.] The present Government... I know not to mention the President's name. [An Hon. Member: You know you do not have to refute that point of view with us. You know I would admit though.] Well, beginning with you.

We call on the Minister of Finance to keep the promise of APNU/AFC and to reduce the VAT or eliminate it in totality. No country can develop unless there is a strong manufacturing sector. The key to a manufacturing sector is cheap, reliable and sustainable power. The then Opposition, now Government, traversed this country and pounded us on the issue of Amelia Hydro-dam, a project that would have given us over 160 megawatts of reliable and sustainable power to generate and expand our manufacturing capacity, a project that would have resulted in job opportunities and many other things. The project has been cancelled and the Government's Budget has not given Guyanese any idea as to when the Government will tackle the issue of cheap and reliable energy and has not identified funding for an alternative to the hydro project.

I noticed another con in the making. A 40-50 megawatts wind farm is an enormous enterprise anywhere in the world. It is renewable energy. The Hon. Minister, Mr. Patterson, knows this. Very few places in the world have tackled a wind farm of 40-50 megawatts. Renewable energy, at this point, particularly in that area, is still the most expensive source of power generated. Thus, the pronouncement of a wind farm at Hope is premature and represents another con but for those who have a personal interest in this project. Where is the feasibility study?

The Opposition, together with some friends of mine, namely Mr. Philips, Professor Hinds and others, have indicated, on several occasions, that there is an ethnic economic imbalance in Guyana. Mr. Speaker, if you were a foreigner, you would believe that this was imposed during the last 23 years, but statistics would show that the economic strength of Afro-Guyanese, rural Indians and Amerindians grew 1,000 times during the last 23 years. When the PPP came to power, there was no black middle class. All left; all ran during the Burnham era. Ask the Hon. Minister, Dr. Rupert Roopnarine. Minister Roopnarine spoke on this on several occasions.

There was no modernisation in Guyana. Before 23 years, there were no functioning hospitals, no villages with potable water, no roads with [*Inaudible*]. Your neighbour did not have a car and television before 23 years ago.

7.08 p.m.

Evidence shows that the PPP/C empowered the Afro-Guyanese, rural Indians and Amerindian peoples while the past Peoples National Congress (PNC) Government brought waste and poverty to Guyana.

This Government has access to billions of taxpayers' deposits in the banks in Guyana. Yet, while the Hon. Minister spoke eloquently about the need to ensure that 30% of the economy is in the hands of the have nots, he has not indicated how he will implement that transformation and that is the 3% and third aspect of the three-card illusion. The Minister of Finance has an obligation to implement the 30% distribution he speaks of by way of a Government guarantee so that small businesses will receive loans for start-up capital projects after approval by the Guyana Office for Investment (GO-Invest). This Government needs *to walk the walk and not talk the talk*.

Mr. Speaker, I want to speak on the issue of the village economies. The President has made the villages a very noble pet project of his and we must give him some credit for that. However, I am very disappointed that the Minister only selected a few villages - Buxton, Triumph and Ithaca - for such initial development or, maybe, they are just examples. This House needs clarity on whether these funds or additional funds will be allocated for projects in communities such as Lichfield, Hopetown, Unity, Leonora, Enmore, Weldaad, Belladrum and others. Nothing is wrong with these villages. There are also areas in Regions 8 and 9 that are blessed with productive agricultural lands and they should be part of the village projects.

What must be noted is the failure of the Minister of Finance to illustrate and specify the strategy that will be put in place to manage the dispensation of these expenditures. In addition to the selection process of the individual participants, whether there will be training, the criteria of funding and other related issues must be pronounced on. Mr. Speaker, I am not trying to, in anyway, say you are an old man; I will never say that because I do not know your age. But I know that you are aware that the late L F S Burnham, the late President, was very aggressive on village economics and, together with the elder statesman, Eusi Kwayana, and an organisation

called ASTRA, developed several agriculture and livestock schemes in many communities in Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know if you can recall, but I can certainly enlighten you to the fact that this endeavour collapsed for basic reasons. For example, the people of Pomeroon could not get their passion fruit to Georgetown in a timely manner. There was a lack of transportation. Pumpkins and ground provision rotted on the ground in many communities. Packaging, storage and marketing were absent from this process. I hope that the Hon. Minister of Finance can answer some of my queries which will determine whether the people of Buxton and Triumph's farm system will be supported by adequate roads to bring their products out of the back dam, in particular during rainy seasons, and whether he has spent time to look at the reasons behind the past failures.

It would be good if the Minister of Finance, in his Budget defence, could point out whether he plans to allocate funding for packaging and marketing of these produce. One of the critical elements here is start-up capital or initial expenditure to support the village enterprise entrepreneurs. To me, the Minister of Finance was not clear on this. The Minister of Finance brought this Budget to the honourable House and indicated that billions of dollars will be spent to develop village economies, but he did not indicate whether there is funding for feasibility studies and planning, plus his presentation lacks expectation and did not emphasise the economic impact on the villages, in particular employment.

The days of providing something to do for a certain ethnic group are over, in particular Afro-Guyanese. We cannot just empower them in the public service, by the People's Militia or by the National Service. We have to empower them so that they can become businessmen and businesswomen. The Minister needs to tell us whether these billions of dollars will go beyond two boxes of ochro, four cows, 10 pounds of yam, six hogs or if the end results of this allocation will result in dramatic increase in production of these items, and whether there will be put in place an aggressive response from the Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC). In essence, we cannot put the village economies in place and we cannot put the production elements of the village in place unless the Guyana Marketing Corporation is modernised and activated properly or we will have the same problem like we had in the past.

Furthermore, the Hon. Minister must tell this House whether his decision to select the villages was based on ethnicity, history or geography, whether these factors led to the identification of locations, and whether the budgetary proposal has room for rural Indians and Amerindians.

Another issue that bothers me is the silent decision to restructure the economy so that the resources of our country can respond to the call of Dr. Hinds, Eric Phillips, Dr. Thomas and others. This call might be timely and, in particular, with the pending closure of Wales Estate, these decisions must be brought before the House and debated extensively. I believe that the catalyst of this 30% initiative that the Minister has focused on can, in a positive manner, energise small businesses but it must be handled in a bipartisan manner and must not be seen as a means to put one ethnic group against another. I have not accused the Minister of doing that; I am just saying that we have to be careful in terms of how it is being handled.

The potential of hundreds of small business entities can be financed through a financial structure from the banking institutions. These banks host billions of dollars of taxpayers' money and, sometimes, it is very difficult for a small businessman or businesswoman to get a loan from these banks. So, there has to be some assurances. It does not make logical sense for the Minister to beat his chest and tell this nation that he is going to ensure that 30% of the national economy goes towards the have nots so they can become the haves and, at the same time, he does not look at the restructuring of the banking system; he does not find a way to put the mechanisms in place so that a small man can become the real man.

The Minister of Finance should note that the banks in Guyana are custodians of taxpayers' money and, while the banks cannot offer loans to Tom, Dick and Harry, the Minister of Finance must put in place mechanisms so that 30% of the deposits can go to our small business and village projects approved by GO-Invest.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to turn to mining. An important aspect of the mining industry is its impact on small miners. I want to use this opportunity to congratulate the Government of Guyana for appointing Mdm. Broomes as Minister. I think her heart is in the right place and she will protect the rights of the small and the abused.

The President has spoken about village economies and what should not be forgotten are African villages and the role the mining industry played in their development. Mr. Speaker, the strength

of these villages were elders like my grandfather and, even possibly, your grandfather, who went in the bush, not the Interior in those days - we said grandfather went in the bush - who left their families for six and seven months, who returned with their gold and diamond and who bought land, built houses and supported their children so that they can gain an education. We can call them pork knockers but those days are long gone. Now, we have small miners but the problems are still the same. They are allowed to work on lands that belong to the landlord; they find gold and diamond; then they are driven off like cattle. [Mr. Bulkan: What is the Master Blaster doing?]

We got to do it together. These small miners are the real prospectors and the Guyana Geological and Mines Corporation (GGMC) has failed them by supporting corrupt mining officials and greedy landlords.

What is interesting is that the APNU/AFC coalition went to these villages prior to Elections and pledged to protect the rights of the small and the weak, yet this Budget has failed to highlight how the GGMC, as an institution, will protect those I spoke of earlier.

We need legislation that will clearly allow the small miner, who is, indeed, the initial prospector, to delink his find from the landlord but provide the landlord with fair compensation. [An

Hon. Member: We have.] The legislation needs to be strengthened. The small miners or the modern porkknockers were the strength of dozens of villages and the Hon. Member, Dr. Roopnarine, knows this because he is a familiar visitor of Buxton, even in the days when he was tormented by the People's National Congress. The pork knockers have been the base of dozens of African families. This Budget should be amended so that the engine of growth can be cemented around the gold and diamond industries, which can, once again, play a part of the economic development of the villages. It must happen and I anticipate that the Hon. Minister of Natural Resources would pronounce on these matters and will acknowledge that the absence was a mistake by the Minister of Finance.

The 30% access in the national economy that this Government speaks of must also target mining lands. Let us not only *talk the talk*; this Budget must allow us to *walk the walk*. My Good friend, fellow Buxtonian Professor David Hinds, Eric Phillips and Dr. Clive Thomas, have spoken at length about the need to empower certain sections of the economy. As a matter of fact, Mr. Phillips said that the Afro-Guyanese represent 3% to 5% of the national economy. I differ with his conclusion and I have no idea where he received his facts. We cannot advocate walking into

the vaults at the bank and handing out money. We cannot take people's vehicles and homes and hand them to the have nots so that they can become the haves. But let us work together to put in place a perceived fair environment that will address the issue of ethnic equality and a balance class system. Again, the Government has failed to bring a solution to the perceptions to the table. It is this Government that rallied around this country and spoke of the inequalities in the economic system. It is this Government that said that it needs to set aside 30% and it needs to restructure the economy, but this Government is being feeble in its approach to solve this problem. Bring a paper to this Parliament; let us debate and discuss it.

The whole cowboy days of the Western America was dominated by gold and cattle, then the railroad. In Guyana, we have gold and diamond. The Budget needs to be amended with the introduction of mechanisms to access the 30% of the gold and diamond lands. We cannot throw this 30% figure in an unscientific manner. It must be justified and must be structured by the means of good and fair governance. We must put in place the fair mechanism that will allow the Hinds, the Phillips and the Thomases to recommend valuable solutions to historical cultural issues.

As a young man growing up in Buxton, my mother used to tell me to not like money. She said, "God does not like people who like money." And many Afro-Guyanese were told this: do not like money; it is bad if you like money.

7.23 p.m.

I am saying here is that we have to turn this clock around. Nothing is wrong with money. All money is not good money.

Let me go back to mining. Mining is another key and fundamental issue. The absence of a strong Government strategy to improve the management of the gold industry is worrisome. The key issues are landlordism, protection and development of small miners and land reclamation. For each of these areas there needs to be stronger legislation to give more teeth to the authority and officials at the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC). Legislation should be introduced that would ensure that each medium and large-scale applicant gain a temporary permit first, with guidelines on how to operate and would proceed with prospecting as part of the initial stage. Prior to the operator being granted official mining licence, an adequate reclamation

plan with proper bond must be put together. Too much mining is going on in Guyana that leaves the land in a terrible state of affairs. In developing countries, after a person mines the land must be able to tolerate man, animal and plants. The Closed Area Committee, which comes under the board, and in many way the Minister, should be abolished and all lands, except those set aside to small miners, should be processed by means of lottery and a bidding system. The closed area system leads to corruption, nepotism and all kinds of other isms.

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given his full time, whatever time is available to him now plus the five minutes.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Lumumba: This new legislation will serve as an obstacle to landlordism. I listened to Senator Bernie Sanders, the United States of America presidential contestant, on his pronouncement of the 1% which controls the American economy. I immediately saw the nexus between the 1% in Guyana which controls the gold and diamond industry. In many ways it serves as a hindrance to the development of small miners and the equitable distribution of wealth in our society. I thought that this budget proposal would have and should have pinpointed measures that would be put in place to expand the revenue base of the country, by ensuring that our primitive system of allocating gold and diamond lands is dispensed with by means of legislation and we put a halt to landlordism and monopoly.

The budget presentation in this area contradicts APNU/AFC pre-election promise to make the small man the real man. Government can only expand its revenue base if its natural resources are put to proper use. The more mining lands are made available for work, in particular with the need to have more independent operators and small miners, it would create more opportunities for revenue growth. It is to the advantage of the Government to control landlordism and ensure that more small miners are involved in the process. This not only creates economic opportunities for the small man but increases employment, increases small business and has a lot of implications for villages and our community as a whole.

The petroleum sector: Oil and gas are on the horizon. Oil and gas are probably the most powerful natural resources on the planet today, either for the good or the bad. Oil and gas have destroyed countries such as Nigeria; it has made some countries grow; it made some countries stable; it is on our horizon. This budget does not illustrate how the Government will prepare for the petroleum industry. This budget lacks a futuristic approach to its development. For example, the Minister should have pledged funding to the University of Guyana now. We must not wait on ExxonMobil. If we wait on ExxonMobil, it would want something in return. We should immediately start in September a two-year diploma or a four-year degree programme in petroleum. We should immediately have a relationship with Trinidad, some form of collaboration, so we can train potential technicians about the industry. We should ensure that the Guyana Technical Institute (GTI) becomes functional in this area so that there can be technicians. Furthermore, in this budget, the Government of Guyana should have set aside the training of a significant number of technical personnel by means of collaboration with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and ExxonMobil. Again, this shows the lack of creativity and the absence of vision when it comes to the handling of our economy.

The Minister of Natural Resources – Mr. Speaker, I know I should be looking at you but I want to look at him a bit - I know he means well, and he has spoken at length about the Sovereign Wealth Fund, but speaking at length is not good enough. The time has come in which a concept paper or some proposal or White Paper should be brought before this National Assembly for discussions and debate.

In closing, on my way here today - I would whisper at the appropriate time to my good friend Hon. Minister Joseph Harmon - I saw a very strong supporter of APNU/AFC and she said to me, “Mr. Odinga, I am disappointed in the budget. These men I voted for, run around the country whole year and was talking about the PPP/C discriminating against black people, I do not see anything fundamental in the budget to help black people.” I said to her that we have to be balanced in this country. She said to me that she does not support what is happening in Wales because when you interfere with the sugar industry you are interfering with the survival of the Indian community. She said that just as when you interfered with Linden I did not like it, I do not want you to interfere with Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), because when you close an

estate you are threatening the livelihood of thousands of people, and in most cases those thousands of people are an ethnic type.

We need to move this country. We need to find solutions in this country so that all races can work together. We must not live in a society where it appears that one Government is for one race and one party is for another race.

I just want to close by saying that this year must be a watershed year for Guyana. This must be the year, regardless of our differences, we must find some mechanism so that we can work together for the development of this country, so we can put racial problems at the back of us and look forward as one united country.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we are now at 7.30 p.m. We would take the suspension and return in half of an hour.

Sitting suspended at 7.33 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 8.07 p.m.

Mr. Trotman: I rise, as my colleagues before me, to make my contribution to the debate on Budget 2016 which is being presented under the theme, *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*. At the outset, let me joint with my colleagues in this National Assembly in first commending the visionary, the Hon. W.D. Jordan, Minister of Finance and his erudite team for presenting to this National Assembly with yet another budget of the coalition Government. It is a budget that speaks and responds to the aspirations of all Guyanese. If I may say, it is no small feat to produce two budgets in four months, between August and December, by my calculations, is four months. This effort of the Hon. Minister of Finance and his dedicated team cannot be understated nor its significance be allowed to pass unmentioned.

It was Winston Churchill who said, many years ago, that “continuous effort, not strength or intelligence, is the key to unlocking our potential.” If I may use a topical analogy borrowed from American football, “it is like gaining yards towards the end zone until the touchdown is

achieved.” This budget, coming months after the first presented, has gained yardage for the coalition Government and the people of Guyana.

Before I go into the presentation I prepared, allow me to respond to comments made by the Hon. Member Odinga Lumumba who has come back in. I have sat in this House for 18 continuous years and have listened to the Hon. Member Odinga Lumumba for many of those years. I can say, without fear of contradiction, that the presentation he made today is the same speech he has made every year. There is the usual attack on the PNC, Burnham, who chased away, who left the country. There is nothing new about it. The Hon. Member I can call a colleague and I can call a friend. I have tremendous respect for him.

There was something that has been jarring me throughout these debates and it is the constant reference by Members of the Opposition pointing to the Government about geriatrics. It jars me. Let me say that when I heard the Hon. Member Lumumba I think I got the point. We are okay over here; you have a problem over there. [Mr. Ramson: It is your own PNC man who said that.] With that said, you never bite the hand that feeds you. That is something that should be remembered. Your father would tell you that because he was in the PNC for some time. The Hon. Member Ramson’s grandfather was the Assistant General Secretary for the People’s National Congress. The People’s National Congress would never forget him, I know, for the good work and labour he put in to keep the party strong.

Moving on, the Hon. Member Mr. Lumumba made some very good points which we would be taking into consideration. If I may say, I have written to him and we have started our discourse because he has brought some good contributions and points which we will be taking on board and I will get to them later in the presentation.

8.11 p.m.

With that said, I feel inspired to point out that the efforts of the second row, on the Government side, has been nothing but outstanding and at the risk of causing some disruption in the front, and unless some of my colleagues feel disrespected, I still have to say to them well done. I believe that they have done better than expected and they have done better than us here, if I may be allowed that. Thank you very much for your contributions.

The tenor of these debates has not been the best but certainly not the worst that have been witnessed in this House before. I believe, however, that there two fundamental matters that I wish to address, fundamental to good governance and to our inclusive and participatory governance and democracy. We were lectured yesterday about respect and disrespect. I feel it is my duty to point out some glaring examples, not just for the sake of saying this is an example of disrespect, but it is to ask the question: Are we to continue with the disrespect that we speak of?

It is time for change. There was disrespect shown when the Opposition was invited to be part of joint committees and then that invitation was met by refusal. In the past, whenever an invitation came from the Office of the President, the Opposition never failed to respond in the national interest to that invitation. We may not have always respected the personages or the persons we had to meet but we always respected the Office of the President, and always attended whenever invited to participate in talks.

In 1997, myself, a junior then, sat in a room for two and a half years with the Hon. Member Teixeira, Hon. Member, then as he was, Mr. Ramotar and Dr. Roger Luncheon in political dialogue. In 2001, there was constructive engagement. In 2006, we were invited back to the Office of the President and we met. We did not refuse to meet. There was disrespect shown in failing to honour the Herdmanston Accord process by not taking up seats on boards and commissions, as we agreed that the Opposition would always have a seat reserve for it at every board and committee.

Lastly, there was gross disrespect shown recently in this House when the Minister of Finance gave his address and budget presentation and the Leader of the Opposition chose to sit in the Members' lounge. He failed to sit here and listen to the Minister of Finance. Past Leaders of the Opposition, the Hon. Members Mr. Hoyte, Mr. Corbin and Mr. Granger never disrespected the Minister of Finance in the way that this disrespect was heaped on this Government. It never happened in the past.

This brings me to the second point, as we are discussing respect. Last night, again, we were lectured about religion and the use of references to scripture by Members on this side of the House. It may appear a simple matter, but to us it is a serious one. Guyana is indeed a secular

state and yet we have the good sense, of every day prayer, to give prayer to the Almighty God to guide us with our infinite wisdom.

Ms. Teixeira: Point of Order, Mr. Speaker. I have no problem with the Hon. Member's view on religion but what I said in this House, and the *Hansard* would show it, is the use of one text in the budget speech and at the inauguration. I said nothing about Members of this House referring to speeches or quoting from the Bible. I talked about the official budget document that quotes from one text and I quoted from the inauguration, one text. Sir, I do not have a problem with people with their beliefs and quoting what they want, but I am saying at official functions then it is not... That is the point I was making. The Member is trying to make it appear as if I am trying to muzzle people's religious belief. It is not true.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you know the rules and you have tirelessly talked about your length of service here. You should, and I hasten to say, set an example in the manner which these things are done. I must ask you to do that. When you rise to speak, if you are rising on a Point of Order you know what you must do. If you are rising on a point of explanation you know what you must do. I say no more.

Ms. Teixeira: What is your ruling? I asked that the matter be corrected. I did not say the things the Hon. Member said. It is a point of elucidation, Standing Order 40 (b).

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. It is a point of elucidation and not a Point of Order, as you have presented. Hon. Member, you have heard the statement presented by the Hon. Member, in elucidation.

Mr. Trotman: I have Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I would assume, having heard that, you would want to present your reaction to it.

Mr. Trotman: Yes Sir. Mr. Speaker, to borrow a line use quite successfully by the Minister of Foreign Affairs earlier, "*I throw meh corn but I ain't call anyone.*" Mr. Speaker, I did not name anyone's name and so if, at all, anyone is offended I apologise. I named no one. I just said that we were told about persons making references, on this side of the House, to scriptures from one book and I called no name, Sir, with the greatest of respect. I am wise enough to know not to do so.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member.

Mr. Trotman: As stated, I said that whenever we start our proceeding in this House we invoke the presence of Almighty God in our prayers. Elsewhere, many of us attend functions, both official and unofficial, where prayers are said and we, ourselves, say those prayers and quote different verses of scriptures from various holy books. I have sat in admiration at the fluent way in which the Hon. Member Vindhya Persaud sometimes quotes from her holy book. Even in this debate alone, we have heard the Hon. Members Bishop Edghill, Dharamlall and Ramson quoted scripture quietly in their presentations. Much to my pleasant surprise, the Hon. Member Neendkumar cited a well-known passage from Psalms 118 which tells us, “to rejoice in the day that the Lord has made.” It seems that we are about to have a revival in this House and it is good thing. I do believe that we have become too politically correct, too afraid to affirm our faith and to acknowledge that we have strong spiritual beliefs. I would hate to think that we can practise our religion in closets and be afraid to embrace it when in public. I say let us be like Daniel and throw open the windows and not hide our face.

In this hallowed House we are Christians, Hindus, Muslims and even some of us are agnostic and atheist, and that is our individual right. For a suggestion to come that some of us should not practise our faith, I believe it is a dangerous suggestion. We, on this side, are happy to know they are some over there as well who acknowledge that we are mere mortals... [*Interruption*] I have not called a name.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, the reference is that Members on this side of the House [*inaudible*]. No one said it in this side of the House [*inaudible*]. The point is that he is talking about this side of the House. No Member of said anything to challenge anybody... [*inaudible*] I am asking you Mr. Speaker, to please ask the Hon. Member to stop this. It is misrepresentation of what was said on this side of the House. I am begging you, Mr. Speaker, to please put a stop to this line of argument.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I thank you for your statement but please do not beg the Speaker for anything. The Speaker will do what you request of him as long as it is within the rules. I certainly would. Hon. Member please proceed.

Mr. Trotman: Grateful Sir. I was at the point of interruption making the point that we are mere mortals. We are not infallible neither we do consider ourselves, on this side of the House, to be immutable or invincible and so whenever we quote from scripture we are affirming our faith and acknowledging a higher authority over our lives and our decision making. That is our right. The Book of 2nd Samuel, chapter 23, verse 3 tells us, “He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.” If - with the greatest of respect, this is just a hypothetical “if” - there is any amongst who reject the quoting of any scripture, whether it be from any holy books - the Bible, the Bhagavad Gita or the Koran - then they need to check themselves. I believe that there is delivery service held every night around the city. They may attend. Before I leave the subject, I wish only to state that even as we celebrate our 50th Anniversary I hope that we may gather as a nation and acknowledge our different religions and cultures and have a day of national prayer. That is my wish.

The focus of this year’s budget as we have heard outlined by our able Minister of Finance and many colleagues before, who have spoken, have recognised some of the merits therein. It is about creating opportunities for our people. I wish to say that it is not only creating opportunities for our people, but for creating opportunities for all the people of Guyana, not just those who voted for this side, but all the people of Guyana wherever they are. Since we last met much has happened and much attention had been paid to redefining the scope and definition of natural resources themselves. In the past, administrators had naturally, and no pun intended, seen natural resources as tangible wealth that is to be exploited and earned from. However, with the “fresh approach”, and in the context of the national patrimony, our resources are far more expansive than gold or diamond or logs and bauxite, but include as well air and water, health and well-being. In fact, the “good life” is both a natural and a national treasure. Interestingly the United Arab Emirates only earlier this week appointed a Minister of State with responsibility for happiness, recognising that overall well-being must be achieved correspondingly and contemporaneously with infrastructural and economic growth and that human resources and natural resources are symbiotically related.

In this regard the new Ministry of Natural Resources has set itself the mission:

“To develop, implement and oversee policies for the sustainable development and utilisation of the natural resources whilst promoting the protection and conservation of the environment.”

We carry this mission out in collaboration with all other Ministries and agencies of Government. There is much to celebrate, roads, bridges, clean communities, a cleaner city, higher pensions and better health care to name a few. [Mr. Ramson: Higher ministerial salaries too.] Yes, and higher salaries for you too. For our part, we have to joyous reasons in the Ministry to celebrate. The first is that we do have the formation of a Ministry of Natural Resources and, secondly, we celebrate, and perhaps we can say the augmentation and enrichment of the Ministry with the addition of the illustrious and dynamic Hon. Simona Broomes, Minister within the Ministry.

Time does not permit me to cover every facet of the manifold activities of the Ministry. I will give an overview of our upcoming plans and programmes.

The Ministry, in continuing the expansion and sustainability of the natural resources and environmental sectors, has commenced a series of critical initiatives to improve management and coordination of these sectors in the short and medium terms. This is in keeping with the commitment to have a more inclusive and collaborative working relationship with the various associations and other stakeholders, and to continue building achievements emanating from the natural resources and environmental sectors. We are presently instilling, within the various sectoral agencies, the GGMC, the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC), the Environmental Protection Agency, (EPA), EAB, the Protected Areas Commission and the Guyana Gold Board, and including the Wildlife Management Authority, the concept of the one team approach, so that the patrimonial canopy can be extended over all of them and the expected synergies can be realised.

I believe that it would be appropriate to say that the inclusivity, we speak of, includes the Opposition as well and to remind the Members that there is always a space at the table set and waiting for them to join us.

8.26 p.m.

If I may be allowed to share some highlights on 2015, it is oil and gas. Between July and December, the department, as it then was, in the area of oil and gas, was able to create a draft to upstream oil and gas policy, which will be presented to Cabinet within another month or there about. There were also two workshops on the Sovereign Wealth Fund, in conjunction and with the kind gesture of the Canadian High Commission and the University of Calgary in Canada. We have as well increased activity and interest in both offshore and onshore blocks for drilling and exploring of oil.

In the area of mining, we have continued, and our discussions are now about to implement a mainstream bio-diversity project with the United Nations Development Fund. We are implementing the roadmap for the eradication of the use of mercury in mining, in keeping with the Minamata Convention on mercury. As it is well known, we have established an Anti-gold Smuggling Task Force. We heard that there was gold smuggling task force, so we thought we would establish an Anti-gold Smuggling Task Force. That task force is actually working well. We have reopened, with great success the Bartica Gold Board office and are looking to open a few more. Our crowning glory came at the end of the year when we declared 451,490 ounces of gold, surpassing the target of 381,000 that was set. That declaration gave the nation over half a billion of US dollars of revenue.

In the area of wildlife management, we have completed and submitted to the committee, headed by the Hon. Prime Minister, to review legislation of our draft Wildlife Authority Bill, which will be presented immediately after the budget debates are over. The zoo regulations are also to be laid. We have as well, in the area of the environment, successfully participated in the United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Conference of Parties (COP) 21 Conference in Paris France. It was a defining year for us. The agreement has been hailed by all as the most ambitious international environment agreement in history. Guyana was honoured to have participated in its formation. Despite the doubting Thomases, Guyana and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) accomplished most of what was sought to be achieved in the Paris Agreement. In moving forward, and as a demonstration of Government's continued commitment to addressing climate change, Guyana will ratify the Paris Agreement when the United Nations' General Secretary holds a high level signing ceremony in April of this year.

Lastly, we were able at the end of December, 2015 to pass regulations to restrict the importation of styrofoam products in keeping with our drive for a green and clean economy. Later in this year we will be addressing ways of better managing plastics and other non-degradables.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of forestry we continue negotiations with the European Union (EU) with the EU Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT), which is a governance mechanism for the forestry sector. Currently, there is a team from Brussels in the country. There is a fourth round of negotiations, which will continue in March. We have, as well, done very extensive work in stemming the wild and wanton cutting and export of Guyana's logs at the expense of the value-added development as contained in the various investment development agreements, which were being breached.

Governance in the natural resources sector: We are actively taking steps to take up membership in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). Guyana has already hosted two workshops, and a team is readying to attend the seventh summit of the EITI in Lima, Peru, later in this month. In accompanying, Hon. Prime Minister in Mexico City, in November, Guyana also participated in the Open Government Partnership Summit held in Mexico City where the whole issue of transparency and accountability in the extractive industries sector was dealt with. Guyana has committed to taking up membership there as well.

We are proud to say that on the invitation received by the Hon. Member Odinga Lumumba, Chairman of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee Natural Resources Committee, the Ministry also appeared towards the end of 2015 before that Committee and was able to interact and to answer questions. Indeed, it is to start what is going to be, hopefully, a good, long and healthy relationship between the Ministry and the Parliament going forward.

It is if I may say a few words about gold, I heard the Hon. Member Nandlall, speaking about gold, earlier. The world market prices for all commodities are down, but as of this week, and over the last two, but more so this week, we have seen favourable rises in the price of gold where earlier in the week the price went up to US\$1,200, and if I may quote from a publication called *The Week*, which favourably reported as follows:

“The trajectory over recent weeks is quite clear and that is from a near seven year low around US\$1000, back in December, gold has been setting higher peaks and shallower thrusts”

The Minister of Finance, has already signalled that this year gold production is expected to, again, do the heavy lifting by providing a minimum of 550,000 ounces of gold to the national effort, an increase of 22% over 2015 production. I can safely report that the miners, the representatives the Guyana Gold and Diamond Miners Association, the Guyana Women’s Miners Organisation and the large gold mining companies have assured the Government that they will meet the target set by the Hon. Minister of Finance.

In the area of bauxite, because of challenges in Asia, it underperformed but the two companies operating RUSAL, or the BCGI, Bauxite Company of Guyana Inc., and Bosai, both were able to turn a small profit and to hold their own against a difficult market. The forecast for the next decade, however, is positive, as it is expected that bauxite projects worldwide will have to be enhanced and developed to supply alumina capacity growth in China, the Middle East and India. It augurs well for our industry. The two companies are currently operating and holding their own. There is a third, First Bauxite Inc., which is preparing as soon as the market, does a bit better to enter into production.

This year, I will announce, and am announcing now, that the Government will move to implement its manifesto’s commitment to ensure that a high level technical team is put together to development plans to examine the possibility of an international scale alumina refinery in Linden, Region 10. As always, the Opposition will be invited to participate in this exercise and I hope the Members patriotism will not wane to a point where they say no to this invitation, as well.

In the area of forestry, production this year was 550,000 metric cubic metres with an export value of \$54 million. It was lower than previous years but, as I said, there was too much export of raw logs and less value-added, and this is why there was a reflection or a drop in exports. We will continue to work along with the international community to enhance our capabilities in this regard.

For the benefit of those here and those who may be listening, I would just like to give some figures and statistics for the month of January, 2016. Gold, we have already collected 35,000 ounces of gold for the month of January. This tells us that, if we are to extrapolate, we are well on our way to meeting our target if we maintain the 35,000 mark per month. As well, 3,119 metric carats of diamonds have been produced; 109,000 tons of bauxite has been mined by BCGI, which is RUSAL. We have mined 135,000 tons of stone and 3,300 tons of sand. That is for the month of January, 2016.

As I said, we will continue this year to discharge our responsibilities and to manage as best as we can. I would take the opportunity to address an issue which has been coming up and which I dare say will rear its head next week, and that is the staffing details at the Ministry of Natural Resources. At present, there are 56 staff mentioned in line item 6116, contracted employees, but I wish to state that 31 of them are scholarship recipients who we inherited. I do have their contracts with me. It would appear that persons going on scholarships to Cuba and to the University of Guyana, in the areas and the natural resources sector, Mining Engineering, Forestry, the Environment, the Government of Guyana is mandated to give them employment. The letter would come from the Public Service Ministry, and we are told that we have to absorb them. In that regard, there are 22 such persons as Forest Engineers and Rangers at the Guyana Forestry Commission, five Meteorological Engineers at the GGMC, nine such staff members, Environmental Officers at the EPA and the head office, which is the Ministry itself, only has 20 employees.

The Minister of Finance has been good enough this year to give us \$746 million-plus dollars to implement our environmental management policies, which cover Environmental Protection Agency, the National Parks Commission, the Protected Areas Commission, which encompasses the Kanuku Mountain Range in Region 9, the Shell Beach Reserve in Region 1 and the Kaieteur National Park. This is where moneys will be spent. With this allocation in place, we move closer to revealing a Guyana that is discernibly more environmentally responsible. If I may pause, to say that the Government is currently in negotiations with the Aurora Goldfields to create what is known as an offset because of it having to go on the international market for financing for its project. It has to provide an offset for the environmental damage that is caused by its mining, and so, Government has identified the Kaieteur National Park to be the recipient of that offset. We

are proud to say that we intend to have that in place before April of this year. I would like to report as well that the protected areas system continues to be strengthened. There is a loan with the Government of Germany which is being drawn down on. This year, Government has set aside an extra \$5 million – thank you - in the budget to take care of furniture, equipment, radios and two satellite phones which will be ...

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 minutes allotted.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Trotman: I may return to the issue of the national forest policy. In 2016, the Ministry of Natural Resources will continue to update and rationalise policies and laws relating to the conservation management protection and sustainable development of the nation's patrimony in its forest resources. In light of the changes in Guyana's economic, social and political landscape over the past five years, since the previous policy was crafted, we feel that it is imperative that we put a new one in place. Much to our horror, we discovered, on assuming office, that when asked the question about total production forest areas available in Guyana, all, 100%, have been given out. It is unimaginable. This is what a former Head of State would have referred to as confounded nonsense. How could a responsible Government proceed over the allocation of all, not some, of its productive forest? What about future generations? Are they not entitled to share in the patrimony of the forest? In the context of the national patrimony, this is a threat to our long-term viability and to our security as a people. Understandably, in the national interest the Government will have to do and will be doing something about it.

Only last evening Hon. Member Ms. Hastings quite competently spoke about efforts to have water resource management brought to the front burner. The Ministry of Natural Resources is going to collaborate with the Ministry of Communities to play its part to ensure that that is a success.

I turn quickly to oil and gas. As we know, on or about the 8th May, last year, it was disclosed that a significant, what is described as a significant, find of hydrocarbons was made off the coast of Guyana.

8.41 p.m.

ExxonMobil having made that find will be aggressively, this year starting, in fact this weekend, begin further explorations and the surveying of the sub-surface sea bed and the sea-bed itself and below, to see the extent, scope and depth of that find. We are pleased to say that this has already started to give a boost, small as it is for now, to our economy. There are also heightened activities with helicopters flying and forth. Perhaps, at an appropriate time, we will have the Chairman of the Natural Resources Committee visit the rig so that he may see for himself what is happening.

The Minister of Finance has already spoken about the Sovereign Wealth Fund and its importance. We recognise the statements made by the Hon. Member, Mr. Lumumba. The Government is moving to put in place the Fund, not just for oil and gas, but for all resources, such as, water, forest, sand, stone, diamonds and gold so that future generations, 100 and 200 years from now, will be able to benefit from these resources.

If I may go to my conclusion, just to say that this is the Year of Renaissance. It is a momentous year of the Golden Jubilee of our Independence. If I could reveal, it was also the year in which I was born.

Budget 2016 is anchored innovation that every Guyanese must enjoy the 'good life', and it represents the beginning of the fulfilment of that promise made by the coalition Government towards transforming our national economy and ensuring a 'good life' for all Guyanese. The Natural Resources Sector is one that is growing and very critical and central to economic growth and fostering social stability. The contribution of the sector to our economy is expanding, and with Budget 2016, this sector undoubtedly will continue to perform with resilience, through environmental and economic sustainability.

We must, move and I quote a Biblical phrase again. I hope that it is not too annoying. It is one used frequently by my brother, the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan:

“We must move from being hues of wood and draws of water and move to becoming the producers of value added products from oil, gas, gold and diamonds”.

There are few areas as important as the issue of the National Patrimony and the management of the natural resources that have been bequeathed to us by the Almighty God. It is axiomatic that we must work together. It is what makes sense. Incidentally, the offer for the Opposition to be represented on boards will remain open, but they must realise that, with each passing day, they, and not us, are closing the door on cohesion and on nation-building, thereby, excluding themselves from enjoying the benefits of the ‘good life’.

The Persian Stage of the Middle Age - Omar Khayyam puts it best, he says:

“The moving finger writes; and, having writ, moves on:”

Your time is going to come and pass, if you allow it to go. In the meantime, we will take up the mantle of responsibility and discharge our duties to the best of our abilities, whilst they on the other side come to terms with the new political realities that they are faced with.

We pray for God’s strength, for guidance and covering over the President and Parliament of Guyana, and over all of Guyana’s people, as we excitedly and expectantly enter into an unprecedented era of renaissance, restoration and revival.

Mr. Speaker, this 2016 Budget speaks boldly to us. It is stimulating growth socially, economically, infrastructurally, democratically, and even spiritually; it is restoring our confidence, both in ourselves and in our beloved country; it is loudly beckoning to us hail the ‘good life’; “he that has ears to hear let him hear”. May God bless us all. I thank you.

[Applause]

Minister of Citizenship [Mr. Felix]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Worthy and most Hon. Members of this House, I rise to support a Budget which was proposed to this House by the Hon. Minister of Finance to the tune of some \$230 billion to propel Guyana’s development and to ensure that Guyanese enjoy a better life, which eluded us over the past 23 years.

Permit me to observe the attitude to this Budget by the many speakers of the Opposition. They would have us believe that their work initiated the economic growth-rate, which the PPP/C

Government experienced. Not so! In fact, it was the 1985 – 1992 stewardship of the economic affairs of this country, by the Hon. Carl Barrington Greenidge, and his astute management of the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) which gave birth to a positive growth of 7%. Now, the PPP/C, having experienced a growth of 4%, the PPP MPs now boasts about their growth rate without looking back with gratitude from where it originated.

The Opposition now behaves as though the PPP/C is still in Government. We will not be deterred by their posture, but will follow the path to a glorious future created by the expert guidance of our Minister of Finance.

This Budget, which is entitled *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*, is an example of our Government's recognition that there was some growth, which must be stimulated to give confidence to all Guyanese as they work, that a 'good life' awaits them.

That could not have been our experience in the recent past since the stewardship of the previous Government ensured that crime ate away at our fabric, like the cancer in the human body. It was robbery after robbery; it was piracy after piracy. The Government seemed incapable of reigning in the criminal situation. It is true that crime seem to have been out of control in the hands of the PPP/C.

The Hon. Member Anamayah, spoke of crime as though crime was a phenomenon in our Government, but we have inherited it from the PPP/C. This Budget is designed to ensure that the Guyana Police Force (GPF) is resourced and delivers upon its mandate to protect our citizens, and to prevent and detect crime.

Not so long ago, in our position over there, we had to be goading this Government to reign in the excesses of the police. Thank God that in nine months we have not seen any evidence of any behaviour which suggests that policemen will burn genitals, burn hands, and use batons on persons in custody. In any event, the police now seem to be on a path where they are solving crimes.

I support the ban on used tyres. It is the coalition's way of ensuring the safety of its citizens. We recognise a frugal spending, but we will not encourage frugal spending which would lead our

citizens to a death trap – which is what the used tyres hold in store for Guyanese citizens. I am aware that the countries from where used tyres are imported have strict laws which prohibit the use of tyres on motor vehicles and which do not have a certain thread thickness. That is why they are made used tyres, and we buy them. These tyres become unsafe for use on the roads of those countries and they must be replaced, and they are unsafe here too. Therefore, as leaders we must protect our citizens.

The Opposition has been criticising the Government for returning unspent money to the Treasury. To the Opposition, I say, thank you for the publicity which now informs the public that this Government will deal honestly with their moneys without the need for Commissions of Inquiries to find out what was done with it.

Similarly, they claim that the cost of renewing a firearm licence is too expensive. These licences have not been increased in years and the current increases are well within the range of their holders. The people who apply for firearms or handgun licences are the ones who claim that they move around the country with large sums of moneys. What is wrong with paying a few dollars more?

Mr. Speaker, I will now turn to my department, but before doing so, let me congratulate the Hon. Winston Dacosta Jordan for crafting an excellent Budget, which takes into consideration every aspect of our developmental needs.

This coalition Government will give reality to the enjoyment of a glorious future for all Guyanese. The Department of Citizenship will play its role which transcends all the productive sectors of this Government. The Department of Citizenship plays an essential role in relation to the work of the Ministries of Public Telecommunications, Natural Resources, Agriculture, Public Infrastructure, Public Health, the Guyana Forestry Commission and its immigration service. The Department must perform with a high degree of efficiency, to ensure that visitors and persons pursuing business in Guyana would be allowed to do so with systems and procedures to facilitate free and easy entry and movement in Guyana, void of delays and frustrations, which are all regular experiences of the recent past.

The Department of Citizenship offer services to citizens and foreigners such as: visas for visitors, students, employment and business to allow for business development and the enjoyment of the tourism product.

Visas issued were as follows: for 2014 – 1473; for 2015 – 1171; during January, 2016, the Department issued 445 visas to various foreigners seeking to enter Guyana for different reasons.

The Department is responsible for the naturalisation of persons residing in Guyana and satisfying the residency requirements, and the registering of persons as citizens by birth and by marriage,

During 2015, 94 foreign nationals from 15 countries were registered as citizens in Guyana, while 18 foreign nationals were made citizens through naturalisation.

8.56 p.m.

Our immigration service has to be particularly vigilant as visitors seek to enter our country and remain here outside the confines of the law. As soon as this APNU/AFC Government came into Office, there arose the need to clamp down on persons who arrived at our airport without the standard entry requirements, recognised and implemented in countries around the world, and this form of enforcement continues to this day. Apparently, the tacit approval of those in power, a year and more ago, had turned a blind eye to immigration abuses. This coalition Government is now putting right. Every nation and every country has rules and laws that control and regulate people who come from other places.

Unrecorded Immigrants attract abuses primarily because they are illegal, having arrived in this country without satisfying the entry requirements or they were allowed entry because of deception using forged documents. We must be alive to consequences which would naturally flow from unrecorded immigrants. The result is the abominable crime of human trafficking.

Many of the illegal immigrants end up in very dangerous situations, as they do not have proper documents to secure jobs, and as a consequence, they end up in unfortunate situations. The flow of illegal immigrants to Guyana is the result of the pull factor in certain developed countries, but stringent checks at certain ports have forced these illegal immigrants from those countries to use Guyana as a transit point. Unfortunately, quite a number remain in this country.

Guyana is an open country; it welcomes all visitors and has landed many who have not been traced to have left the country legally. Our checks revealed that over 5300 illegal immigrants remain unaccounted for in Guyana. These are undocumented immigrants who live in Guyana without permission and the Government has only their entry records. They were legally here, but are now illegal because they have overstayed their time. In any country, undocumented and illegal immigrants are a source additional pressure on the resources of Government as they utilise services such as health and education and pay no taxes. Therefore, the law must be enforced against them.

Illegal immigrants contribute to the dark figure of crime, which are unreported crimes, because of their status. This APNU/AFC Government will not relent in its effort to be vigilant at its ports and to track down those who are in Guyana illegally.

Even in this effort, pressure would be placed on the Immigration Department to build up and devote additional manpower, specifically to trace illegals. For January 2016, 26,736 persons were landed at all ports in Guyana; 53 Guyanese nationals were deported from seven countries; 40 persons were deported for immigration related issues; while 13 persons were deported for their alleged involvement in criminal matter; forty three Guyanese nationals were refused entry in the Caribbean.

Passports - soon after taking Office in 2015, the coalition Government, in response to persistent pleas from the diaspora for the speedy processing of their passports, their issues were resolved when this new Government moved to reduce the three-month waiting time to acquire a new passport overseas. Once passports arrived from the diaspora, they are processed in Guyana within five days and are returned to their destinations. I am sure that these passports are returned to their respective owners within one month, removing two months of unnecessary waiting.

During 2015, the Central Immigration and Passport Office at Eve Leary processed 89,136 passports for local use, and 14,606 passports were processed for Guyanese in the diaspora. For January, 2016, 8059 passports were prepared for local use, while 1140 passports were prepared for the diaspora.

Initiatives are under consideration for early implementation, which includes decentralisation of the application and issuance of passports. This Government is in the mood to take services to the

people. The crowds, long lines, and cramped spaces at the Central Immigration and Passport Office, on Camp Road, Eve Leary is an intolerable situation this Government inherited and every effort will be made to take the service to outlying areas and to draw on the power of information technology, particularly where the E-governance project exists.

To promote a project, which facilitates the public making applications for passports online, I am aware of the procedural challenges likely to impede implementation of this project, but in the test phase, corrections and adjustments would guide the project to perfection. Running side by side with this project, there is another initiative which will permit the replacement of machine readable passports, wherever they are in Guyana. Currently, under review, is the reintroduction of the 64-page passports since the current 32-page passport seems inadequate for frequent travellers. These measures intend to relieve the public of poor services, time wasting and to replace the discomforts with a more user-friendly service, befitting this 21st century.

Birth Certificates – this is a basic and an essential document of identity and it should be issued either at birth or as soon as possible thereafter, so that children can receive health and education services. In this regard, Guyana has been pursuing 100% birth registration, which is an international standard intended to ensure that children are documented. In furtherance of our desire to have every child registered, the Department has partnered with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) to visit the hinterland and riverine communities to discover and register children. During the last week ending 6th February, 2016, sections of Region 1, Barima/Waini, was visited by staff from the Department. That visit was very successful based on the number of registrations done, over 200. Another region will be visited in the new week.

There is a proposal in this year’s Budget to digitise the records at the General Register’s Office (GRO). This project was tendered, but would be retendered because of the need to remove certain flaws. As a consequence of the digitisation, huge amounts of data would be stored electronically leading to printed rather than written birth, death, and marriage certificates.

We will continue to ensure that children receive the protection they need from the State against abuses, and eventually attain and maintain 100% birth registration. The areas that are outlined above are just the known and established areas in which the Department functions. On 14th January, 2016, in his address to the National Assembly, His Excellency, President David

Granger, set out other areas in which the Department must play a role. He identified the global terrorist threats and transnational crimes to confront migration and trafficking in persons, as a result of a multi-sectorial approach to these issues.

It is not intended that the Department of Citizenship takes over the job of these agencies, but the intention is to have us play a back-up role to detect and discover the misuse of our country by those who perpetrate transnational crimes or are somewhere involved in terrorist activities. This year, the Budget proposed by our Minister of Finance has adequately catered for this Department's role in ensuring that we move to provide the services which the Guyanese and the wider public need; to ensure that immigration issues are properly dealt with; and that we ensure that our country is not being abused by those who traffic in persons and commit other crimes.

The time is now ripe for all the talk about cooperation and collaboration, and for those on the other side of the House, to work with us and to ensure that we make Guyana what our motto says - *One people, one nation and one destiny*. In this regard, I ask that we all support Mr. Winston Dacosta Jordan in proposing his Budget for approval in this National Assembly. [Applause]

Mr. Rohee: I welcome this opportunity on behalf of the People Progressive Party to speak to this Budget Presentation by the Hon. Minister of Finance. Before I go to the heart of the matter, I have to say that the persistent references that I have heard from the Government benches in respect of – “Working together; that you did not do it when you were there for 23 years; you had so much time to do it, why did you not do it”. All of these platitudes, placed to the context of the existing political situation, are meaningless and worthless.

I would even go on to say that, a lot of talk had also been made in respect to beautification. Who would be against beautification? Who would be against of *nicing-up* our own beautiful Georgetown? The problem is however, one cannot eat beautification. Beautification does not put money in our pockets. It puts money in other people's pockets who may have gotten the contracts to hire people to do so. This romanticism and deification of beatification is something that we need to be a little judicious about.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Trotman, made reference to what he described as the disrespect on the path of the Opposition Leader. I would like to say from the very outset that, Mr. Trotman's words does not match the antecedents which have occurred in this National Assembly.

9.11 p.m.

I have sat in this National Assembly for years and I have seen the respect by my Colleagues, who were on that side of the House for some time, given to past Presidents, including Mr. Hoyte; other Oppositions Leaders, including Mr. Granger and Mr. Corbin. There was not a single heckle of these distinguish gentlemen when they spoke, incidentally, when they spoke in wrapping up for the Opposition benches on the budget debates. What we have now is a glowing departure from that convention. If we want to talk about respect and disrespect, we have to put it in that historical context. Our Opposition Leader has been denied, perpetually, the right that was given to previous Opposition Leaders in this honourable House.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan, the Minister of Finance, have been presented and described in many ways by his Colleagues and they have a right to do so, after all, he is their Colleague, and they are his Colleagues. But what floored me was when someone went totally overboard in describing the distinguish Minister of Finance as a genius. The word “genius” is a very treasured word and ought not to be dispensed whimsically. I want to welcome the Hon. Minister of Finance into the gallery of accidental geniuses.

I have discerned, in the course of this debate, with a certain degree of puzzlement and amazement, if not bewilderment, of statements emanating from the eastern wing of this House that are somewhat bizarre. For example, it would suffice to say that, we were told that only under the APNU/AFC Government could the working class enjoy a ‘good life’. But how can this be, when it is with a gross contradiction to the realities of everyday life in this country. More than 3,000 rice farmers cannot say what their future will be in this so called ‘good life’. They are totally devastated. How can we say that we can rejoice today and be glad, when thousands of sugar workers are at a lost to know what the future holds for them? How could they say to whom the ‘good life’ is beckoning, when hundreds are being witch-hunted out of jobs and are now, as they say in Guyanese parlance, *kicking bricks in hard guava season*.

This situation is grim and irrespective of the gross and rosy picture that might be painted in this honourable House by those who sit on the Government benches, it is in stark contradiction to the realities of Guyanese society. I want to submit that, what they are describing, is tantamount to a surreal situation. That is what we are living and that is what they are pretending to be living. As

the famous song sang by Swamp Dog says: “It is a synthetic world we are living in”; it is a synthetic world that is being painted.

What we have in Guyana is a political party called the PPP fresh out of Government, after 23 years, with, in fact, a wealth of experience, both at the national and international levels. But what have they done, notwithstanding their called for unity? They have totally dismissed 23 long years of governmental experience; an economy that has grown exponentially; and for them it is worth nothing. That is precisely why they will find governing, as we did at the beginning, a very difficult sisyphus task. It will be difficult. Notwithstanding their reluctance to admit the difficulties that we know they are encountering because we have been there and we have done that. So they can paint the rosiest picture that they want to paint, there are many experienced persons on this side of the House who know different.

They chose to throw all of this away, and in the same breath they come to us and talk about the need for national unity and social cohesion. How on earth could you speak about national unity and social cohesion and you dispense with a party, that had been in Government for 23 years, as though it was nothing. We are hearing all these quantum leaps, backward and forward, creating a tremendous gap in the history of this country, as though the PPP/Civic never existed. There was no Government lead by former Presidents of this country.

We do not have a problem, it is okay for them to dismiss the 23 years of the PPP/C. It is quite okay for them to say that we do know have intellectual property rights on the budgets that still symbolises or are symbols of the PPP/Civic reign in office. We do not have a problem with that. The problem is that you cannot wish it away, it is there. When the Hon. Prime Minister travels to Essequibo, which boat does he travel on with his entourage and his retinue? That is a symbol of the rule of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic.

Yet, they have the gumption to come to us and talk to us about the need for social cohesion and national unity. We do not need to defend our track records on social cohesion and national unity. The historical records speak for itself. They are riding on the crest of the accomplishments of the PPP/Civic’s economic policy. They are riding on the crest of the economic developmental polices of the PPP/Civic. How can they, in nine months, construct this monumental mirage, which some have an optical illusion of, created by the APNU/AFC? It is impossible. One cannot

in any way, create in eight months, what this Government is seeking to make people believe. It cannot happen. They cannot create in eight months what the PPP/C has created in 23 years. That is ridiculous.

I want to say that, apart from riding on the crest of the PPP's accomplishments, they are traversing the worn and beaten path of corruption. And, I want to warn the Members on this side of the House that, at some point in time, they will run out of gaff on corruption. They will run out of gaff on this corruption 'hobby horse' and they will have to find something else to speak about.

The sweet taste of victory is already turning bitter. We know what it is all about. Do not believe that we are living in an ivory tower. They keep looking back, but I want to warn them that, if they keep looking back, like Lot's Biblical wife, we know that they will turn into a pillar of salt.

I have read the two documents. I have read the Minister's speeches of 2015 and 2016 and I have made the comparative analysis. In the speech that he has made in respect to the security sector and the public safety, there are three goals: Reducing crime; rebuilding public trust; and reforming the public security system. For 2015 and 2016, they have reduced it to two goals. What are those two goals? Safeguarding public security and rebuilding public trust. Are we to assume that they have accomplished the previous goals, and as a result of accomplishing those, they are now reduced to two goals.

I want to say that, almost each and every one of the programmes that they are now pursuing in the security sector had its genesis in the PPP/Civic Administration. There is no way in eight months - someone said that you could fool some of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all of the time - they would have to do like what Jesus Christ did at the sea of Galilee and I doubt whether they can do that. But I am saying that there is no way in eight months they could create those programmes in the security sector.

I am submitting, as I did before, talking about crime and exerting efforts to fight crime is only one part of the picture and I know what the difficulties are. There is no way that Mr. Ramjattan can lecture me on the difficulties of the security sector - no way. I am saying to my Colleague that, unless you get the cooperation of the ministries in the social sector, you will not succeed.

That is the most difficult task because most of the Ministers in the social sector do not want to go in that particular arena.

So I want to say that, what we have seen in the speech, it is a regurgitation. I have looked at it and compared it, and Mr. Jordan knows what I am talking about. He knows how budget speeches are prepared; he has been there. When one looks at the two presentations, one has four paragraphs and one has three paragraphs.

9.26 p.m.

There are four paragraphs in the 2015 speech and there are three paragraphs in the 2016 speech but it is the *same old same old*.

In the 2015 speech, a lot of emphasis was placed on the Citizens' Security Programme 2 (CSP2). In this Budget, the Hon. Member puts less emphasis on that and more emphasis on the goodies the Government intends to bring to the Guyana Police Force and the other security forces. I am saying that the focus has narrowed. Unless this matter is placed in the context of the totality, a holistic approach, I am sorry but the country would never succeed in addressing the security issue. It is like running on the spot.

We were told that a national security plan was being developed. A special meeting was held with some leading lights in the Government to develop a national security plan in a draft. What has happened subsequently? We were told that the document went from the Ministry of the Presidency to the Ministry of Public Security then to the Commissioner of Police, and all this time it was being tweaked, *weaked*, leaked, *jeaped*. We do not know. In the end, nothing resulted. What we heard or read about was that Operation Dragnet has consummated the national security plan. There is no need for a national security strategy anymore. It is a waste of time because it is now consummated in the Operation Dragnet which we are told will attack the four big areas, and, incidentally, local government elections is one of the areas being targeted in the security plan.

I want to move very quickly. We heard of issues that were inherited and needed fixing. I want to suggest to the distinguished Members, on the Government benches, that there is a store on Main Street called Fix-It. There are some very beautiful tools in there for those who do not have

toolkits, and I am not referring to anyone's virility. To those who need toolkits to do fix-it jobs, I suggest they go there.

In the Budget speech, nothing was heard about the fight against drugs. One leading light in the Government, when in Opposition, mentioned time and time again, to this nation, that the economy was driven by drugs. Well, in eight months, it has stopped; it is no more; the drugs have disappeared; the drug peddlers are no longer there and all of that has dried up in eight months. The economy is not being driven, anymore, by drugs and the drug trade. What is even more surprising and laughable, although we welcome it, is that the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) is here but the drug economy is no longer here. Why? It is because there has been a [*inaudible*] and a new Government is there. Therefore, all the evils that were there when the PPP/C was in Government are no longer there. Glory Hallelujah! They are no longer there.

I am asking the Hon. Minister, where is the national drug strategy master plan which a leading light, when in Opposition, kept harping on the need to implement? It is no longer there. Is the DEA and is Operation Dagnet part of the national drug strategy master plan? I am telling you that if a national drug strategy master plan is being formulated and the players, whether external or internal, are not part of that strategy, you will end up in the trouble which we were envisaging in light of this situation.

We heard about the four horsemen hindering our country's development. There are not four horsemen; it is one horseman because the four areas that were mentioned are all social. So there is one horse in the social area. You better watch out for the other two horsemen – the economic and the political. If we do not address the economic and the political and only deal with the one horseman, you will be overtaken by the time you reach the tape. I mentioned that as something that the Hon. Members need to pay attention to.

In the speech, there was no reference to human security and human security is the basis on which all other aspects of security are built up in this country.

We have heard about the upgrading of the passports by my good Friend, Mr. Winston Felix, a former Commissioner of Police, and I know the police quite well; they are good at making things look nice. Mr. Felix mentioned a 64-page passport but he did not mention what it will cost for

the ordinary Guyanese to purchase a 64-page machine readable passport. I know what it will cost because we were in Government and saw what the cost was and found that it was too exorbitant for the ordinary traveller. It will have a tremendous cost.

In addition to that, I did not hear the Hon. Member, Mr. Felix, mention, which he did last year, the procurement of two pieces of equipment but there is money, in the Budget, again, for the same equipment. They were going to procure two pieces of equipment to upgrade the production of the current machine readable passports. By the way, before the PPP/C left Government, a fresh set of new machine readable passports, with enhanced security features, were already ordered and paid for. We have not heard anything about them. There was supposed to be a phasing out of the current passports and the bringing on stream of the new passports with the enhanced security features. We hope that that money has not gone wasted. Two pieces of equipment were to be procured: one to upgrade the equipment and the other to produce passports in the various regions. I have read an interview with Mr. Felix, recently, where he regretted that this could not have been in place, that they need to have a building and that they had limitations and so forth. Interestingly, and quite cleverly, he did not mention anything about that.

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

Mr. Ali: I rise to request the agreed additional five minutes for the Hon. Member.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Rohee: I looked for the vision. What did I find? The vision comprises three components: one, the British Security Sector Reform Action Plan (SSRAP); two, the draft security plan which we never saw; and three, Operation Dragnet. That is the vision. How on earth can a vision comprise a security plan that is going to be crafted in London and brought to Guyana, a security plan that was never a kind of childbirth and Operation Dragnet, which is an operation that has not been put into any context whatsoever? Therefore, there is no vision whatsoever.

We were told that a command centre, at a cost of \$2.15 million would have been established last year. Nothing has been heard about it. Where does the command centre exist? Where has it been set up? How is it being staffed?

There were also supposed to be sweeps in the Interior location and the *Kayamoo*, the prostitution and the gun smuggling were supposed to be dealt with. We, on this side of the House, would like to know how many sweeps have taken place since the announcement was made. How much harvest has been reaped as a result of these sweeps that took place in the Interior? We would also like to know what has happened with the impact report on the 2.00 a.m. curfew. The Minister of Tourism had announced, publicly, that an impact assessment study had been commissioned to examine the merits and demerits of the 2.00 a.m. curfew. Is this a turf facing question? Is it a question of ministerial turf? Is it a question that the matter has been caught up in the politics of Cabinet? If it is so, I believe we ought to know.

We heard that every street in the City was to have Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras and moneys were allocated for that in the Budget last year. Where are the cameras? Who got the contracts to establish the cameras around the city? We do not know.

We also heard that there is a Presidential Advisor on National Security who has been going around to different police stations, which the Minister should be doing, and was supposed to present a report in August, last year, to the Ministry of the Presidency. I do not want to call his name because he is not here and there might be an objection to say, “Why call his name if he is not here to defend himself?” But I think the Hon. Member knows who I am speaking about. Where is the document that the Presidential Advisor on National Security was supposed to present, in August of last year, to assist the Minister and the Government, as a whole, in dealing with these questions? What we have are people trampling all over the Ministry of Public Security and the Minister probably needs a dose of Viagra, Tisane de Durbon, Nutrophos or Phosphorine. We are not seeing or hearing the Minister on these issues. Other than that, we are hearing of people who are walking here and walking there and the next thing we will hear is that they are walking all over [*inaudible*]. “These boots are made for walking.”

Mr. Speaker, I want to wind up now.

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

Mr. Rohee: We heard that there was an investigation into the taking of bribes on the Corentyne, where a truck with \$6 million worth of cash and drugs was allowed to pass. No one has been interdicted, as far as we are aware, but the Hon. Minister did say that he will commission an

inquiry into that incident. Nothing was heard, so far, on this matter and, in the same breath, the Minister is saying that he will root out corruption in the Guyana Police Force.

9.41 p.m.

We would like to find out, from the Hon. Minister, how many corrupt cops he has rooted out so far from the Guyana Police Force. We would like to know that because he waged, and is still waging, I understand, a campaign to deal with corruption in the Police Force. I think it is important for the nation to hear how many of these persons he has rooted out from corrupt practices in the Police Force. He must tell us that. It is not only good enough for [*inaudible*] he has to tell us the results.

Incidentally, there is one other thing: before I left the Ministry of Home Affairs in the last Government, we commissioned a floating police base.

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

Mr. Rohee: Thank you.

I have seen this floating police base moving backwards and forwards and I suspect, Mr. Harmon, Hon. Minister, that there is some element of skulduggery going on there because three cheques were cut: \$49 million to build the floating base by Courtney Benn and \$16.4 to purchase the equipment for the boat. Twice cheques were cut to purchase the equipment. The Hon. Member should tell us because the vessel moved from one wharf and ended up at the Coast Guard Wharf. The moment it ended up at the Coast Guard Wharf, the last I heard of it was that the Hon. Prime Minister went to Essequibo and proudly announced that the police floating base was to be stationed in the mouth of the Pomeroon River. I do not think he knew what he was talking about because there was already a Guyana Defence Force (GDF) floating base at the mouth of the Pomeroon River. So we do not need two floating bases there. The Joint Services agreed that the floating base would be at the mouth of the Waini River. If you got the Waini River mixed up with the Pomeroon River, I am sorry we could not have been any help to you.

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

Mr. Rohee: Thank you.

We did not hear anything so far - it is still a mystery - about under whose portfolio the Custom Anti-Narcotic Unit (CANU) falls. When I look at the *Official Gazette*, I still am not very clear who is responsible for CANU. What I did hear is pronouncement from the Office of the President or the Ministry of the Presidency stating that they are going to bring CANU and the police together. Where are we with that? I know the difficulties that are inherent in that move. I know what it is because we tried to do it and there was resistance to it. I assume that that is being experienced up to now. [An Hon. Member: You failed.] It is not a question of failing. Well, you are there to succeed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Minister of Education [Dr. Roopnarine]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I have to say that, looking at the list of speakers, I find myself in a most curious cluster. I was very instructed and entertained by my Friend the Hon. Clement Rohee's presentation and there is one aspect of it with which I do want to deal. That really has to do with the points he offered on the question of national unity and the extent to which we, on this side, were failing to take advantage of the experience and knowledge that exist on the other side, acquired over long years of experience. I cannot speak for my Colleagues but I do believe that certainly we, in the Ministry of Education, are relying on the expertise and experience of our Colleagues on that side to move us forward in an area in which, I believe, we need not have any great fat. Education is an area of our work in this Assembly over which we do not need to fight. It is an area, I believe, over which we can find much agreement. I do not think there is anyone in this House who would argue that there is anything more important than the formation of our young people. This is what takes place in our schools and for it to happen as you want it to happen, it would require the active collaboration of parents, teachers and, I believe, all energies in this House.

As we, in the Ministry of Education, under the APNU/AFC Government, embark on our first full calendar year of operations, it inevitably continues to be partially in diagnostic mode. As we said, in 2015, we shall go ahead with what works and discard what does not. I had promised this in 2015; I repeat it now. As we forge ahead, we remain cognisant of the immediate past state of the education system, the course of which, I believe, we must change for the good of the nation. We remain cognisant of listing some of the critical shortcomings of the system, as I see it, the system that we have inherited. I will cite a number of areas: one, there has been a neglect of the tertiary education system; two, the significant appropriations, the returns on which were often far

from optimal; three, the mismatch of appropriations with the articulated plans; four, the gap between programme rationalising and programme implementation; five, politically motivated decision making and coercion and intimidation of professionals; six, the hyping of the stellar performance of a few in contrast to poor and declining results overall.

This is not a system that we intend to perpetuate. In its Manifesto, the APNU/AFC coalition clearly identified the creation of a united, peaceful and developed Guyana as its core objective. That objective or any one of its component parts is not achievable in a society which has not benefited from real education. By that I mean education being a state of knowing and learning that engenders the appreciation of human beings, of their existence, biologically and socially; education that induces rationality to their existence; and education that enables the application of knowledge to themselves and their environment in a complex relationship of thought, desire and work as a basis for sustenance and self-reproduction. It is the achievement of that state of being or the continuum towards its achievement that APNU/AFC refers to when it speaks about a good life. Education is the driving force, the locomotive engine of that good life, and our primary challenge is crafting a system that engenders education as we conceive it.

The stark reality is that our education system, under the previous Administration, did not grapple with that concern, with focus instead being placed on the achievements of certificates at the expense of the education of the citizens. We enjoin the entire nation to join us in this enterprise of enhancing the education system to address our growth and improvement of society over the next 50 years and beyond. We enjoin our Hon. Colleagues of the Opposition, in particular.

In view of APNU/AFC's objective-oriented approach to the fulfilment of its mandate to govern, in view of its understanding of the historiography of Guyana and in the context of its understanding of the role of education, it conceptualised an appropriate approach to education in Guyana. The approach envisaged programmes in as much as it identifies specific strategies for the achievement of its objective - a good life for all. From a programmatic perspective, the APNU/AFC concluded that attention to the curricula for the education system is key since therein would be the knowledge which ought to be shared by Guyanese who would be involved in the project, creating a good life for all. This also takes into consideration that curricula would inevitably address the question of the manner in which learning should occur, thus providing an opportunity for approaches to learning and the application of knowledge to be inculcated.

APNU/AFC also recognises the plural nature of the Guyanese society and, in response to that recognition, determined that the University of Guyana should establish research programmes to investigate the causal factor of ethnic and racial tensions and conflicts in our society and to make recommendations on how to address these.

Clearly, the APNU/AFC's Manifesto provided an unambiguous direction in relation to how the education system should be remedied as well as identifying the central issues that required attention. These issues include: one, meeting the nutritional and transportation needs of primary and secondary schools; two, retaining and recruiting teachers; three, reforming the curriculum; four, equipping the schools for the teaching of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) selected subjects; five, rescuing the University of Guyana; six, implementing a national programme for technical and vocational education across the country; and seven, creating a friendly and equitable environment for learning, along with extracurricular activities that would enhance all-round development.

In terms of the 2015 Budget projections, those core strategic concerns are reflected in the presentation of this Administration's inaugural Budget, less than a year ago. It bears reminding that, in his inaugural Budget speech in 2015, the Minister of Finance projected that education would become both a means to and an end of sustainable development. He emphasised the intended vision where all of our citizens would have equal access to high quality education and learning opportunities and where education is positioned as the key intermediary through which we lay the foundation of a robust, competitive economy as well as an inclusive and social cohesive society.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I ask you to reclaim your seat for a moment.

9.56 p.m.

The Hon. Prime Minister would proceed to move a motion for continuation of the debate beyond 10.00 p.m.

Suspension of Standing Order No. 10

Mr. Nagamootoo: If it pleases Your Honour, I beg to move that this National Assembly continues to meet and to discuss the matters on today's agenda, beyond the hour of 10.00 p.m., until the list is completed.

Question put and agreed to.

Motion carried.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will continue until we have exhausted our list. Please proceed.

Dr. Roopnarine: On that occasion, the Hon. Minister of Finance further underlined the collaborative nature of the education enterprise and the need for a holistic and integrated approach to education, the objectives being to ensure a seamless transition between schooling and employment. He projected that ultimately:

“By 2020, our children and young people must be exposed to an appropriate mix of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects, liberal arts, and sports and culture that together will ensure well-rounded individuals who are capable of excelling in their chosen path.”

In enjoining the Hon. Minister, Mr. Jordan, on that occasion, I, first of all, intimated the intention to establish a commission of inquiry into the education system, with a view of locating precisely where our journey begins. This approach is also informed by the intention to formulate evidence-based policies and system-based reform. In consonance with this approach, I highlighted the need for the establishment of the National Advisory Council as a stakeholder forum that would guide the process of constructing and implementing an evidence-based strategy, based on core tenets, including: one, a broad, multi-phased strategy framework for national education reform and development; two, contextualisation within the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Regional Education and Human Resources (HR) Development Strategy 2030; three, particular focus on the use of technology and education sector management; and four, particular focus on Hinterland education reform.

In that regard, I mentioned some specific initiatives that were to be outlined. Among those initiatives were: one, a review of the Education Cash Grant Programme which seems not to be serving the intended purpose; two, the expansion of the warm meals and general school feeding

programmes; three, the revamping of school boards and parent teacher association and the re-establishment of regional education committees; four, better service delivery to the disabled and a more enlightened approach, by the population, to persons with disabilities; five, the strategic integration of ICT education as opposed to a One Laptop Per Family (OLPF) Project that proved not only ill-conceived, but was also, in our experience, froth with wastage and corruption; and six, provision of teachers with both equipment and training.

The 2020 outcome that I envisaged was the production of a competent Guyanese citizen and provision of our youth, the voice and the role in shaping their destiny. The reality of 2015 was that it was a severely truncated year. The Government was installed in May, 2015, but a budget only became available in September, 2015. Having embarked in September, much was done to commence the realisation of that which had been articulated in the Manifesto, and which found itself into the proposals for the 2015 Budget and subsequent presidential and ministerial pronouncements.

Even against this backdrop, in keeping with the Ministry's action plan and with a view to the actual state of the sector, a number of policies were formulated and initiated. The most notable of such initiatives are: one, the use of the Grades Two and Four Assessments purely for diagnostic purposes and the attendant follow-up, and the use of the Grade VI assessment solely for the determination of placement in post primary schools; two, the lowering of the entry age for nursery schools from three years, nine months to three years, six months; three, the raising of the age for qualification to write the Grade Six Assessment from 12 to 13 years, thus eliminating the need for unwarranted acceleration solely for the purpose of writing the Secondary School Entrance Examination (SSEE) even though the pupil might not be preferred; four, the engagement of the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) to develop and administer Grades Two, Four and Six Assessments, while simultaneously building the National Centre for Education Resource Development's (NCERD) capacity in that area, with the intention of restoring the function to NCERD in the medium term; five, the development of the mechanism to ensure that the CSEC School Based Assessments (SBAs) are submitted by 31st January each year; six, the review of the status of parent teachers associations countrywide, with a view to ensuring that they are established and functional; seven, a review of the student report system and parent teacher conference arrangements with the intent of ensuring that reports are provided

in a timely manner and parents are actively involved in their children's welfare; eight, the drafting of a universal prayer for schools and a consultative process to achieve consensus on the prayer, in recognition of the plural nature of Guyanese society; nine, the crafting of sports and physical education survey instrument which is to be used to determine what steps should be taken to ensure that sports and physical education find their rightful place in the school system; and the induction of a cohort of education cadet officers: this programme is intended to improve the quality of administrators in and administration of the education system.

Allow me to say here, Mr. Speaker, that I have attempted to place great emphasis on the restoration of the place of sports and music in the school system. I have a vision, over the next few years, of encouraging, since it is beyond our capacity in a budgetary sense to provide an operational orchestra in all the schools, a small steel band, for instance, which would be wonderful, but expensive. What I know is that every child is born with a musical instrument, which is called the voice, and it is not beyond us to train school choirs throughout the country and to have our children singing every morning. In fact, I was thinking as I listened to the Hon. Minister, Carl Greenidge, today, speaking about the Venezuelans. I was tempted to think of if all the children in all the schools of Guyana, at a single hour every morning, were to be singing "*not a blade of grass*", perhaps they would even hear us in Caracas.

Early Childhood Education

The operational education engines of educational delivery are early childhood, primary, secondary, technical and vocational and tertiary, each capably supported by several units within the Ministry. In the area of early childhood education, we have had the following achievements: one, four new nursery schools were commissioned in 2015 - Good Hope Nursery in Region 4, Number 77 Nursery in Region 6, Kairuni Nursery in Region 4 and Cummings Park Nursery in Georgetown; two, the newly developed nursery diagnostic assessments were administered as well as the revamped literacy and numeracy assessments for nursery years one and two; three, the Roraima Reader Series, which was piloted in 2013, was rolled out nationally; four, Nursery Field Officers received further training and are expected to support the monitoring and supervision being done at this level. The Guyana Early Childhood Education Project is being rolled out in the Hinterland regions to improve our delivery and output.

In the area of primary education, the primary grades diagnostic assessments were administered system-wide, with specific emphasis placed on teachers' planning based on the demonstrated needs of pupils; secondly, greater emphasis is being placed on the early grades, literacy and numeracy preparation of pupils to ensure mastery is attained. To that end, all schools are now required to prepare action plans based on the needs of pupils, as demonstrated by assessments and to report on the progress made at the end of every term; thirdly, continuous professional development of teachers in the primary level has been expanded to all regions, with specific emphasis on education delivery in the core subject areas; fourthly, music instruction has been improved with the training of primary teachers to facilitate the formation and sustainability of school choirs. The expansion to include the use of instruments such as recorders and steel bands will be attained through further training of teachers. This is in keeping with our objective of significantly enhancing arts education within the school system.

With regard to secondary education, firstly, through collaboration with the Caribbean Examination Council, a number of CSEC and Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) syllabus reviews and methodology workshops were conducted for teachers across the country in various subject areas; secondly, the work to improve the performance in the key areas of English Language and Mathematics is ongoing, with consistent training and monitoring of teachers. In addition, the Guyana Secondary Education Improvement Project has commenced, with specific emphasis on the improvement of Mathematics instruction in all secondary schools; thirdly, a survey was conducted on the status of all dormitories across the country and the information compiled will be used to devise a comprehensive dormitory improvement strategy.

10.11 p.m.

Fourthly, through collaboration with the Faculty of Education and Humanities at the University of Guyana, teachers of Spanish have commenced their Bachelor of Arts degree programme. It is our hope also that come September to introduce Portuguese into secondary schools.

Guyana continues to benefit from the contribution of World Teach, Project Trust and Peace Core Volunteers in secondary schools across the country.

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

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

Question put, and agreed to.

Dr. Roopnaraine: In the area of technical and vocational education, technical institutes have collaborated with the Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to meet requirements for Guyana to be recognised to award the Caribbean vocational qualifications at the next Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) meeting. Competence based education and training courses are still being rolled out in all technical institutes. As promised, we made good on our commitment to strengthen one of the core components of the system, namely teacher training. The Cyril Potter College of Education has had its largest intake of approximately 751 trainees in 2015. The technical teacher programme has commenced in collaboration with the Government Technical Institute (GTI).

The mentorship and induction programme for new teachers has been embedded in the system with widespread and consistent monitoring being done in all regions. Teacher training has been expanded to Kwakwani, Charity and Mahdia to ensure underqualified and untrained teachers receive the necessary capacity building. Distance education training programmes continue in Regions 1 and 9 as well as other satellite centres across the country. The Guyana Improving Teacher Education Project came to an end in 2015 with the significant strategic objectives being attained.

I turn to the University of Guyana with a few brief remarks. On the important issue of the fate of our sole national tertiary education institution, I am happy to report that a new University Council was appointed without any political manipulation of the process and a new Chancellor was appointed by the council. The council has since embarked on a search for a new Vice-Chancellor to replace the outgoing Vice-Chancellor Professor Jacob Opedayi. As well, the council has embarked on the process of establishing a transformational task force to craft a strategy for the reversal of the university's decline. The first meeting of this task force was convened earlier today.

As it relates to the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) assessments, performance in 2015 continued to show improvement over previous years. In the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency

Examinations (CAPE) candidates wrote units in 29 subject areas. Each unit comprises three modules equivalent to 150 credit hours and is separately examined and certified. Candidates from Guyana wrote 56 units at this year's examination. In addition, for the first time Guyana received two regional top awards for CAPE.

The analysis of the 2015 Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) results revealed that the overall pass rate at the general and technical proficiencies for Grades I to III was 62.72% as opposed to 60.21% in 2014. The Grades I to III passes in English A and Mathematics both improved over last year's performance. The English A pass rate is 49.36%, up from 46.98% in 2014 and 45.69% in 2013. The Mathematics pass rate is 45.07%, up from 38.75% in 2014 and 28.92% in 2013. Guyana continued to earn top regional CSEC awards.

The appointment of boards for the various schools was done, as well as the appointment of boards for other allied agencies, that is, the National Accreditation Council (NAC), which was also achieved. The National Accreditation Council and the Council for Technical and Vocational Training have forged ahead with the execution of their projects under the CARICOM Single Market and Economy/ Caribbean Development Bank (CSME/CDB) facility. The NAC should be equipped to commence accreditation later this year. The National Accreditation Council and the Ministry proposes to host the Caribbean Area Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education annual workshop and conference in 2016.

In 2015 the hot meals programme was expanded to include four schools in Region 7, namely, Precious Gems Nursery, Beach View Nursery, Hill View Nursery and Future Builders Nursery. With regard to transportation, His Excellency would have strategically commissioned five boats for use in Region 2, Pomeroon, Region 4, Demerara River, Region 5, Mahaicony River and Region 10, Berbice River. In 2016, we expect that under the 3 "Bs" initiative the critical gap in access to education will continue to be addressed.

During the period May to December, 2015 a number of areas of concern were identified and these will be the focus of our agenda in 2016. They include

- First, the need for psychosocial support programmes for schools and residential facilities. Beyond the glaring fact that suicide disproportionately impacts upon our

young people, there is recognition that it is only one of the unfortunate outcomes of poor psychosocial support system, in general.

- Secondly, the need for an approach for the reintegration of teenage mothers into the school system. Young women in the Twenty-first Century cannot have pregnancy be a barrier to their continued education.
- Thirdly, the provision of more opportunities for continuous professional development and the widening of the scope of the learning channel and the Ministry's radio broadcast; the expansion of the skills for life training programme generally, with emphasis on the hinterland areas; and, we need to deal with the issue of accommodation for teachers in the hinterland.

These are among the challenges that are going to be confronted in 2016 as the Ministry seeks to overcome these challenges and launch new initiatives for the enhancement of the education system, which enhancement will eventually impact the ultimate goal of the system, the production of a better all-round citizen and the creation of a better society.

The Ministry is committed to an inclusive approach to its work, hence much of what it proposed to do will be subjected to a consultative process with its stakeholders, foremost of whom would be the teachers, parents, students and employers. In fact, the inquiry which was referred to in the Budget 2015 speech should be fully operationalised and concluded in 2016. The members of the commission have already been assembled. Similarly, the members of the National Education Council, National Advisory Council, have also been identified. The intention is for the council to be convened at the end of the inquiry. The council would then deliberate on the findings of the inquiry and the Education Sector Bill and provide the Ministry with advice on the way forward. Thereafter, the Ministry will be engaged on the review of the 2014-2018 Education Sector Plan. The reviewing and tabling of the Education Sector Bill in the National Assembly will see the Ministry emerging from what I earlier described as the diagnostic phase into its full-fledged operations to improve the education system.

I am assured that the Ministry has been and will be doing to demonstrate its commitment to the policies and programmes outlined in the manifesto of 2015 and subsequent pronouncements of the President, the Minister of Finance and yours truly. We will continue with that which works,

discontinue what does not as we embark on new initiatives aimed at ultimately giving the Guyanese a “good life.” I believe that a “good life” will only be achieved through an education system that creates the competent Guyanese citizen.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Ramjattan: Before I proceed to deal with the matters, especially the more meritorious ones dealt with by Hon. Member Mr. Rohee, I too want to pay tribute to Mr. Winston Jordan, Hon. Minister of Finance, for coming up with a budget that provides literally for all. What makes it all the more wonderful is the context in which it is being presented; and, that context is a number of difficult, what the economists would call, exogenous and endogenous factors. He has managed with the resources he has got and which he will get through revenue collection in the months to come, the necessary resources to ensure the Ministries in this Government get allocation which will create that which is the “good life” which is beckoning in this country today. In that context then, we must appreciate all the more this budget. I want to thank you very much Hon. Minister of Finance. To do that in these circumstances requires some amount of genius. Those who might not want to grant you that status, well, this is a democratic country and they are entitled to their opinion.

I want to tell my honourable colleague, Mr. Rohee, in this budget debate that I took a stand against police torture, and nobody can deny that. I took a stand against drunken driving by ensuring that there is a curfew which, by the way, it is but the law. It was not anything but the law. I took a stand to police our vast borders in association with the Office of the President, even if we had to use horses to do so. I took a stand, bold and strong, against illegal firearms and offered an amnesty. Even though partially successful, it was a stand nevertheless. Hon. Mr. Rohee, as far as I knew, never took any such stands.

10.26 p.m.

If anyone needs a dose of that medication, which he talks about, it is him.

I want to be frank with my colleague and indicate that a number of the points he made are largely meritorious because we do have a very difficult crime and violence situation in this country. It is particularly during the last decade and a half in which this crime and violence have become a

legitimate concern for each and every one of us. Guyana's homicide rates have dramatically increased since 2000 from 9.9 per 100,000 inhabitants to now - 2014 and this was the last statistics I got - 20 per 100,000. It rose from a lower level in 2000 to 2013, that is, the robbery rate reaching 214.9 per 100,000 inhabitants.

Domestic violence rate also rose in 2013 to almost 431.2 per 100 inhabitants and we also have in accordance with a very profound report from the World Health Organization, the highest suicide rate in the Americas and in the world, and that were based on statistics prior to 2014.

This issue about these negatives in our society did not occur during the course of our stewardship from May last year. They were with us. If we want to confront these issues with the full brunt of our intellect, it requires us being frank about these figures and not in way trying to twist facts to play political football, because it is not going to get us anywhere. To that extent then we have to... It is by virtue of getting these statistics then analysing them to find out what are the causes.

The crime problem in Guyana is compounded by high incidents of violent behaviour at the community level. There is no doubt about that. I see that that every day, literally. Then, of course, there is relatively low levels of trust in law enforcement agencies. I must say that Hon. Member Mr. Rohee had commanded a commission from Mr. Ganga Persaud. In that commission, Mr. Ganga Persaud's report revealed exactly that. Low levels of trust in the law enforcement and also, what is called, a set of social norms that tolerate the use of violence among partners and of course within the community itself. I have the report here by Mr. Ganga Persaud. I think the Ministry still owes him some moneys for this report. We also have in an assessment report - it is necessary that we take these facts as produce by another report - the Citizen Security Programme Phase One Report, that the perception of insecurity increased dramatically in and around 2014. The perception of the police, that they are not doing a good job, rose from 26 % in 2006 to 43 % in 2014. That is nationally. They were certain regions where it rose even longer.

Those findings from major studies done by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Mr. Ganga Persaud and a number of others have caused my administration of the Ministry of Public Security identify certain priority matters to ensure that we can curb this scourge that assails us as a people. We are using that which were those findings and facts in what is called now the

Citizens Security Programme Phase Two. I want to commend what I inherited in the Ministry of Home Affairs, now called Ministry of Public Security, because there were indeed a lot of facts and recommendations that were in its policy and research department that I found extraordinarily useful.

I agree that stopping crime and violence is not going to be merely the task of law enforcement. The social factors mentioned and the social projects mentioned by Mr. Rohee, have to be promoted.

That is why the Citizens Security Programme Phase Two is going to be incorporated as a big part of the crime strategy of Guyana, which was literally adopted. It is in the context of it being integrated with the five-point plan of the Commissioner of Police and a number of other task force recommendations, such as the combating of illicit trafficking in person, the task force on suicide and there is the drug master plan strategy, all being incorporated and integrated. We are going to come up with that which is going to be probably the best strategy, but it will take some time.

I want to tell Hon. Member Mr. Rohee and the Members on the other side that the Citizen's Security Strategy is a five-year plan. It is not a one-year plan and in the Project Execution Unit is going to ensure that our Smart City Project, which he seems to want immediately, in eight months,... He cannot have it. Right now the Project Execution Unit is doing some designing as to what might be best for the city. Remember in Georgetown, 52% of Guyana's crimes are committed when compared nationally, in the city and that is the Ministry of Home Affairs' statistics. Right now, the statistics of serious crimes in and around the divisions are proving that.

We thus have to incorporate a variety of these recommendations and findings into that. We are coming up with this plan that will involve community based crime prevention, capacity building. Of course, we have started and we have community policing groups all around the country which we are trying to resource and tool better. He spoke about tool kits, and so on. Yes, we are doing all of that and more. More vehicles will be provided. [Mr. Rohee: Give back the vehicles.]

I will come just now to a number. When I got into the office there in Brickdam I had to take some vehicles from the community policing and give to the Police Force for purposes of the

police doing their surveillance. They will get theirs. I am not going to say that they would not get it back, but it will take some time.

We also see another component of this citizen security dealing with evidence based social projects. We have to do what is called local diagnostics and we are not going to incorporate necessarily what is from overseas. There is a need sometimes for international imitation, but it must be juxtaposed with local invention, if I may put it that way. We can combine the two to get the correct strategy and then we will move on.

As a part of the next component, we will also increase the effectiveness of the Guyana Police Force in preventing and investigating crime and violence by creating a network component that is going to ensure that there will be literally a police headquarters, a command centre that will know everything and all the reports being made at each and every station. It is going to be to the extent...

Additionally, the programme will ensure support for criminal and forensic investigation techniques. In that regard, we have to do lots more to graduate the forensic lab into a higher level that would get it the certification required for it to do the DNA testing and all of that. It is an important aspect that is required in this country, that forensic lab. As the certifiers have been saying there are certain difficulties of integrity with specimen and a number of issues that caused it not as yet to be so certified. There is difficulty of space and a number of difficulties which include cost, and so on. We are going to look after those this year in at least a gradual way. It might not be done this year or it might take some more time.

Also we want to congratulate the United States Government for ensuring, only two days ago, that we now have the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) office here in Guyana. It is not only the DEA office that is assisting in relation to police matters. We have got huge support from the British who, right now, are in the process of doing a big training in relation to immigration officers. The arrangement is for them to come here in Guyana to train at least 30 immigration officers. Also it is to train a number of policemen as they have been doing either by going to Florida, New York, and there is some police academy in El Salvador under the Organization of American States (OAS) agreement. All of that we are having a lot of policemen...

In last year's budget debate I indicated how policemen were not having these training because there was, as I said then, certain controls. Whatever it was, they have now got no interference, in relation to these matters, to the extent now that almost everyone that becomes policemen are sent overseas. The Cabinet, as of today, has not blocked any from going overseas for training and we feel all of these are going to help in that.

There is also a component three which seeks to strengthen the rehabilitative services of the Guyana Prison Service. This component will employ a menu of many measures aimed at reducing prisoners' recidivism, that is, going back as soon as they come out to steal or to commit robbery again.

10.41 p.m.

We need alternatives to incarceration for pre-trial detainees. That is why, as part of that larger umbrella or main set of menu measures, we are going to deal with a brand new Juvenile Justice Bill this year, as was mentioned by the Attorney General. It is being fine-tuned, I understand, and it will be going to go for further consultation. We do have a strategy. Moreover, the Ministry of Public Security also has, right now, a final draft of the drug master plan, which was further refined as that which was there during the Hon. Member Mr. Rohee's administration. I must say that it is being fine-tuned by Mr. Michael Atherley. I want to tell Mr. Rohee this, so that Members over there will also know that Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit (CANU) comes under the Ministry of Public Security, and this drug master plan strategy is going to... As Mr. Rohee said, he had difficulties with it in integrating the networks. We are going to make sure that it is done under an umbrella organisation called the National Anti-Narcotics Agency (NANA). It will incorporate in an integrative way CANU, the Police Narcotics Unit and the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA). It is important that he understands that. It is called NANA. They will have their autonomy, these units, but they will come under an umbrella organisation for purposes of ensuring that their work be integrated. CANU would not in a way know what the Police Narcotics Unit is doing or the GRA is not doing. It is a concept that is required especially in these times when the integrative measures are needed to be put in place to ensure that all of them know.

It is also important to know that this M. B. Tamakay platform, which Mr. Rohee was talking about, the first cheque is to ensure that it is built and it has been built. There has been another cheque issued for the ancillaries to be placed in it so that it can be like a police station on a floating platform. Certain moneys in this budget, the details in the Capital Estimates, are here; and provision for the floating base, \$6.3 million. [Mr. Rohee: We want an audit of that.] Well, you are going to get your audit of whatever you want. [Mr. Rohee: You are making an issue.] I want you to give me as much scrutiny as you want. We have here a number of questions asked in relation to the training of policemen, the M. B. Tamakay and what is happening with the drug master strategy. I am just reporting to this National Assembly because these are the things that would appear.

Right now, in relation to the Smart City Project and the Close Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras, the Project Execution Unit would want to know whether it is America or England it would have to go to see it in action to find out what best might be the model that would be applicable here for Guyana. All of that is now in this first year, the design year as it is called.

It was only last week, in last month, that the disbursements were finally obtained from IDB for this US\$15 million project which will be a five-year programme and which comes up to \$3 billion. [Ms. Manickchand: You have spent three minutes on that, so...] You will not fix my agenda, Madam. You can never do that.

The police force also requires a number of comfort zones in the context of having better facilities. I want to congratulate the Minister of Finance for literally giving...Although we had asked for some more, I must say, he indicated that we could not have got all. I appreciated that. Here are some. Rehabilitation of officers' quarters in Fort Kaituma - \$7 million; rehabilitation of Special Branch Admin building - \$24 million; rehabilitation to Leonora Police Station - \$6.7 million; Enmore Outpost - \$5.3 million; Mounted Branch stable - \$31 million; Reliance Police Station - \$10 million; living quarters, Mahaicony - \$6.1 million; rehabilitation of East La Penitence Police Station - \$5.6 million. Now, when there is a police force that has comfortable working conditions it is going to deliver. Try to understand it in that context. There is too, provision for the floating base; construction of the stable at Lethem another - \$20 million; construction of the lockups at the Brickdam Police Station, the upper flat - \$20 million; rehabilitation of Quarter Master building - \$60 million; band room - we also want some music

and dedication as the Minister said but we are going to refurbish it with lots more instruments to the tune of \$74 million, Ms. Teixeira. We will have new drums not old drums. There is the construction of a brand new police station, as I have been hearing from some Members in the back benches, at La Parfaite Harmonie.

I know time is going to run and I want you and the Members over there to understand that we also have for the Police Force's Fingerprint Branch being resourced with a number of other items that will be to the tune of \$15 million. The Ballistic Section - \$10 million; the communication equipment, the Integrated Crime Information System (ICIS) - \$60 million, and a whole lot more, and even the Canines Section some \$4 million.

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

Ms. Ally: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes extension added to his original amount.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Ramjattan: The Ministry of Public Security has lots more than merely the police force, and it is especially important that we also pay attention to that which was done in relation to capital for the fire service, and what was done in relation to a number of other services, even CANU and the forensic lab. It is all there in the Capital Estimates. I want to say that in the fire department we are trying to strengthen that by ensuring that we move ahead with the consultancy for the realignment of that organisation structure and also the job descriptions. There are certain recommended models for the fire and rescue services administration. We are in the process of fine-tuning those in an emergency service department. It is going to be hard work but we are also getting the support of some members of the diaspora who got almost US\$100,000 in equipment for the fire service out of the Hillsborough New Brunswick Canada Fire Department. I have already indicated our gratitude to Fire Chief Glen Northrup and also Chief Ivan Davis of the Norton Fire Department through some people who were in the fire service but are now living overseas. One of the persons' named is Mr. Taylor. And so we are going to utilise that. The diaspora support will be there to get all these things. It is going to be very much important.

Before my ten minutes is done I want to also make mention of what a lot of the Opposition Members talked about, and that is the increase fees for gun licences. I have here a Cabinet paper since 2012 to come into operation in 2013, signed by Dr. Roger Luncheon, and the original paper was signed by Mr. Rohee, to increase fees for shot gun from \$2,000 to \$5,000. So I do not know what they are rowing about. They had argued a case. It was then from \$5,000 to \$20,000. Now, when Mr. Ramjattan does it, it is a big story. Rifle, it was to be \$25, 000 and I increased it further this year to \$40,000. For firearms, the dealers, they went from \$5,000 to \$30,000. I have gone over \$150,000. They did not implement it, maybe because of probably political reasons. But it was debated and they passed it in their Cabinet. The argument is well they have passed it and we are going ahead executing on that which they passed because it is necessary.

I want also to make mention of something that we have heard that is very important, and that is - I think it was my good colleague, Hon. Member Dr. Vindhya Persaud, who indicated yesterday that she wanted some information as to how many... It would appear that we are not releasing women prisoners. I would like to tell her, through the parole board, and also the arguments by the Office of the President, under the grant of pardon,... I will name them because sometimes this thing is twisted and turned in the public as if we are against women. We are not. Bibi Basheen, Latisha Sattaur, Indira Bissondai, Jasodra Bahadur, Annette Small, Odessa Thomas, Coleen Easton, Tiffany Peters and Ashley Albert, grant of pardon, their ages range from the ages of 37, and, one by the way, is at the age of 60. It was at least 11 or 12 of them in the 2015 December Presidential pardon. If the information is required, I have an open line. As you all know my line, you just ask and you will get the information so that there might not be any misinformation as a result of no information. There are lots more that I can speak on in relation to the Ministry of Public Security.

They want to hear something about SOCU. SOCU is under the Ministry of Public Security. It was created by the Hon. Minister Rohee. [Ms. Teixeira: It was under the law.] The protocols have been already drafted in relation to how... That was not done, as far as I understand, under Mr. Rohee's administration. I have now done that. It is about six pages of protocols as to how it must do its operations and those are going to be made public. You will see them. It is to ensure that they come in line with that which is under the Police Standing Orders. I am glad that you will welcome that.

The difficulties of overcoming crime and violence in our society are not going to be an overnight success. It will take some time and people must appreciate the difficulties of this thing. It is not as if it is only in Guyana. In Jamaica, Minister Bunting is having problems; Trinidad, it has huge problems.

10.56 p.m.

It probably had lots more than us here in Guyana, but with the Drug Enforcement Agency, with all these Task Forces and the men and women behind them, with the Guyana Police Force (GPC) and our Prisons Service, our Fire Service and all those that come under the Ministry of Public Security, we are going to beat this scourge that assails this society. I must say in that sense that all that which was allocated to this Ministry this year, and of course, in years to come, will ensure that we beat it. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member for his statement. Hon. Members, we have exhausted our list for today. Hon. Prime Minister, you may move the adjournment.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Nagamootoo: Mr. Speaker, I now move that this House be adjourned until tomorrow, Friday, 12th February, at 1.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: This House stands adjourned until tomorrow, Friday, 12th February, at 1.00 p.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 10.57 p.m.